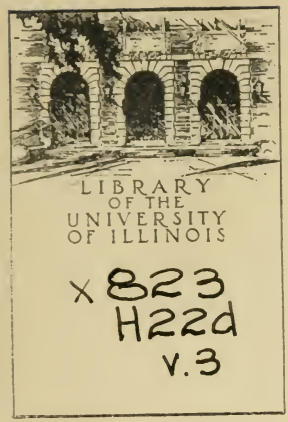

DESPERATE REMEDIES.

DESPERATE REMEDIES.

A Novel.

"Though a course of adventures which are only connected with each other by having happened to the same individual is what most frequently occurs in nature, yet the province of the romance-writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality."

SIR W. SCOTT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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DESPERATE REMEDIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE EVENTS OF FIVE WEEKS.

§ 1. *From the sixth to the thirteenth of January.*

MANSTON had evidently resolved to do nothing in a hurry.

This much was plain, that his earnest desire and intention was to raise in Cytherea's bosom no feelings of permanent aversion to him. The instant after the first burst of disappointment had escaped him in the hotel at Southampton, he had seen how far better it would be to lose her presence for a week than her respect for ever.

"She shall be mine; I will claim the young

thing yet," he insisted. And then he seemed to reason over methods for compassing that object, which, to all those who were in any degree acquainted with the recent event, appeared the least likely of possible contingencies.

He returned to Knapwater late the next day, and was preparing to call on Miss Aldclyffe, when the conclusion forced itself upon him that nothing would be gained by such a step. No; every action of his should be done openly—even religiously. At least, he called on the rector, and stated this to be his resolve.

"Certainly," said Mr. Raunham, "it is best to proceed candidly and fairly, or undue suspicion may fall on you. You should, in my opinion, take active steps at once."

"I will do the utmost that lies in my power to clear up the mystery, and silence the hubbub of gossip that has been set going about me. But what can I do? They say that the man who comes first in the chain of inquiry is not to be found—I mean the porter."

"I am sorry to say that he is not. When I returned from the station last night, after seeing Owen Graye off, I went again to the cottage where he has been lodging, to get more intelligence, as I thought. He was not there. He had gone out at dusk, saying he would be back soon. But he has not come back yet."

"I rather doubt if we shall see him again."

"Had I known of this, I would have done what in my flurry I did not think of doing—set a watch upon him. But why not advertise for your missing wife as a preliminary, consulting your solicitor in the meantime?"

"Advertise. I'll think about it," said Manston, lingering on the word as he pronounced it. "Yes, that seems a right thing—quite a right thing."

He went home and remained moodily indoors all the next day and the next—for nearly a week in short. Then, one evening at dusk, he went out with an uncertain air as to the direction of his walk, which resulted, however, in leading him again to the rectory.

He saw Mr. Raunham. "Have you done anything yet?" the rector inquired.

"No—I have not," said Manston, absently. "But I am going to set about it." He hesitated, as if ashamed of some weakness he was about to betray. "My object in calling was to ask if you had heard any tidings from Creston of my—Cytherea. You used to speak of her as one you were interested in."

There was, at any rate, real sadness in Manston's tone now, and the rector paused to weigh his words ere he replied.

"I have not heard directly from her," he said, gently. "But her brother has communicated with some people in the parish——"

"The Springroves, I suppose," said Manston, gloomily.

"Yes; and they tell me that she is very ill, and I am sorry to say, likely to be for some days."

"Surely, surely, I must go and see her!" Manston cried.

"I would advise you not to go," said Raun-

ham. "But do this instead—be as quick as you can in making a movement towards ascertaining the truth as regards the existence of your wife. You see, Mr. Manston, an outstep place like this is not like a city, and there is nobody to busy himself for the good of the community; whilst poor Cytherea and her brother are socially too dependent to be able to make much stir in the matter, which is a greater reason still why you should be disinterestedly prompt."

The steward murmured an assent. Still there was the same indecision!—not the indecision of weakness — the indecision of conscious perplexity.

On Manston's return from this interview at the rectory, he passed the door of the Traveller's Rest Inn. Finding he had no light for his cigar, and it being three-quarters of a mile to his residence in the park, he entered the tavern to get one. Nobody was in the outer portion of the front room where Manston stood, but a space round the fire was

screened off from the remainder, and inside the high oak settle, forming a part of the screen, he heard voices conversing. The speakers had not noticed his footsteps, and continued their discourse.

One of the two he recognised as a well known night-poacher, the man who had met him with tidings of his wife's death on the evening of the conflagration. The other seemed to be a stranger following the same mode of life. The conversation was carried on in the emphatic and confidential tone of men who are slightly intoxicated.

What the steward heard was enough, and more than enough, to lead him to forget or to renounce his motive in entering. The effect upon him was strange and strong. His first object seemed to be to escape from the house again without being seen or heard.

Having accomplished this he went in at the park gate, and strode off under the trees to the Old House. There sitting down by the fire, and burying himself in reflection, he allowed the

minutes to pass by unheeded. First the candle burnt down in its socket and stunk: he did not notice it. Then the fire went out: he did not see it. His feet grew cold; still he thought on.

It may be remarked that a lady, a year and a quarter before this time, had, under the same conditions—an unrestricted mental absorption—shown nearly the same peculiarities as this man evinced now. The lady was Miss Aldclyffe.

It was half-past twelve when Manston moved, as if he had come to a determination.

The first thing he did the next morning was to call at Knapwater House; where he found that Miss Aldclyffe was not well enough to see him. She had been ailing from slight internal hemorrhage ever since the confession of the porter Chinney. Apparently not much aggrieved at the denial, he shortly afterwards went to the railway station and took his departure for London, leaving a letter for Miss Aldclyffe, stating the reason of his

journey thither—to recover traces of his missing wife.

During the remainder of the week paragraphs appeared in the local and other newspapers, drawing attention to the facts of this singular case. The writers, with scarcely an exception, dwelt forcibly upon a feature which had at first escaped the observation of the villagers, including Mr. Raunham,—that if the announcement of the man Chinney was true, it seemed extremely probable that Mrs. Manston left her watch and keys behind on purpose to blind people as to her escape ; and that therefore she would not now let herself be discovered, unless a strong pressure were put upon her. The writers added that the police were on the track of the porter, who very possibly had absconded in the fear that his reticence was criminal, and that Mr. Manston, the husband, was with praiseworthy energy, making every effort to clear the whole matter up.

§ 2. *From the eighteenth to the end of January.*

Five days from the time of his departure, Manston returned from London and Liverpool, looking very fatigued and thoughtful. He explained to the rector and other of his acquaintance that all the inquiries he had made at his wife's old lodgings and his own had been totally barren of results.

But he seemed inclined to push the affair to a clear conclusion now that he had commenced. After the lapse of another day or two he proceeded to fulfil his promise to the rector, and advertised for the missing woman in three of the London papers, the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Standard*. The advertisement was a carefully considered and even attractive effusion, calculated to win the heart, or at least the understanding, of any woman who had a spark of her own nature left in her.

There was no answer.

Three days later he repeated the experiment; with the same result as before.

"I cannot try any further," said Manston speciously to the rector, his sole auditor throughout the proceedings. "Mr. Raunham, I'll tell you the truth plainly: I don't love her; I do love Cytherea, and the whole of this business of searching for the other woman goes altogether against me. I hope to God I shall never see her again."

"But you will do your duty at least?" said Mr. Raunham.

"I have done it," said Manston. "If ever a man on the face of this earth has done his duty towards an absent wife, I have towards her, —living or dead—at least," he added, correcting himself, "since I have lived at Knapwater. I neglected her before that time—I own that, as I have owned it before."

"I should, if I were you, adopt other means to get tidings of her if advertising fails, in spite of my feelings," said the rector, emphatically. "But at any rate try advertising once more. There's a satisfaction in having made any attempt three several times."

When Manston had left the study, the rector stood looking at the fire for a considerable length of time, lost in profound reflection. He went to his private diary, and after many pauses, which he varied only by dipping his pen, letting it dry, wiping it on his sleeve, and then dipping it again, he took the following note of events :—

"January 25.—Mr. Manston has just seen me for the third time, on the subject of his lost wife. There have been these peculiarities attending the three interviews,—

"The first. My visitor, whilst expressing by words his great anxiety to do everything for her recovery, showed plainly by his bearing that he was convinced he should never see her again.

"The second. He had left off feigning anxiety to do rightly by his first wife, and honestly asked after Cytherea's welfare.

"The third (and most remarkable). He seemed to have lost all consistency. Whilst expressing his love for Cytherea (which certainly

is strong) and evincing the usual indifference to the first Mrs. Manston's fate, he was unable to conceal the intensity of his eagerness for me to advise him to *advertise again* for her."

A week after the second, the third advertisement was inserted. A paragraph was attached, which stated that this would be the last time the announcement would appear.

§ 3. *The first of February.*

At this, the eleventh hour, the postman brought a letter for Manston, directed in a woman's hand.

A bachelor friend of the steward's, Mr. Dickson by name, who was somewhat of a chatterer—*plenus rimarum*,—and who boasted of an endless string of acquaintances, had come over from Froominster the preceding day by invitation—an invitation which had been a pleasant surprise to Dickson himself, insomuch that Manston, as a rule, voted him a bore almost to his face. He had stayed over the night and

was sitting at breakfast with his host when the important missive arrived.

Manston did not attempt to conceal the subject of the letter, or the name of the writer. First glancing the pages through, he read aloud as follows :—

"'My Husband,

"'I implore your forgiveness.

"'During the last thirteen months I have repeated to myself a hundred times that you should never discover what I voluntarily tell you now, namely, that I am alive and in perfect health.

"'I have seen all your advertisements. Nothing but your persistence has won me round. Surely, I thought, he *must* love me still. Why else should he try to win back a woman who, faithful unto death as she will be, can, in a social sense, aid him towards acquiring nothing ?—rather the reverse, indeed.

"'You yourself state my own mind—that the only grounds upon which we can meet

and live together, with a reasonable hope of happiness, must be a mutual consent to bury in oblivion all past differences. I heartily and willingly forget everything—and forgive everything. You will do the same, as your actions show.

"'There will be plenty of opportunity for me to explain the few facts relating to my escape on the night of the fire. I will only give the heads in this hurried note. I was grieved at your not coming to fetch me, more grieved at your absence from the station, most of all by your absence from home. On my journey to the inn I writhed under a passionate sense of wrong done me. When I had been shown to my room I waited and hoped for you till the landlord had gone upstairs to bed. I still found that you did not come, and then I finally made up my mind to leave. I had half undressed, but I put on my things again, forgetting my watch (and I suppose dropping my keys, though I am not sure where) in my hurry, and stepped out of the house. The——'"

"Well, that's a rum story," said Mr. Dickson, interrupting.

"What's a rum story?" said Manston, hastily, and flushing in the face.

"Forgetting her watch and dropping her keys in her hurry."

"I don't see anything particularly wonderful in it. Any woman might do such a thing."

"Any woman might if escaping from fire or shipwreck, or any such immediate danger. But it seems incomprehensible to me that any woman in her senses, who quietly decides to leave a house, should be so forgetful."

"All that is required to reconcile your seeming with her facts is to assume that she was not in her senses, for that's what she did plainly, or how could the things have been found there? Besides, she's truthful enough." He spoke eagerly and peremptorily.

"Yes, yes, I know that. I merely meant that it seemed rather odd."

"O yes." Manston read on,—

"'—— and stepped out of the house. The

rubbish-heap was burning up brightly, but the thought that the house was in danger did not strike me; I did not consider that it might be thatched.

"'I idled in the lane behind the wood till the last down-train had come in, not being in a mood to face strangers. Whilst I was there the fire broke out, and this perplexed me still more. However, I was still determined not to stay in the place. I went to the railway station, which was now quiet, and inquired of the solitary man on duty there concerning the trains. It was not till I had left the man that I saw the effect the fire might have on my history. I considered also, though not in any detailed manner, that the event, by attracting the attention of the village to my former abode, might set people on my track should they doubt my death, and a sudden dread of having to go back again to Knapwater—a place which had seemed inimical to me from first to last—prompted me to run back and bribe the porter to secrecy. I then walked on to Froominster, lingering about the

outskirts of the town till the morning train came in, when I proceeded by it to London, and then took these lodgings, where I have been supporting myself ever since by needlework, endeavouring to save enough money to pay my passage home to America, but making melancholy progress in my attempt. However, all that is changed—can I be otherwise than happy at it? Of course not. I am happy. Tell me what I am to do, and

"'Believe me still to be

"'Your faithful wife,

"'EUNICE.

"'My name here is (as before)

"'MRS. RONDLEY, and my address,

"'79, Addington Street,

"'Lambeth.'"

The name and address were written on a separate slip of paper.

"So it's to be all right at last then," said

Manston's friend. "But after all there's another woman in the case. You don't seem very sorry for the little thing who is put to such distress by this turn of affairs? I wonder you can let her go so coolly."

The speaker was looking out between the mullions of the window—noticing that some of the lights were glazed in lozenges, some in squares—as he said the words, otherwise he would have seen the passionate expression of agonized hopelessness that flitted across the steward's countenance when the remark was made. He did not see it, and Manston answered after a short interval. The way in which he spoke of the young girl who had believed herself his wife, whom, a few short days ago, he had openly idolised, and whom, in his secret heart, he idolised still, as far as such a form of love was compatible with his nature, showed, that from policy or otherwise, he meant to act up to the requirements of the position into which fate appeared determined to drive him.

"That's neither here nor there," he said; "It is a point of honour to do as I am doing, and there's an end of it."

"Yes. Only I thought you used not to care overmuch about your first bargain."

"I certainly did not at one time. One is apt to feel rather weary of wives when they are so devilish civil under all aspects, as she used to be. But anything for a change—Abigail is lost, but Michal is recovered. You would hardly believe it, but she seems in fancy to be quite another bride—in fact almost as if she had really risen from the dead, instead of having only done so virtually."

"You let the young pink one know that the other has come or is coming?"

"*Cui bono?*" The steward meditated critically, showing a portion of his intensely white and regular teeth within the ruby lips.

"I cannot say anything to her that will do any good," he resumed. "It would be awkward—either seeing or communicating with

her again. The best plan to adopt will be to let matters take their course—she'll find it all out soon enough."

Manston found himself alone a few minutes later. He buried his face in his hands, and murmured, "O my lost one—O my Cytherea! That it should come to this is hard for me! 'Tis now all darkness—'a land of darkness as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is as darkness.'"

Yes, the artificial bearing which this extraordinary man had adopted before strangers ever since he had overheard the conversation at the inn, left him now, and he mourned for Cytherea aloud.

§ 4. *The twelfth of February.*

Knapwater Park is the picture—at eleven o'clock on a muddy, quiet, hazy, but bright morning—a morning without any blue sky, and without any shadows, the earth being enlivened

and lit up rather by the spirit of an invisible sun than by its bodily presence.

The local Hunt had met for the day's sport on the open space of ground immediately in front of the steward's residence—called in the list of appointments, "Old House, Knapwater" —the meet being here once every season, for the pleasure of Miss Aldclyffe and her friends.

Leaning out from one of the first-floor windows, and surveying with the keenest interest the lively picture of red and black jackets, rich-coloured horses, and sparkling bits and spurs, was the returned and long-lost woman, Mrs. Manston.

The eyes of those forming the brilliant group were occasionally turned towards her, showing plainly that her adventures were the subject of conversation equally with or more than the chances of the coming day. She did not flush beneath their scrutiny; on the contrary, she seemed rather to enjoy it, her eyes being kindled with a light of contented exultation, subdued to

square with the circumstances of her matronly position.

She was, at the distance from which they surveyed her, an attractive woman—comely as the tents of Kedar. But to a close observer it was palpable enough that God did not do all. Appearing at least seven years older than Cytherea, she was probably her senior by double the number, the artificial means employed to heighten the natural good appearance of her face being very cleverly applied. Her form was full and round, its voluptuous maturity standing out in strong contrast to the memory of Cytherea's lissom girlishness.

It seems to be an almost universal rule that a woman who once has courted, or who eventually will court, the society of men on terms dangerous to her honour, cannot refrain from flinging the meaning glance whenever the moment arrives in which the glance is strongly asked for, even if her life and whole future depended upon that moment's abstinence.

Had a cautious, uxorious husband seen in

his wife's countenance what might now have been seen in this dark-eyed woman's as she caught a stray glance of flirtation from one or other of the red-jacketed gallants outside, he would have passed many days in an agony of restless jealousy and doubt. But Manston was not such a husband, and he was, moreover, calmly attending to his business at the other end of the manor.

The steward had fetched home his wife in the most matter-of-fact way a few days earlier, walking round the village with her the very next morning—at once putting an end, by this simple solution, to all the riddling inquiries and surmises that were rank in the village and its neighbourhood. Some men said that this woman was as far inferior to Cytherea as earth to heaven; others, older and sager, thought Manston better off with such a wife than he would have been with one of Cytherea's youthful impulses, and inexperience in household management. All felt their curiosity dying out of them. It was the same in Carriford as in other parts

of the world—immediately circumstantial evidence became exchanged for direct, the loungers in court yawned, gave a final survey, and turned away to a subject which would afford more scope for speculation.

CHAPTER II.

THE EVENTS OF THREE WEEKS.

§ 1. *From the twelfth of February to the second of March.*

Owen Graye's recovery from the illness that had incapacitated him for so long a time was, professionally, the dawn of a brighter prospect for him in every direction, though the change was at first very gradual, and his movements and efforts were little more than mechanical. With the lengthening of the days, and the revival of building operations for the forthcoming season, he saw himself, for the first time, on a road which, pursued with care, would probably lead to a comfortable income at some future day. But he was still very low down the hill as yet.

The first undertaking entrusted to him in the

new year, commenced about a month after his return from Southampton. Mr. Gradfield had come back to him in the wake of his restored health, and offered him the superintendence, as clerk of works, of a new church, which was to be built at the village of Palchurch, ten or twelve miles north of Creston, and about half that distance from Carriford.

"I am now being paid at the rate of a hundred and twenty pounds a year," he said to his sister in a burst of thankfulness, "and you shall never, Cytherea, be at any tyrannous lady's beck and call again as long as I live. Never pine or think about what has happened, dear; it's no disgrace to you. Cheer up—you'll be somebody's happy wife yet."

He did not say Edward Springrove's, for greatly to his disappointment, a report had reached his ears that the friend to whom Cytherea owed so much had been about to pack up his things and sail for Australia. However, this was before the uncertainty concerning Mrs. Manston's existence had been dispersed

by her return, a phenomenon that altered the cloudy relationship in which Cytherea had lately been standing towards her old lover, to one of distinctness; which result would have been delightful, but for circumstances about to be mentioned.

Cytherea was still pale from her recent illness, and still greatly dejected. Until the news of Mrs. Manston's return had reached them, she had kept herself closely shut up during the day-time, never venturing forth except at night. Sleeping and waking she had been in perpetual dread, lest she should still be claimed by a man whom, only a few weeks earlier, she had regarded in the light of a future husband with quiet assent, not unmixed with cheerfulness.

But the removal of the uneasiness in this direction—by Mrs. Manston's arrival, and her own consequent freedom—had been the imposition of pain in another. Utterly fictitious details of the finding of Cytherea and Manston had been invented and circulated, unavoidably

reaching her ears in the course of time. Thus the freedom brought no happiness, and it seemed well-nigh impossible that she could ever again show herself the sparkling creature she once had been,—

"Apt to entice a deity."

On this account, and for the first time in his life, Owen made a point of concealing from her the real state of his feelings with regard to the unhappy transaction. He writhed in secret under the humiliation to which they had been subjected, till the resentment it gave rise to, and for which there was no vent, was sometimes beyond endurance; it induced a mood that did serious damage to the material and plodding perseverance necessary if he would secure permanently the comforts of a home for them.

They gave up their lodgings at Creston, and went to Palchurch as soon as the work commenced.

Here they were domiciled in one half of an old farm-house, standing close beneath the ivy-

covered church tower (which was all that was to remain of the original structure). The long steep roof of this picturesque dwelling sloped nearly down to the ground, the old tiles that covered it being overgrown with rich olive-hued moss. New red tiles in twos and threes had been used for patching the holes wrought by decay, lighting up the whole harmonious surface with dots of brilliant scarlet.

The chief internal features of this snug abode were a wide fireplace, enormous cupboards, a brown settle, and several sketches on the wood mantel, done in outline with the point of a hot poker—the subjects mainly consisting of old men walking painfully erect, with a curly-tailed dog behind.

After a week or two of residence in Palchurch, and rambles amid the quaint scenery circumscribing it, a tranquillity began to spread itself through the mind of the maiden, which Graye hoped would be a preface to her complete restoration. She felt ready and willing to live the whole remainder of her days in the

retirement of their present quarters : she began to sing about the house in low tremulous snatches :—

"—I said, if there's peace to be found in the world,
A heart that is humble may hope for it here."

§ 2. *The third of March.*

Her convalescence had arrived at this point on a certain evening towards the end of the winter, when Owen had come in from the building hard by, and was changing his muddy boots for slippers, previously to sitting down to toast and tea.

A prolonged, though quiet knocking came to the door.

The only person who ever knocked at their door in that way was the new vicar, the prime mover in the church-building. But he was that evening dining with the Squire.

Cytherea was uneasy at the sound—she did not know why, unless it was because her nerves were weakened by the sickness she had under-

gone. Instead of opening the door she ran out of the room, and upstairs.

"What nonsense, Cytherea," said her brother, going to the door.

Edward Springrove stood in the grey light outside.

"Capital—not gone to Australia, and not going, of course!" cried Owen. "What's the use of going to such a place as that—I never believed that you would."

"I am going back to London again to-morrow," said Springrove, "and I called to say a word before going. Where is . . . ?"

"She has just run upstairs. Come in—never mind scraping your shoes—we are regular cottagers now; stone floor, yawning chimney-corner, and all, you see."

"Mrs. Manston came," said Edward, awkwardly, when he had sat down in the chimney-corner by preference.

"Yes." At mention of one of his skeletons Owen lost his blitheness at once, and fell into a reverie.

"The history of her escape is very simple."

"Very."

"You know I always had wondered, when my father was telling any of the circumstances of the fire to me, how it could be that a woman should sleep so soundly as to be unaware of her horrid position till it was too late even to give shout or sound of any kind."

"Well, I think that would have been possible, considering her long wearisome journey. People have often been suffocated in their beds before they awake. But it was hardly likely a body would be completely burnt to ashes as this was assumed to be, though nobody seemed to see it at the time. And how positive the surgeon was, too, about those bits of bone. Why he should have been so, nobody can tell. I cannot help saying that if it has ever been possible to find pure stupidity incarnate, it was in that jury at Carriford. There existed in the mass the stupidity of twelve and not the penetration of one."

"Is she quite well?" said Springrove.

"Who?—O my sister, Cytherea. Thank you, nearly well, now. I'll call her."

"Wait one minute. I have a word to say to you."

Owen sat down again.

"You know, without my saying it, that I love Cytherea as dearly as ever . . . . I think she loves me, too,—does she really?"

There was in Owen enough of that worldly policy on the subject of matchmaking which naturally resides in the breasts of parents and guardians, to give him a certain caution in replying, and, younger as he was by five years than Edward, it had an odd effect.

"Well, she may possibly love you still," he said, as if rather in doubt as to the truth of his words.

Springrove's countenance instantly saddened; he had expected a simple "Yes," at the very least. He continued in a tone of greater depression.

"Supposing she does love me, would it be fair to you and to her if I made her an offer of

marriage, with these dreary conditions attached, —that we live for a few years on the narrowest system, till a great debt, which all honour and duty require me to pay off, shall be paid? My father, by reason of the misfortune that befel him, is under a great obligation to Miss Aldclyffe. He is getting old, and losing his energies. I am attempting to work free of the burden. This makes my prospects gloomy enough at present.

"But consider again," he went on. "Cytherea has been left in a nameless and unsatisfactory, though innocent state, by this unfortunate, and now void, marriage with Manston. A marriage with me, though under the—materially—untoward conditions I have mentioned, would make us happy; it would give her a *locus standi.* If she wished to be out of the sound of her misfortunes we would go to another part of England—emigrate—do anything."

"I'll call Cytherea," said Owen. "It is a matter which she alone can settle." He did

not speak warmly. His pride could not endure the pity which Edward's visit and errand tacitly implied. Yet, in the other affair, his heart went with Edward; he was on the same beat for paying off old debts himself.

"Cythie, Mr. Springrove is here," he said, at the foot of the staircase.

His sister descended the creaking old steps with a faltering tread, and stood in the fire-light from the hearth. She extended her hand to Springrove, welcoming him by a mere motion of the lip, her eyes averted—a habit which had engendered itself in her since the beginning of her illness and defamation. Owen opened the door and went out—leaving the lovers alone. It was the first time they had met since the memorable night at Southampton.

"I will get a light," she said, with a little embarrassment.

"No—don't, please, Cytherea," said Edward, softly. "Come and sit down with me."

"O yes. I ought to have asked *you* to," she returned, timidly. "Everybody sits in the

chimney-corner in this parish. You sit on that side. I'll sit here."

Two recesses—one on the right, one on the left hand—were cut in the inside of the fire-place, and here they sat down facing each other, on benches fitted to the recesses, the fire glowing on the hearth between their feet. Its ruddy light shone on the underslopes of their faces, and spread out over the floor of the room with the low horizontality of the setting sun, giving to every grain of sand and tumour in the paving a long shadow towards the door.

Edward looked at his pale Love through the thin azure twines of smoke that went up like ringlets between them, and invested her, as seen through its medium, with the shadowy appearance of a phantom. Nothing is so potent for coaxing back the lost eyes of a woman as a discreet silence in the man who has so lost them—and thus the patient Edward coaxed hers. After lingering on the hearth for half a minute, waiting in vain for another word from him, they were lifted into his face.

He was ready primed to receive them. "Cytherea, will you marry me?" he said.

He could not wait in his original position till the answer came. Stepping across the front of the fire to her own side of the chimney-corner, he reclined at her feet, and searched for her hand. She continued in silence awhile.

"Edward, I can never be anybody's wife," she then said, sadly, and with firmness.

"Think of it in every light," he pleaded; "the light of love, first. Then, when you have done that, see how wise a step it would be. I can only offer you poverty as yet, but I want—I do so long to secure you from the intrusion of that unpleasant past, which will often and always be thrust before you as long as you live the shrinking solitary life you do now—a life which purity chooses, it may be; but to the outside world it appears like the enforced loneliness of neglect and scorn—and tongues are busy inventing a reason for it which does not exist."

"I know all about it," she said, hastily; "and

those are the grounds of my refusal. You and Owen know the whole truth—the two I love best on earth—and I am content. But the scandal will be continually repeated, and I can never give anyone the opportunity of saying to you—that—your wife . . ." She utterly broke down, and wept hysterically.

"Don't, my own darling!" he entreated. "Don't Cytherea!"

"Please to leave me—we will be friends, Edward—but don't press me—my mind is made up—I cannot—I will not marry you or any man under the present ambiguous circumstances—never will I—I have said it: never!"

They were both silent. He listlessly regarded the illuminated blackness overhead, where long flakes of soot floated from the sides and bars of the chimney-throat like tattered banners in ancient aisles; whilst through the square opening in the midst one or two bright stars looked down upon them from the grey March sky. The sight seemed to cheer him.

"At any rate, you will love me?" he murmured to her.

"Yes—always—for ever and for ever!"

He kissed her once, twice, three times, and arose to his feet, slowly withdrawing himself from her side towards the door. Cytherea remained with her gaze fixed on the fire. Edward went out grieving, but hope was not extinguished even now.

He smelt the fragrance of a cigar, and immediately afterwards saw a small red star of fire against the darkness of the hedge. Graye was pacing up and down the lane, smoking as he walked. Springrove told him the result of the interview.

"You are a good fellow, Edward," he said; "but I think my sister is right."

"I wish you would believe Manston a villain, as I do," said Springrove.

"It would be absurd of me to say that I like him now—family feeling prevents it, but I cannot in honesty say deliberately that he is a bad man."

Edward could keep the secret of Manston's coercion of Miss Aldclyffe in the matter of the houses a secret no longer. He told Owen the whole story.

"That's one thing," he continued, "but not all. What do you think of this—I have discovered that he went to Creston post-office for a letter the day before the first advertisement for his wife appeared in the papers. One was there for him, and it was directed in his wife's handwriting, as I can prove. This was not till after the marriage with Cytherea, it is true, but if (as it seems to show), the advertising was a farce, there is a strong presumption that the rest of the piece was."

Owen was too astounded to speak. He dropped his cigar, and fixed his eyes upon his companion.

"Collusion!"

"Yes."

"With his first wife?"

"Yes—with his wife. I am firmly persuaded of it."

"What did you discover?"

"That he fetched from the post-office at Creston a letter from her the day before the first advertisement appeared."

Graye was lost in a long consideration. "Ah!" he said, "it would be difficult to prove anything of that sort now. The writing could not be sworn to, and if he is guilty the letter is destroyed."

"I have other suspicions——"

"Yes—as you said," interrupted Owen, who had not till now been able to form the complicated set of ideas necessary for picturing the position. "Yes, there is this to be remembered —Cytherea had been taken from him before that letter came—and his knowledge of his wife's existence could not have originated till after the wedding. I could have sworn he believed her dead then. His manner was unmistakable."

"Well, I have other suspicions," repeated Edward; "and if I only had the right—if I were her husband or brother, he should be convicted of bigamy yet."

"The reproof was not needed," said Owen, with a little bitterness. "What can I do—a man with neither money nor friends—whilst Manston has Miss Aldclyffe and all her fortune to back him up? God only knows what lies between the mistress and her steward, but since this has transpired—if it is true—I can believe the connection to be even an unworthy one—a thing I certainly never so much as owned to myself before."

§ 3. *The fifth of March.*

Edward's disclosure had the effect of directing Owen Graye's thoughts into an entirely new and uncommon channel.

On the Monday after Springrove's visit, Owen had walked to the top of a hill in the neighbourhood of Palchurch—a wild hill that had no name, beside a barren down where it never looked like summer. In the intensity of his meditations on the ever-present subject, he sat down on a weather-beaten boundary-

stone gazing towards the distant valleys—seeing only Manston's imagined form.

Had his defenceless sister been trifled with? that was the question which affected him. Her refusal of Edward as a husband was, he knew, dictated solely by a humiliated sense of inadequacy to him in repute, and had not been formed till since the slanderous tale accounting for her seclusion had been circulated. Was it not true, as Edward had hinted, that he, her brother, was neglecting his duty towards her in allowing Manston to thrive unquestioned, whilst she was hiding her head for no fault at all?

Was it possible that Manston was sensuous villain enough to have contemplated, at any moment before the marriage with Cytherea, the return of his first wife, when he should have grown weary of his new toy? Had he believed that, by a skilful manipulation of such circumstances as chance would throw in his way, he could escape all suspicion of having known that she lived? Only one fact within his own direct knowledge afforded the least ground for such a

supposition. It was that, possessed by a woman only in the humble and unprotected station of a lady's hired companion, his sister's beauty, great as it was, might scarcely have been sufficient to induce a selfish man like Manston to make her his wife, unless he had foreseen the possibility of getting rid of her again.

"But for that stratagem of Manston's in relation to the Springroves," Owen thought, "Cythie might now have been the happy wife of Edward. True, that he influenced Miss Aldclyffe only rests on Edward's suspicions, but the grounds are good,—the probability is strong."

He went indoors and questioned Cytherea.

"On the night of the fire, who first said that Mrs. Manston was burnt?" he asked.

"I don't know who started the report."

"Was it Manston?"

"It was certainly not he. All doubt on the subject was removed before he came to the spot, —that I am certain of. Everybody knew that she did not escape *after* the house was on fire,

and thus all overlooked the fact that she might have left before—of course that would have seemed such an improbable thing for anybody to do."

"Yes, until the porter's story of her irritation and doubt as to her course, made it natural."

"What settled the matter at the inquest," said Cytherea, "was Mr. Manston's evidence that the watch was his wife's."

"He was sure of that, wasn't he?"

"I believe he said he was certain of it."

"It might have been hers—left behind in her perturbation, as they say it was—impossible as that seems at first sight. Yes—on the whole, he might have believed in her death."

"I know by several proofs that then, and at least for some time after, he had no other thought than that she was dead. I now think that before the porter's confession he knew something about her—though not that she lived."

"Why do you?"

"From what he said to me on the evening of the wedding-day, when I had fastened myself

in the room at the hotel, after Edward's visit. He must have suspected that I knew something, for he was irritated, and in a passion of uneasy doubt. He said 'You don't suppose my first wife is come to light again, madam, surely?' Directly he had let the remark slip out, he seemed anxious to withdraw it."

"That's odd," said Owen.

"I thought it very odd."

"Still, we must remember he might only have hit upon the thought by accident, in doubt as to your motive. Yes, the great point to discover remains the same as ever—did he doubt his first impression of her death *before* he married you. I can't help thinking he did, although he was so astounded at our news that night. Edward swears he did."

"It was perhaps only a short time before," said Cytherea; "when he could hardly recede from having me."

"Seasoning justice with mercy as usual, Cytherea. 'Tis unfair to yourself to talk like that. If I could only bring him to ruin as a

bigamist—supposing him to be one, I should die happy. That's what we must find out by fair means or foul—was he a wilful bigamist."

"It is no use trying Owen. You would have to employ a solicitor, and how can you do that?"

"I can't at all—I know that very well. But neither do I altogether wish to at present—a lawyer must have a case—facts to go upon, that means. Now they are scarce at present—as scarce as money is with us, and till we have found more money there is no hurry for a lawyer. Perhaps by the time we have the facts we shall have the money. The only thing we lose in working alone in this way, is time—not the issue: for the fruit that one mind matures in a twelvemonth forms a more perfectly organised whole than that of twelve minds in one month, especially if the interests of the single one are vitally concerned, and those of the twelve are only hired. But there is not only my mind available—you are a shrewd woman Cythie, and Edward is an earnest ally.

Then, if we really get a sure footing for a criminal prosecution, the crown will take up the case."

"I don't much care to press on in the matter," she murmured. "What good can it do us, Owen, after all?"

"Selfishly speaking, it will be this good—that all the facts of your journey to Southampton will become known, and the scandal will die. Besides, Manston will have to suffer—it's an act of justice to you and to other women, and to Edward Springrove."

He now thought it necessary to tell her of the real nature of the Springroves' obligation to Miss Aldclyffe—and their nearly certain knowledge that Manston was the prime mover in effecting their embarrassment. Her face flushed as she listened.

"And now," he said, "our first undertaking is to find out where Mrs. Manston lived during the separation; next, when the first communication passed between them after the fire."

"If we only had Miss Aldclyffe's countenance and assistance as I used to have them," Cytherea

returned, "how strong we should be. O, what power is it that he exercises over her, swaying her just as he wishes! She loves me now. Mrs. Morris in her letter said that Miss Aldclyffe prayed for me—yes, she heard her praying for me, and crying. Miss Aldclyffe did not mind an old friend like Mrs. Morris knowing it, either. Yet in opposition to this, notice her dead silence and inaction throughout this proceeding."

"It is a mystery; but never mind that now," said Owen impressively. "About where Mrs. Manston has been living. We must get this part of it first—learn the place of her stay in the early stage of their separation, during the period of Manston's arrival here and so on, for that was where she was first communicated with on the subject of coming to Knapwater, before the fire; and that address too was her point of departure when she came to her husband by stealth in the night—you know, —the time I visited you in the evening and went home early in the morning, and it was

found that he had been visited too. Ah! couldn't we inquire of Mrs. Leat, who keeps the post-office at Carriford, if she remembers where the letters to Mrs. Manston were directed?"

"He never posted his letters to her in the parish—it was remarked at the time. I was thinking if something relating to her address might not be found in the report of the inquest in the *Froominster Chronicle* of the date. Some facts about the inquest were given in the papers to a certainty."

Her brother caught eagerly at the suggestion. "Who has a file of the *Chronicles?*" he said.

"Mr. Raunham used to file them," said Cytherea. "He was rather friendly-disposed towards me, too."

Owen could not on any consideration escape from his attendance at the church-building till Saturday evening; and thus it became necessary, unless they actually wasted time, that Cytherea herself should assist. "I act under your orders, Owen," she said.

CHAPTER III.

THE EVENTS OF ONE WEEK.

§ 1. *March the sixth.*

THE next morning the opening move of the game was made. Cytherea, under cover of a thick veil, walked to Froominster railway station and took the train for Carriford-Road. It was with a renewed sense of depression that she saw again the objects which had become familiar to her eye during her sojourn under Miss Aldclyffe's roof,—the outline of the hills, the meadow streams, the old park trees. She hastened by a lonely path to the rectory house, and asked if Mr. Raunham was at home.

Now the rector, though a solitary bachelor, was as gallant and courteous to womankind as an ancient Iberian; and moreover, he was Cytherea's friend in particular, to an extent far

greater than she had ever surmised. Rarely visiting his relative Miss Aldclyffe, except on parish matters, more rarely still being called upon by Miss Aldclyffe, Cytherea had learnt very little of him whilst she lived at Knapwater. The relationship was on the paternal side, and for this branch of her family the lady of the estate had never evinced much sympathy.

In looking back upon our line of descent it is an instinct with us to feel that all our vitality was drawn from the richer side of any unequal marriage in the chain.

Since the death of the old captain, the rector's bearing in Knapwater House had been almost that of a stranger, a circumstance which he himself was the last man in the world to regret. This polite indifference was so frigid on both sides, that the rector did not concern himself to preach at her, which was a great deal in a rector; and she did not take the trouble to think his sermons poor stuff, which in a cynical female was a great deal more.

Though barely fifty years of age, his hair was as white as snow, contrasting strangely with the redness of his skin, which was as fresh and healthy as a lad's. Cytherea's bright eyes, mutely and demurely glancing up at him Sunday after Sunday, had been the means of driving away many of the saturnine humours that creep into an empty heart during the hours of a solitary life; in this case, however, to supplant them, when she left his parish, by those others of a more aching nature which accompany an over full one. In short, he had been on the verge of feeling towards her that passion to which his dignified self-respect would not give its true name, even in the privacy of his own thought.

He received her kindly; but she was not disposed to be frank with him. He saw her wish to be reserved, and with genuine good taste and good nature made no comment whatever upon her request to be allowed to see the *Chronicle* for the year before the last. He placed the papers before her on his study table, with a

timidity as great as her own, and then left her entirely to herself.

She turned them over till she came to the first heading connected with the subject of her search,—"Disastrous Fire and Loss of Life at Carriford."

The sight, and its calamitous bearing upon her own life, made her so dizzy that she could, for a while, hardly decipher the letters. Stifling recollection by an effort, she nerved herself to her work, and carefully read the column. The account reminded her of no other fact than was remembered already.

She turned on to the following week's report of the inquest. After a miserable perusal she could find no more pertaining to Mrs. Manston's address than this:—"Abraham Brown, of Hoxton, London, at whose house the deceased woman had been living, deposed," &c.

Nobody else from London had attended the inquest.

She arose to depart, first sending a message

of thanks to Mr. Raunham, who was out gardening.

He stuck his spade into the ground, and accompanied her to the gate.

"Can I help you in anything, Cytherea?" he said, using her christian name by an intuition that unpleasant memories might be revived if he called her Miss Graye after wishing her good-bye as Mrs. Manston after the wedding. Cytherea saw the motive and appreciated it, nevertheless replying evasively,—

"I only guess and fear."

He earnestly looked at her again.

"Promise me that if you want assistance, and you think I can give it, you will come to me."

"I will," she said.

The gate closed between them.

"You don't want me to help you in anything now, Cytherea?" he repeated.

If he had spoken what he felt, "I want very much to help you, Cytherea, and have been watching Manston on your account," she would

gladly have accepted his offer. As it was she was perplexed, and raised her eyes to his, not so fearlessly as before her trouble, but as modestly, and with still enough brightness in them to do fearful execution as she said over the gate,

"No, thank you."

She returned to Palchurch weary with her day's work. Owen's greeting was anxious:

"Well, Cytherea?"

She gave him the words from the report of the inquest, pencilled on a slip of paper.

"Now to find out the name of the street and number," Owen remarked.

"Owen," she said, "will you forgive me for what I am going to say? I don't think I can—indeed I don't think I can—take any further steps towards disentangling the mystery. I still think it a useless task, and it does not seem any duty of mine to be revenged upon Mr. Manston in any way." She added more gravely, "It is beneath my dignity as a woman to labour for this; I have felt it so all day."

"Very well," he said, somewhat shortly, "I shall work without you then. There's dignity in justice." He caught sight of her pale tired face, and the dilated eye which always appeared in her with weariness. "Darling," he continued, warmly, and kissing her, "you shall not work so hard again—you are worn out quite. But you must let me do as I like."

§ 2. *March the tenth.*

On Saturday evening Graye hurried off to Froominster, and called at the house of the reporter to the *Chronicle*. The reporter was at home, and came out to Graye in the passage. Owen explained who and what he was, and asked the man if he would oblige him by turning to his notes of the inquest at Carriford in the December of the year preceding the last—just adding that a family entanglement, of which the reporter probably knew something, made him anxious to ascertain some additional details of the event, if any existed.

"Certainly" said the other, without hesitation; "though I am afraid I haven't much beyond what we printed at the time. Let me see—my old note-books are in my drawer at the office of the paper: if you will come with me I can refer to them there." His wife and family were at tea inside the room, and with the timidity of decent poverty everywhere, he seemed glad to get a stranger away from his domestic groove.

They crossed the street, entered the office, and went thence to an inner room. Here, after a short search, was found the book required. The precise address, not given in the condensed report that was printed, but written down by the reporter, was as follows:

"Abraham Brown, Lodging-house keeper, 41, Charles Square, Hoxton."

Owen copied it, and gave the reporter a small fee. "I want to keep this inquiry private for the present," he said, hesitatingly. "You will perhaps understand why, and oblige me."

The reporter promised. "News is shop with

me," he said, "and to escape from handling it is my greatest social enjoyment."

It was evening, and the outer room of the publishing-office was lighted up with flaring jets of gas. After making the above remark, the reporter came out from the inner apartment in Graye's company, answering an expression of obligation from Owen with the words that it was no trouble. At the moment of his speech, he closed behind him the door between the two rooms, still holding his note-book in his hand.

Before the counter of the front room stood a tall man, who was also speaking, when they emerged. He said to the youth in attendance, "I will take my paper for this week now I am here, so that you needn't post it to me."

The stranger then slightly turned his head, saw Owen, and recognised him. Owen passed out without recognising the other as Manston.

Manston then looked at the reporter, who, after walking to the door with Owen, had come back again to lock up his books. Manston did

not need to be told that the shabby marble-covered book which he carried in his hand, opening endways and interleaved with blotting-paper, was an old reporting book. He raised his eyes to the reporter's face, whose experience had not so schooled his features but that they betrayed a consciousness, to one half-initiated as the other was, that his late proceeding had been connected with events in the life of the steward. Manston said no more, but, taking his newspaper, followed Owen from the office, and disappeared in the gloom of the street.

Edward Springrove was now in London again, and on this same evening before leaving Froominster, Owen wrote a careful letter to him, stating therein all the facts that had come to his knowledge, and begging him, as he valued Cytherea, to make cautious inquiries. A tall man was standing under the lamp-post, about half-a-dozen yards above the post-office, when he dropped the letter into the box.

That same night too, for a reason connected with the rencounter with Owen Graye, the

steward entertained the idea of rushing off suddenly to London by the mail-train, which left Froominster at ten o' clock. But remembering that letters posted after the hour at which Owen had obtained his information—whatever that was—could not be delivered in London till Monday morning, he changed his mind and went home to Knapwater. Making a confidential explanation to his wife, arrangements were set on foot for his departure by the mail on Sunday night.

§ 3. *March the eleventh.*

Starting for church the next morning several minutes earlier than was usual with him, the steward intentionally loitered along the road from the village till old Mr. Springrove overtook him. Manston spoke very civilly of the morning, and of the weather, asking how the farmer's barometer stood, and when it was probable that the wind might change. It was not in Mr. Springrove's nature — going to

church as he was, too—to return anything but a civil answer to such civil questions, however his feelings might have been biassed by late events. The conversation was continued on terms of greater friendliness.

"You must be feeling settled again by this time, Mr. Springrove, after the rough turn out you had on that terrible night in November."

"Ay, but I don't know about feelen settled, either, Mr. Manston. The old window in the chimney-corner of the old house I shall never forget. No window in the chimney-corner where I am now, and I had been used to en for more than fifty years. Ted says 'tis a great loss to me, and he knows exactly what I feel."

"Your son is again in a good situation, I believe?" said Manston, imitating that inquisitiveness towards inferiors which passes for high breeding among the pinchbeck aristocracy of country villages.

"Yes, sir. I hope he'll keep it, or do something else and stick to it."

"'Tis to be hoped he'll be steady now."

"He's always been that, I assure ye," said the old man, tartly.

"Yes—yes—I mean intellectually steady. Intellectual wild oats will thrive in a soil of the strictest morality."

"Intellectual gingerbread! Ted's steady enough—that's all I know about it."

"Of course—of course. Has he respectable lodgings? My own experience has shown me that that's a great thing to a young man living alone in London."

"Warwick Street, Charing Cross—that's where he is."

"Well, to be sure—strange! A very dear friend of mine used to live at number fifty-two in that very same street."

"Edward lives at number forty-nine—how very near being the same house," said the old farmer, pleased in spite of himself.

"Very," said Manston. "Well, I suppose we had better step along a little quicker, Mr. Springrove; the parson's bell has just begun."

"Number forty-nine," he murmured.

§ 4. *March the twelfth.*

Edward received Owen's letter in due time, but on account of his daily engagements he could not attend to any request till the clock had struck five in the afternoon. Rushing then from his office in the Adelphi, he called a Hansom and proceeded to Hoxton. A few minutes later he knocked at the door of number forty-one, Charles Square, the old lodging of Mrs. Manston.

A tall man, who would have looked extremely handsome had he not been clumsily and closely wrapped up in garments that were much too elderly in style for his years, stood at the corner of the quiet square at the same instant, having, too, alighted from a cab that had been driven along Old Street in Edward's rear. He smiled confidently when Springrove knocked.

Nobody came to the door. Springrove knocked again.

This brought out two people—one at the

door he had been knocking upon, the other from the next on the right.

"Is Mr. Brown at home?" said Springrove.

"No, sir."

"When will he be in?"

"Quite uncertain."

"Can you tell me where I may find him?"

"No. O here he is coming, sir. That's Mr. Brown."

Edward looked down the pavement in the direction pointed out by the woman, and saw a man approaching. He proceeded a few steps to meet him.

Edward was impatient, and to a certain extent still a countryman, who had not, after the manner of city men, subdued the natural impulse to speak out the ruling thought without preface. He said in a quiet tone to the stranger, "One word with you—do you remember a lady lodger of yours of the name of Mrs. Manston?"

Mr. Brown half-closed his eyes at Springrove,

somewhat as if he were looking into a telescope at the wrong end.

"I have never let lodgings in my life," he said, after his survey.

"Didn't you attend an inquest a year and a half ago, at Carriford?"

"Never knew there was such a place in the world, sir; and as to lodgings, I have taken acres first and last during the last thirty years, but I have never let an inch."

"I suppose there is some mistake," Edward murmured, and turned away. He and Mr. Brown were now opposite the door next to the one he had knocked at. The woman who was still standing there had heard the inquiry and the result of it.

"I expect it is the other Mr. Brown, who used to live there, that you want, sir," she said, "The Mr. Brown that was inquired for the other day?"

"Very likely that is the man," said Edward, his interest reawakening.

"He couldn't make a do of lodging-letting

here, and at last he went to Cornwall, where he came from, and where his brother still lived, who had often asked him to come home again. But there was little luck in the change; for after London they say he couldn't stand the rainy west winds they get there, and he died in the December following. Will you step into the passage?"

"That's unfortunate," said Edward, going in. "But perhaps you remember a Mrs. Manston living next door to you?"

"O yes," said the landlady, closing the door. "The lady who was supposed to have met with such a horrible fate, and was alive all the time. I saw her the other day."

"Since the fire at Carriford?"

"Yes. Her husband came to ask if Mr. Brown was still living here—just as you might. He seemed anxious about it; and then one evening, a week or fortnight afterwards, when he came again to make further inquiries, she was with him. But I did not speak to her—she stood back, as if she were shy. I was

interested, however, for old Mr. Brown had told me all about her when he came back from the inquest."

"Did you know Mrs. Manston before she called the other day?"

"No. You see she was only Mr. Brown's lodger for two or three weeks, and I didn't know she was living there till she was near upon leaving again—we don't notice next-door people much here in London. I much regretted I had not known her when I heard what had happened. It led me and Mr. Brown to talk about her a great deal afterwards. I little thought I should see her alive after all."

"And when do you say they came here together?"

"I don't exactly remember the day—though I remember a very beautiful dream I had that same night—ah, I shall never forget it! Shoals of lodgers coming along the square with angels' wings and bright golden sovereigns in their hands wanting apartments at West End prices.

They would not give any less; no, not if you——"

"Yes. Did Mrs. Manston leave anything, such as papers, when she left these lodgings originally?" said Edward, though his heart sank as he asked. He felt that he was outwitted. Manston and his wife had been there before him, clearing the ground of all traces.

"I have always said 'No' hitherto," replied the woman, "considering I could say no more if put upon my oath, as I expected to be. But speaking in a common everyday way now the occurrence is past, I believe a few things of some kind (though I doubt if they were papers) were left in a workbox she had, because she talked about it to Mr. Brown, and was rather angry at what occurred—you see she had a temper by all account, and so I didn't like to remind the lady of this workbox when she came the other day with her husband."

"And about the workbox?"

"Well, from what was casually dropped, I

think Mrs. Manston had a few articles of furniture she didn't want, and when she was leaving they were put in a sale just by. Amongst her things were two workboxes very much alike. One of these she intended to sell, the other she didn't, and Mr. Brown, who collected the things together, took the wrong one to the sale."

"What was in it?"

"O nothing in particular, or of any value—some accounts, and her usual sewing materials I think—nothing more. She didn't take much trouble to get it back—she said the bills were worth nothing to her or anybody else, but that she should have liked to keep the box because her husband gave it her when they were first married, and if he found she had parted with it he would be vexed."

"Did Mrs. Manston, when she called recently with her husband, allude to this, or inquire for it, or did Mr. Manston?"

"No—and I rather wondered at it. But she seemed to have forgotten it—indeed she didn't make any inquiry at all, only standing behind

him, listening to his; and he probably had never been told anything about it."

"Whose sale were these articles of hers taken to?"

"Who was the auctioneer? Mr. Halway. His place is the third turning from the end of that street you see there. Anybody will tell you the shop—his name is written up."

Edward went off to follow up this clue with a promptness which was dictated more by a dogged will to do his utmost than by a hope of doing much. When he was out of sight, the tall and cloaked man, who had watched him, came up to the woman's door, with an appearance of being in breathless haste.

"Has a gentleman been here inquiring about Mrs. Manston?"

"Yes: he's just gone."

"Dear me! I want him."

"He's gone to Mr. Halway's."

"I think I can give him some information upon the subject. Does he pay pretty liberally?"

"He gave me half-a-crown."

"That scale will do. I'm a poor man, and will see what my little contribution to his knowledge will fetch. But by-the-way, perhaps you told him all I know—where she lived before coming to live here?"

"I didn't know where she lived before coming here. O no—I only said what Mr. Brown had told me. He seemed a nice gentle young man, or I shouldn't have been so open as I was."

"I shall now about catch him at Mr. Halway's," said the man, and went away as hastily as he had come.

Edward in the meantime had reached the auction-room. He found some difficulty, on account of the inertness of those whose only inducement to an action is a mere wish from another, in getting the information he stood in need of, but it was at last accorded him. The auctioneer's book gave the name of Mrs. Higgins, 3, Canley Passage, as the purchaser of the lot which had included Mrs. Manston's workbox.

Thither Edward went, followed by the man. Four bell-pulls, one above the other like waistcoat buttons, appeared on the door-post. Edward seized the first he came to.

"Who did you want?" said a thin voice from somewhere.

Edward looked above and around him: nobody was visible.

"Who did you want?" said the thin voice again.

He found now that the sound proceeded from below the grating covering the basement window. He dropped his glance through the bars, and saw a child's white face.

"Who did you want?" said the voice the third time, with precisely the same languid inflection.

"Mrs. Higgins," said Edward.

"Third bell up," said the face, and disappeared.

He pulled the third bell from the bottom, and was admitted by another child, the daughter of the woman he was in search of. He gave the

little thing sixpence, and asked for her mamma. The child led him upstairs.

Mrs. Higgins was the wife of a carpenter who from want of employment one winter had decided to marry. Afterwards they both took to drink, and sank into desperate circumstances. A few chairs and a table were the chief articles of furniture in the third-floor back room which they occupied. A roll of baby-linen lay on the floor : beside it a pap-clogged spoon and an overturned tin pap-cup. Against the wall a Dutch clock was fixed out of level, and ticked wildly in longs and shorts, its entrails hanging down beneath its white face and wiry hands, like the fæces of a Harpy ; ("fœdissima ventris proluvies, uncæque manus, et pallida semper ora.") A baby was crying against every chair-leg, the whole family of six or seven being small enough to be covered by a washing-tub. Mrs. Higgins sat helpless, clothed in a dress which had hooks and eyes in plenty, but never one opposite the other, thereby rendering the dress almost useless as

a screen to the bosom. No workbox was visible anywhere.

It was a depressing picture of married life among the very poor of a city. Only for one short hour in the whole twenty-four did husband and wife taste genuine happiness. It was in the evening, when, after the sale of some necessary article of furniture, they were under the influence of a bottle of gin.

Of all the ingenious and cruel satires that from the beginning till now have been stuck like knives into womankind, surely there is not one so lacerating to them, and to us who love them, as the trite old fact, that the most wretched of men can, in the twinkling of an eye, find a wife ready to be more wretched still for the sake of his company.

Edward hastened to dispatch his errand.

Mrs. Higgins had lately pawned the workbox with other useless articles of lumber, she said. Edward bought the duplicate of her, and went downstairs to the pawnbroker's.

In the back division of a musty shop, amid the

heterogeneous collection of articles and odours invariably crowding such places, he produced his ticket, and with a sense of satisfaction out of all proportion to the probable worth of his acquisition, took the box and carried it off under his arm. He attempted to lift the cover as he walked, but found it locked.

It was dusk when Springrove reached his lodging. Entering his small sitting-room, the front apartment on the ground floor, he struck a light, and proceeded to learn if any scrap or mark within or upon his purchase rendered it of moment to the business in hand. Breaking open the cover with a small chisel, and lifting the tray, he glanced eagerly beneath, and found —nothing.

He next discovered that a pocket or portfolio was formed on the underside of the cover. This he unfastened, and slipping his hand within, found that it really contained some substance. First he pulled out about a dozen tangled silk and cotton threads. Under them were a short household account, a dry moss-rosebud,

and an old pair of carte-de-visite photographs. One of these was a likeness of Mrs. Manston—"Eunice" being written under it in ink,—the other of Manston himself.

He sat down dispirited. This was all the fruit of his task—not a single letter, date, or address of any kind to help him—and was it likely there would be?

However, thinking he would send the fragments, such as they were, to Graye, in order to satisfy him that he had done his best so far, he scribbled a line, and put all except the silk and cotton into an envelope. Looking at his watch he found it was then twenty minutes to seven; By affixing an extra stamp he would be enabled to dispatch them by that evening's post. He hastily directed the packet, and ran with it at once to the post-office at Charing Cross.

On his return he took up the workbox again to examine it more leisurely. He then found there was also a small cavity in the tray under the pincushion, which was moveable by a bit of ribbon. Lifting this he uncovered a flattened

sprig of myrtle, and a small scrap of crumpled paper. The paper contained a verse or two in a man's handwriting. He recognised it as Manston's, having seen notes and bills from him at his father's house. The stanza was of a complimentary character, descriptive of the lady who was now Manston's wife.

"EUNICE.

"Whoso for hours or lengthy days
Shall catch her aspect's changeful rays,
Then turn away, can none recall
Beyond a galaxy of all
In hazy portraiture;
Lit by the light of azure eyes
Like summer days by summer skies:
Her sweet transitions seem to be
A kind of pictured melody,
And not a set contour.

"Æ. M."

To shake, pull, and ransack the box till he had almost destroyed it was now his natural action. But it contained absolutely nothing more.

"Disappointed again," he said flinging down the box, the bit of paper, and the withered twig that had lain with it.

Yet valueless as the new acquisition was, on second thoughts he considered that it would be worth while to make good the statement in his late note to Graye—that he had sent everything the box contained except the sewing-thread. Thereupon he enclosed the verse and myrtle-twig in another envelope, with a remark that he had overlooked them in his first search, and put it on the table for the next day's post.

In his hurry and concentration upon the matter that occupied him, Springrove on entering his lodging and obtaining a light had not waited to pull down the blind or close the shutters. Consequently all that he had done had been visible from the street. But as on an average not one person in five minutes passed along the quiet pavement at this time of the evening, the discovery of the omission did not much concern his mind.

But the real state of the case was, that a tall man had stood against the opposite wall and watched the whole of his proceeding. When Edward came out and went to the Charing

Cross post-office, the man followed him and saw him drop the letter into the box. The stranger did not further trouble himself to follow Springrove back to his lodging again.

Manston now knew that there had been photographs of some kind in his wife's workbox, and though he had not been near enough to see them, he guessed whose they were. The least reflection told him to whom they had been sent.

He paused a minute under the portico of the post-office, looking at the two or three omnibuses stopping and starting in front of him. Then he rushed along the Strand, through Holywell Street, and on to Old Boswell Court. Kicking aside the shoeblacks who began to importune him as he passed under the colonnade, he turned up the narrow passage to the publishing-office of the Post-Office Directory. He begged to be allowed to see the Directory of the South-west counties of England for a moment.

The shopman immediately handed down the volume from a shelf, and Manston retired with it to the window-bench. He turned to the

county, and then to the parish of Palchurch. At the end of the historical and topographical description of the village he read,

"Postmistress—Mrs. Hurston. Letters received at 6.30 a.m. by foot-post from Mundsbury."

Returning his thanks, he handed back the book and quitted the office, thence pursuing his way to an obscure coffee-house by the Strand, where he now partook of a light dinner. But rest seemed impossible with him. Some absorbing intention kept his body continually on the move. He paid his bill, took his bag in his hand, and went out to idle about the streets and over the river till the time should have arrived at which the night mail left the Waterloo Station, by which train he intended to return homeward.

There exists as it were an outer chamber to the mind, in which, when a man is occupied centrally with the most momentous question of his life, casual and trifling thoughts are just allowed to wander softly for an interval, before

being banished altogether. Thus, amid his concentration did Manston receive perceptions of the individuals about him in the lively thoroughfare of the Strand: tall men looking insignificant: little men looking great and profound: lost women of miserable repute looking as happy as the days are long: wives, happy by assumption, looking careworn and miserable. Each and all were alike in this one respect, that they followed a solitary trail like the inwoven threads which form a banner, and all were equally unconscious of the significant whole they collectively showed forth.

At ten o'clock he turned into Lancaster Place, crossed the river, and entered the railway station, where he took his seat in the down mail-train, which bore him, and Edward Springrove's letter to Graye, far away from London.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENTS OF ONE DAY.

§ 1. *March the thirteenth. Three to six o'clock, a.m.*

They entered Mundsbury Station—the next but one to Froominster on the London side—in the dead, still time of early morning, the clock over the booking-office pointing to twenty-five minutes to three. Manston lingered on the platform and saw the mail-bags brought out, noticing, as a pertinent pastime, the many shabby blotches of wax from innumerable seals that had been set upon their mouths. The guard took them into a fly, and was driven down the road to the post-office.

It was a raw, damp, uncomfortable morning, though, as yet, little rain was falling. Manston drank a mouthful from his flask and walked at

once away from the station. Avoiding Mundsbury by keeping in a lane which curved about its outskirts, he pursued his way through the gloom till he stood on the side of the town opposite to the railway station, at a distance from the last house in the street of about two hundred yards.

Here the turnpike-road into the country lay, the first part of its course being across a moor. Having surveyed the highway up and down to make sure of its bearing, Manston methodically set himself to walk backwards and forwards a stone's throw in each direction. Although the spring was temperate, the time of day, and the condition of suspense in which the steward found himself, caused a sensation of chilliness to pervade his frame in spite of the overcoat he wore. The drizzling rain increased, and drops from the trees at the wayside fell noisily upon the hard road beneath them, which reflected from its glassy surface the faint halo of light hanging over the lamps of the adjacent town.

Here he walked and lingered for two hours,

without seeing or hearing a living soul. Then he heard the market-house clock strike five, and soon afterwards, quick hard footsteps smote upon the pavement of the street leading towards him. They were those of the postman for the Palchurch beat. He reached the bottom of the street, gave his bags a final hitch-up, stepped off the pavement, and struck out for the country with a brisk shuffle.

Manston then turned his back upon the town, and walked slowly on. In two minutes a flickering light shone upon his form, and the postman overtook him.

The new-comer was a short, stooping individual of above five-and-forty, laden on both sides with leather bags large and small, and carrying a little lantern strapped to his breast, which cast a tiny patch of light upon the road ahead.

"A tryen mornen for travellers!" the postman cried, in a cheerful voice, without turning his head or slackening his trot.

"It is, indeed," said Manston, stepping out

abreast of him. "You have a long walk every day."

"Yes—a long walk—for though the distance is only sixteen miles on the straight—that is eight to the furthest place and eight back, what with the ins and outs to the gentlemen's houses, d' make two-and-twenty for my legs. Two-and-twenty miles a day, how many a year? I used to reckon it, but I never do now. I don't care to think o' my wear and tear, now d' begin to tell upon me."

Thus the conversation was begun, and the postman proceeded to narrate the different strange events that had marked his experience. Manston grew very friendly.

"Postman, I don't know what your custom is," he said, after a while; "but, between you and me, I always carry a drop of something warm in my pocket when I am out on such a morning as this. Try it." He handed the bottle of brandy.

"If you'll excuse me, please. I haven't took no stimmilents these five years."

'Tis never too late to mend."

"Against the regulations, I be afraid."

"Who'll know it?"

"That's true—nobody will know it. Still, honesty's the best policy."

"Ah—it is certainly. But, thank God, I've been able to get on without it yet. You'll surely drink with me?"

"Really, 'tis a'most too early for that sort o thing—however, to oblige a friend, I don't object to the faintest shadder of a drop." The postman drank, and Manston did the same to a very slight degree. Five minutes later, when they came to a gate, the flask was pulled out again.

"Well done!" said the postman, beginning to feel its effect; "but, guide my soul, I be afraid 'twill hardly do!"

"Not unless 'tis well followed, like any other line you take up," said Manston. "Besides, there's a way of liking a drop of liquor, and of being good—even religious—at the same time."

"Ay, for some thimble-and-button in-and-out

fellers; but I could never get into the knack o' it; not I."

"Well, you needn't be troubled; it isn't necessary for the higher class of mind to be religious —they have so much common sense that they can risk playing with fire."

"That hits me exactly."

"In fact, a man I know, who always had no other god but Me, and devoutly loved his neighbour's wife, says now that believing is a mistake."

"Well, to be sure! However, believing in God is a mistake made by very few people, after all."

"A true remark."

"Not one Christian in our parish would walk half a mile in a rain like this to know whether the Scripture had concluded him under sin or grace."

"Nor in mine."

"Ah, you may depend upon it they'll do away wi' Providence altogether, afore long, although we've had him over us so many years."

"There's no knowing."

"And I suppose the Queen will be done

away wi' then. A pretty concern that'll be! Nobody's head to put on your letters; and then your honest man who do pay his penny will never be known from your scamp who don't. O 'tis a nation!"

"Warm the cockles of your heart, however. Here's the bottle waiting."

"I'll oblige you, my friend."

The drinking was repeated. The postman grew livelier as he went on, and at length favoured the steward with a song, Manston himself joining in the chorus.

"He flung his mallet against the wall,
Said, 'The Lord make churches and chapels to fall,
And there'll be work for tradesmen all!'
When Joan's ale was new,
My boys,
When Joan's ale was new."

"You understand, friend," the postman added, "I was originally a mason by trade: no offence to you if you be a parson?"

"None at all," said Manston.

The rain now came down heavily, but they pursued their path with alacrity, the produce of

the several fields between which the lane wended its way being indicated by the peculiar character of the sound emitted by the falling drops. Sometimes a soaking hiss proclaimed that they were passing by a pasture, then a patter would show that the rain fell upon some large-leafed root crop, then a paddling plash announced the naked arable, the low sound of the wind in their ears rising and falling with each pace they took.

Besides the small private bags of the county families, which were all locked, the postman bore the large general budget for the remaining inhabitants along his beat. At each village or hamlet they came to, the postman searched for the packet of letters destined for that place, and thrust it into an ordinary letter-hole cut in the door of the receiver's cottage—the village post-offices being mostly kept by old women who had not yet risen, though lights moving in other cottage windows showed that such people as carters, woodmen, and stablemen, had long been stirring.

The postman had by this time become

markedly unsteady, but he still continued to be too conscious of his duties to suffer the steward to search the bag. Manston was perplexed, and at lonely points in the road cast his eyes keenly upon the short bowed figure of the man trotting through the mud by his side, as if he were half inclined to run a very great risk indeed.

It frequently happened that the houses of farmers, clergymen, &c., lay a short distance up or down a lane or path branching from the direct track of the postman's journey. To save time and distance, at the point of junction of some of these lanes with the main one, the gate-post was hollowed out to form a letter-box, in which the postman deposited his missives in the morning, looking in the box again in the evening to collect those placed there for the return post. Palchurch Vicarage and Farmstead, lying apart from the village, were unitedly served on this principle. This fact the steward now learnt by conversing with the postman, and the discovery relieved Manston greatly, making his intentions

much clearer to himself than they had been in the earlier stages of his journey.

They had reached the outskirts of the village. Manston insisted upon the flask being emptied before they proceeded further. This was done, and they ascended the sandy hill from which branched the lane leading to the church, the vicarage, and the farmhouse in which Owen and Cytherea were living.

The postman paused, fumbled in his bag, took out by the light of his lantern some half-dozen letters, and tried to sort them. He could not perform the task.

"We be crippled disciples a b'lieve," he said, with a sigh and a stagger.

"Not drunk, but market-merry," said Manston, cheerfully.

"Well done! If I ben't so weak that I can't see the clouds—much less letters. Guide my soul, if so be anybody should tell the queen's postmaster-general of me! The whole story will have to go through Parliament House, and I shall be high-treasoned—as safe as houses—

and be fined, and who'll pay for a poor martel! O 'tis a world!"

"Trust in the Lord—he'll pay."

"He pay a b'lieve! why should he when he didn't drink the drink, and the devil's a friend o' them who did? He pay a b'lieve! D'ye think the man's a fool?"

"Well, well, I had no intention of hurting your feelings—but how was I to know you were so sensitive?"

"True—you were not to know I was so sensitive. Here's a caddle wi' these letters! Guide my soul, what will Billy do!"

Manston offered his services.

"They are to be divided," the man said.

"How?" said Manston.

"These, for the village, to be carried on into it: any for the vicarage or vicarage-farm must be left in the box of the gate-post just here. There's none for the vicarage-house this mornen, but I saw when I started there was one for the clerk o' works at the new church. This is it, isn't it?"

He held up a large envelope, directed in Edward Springrove's handwriting,

"MR. OWEN GRAYE,
"CLERK OF WORKS,
"PALCHURCH,
"NEAR MUNDSBURY."

The letter-box was scooped in an oak gate-post about a foot square. There was no slit for inserting the letters, by reason of the opportunity such a lonely spot would have afforded mischievous peasant-boys of doing mischief had such been the case; but at the side was a small iron door, kept close by an iron reversible strap locked across it. One side of this strap was painted black, the other white, and white or black outwards implied respectively that there were letters inside, or none.

The postman had taken the key from his pocket and was attempting to insert it in the keyhole of the box. He touched one side, the other, above, below, but never made a straight hit.

"Let me unlock it," said Manston taking the key from the postman. He opened the box and reached out with his other hand for Owen's letter.

"No, no. Oh no—no," the postman said. "As—one of—Majesty's servants—care—Majesty's mails—duty—put letters—own hands." He slowly and solemnly placed the letter in the small cavity.

"Now lock it," he said, closing the door.

The steward placed the bar across, with the black side outwards, signifying "empty," and turned the key.

"You've put the wrong side outwards!" said the postman. "'Tisn't empty."

"And dropped the key in the mud, so that I can't alter it," said the steward, letting something fall.

"What an awkward thing!"

"It is an awkward thing."

They both went searching in the mud, which their own trampling had reduced to the consistency of pap, the postman unstrapping his little lantern from his breast, and thrusting it

about, close to the ground, the rain still drizzling down, and the dawn so tardy on account of the heavy clouds that daylight seemed delayed indefinitely. The rays of the lantern were rendered individually visible upon the thick mist, and seemed almost tangible as they passed off into it, after illuminating the faces and knees of the two stooping figures dripping with wet; the postman's cape and private bags, and the steward's valise, glistening as if they had been varnished.

"It fell on the grass," said the postman.

"No: it fell in the mud," said Manston. They searched again.

"I'm afraid we shan't find it by this light," said the steward at length, washing his muddy fingers in the wet grass of the bank.

"I'm afraid we shan't," said the other, standing up.

"I'll tell you what we had better do," said Manston. "I shall be back this way in an hour or so, and since it was all my fault, I'll look again, and shall be sure to find it in the day-

light. And I'll hide the key here for you." He pointed to a spot behind the post. "It will be too late to turn the index then, as the people will have been here, so that the box had better stay as it is. The letter will only be delayed a day, and that will not be noticed: if it is, you can say you placed the iron the wrong way without knowing it, and all will be well."

This was agreed to by the postman as the best thing to be done under the circumstances, and the pair went on. They had passed the village and come to a cross-road, when the steward, telling his companion that their paths now diverged, turned off to the left towards Froominster.

No sooner was the postman out of sight and hearing than Manston stalked back to the vicarage letter-box by keeping inside a fence, and thus avoiding the village; arrived here, he took the key from his pocket, where it had been concealed all the time, and abstracted Owen's letter. This done he turned towards home, by the help of what he carried in his valise

adjusting himself to his ordinary appearance as he neared the quarter in which he was known.

An hour and half's sharp walking brought him to his own door in Knapwater Park.

§ 2. *Eight o'clock, a.m.*

Seated in his private office he wetted the flap of the stolen letter, and waited patiently till the adhesive gum could be loosened. He took out Edward's note, the accounts, the rosebud, and the photographs, regarding them with the keenest interest and anxiety.

The note, the accounts, the rosebud, and his own photograph, he restored to their places again. The other photograph he took between his finger and thumb, and held it towards the bars of the grate. There he held it for half a minute or more, meditating.

"It is a great risk to run, even for such an end," he muttered.

Suddenly, impregnated with a bright idea, he jumped up and left the office for the front

parlour. Taking up an album of portraits, which lay on the table, he searched for three or four likenesses of the lady who had so lately displaced Cytherea, which were interspersed among the rest of the collection, and carefully regarded them. They were taken in different attitudes and styles, and he compared each singly with that he held in his hand. One of them, the one most resembling that abstracted from the letter in general tone, size, and attitude, he selected from the rest, and returned with it to his office.

Pouring some water into a plate, he set the two portraits afloat upon it, and sitting down tried to read.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, after several ineffectual attempts, he found that each photograph would peel from the card on which it was mounted. This done, he threw into the fire the original likeness and the recent card, stuck upon the original card the recent likeness from the album, dried it before the fire, and placed it in the envelope with the other scraps.

The result he had obtained, then, was this: in the envelope were now two photographs, both having the same photographer's name on the back and consecutive numbers attached. At the bottom of the one which showed his own likeness, his own name was written down; on the other his wife's name was written; whilst the central feature, and whole matter to which this latter card and writing referred, the likeness of a lady mounted upon it, had been changed.

Mrs. Manston entered the room, and begged him to come to breakfast. He followed her, and they sat down. During the meal he told her what he had done, with scrupulous regard to every detail, and showed her the result.

"It is indeed a great risk to run," she said, sipping her tea.

"But it would be a greater not to do it."

"Yes."

The envelope was again fastened up as before, and Manston put it in his pocket and went out. Shortly afterwards he was seen on horseback

riding in a direction skirting Froominster and towards Palchurch. Keeping to the fields, as well as he could, for the greater part of the way, he dropped into the road by the vicarage letter-box, and looking carefully about, to ascertain that no person was near, he restored the letter to its nook, placed the key in its hiding-place, as he had promised the postman, and again rode homewards by a roundabout way.

§ 3. *Afternoon.*

The letter was brought to Owen Graye, the same afternoon, by one of the vicar's servants who had been to the box with a duplicate key, as usual, to leave letters for the evening post. The man found that the index had told falsely that morning for the first time within his recollection ; but no particular attention was paid to the mistake, as it was considered. The contents of the envelope were scrutinized by Owen and flung aside as useless.

The next morning brought Springrove's second letter, the existence of which was unknown to Manston. The sight of Edward's handwriting again raised the expectations of brother and sister, till Owen had opened the envelope and pulled out the twig and verse.

"Nothing that's of the slightest use after all," he said to her, "we are as far as ever from the merest shadow of legal proof that would convict him of what I am morally certain he did, marry you, suspecting, if not knowing, her to be alive all the time."

"What has Edward sent?" said Cytherea.

"An old amatory verse in Manston's writing. Fancy," he said, bitterly, "this is the strain he addressed her in when they were courting—as he did you, I suppose."

He handed her the verse and she read,

"'EUNICE.

"'Whoso for hours or lengthy days
Shall catch her aspect's changeful rays,
Then turn away, can none recall
Beyond a galaxy of all
In hazy portraiture;

Lit by the light of azure eyes,
Like summer days by summer skies,
Her sweet transitions seem to be
A kind of pictured melody,
And not a set contour.

"'Æ. M.'"

A strange expression had overspread Cytherea's countenance. It rapidly increased to the most death-like anguish. She flung down the paper, seized Owen's hand tremblingly, and covered her face.

"Cytherea! What is it, for Heaven's sake?"

"Owen—suppose—O you don't know what I think."

"What?"

"'*The light of azure eyes*'," she repeated with ashy lips.

"Well, 'the light of azure eyes'?" he said, astounded at her manner.

"Mrs. Morris said in her letter to me that her eyes are *black!*"

"H'm. Mrs. Morris must have made a mistake—nothing likelier."

"She didn't."

"They might be either in this photograph," said Owen, looking at the card bearing Mrs. Manston's name.

"Blue eyes would scarcely photograph so deep in tone as that," said Cytherea. "No, they seem black here, certainly."

"Well then, Manston must have blundered in writing his verses."

"But could he? Say a man in love may forget his own name, but not that he forgets the colour of his mistress's eyes. Besides, she would have seen the mistake when she read them, and have had it corrected."

"That's true, she would," mused Owen. "Then, Cytherea, it comes to this—you must have been misinformed by Mrs. Morris, since there is no other alternative."

"I suppose I must."

Her looks belied her words.

"What makes you so strange—ill?" said Owen again.

"I can't believe Mrs. Morris wrong."

"But look at this, Cytherea. If it is clear to us that the woman had blue eyes two years ago, she *must* have blue eyes now, whatever Mrs. Morris or anybody else may fancy. Anyone would think that Manston could change the colour of a woman's eyes, to hear you."

"Yes," she said, and paused.

"You say yes, as if he could," said Owen, impatiently.

"By changing the woman herself," she exclaimed. "Owen, don't you see the horrid—what I dread?—that the woman he lives with is not Mrs. Manston—that she was burnt after all—and that I am HIS WIFE!"

She tried to support a stoicism under the weight of this new trouble, but no! The unexpected revulsion of ideas was so overwhelming that she crept to him and leant against his breast.

Before reflecting any further upon the subject Graye led her upstairs and got her to lie down. Then he went to the window and stared out of it up the lane, vainly endeavouring to come to

some conclusion upon the fantastic enigma that confronted him. Cytherea's new view seemed incredible, yet it had such a hold upon her that it would be necessary to clear it away by positive proof before contemplation of her fear should have preyed too deeply upon her.

"Cytherea," he said, "this will not do. You must stay here alone all the afternoon whilst I go to Carriford. I shall know all when I return."

"No, no, don't go!" she implored.

"Soon, then, not directly." He saw her subtle reasoning—that it was folly to be wise.

Reflection still convinced him that good would come of persevering in his intention and dispelling his sister's idle fears. Anything was better than this absurd doubt in her mind. But he resolved to wait till Sunday, the first day on which he might reckon upon seeing Mrs. Manston without suspicion. In the meantime he wrote to Edward Springrove, requesting him to go again to Mrs. Manston's former lodging.

CHAPTER V.

THE EVENTS OF THREE DAYS.

§ 1. *March the eighteenth.*

SUNDAY morning had come, and Owen was trudging over the six miles of hill and dale that lay between Palchurch and Carriford.

Edward Springrove's answer to the last letter, after expressing his amazement at the strange contradiction between the verses, and Mrs. Morris's letter, had been to the effect that he had again visited the neighbour of the dead Mr. Brown, and had received as near a description of Mrs. Manston as it was possible to get at second-hand, and by hearsay. She was a tall woman, wide at the shoulders, and full-bosomed, and she had a straight and rather large nose. The colour of her eyes the informant did not know, for she had only seen the lady in the

street as she went in or out. This confusing remark was added. The woman had almost recognised Mrs. Manston when she had called with her husband lately, but she had kept her veil down. Her residence, before she came to Hoxton, was quite unknown to this next-door neighbour, and Edward could get no manner of clue to it from any other source.

Owen reached the church-door a few minutes before the bells began chiming. Nobody was yet in the church, and he walked round the aisles. From Cytherea's frequent description of how and where herself and others used to sit, he knew where to look for Manston's seat; and after two or three errors of examination he took up a prayer book in which was written "Eunice Manston." The book was nearly new, and the date of the writing about a month earlier. One point was at any rate established: that the woman living with Manston was presented to the world as no other than his lawful wife.

The quiet villagers of Carriford required no pew-opener in their place of worship: natives

and indwellers had their own seats, and strangers sat where they could. Graye took a seat in the nave, on the north side, close behind a pillar dividing it from the north aisle, which was completely allotted to Miss Aldclyffe, her farmers, and her retainers, Manston's pew being in the midst of them. Owen's position on the other side of the passage was a little in advance of Manston's seat, and so situated that by leaning forward he could look directly into the face of any person sitting there, though, if he sat upright, he was wholly hidden from such a one by the intervening pillar.

Aiming to keep his presence unknown to Manston if possible, Owen sat without once turning his head, during the entrance of the congregation. A rustling of silk round by the north passage and into Manston's seat, told him that some female had entered there, and as it seemed from the accompaniment of heavier footsteps, Manston was with her.

Immediately upon rising up, he looked intently in that direction, and saw a lady stand-

ing at the end of the seat nearest himself. Portions of Manston's figure appeared on the other side of her. In two glances Graye read thus many of her characteristics, and in the following order.

She was a tall woman.

She was broad at the shoulders.

She was full-bosomed.

She was easily recognisable from the photograph; but nothing could be discerned of the colour of her eyes.

With a preoccupied mind he withdrew into his nook, and heard the service continued—only conscious of the fact that in opposition to the suspicion which one odd circumstance had bred in his sister concerning this woman, all ostensible and ordinary proofs and probabilities tended to the opposite conclusion. There sat the genuine original of the portrait — could he wish for more? Cytherea wished for more. Eunice Manston's eyes were blue, and it was necessary that this woman's eyes should be blue also.

Unskilled labour wastes in beating against

the bars ten times the energy exerted by the practised hand in the effective direction. Owen felt this to be the case in his own and Edward's attempts to follow up the clue afforded them. Think as he might, he could not think of a crucial test in the matter absorbing him, which should possess the indispensable attribute—a capability of being applied privately, that in the event of its proving the lady to be the rightful owner of the name she used, he might recede without obloquy from an untenable position.

But to see Mrs. Manston's eyes from where he sat was impossible, and he could do nothing in the shape of a direct examination at present. Miss Aldclyffe had possibly recognised him, but Manston had not, and feeling that it was indispensable to keep the purport of his visit a secret from the steward, he thought it would be as well too to keep his presence in the village a secret from him, at any rate till the day was over.

At the first opening of the doors, Graye left the church and wandered away into the fields to ponder on another scheme. He could not

call on Farmer Springrove, as he had intended, until this matter was set at rest. Two hours intervened between the morning and afternoon services.

This time had nearly expired before Owen had struck out any line as to his method of proceeding, or could decide to run the risk of calling at the Old House and asking to see Mrs. Manston point-blank. But he had drawn near the place, and was standing still in the public path, from which a partial view of the front of the building could be obtained, when the bells began chiming for afternoon service. Whilst Graye paused, two persons came from the front door of the half-hidden dwelling, whom he presently saw to be Manston and his wife.

Manston was wearing his old garden-hat, and carried one of the monthly magazines under his arm. Immediately they had passed the gateway he branched off and went over the hill in a direction away from the church, evidently intending to ramble along, and read as the humour moved him. The lady meanwhile

turned in the other direction, and went along the church path.

Owen resolved to make something of this opportunity. He hurried along towards the church, doubled round a sharp angle, and came back upon the other path, by which Mrs. Manston must arrive.

In about three minutes she appeared in sight without a veil. He discovered, as she drew nearer, a difficulty which had not struck him at first—that it is not an easy matter to particularise the colour of a stranger's eyes in a merely casual encounter on a path out of doors. That Mrs. Manston must be brought close to him, and not only so, but to look closely at him, if his purpose were to be accomplished.

He adumbrated a plan. It might by chance be effectual: if otherwise, it would not reveal his intention to her.

When Mrs. Manston was within speaking distance, he went up to her and said,

"Will you kindly tell me which turning will take me to Froominster?"

"The second on the right," said Mrs. Manston.

Owen put on a blank look : he held his hand to his ear—conveying to the lady the idea that he was deaf.

She came closer and said more distinctly,

"The second turning on the right."

Owen flushed a little. He fancied he had beheld the revelation he was in search of. But had his eyes deceived him ?

Once more he used the ruse, still drawing nearer, and intimating by a glance that the trouble he gave her was very distressing to him.

"How very deaf," she murmured. She exclaimed loudly,

"*The second turning to the right.*"

She had advanced her face to within a foot of his own, and in speaking mouthed very emphatically, fixing her eyes intently upon his. And now his first suspicion was indubitably confirmed. Her eyes were as black as midnight.

All this feigning was most distasteful to Graye. The riddle having been solved, he

unconsciously assumed his natural look before she had withdrawn her face. She found him to be peering at her as if he would read her very soul—expressing with his eyes the notification of which, apart from emotion, the eyes are more capable than any other—inquiry.

Her face changed its expression—then its colour. The natural tint of the lighter portions sank to an ashy grey: the pink of her cheeks grew purpler. It was the precise result which would remain after blood had left the face of one whose skin was dark, and artificially coated with pearl-powder and carmine.

She turned her head and moved away, murmuring a hasty reply to Owen's farewell remark of "Good-day," and with a kind of nervous twitch lifting her hand and smoothing her hair, which was of a light brown colour.

"She wears false hair," he thought, "or has changed its colour artificially. Her true hair matched her eyes."

And now, in spite of what Mr. Brown's neighbours had said about nearly recognising

Mrs. Manston on her recent visit—which might have meant anything or nothing; in spite of the photograph, and in spite of his previous incredulity: in consequence of the verse, of her silence and backwardness at the visit to Hoxton with Manston, and of her appearance and distress at the present moment, Graye had a conviction that the woman was an impostor.

What could be Manston's reason for such an astounding trick he could by no stretch of imagination divine.

He changed his direction as soon as the woman was out of sight, and plodded along the lanes homeward to Palchurch.

One new idea was suggested to him by his desire to allay Cytherea's dread of being claimed, and by the difficulty of believing that the first Mrs. Manston lost her life as supposed, notwithstanding the inquest and verdict. Was it possible that the real Mrs. Manston, who was known to be a Philadelphian by birth, had returned by the train to London, as the porter had said, and then left the country under an

assumed name, to escape that worst kind of widowhood—the misery of being wedded to a fickle, faithless, and truant husband ?

In her complicated distress at the news brought by her brother, Cytherea's thoughts at length reverted to her friend, the rector of Carriford. She told Owen of Mr. Raunham's warm-hearted behaviour towards herself, and of his strongly expressed wish to aid her.

"He is not only a good but a sensible man. We seem to want an old head on our side."

And he is a magistrate," said Owen in a tone of concurrence. He thought too that no harm could come of confiding in the rector, but there was a difficulty in bringing about the confidence. He wished that his sister and himself might both be present at an interview with Mr. Raunham, yet it would be unwise for them to call on him together, in the sight of all the servants and parish of Carriford.

There could be no objection to their writing him a letter.

No sooner was the thought born than it was carried out. They wrote to him at once, asking him to have the goodness to give them some advice they sadly needed, and begging that he would accept their assurance that there was a real justification for the additional request they made—that instead of their calling upon him, he would any evening of the week come to their cottage at Palchurch.

§ 2. *March the twentieth. Six to nine o'clock, p.m.*

Two evenings later, to the total disarrangement of his dinner hour, Mr. Raunham appeared at Owen's door. His arrival was hailed with genuine gratitude. The horse was tied to the palings, and the rector ushered indoors and put into the easy chair.

Then Graye told him the whole story, reminding him that their first suspicions had been of a totally different nature, and that it was in endeavouring to obtain proof of their truth

they had stumbled upon marks which had surprised them into these new uncertainties, thrice as marvellous as the first, yet more prominent.

Cytherea's heart was so full of anxiety that it superinduced a manner of confidence which was a death-blow to all formality. Mr. Raunham took her hand pityingly.

"It is a serious charge," he said, as a sort of original twig on which his thoughts might precipitate themselves.

"Assuming for a moment that such a substitution was rendered an easy matter by fortuitous events," he continued; "there is this consideration to be placed beside it—what earthly motive can Mr. Manston have had which would be sufficiently powerful to lead him to run such a very great risk? The most abandoned roué could not, at that particular crisis, have taken such a reckless step for the mere pleasure of a new companion."

Owen had seen that difficulty about the motive; Cytherea had not.

"Unfortunately for us," the rector resumed,

"no more evidence is to be obtained from the porter Chinney. I suppose you know what went with him? He got to Liverpool and embarked, intending to work his way to America, but on the passage he fell overboard and was drowned. But there is no doubt of the truth of his confession—in fact, his conduct tends to prove it true, and no moral doubt of the fact that Mrs. Manston left Froominster by that morning's train. This being the case, then, why did she take no notice of the advertisement—I mean not necessarily a friendly notice, but from the information it afforded her have rendered it impossible that she should be personified without her own connivance?"

"I think that argument is overthrown," Graye said, "by my earliest assumption of her hatred of him, weariness of the chain which bound her to him, and a resolve to begin the world anew. Let's suppose she has married another man — somewhere abroad, say; she would be silent for her own sake."

"You've hit the only genuine possibility,"

said Mr. Raunham, tapping his finger upon his knee. "That would decidedly dispose of the second difficulty. But his motive would be as mysterious as ever."

Cytherea's pictured dreads would not allow her mind to follow their conversation. "She's burnt," she said. "O, yes; I fear—I fear she is!"

"I don't think we can seriously believe that now, after what has happened," said the rector.

Still straining her thought towards the worst, "Then, perhaps, the first Mrs. Manston was not his wife," she returned; "and then I should be his wife just the same, shouldn't I?"

"They were married safely enough," said Owen. "There is abundance of circumstantial evidence to prove that."

"Upon the whole," said Mr. Raunham, "I should advise your asking in a straightforward way for legal proof from the steward that the present woman is really his original wife—a thing which, to my mind, you should have done at the outset." He turned to Cytherea kindly,

and asked her what made her give up her husband so unceremoniously.

She could not tell the rector of her aversion to Manston, and of her unquenched love for Edward.

"Your terrified state, no doubt," he said, answering for her, in the manner of those accustomed to the pulpit. "But into such a solemn compact as marriage, all-important considerations, both legally and morally, enter; it was your duty to have seen everything clearly proved. Doubtless Mr. Manston is prepared with proofs, but as it concerns nobody but yourself that her identity should be publicly established, (and by your absenteeism you act as if you were satisfied), he has not troubled to exhibit them. Nobody else has taken the trouble to prove what does not affect them in the least—that's the way of the world always. You, who should have required all things to be made clear, ran away."

"That was partly my doing," said Owen.

The same explanation—her want of love for

Manston—applied here too, but she shunned the revelation.

"But never mind," added the rector; "it was all the greater credit to your womanhood, perhaps. I say, then, get your brother to write a line to Mr. Manston, saying you wish to be satisfied that all is legally clear, (in case you should want to marry again, for instance) and I have no doubt that you will be. Or if you would rather, I'll write myself?"

"Oh, no sir, no," pleaded Cytherea, beginning to blanch, and breathing quickly. "Please don't say anything. Let me live here with Owen. I am so afraid it will turn out that I shall have to go to Knapwater and be his wife, and I don't want to. Do conceal what we have told you. Let him continue his deception—it is much the best for me."

Mr. Raunham at length divined that her love for Manston, if it had ever existed, had transmuted itself into a very different feeling now.

"At any rate," he said, as he took his leave

and mounted his mare, "I will see about it. Rest content, Miss Graye, and depend upon it that I will not lead you into difficulty."

"Conceal it," she still pleaded.

"We'll see—but of course I must do my duty."

"No—don't do your duty!" She looked up at him through the gloom, illuminating her own face and eyes with the candle she held.

"I will consider, then," said Mr. Raunham, sensibly moved. He turned his horse's head, bade them a warm adieu, and left the door.

The rector of Carriford trotted homewards under the cold and clear March sky, its countless stars fluttering like bright birds. He was unconscious of the scene. Recovering from the effect of Cytherea's voice and glance of entreaty, he laid the subject of the interview clearly before himself.

The suspicions of Cytherea and Owen were honest, and had foundation — that he must own.

Was he—a clergyman, magistrate, and con-

scientious man—justified in yielding to Cytherea's importunities to keep silence, because she dreaded the possibility of a return to Manston?

Was she wise in her request? Holding her present belief, and with no definite evidence either way, she could, for one thing, never conscientiously marry any one else.

Suppose that Cytherea were Manston's wife —*i.e.*, that the first wife was really burnt? The adultery of Manston would be proved, and Mr. Raunham thought, cruelty sufficient to bring the case within the meaning of the statute.

Suppose the new woman was, as stated, Mr. Manston's restored wife? Cytherea was perfectly safe as a single woman whose marriage had been void.

And if it turned out that, though this woman was not Manston's wife, his wife was still living, as Owen had suggested, in America or elsewhere, Cytherea was safe.

The first supposition opened up the worst

contingency. Was she really safe as Manston's wife?

Doubtful. But however that might be, the gentle, defenceless girl, whom it seemed nobody's business to help or defend, should be put in a track to proceed against this man. She had but one life, and the superciliousness with which all the world now regarded her, should be compensated for in some measure by the man whose carelessness—to set him in the best light—had caused it.

Mr. Raunham felt more and more positively that his duty must be done. An inquiry must be made into the matter.

Immediately on reaching home, he sat down and wrote a plain and friendly letter to Mr. Manston, and despatched it at once to him by hand. Then he flung himself back in his chair, and went on with his meditation.

Was there anything in the suspicion? There could be nothing, surely. Nothing is done by a clever man without a motive, and what conceivable motive could Manston have for such

abnormal conduct? Corinthian that he was, who had preyed on virginity like St. George's dragon, he would never have been absurd enough to venture on such a course for the possession alone of the woman—there was no reason for it—she was inferior to Cytherea in every respect, physical and mental.

On the other hand it seemed rather odd, when he analysed the action, that a woman who deliberately hid herself from her husband for more than a twelvemonth, should be brought back by a mere advertisement. In fact, the whole business had worked almost too smoothly and effectually for unpremeditated sequence. It was too much like the indiscriminate righting of everything at the end of an old play.

And there was that curious business of the keys and watch. Her way of accounting for their being left behind by forgetfulness, had always seemed to him rather forced. The only unforced explanation was that suggested by the newspaper writers—that she left them behind on purpose to blind people as to her escape, a

motive which would have clashed with the possibility of her being fished back by an advertisement, as the present woman had been.

Again, there were the two charred bones.

He shuffled the books and papers in his study, and walked about the room, restlessly musing on the same subject. The parlour-maid entered.

"Can young Mr. Springrove from London see you to-night, sir?"

"Young Mr. Springrove?" said the rector, surprised.

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, of course he can see me. Tell him to come in."

Edward came so impatiently into the room, as to show that the few short moments his announcement had occupied had been irksome to him. He stood in the doorway with the same black bag in his hand, and the same old grey cloak on his shoulders, that he had worn fifteen months earlier when returning on the night of the fire. This appearance of his conveyed a

true impression; he had become a stagnant man. But he was excited now.

"I have this moment come from London," he said, as the door was closed behind him.

The prophetic insight, which so strangely accompanies critical experiences, prompted Mr. Raunham's reply.

"About the Grayes and Manston?"

"Yes. That woman is not Mrs. Manston."

"Prove it."

"I can prove that she is somebody else—that her name is Anne Seaway."

"And are their suspicions true indeed!"

"And I can do what's more to the purpose at present."

"Suggest Manston's motive?"

"Only suggest it, remember. But my assumption fits so perfectly with the facts that have been secretly unearthed and conveyed to me, that I can hardly conceive of another."

There was in Edward's bearing that entire unconsciousness of himself which, natural to wild animals, only prevails in a sensitive man

at moments of extreme intentness. The rector saw that he had no trivial story to communicate, whatever the story was.

"Sit down," said Mr. Raunham. "My mind has been on the stretch all the evening to form the slightest guess at such an object, and all to no purpose—entirely to no purpose. Have you said anything to Owen Graye?"

"Nothing—nor to anybody. I could not trust to the effect a letter might have upon yourself either: the intricacy of the case brings me to this interview."

Whilst Springrove had been speaking the two had sat down together. The conversation, hitherto distinct to every corner of the room, was carried on now in tones so low as to be scarcely audible to the interlocutors, and in phrases which hesitated to complete themselves. Three-quarters of an hour passed. Then Edward arose, came out of the rector's study and again flung his cloak around him. Instead of going thence homeward, he went first to

the Carriford-Road Station with a telegram, having despatched which he proceeded to his father's house for the first time since his arrival in the village.

§ 3. *From nine to ten o'clock, p.m.*

The next presentation is the interior of the Old House on the evening of the preceding section. The steward was sitting by his parlour fire, and had been reading the letter arrived from the rectory. Opposite to him sat the woman known to the village and neighbourhood as Mrs. Manston.

"Things are looking desperate with us," he said gloomily. His gloom was not that of the hypochondriac, but the legitimate gloom which has its origin in a syllogism. As he uttered the words he handed the letter to her.

"I almost expected some such news as this," she replied, in a tone of much greater indifference. I knew suspicion lurked in the eyes of that young man who stared at me

so in the church path : I could have sworn it."

Manston did not answer for some time. His face was worn and haggard : latterly his head had not been carried so uprightly as of old. "If they prove you to be—who you are . . . . Yes, if they do—" he murmured.

"They must not find that out," she said, in a positive voice, and looking at him. "But supposing they do, the trick does not seem to me to be so serious as to justify that wretched, miserable, horrible look of yours. It makes my flesh creep : it is perfectly deathlike."

He did not reply, and she continued, "If they say and prove that Eunice is indeed living, —and dear, you know she is, she is sure to come back."

This remark seemed to awaken and irritate him to speech. Again, as he had done a hundred times during their residence together, he categorised the events connected with the fire at the Three Tranters. He dwelt on every incident of that night's history, and en-

deavoured, with an anxiety which was extraordinary under the apparent circumstances, to prove that his wife must, by the very nature of things, have perished in the flames.

She arose from her seat, crossed the hearth-rug, and set herself to soothe him: then she whispered that she was still as unbelieving as ever. "Come, supposing she escaped — just supposing she escaped—where is she?" coaxed the lady.

"Why are you so curious continually?" said Manston.

"Because I am a woman and want to know. Now where is she?"

"In the Flying Isle of San Borandan."

"Witty cruelty is the cruellest of any. Ah, well — if she is in England, she will come back."

"She is not in England."

"But she will come back?"

"No she won't . . . . Come madam," he said arousing himself, "I shall not answer any more questions."

"Ah—ah—ah—she is not dead." the woman murmured again poutingly.

"She is, I tell you."

"I don't think so, love."

"She was burnt, I tell you!" he exclaimed.

"Now to please me, admit the bare possibility of her being alive,—just the possibility."

"O yes—to please you I will admit that," he said quickly. "Yes I admit the possibility of her being alive, to please you."

She looked at him in utter perplexity. The words could only have been said in jest, and yet they seemed to savour of a tone the farthest remove from jesting. There was his face plain to her eyes, but no information of any kind was to be read there.

"It is only natural that I should be curious," she murmured pettishly, "if I resemble her as much as you say I do."

"You are handsomer," he said, "though you are about her own height, and size. But don't worry yourself. You must know that you are

body and soul united with me, though you are but my housekeeper.

She bridled a little at the remark. "Wife," she said, "most certainly wife, since you cannot dismiss me without losing your character and position, and incurring heavy penalties."

"I own it—it was well said, though mistakenly—very mistakenly."

"Don't riddle to me about mistakenly and such dark things. Now what was your motive, dearest,—in running the risk of having me here?"

"Your beauty," he said.

"She thanks you much for the compliment, but will not take it. Come what was your motive?"

"Your wit."

"No, no; not my wit. Wit would have made a wife of me by this time instead of what I am."

"Your virtue."

"Or virtue either."

"I tell you it was your beauty—really."

"But I cannot help seeing and hearing, and if what people say is true, I am not nearly so good-looking as Cytherea, and several years older."

The aspect of Manston's face at these words from her was so confirmatory of her hint, that his forced reply of "O no," tended to develope her chagrin.

"Mere liking, or love for me," she resumed, "would not have sprung up all of a sudden, as your pretended passion did. You had been to London several times between the time of the fire and your marriage with Cytherea—you had never visited me or thought of my existence or cared that I was out of a situation and poor. But the week after you married her and were separated from her, off you rush to make love to me—not first to me either, for you went to several places—"

"No, not several places."

"Yes, you told me so yourself—that you went first to the only lodging in which your wife had been known as Mrs. Manston, and

when you found that the lodging-house keeper had gone away and died, and that nobody else in the street had any definite ideas as to your wife's personal appearance, you came and proposed the arrangement we carried out—that I should personate her. Your taking all this trouble shows that something more serious than love had to do with the matter."

"Humbug,—what trouble after all did I take? When I found Cytherea would not stay with me after the wedding I was much put out at being left alone again. Was that unnatural?"

"No."

"And those favouring accidents you mention —that nobody knew my first wife—seemed an arrangement of Providence for our mutual benefit, and merely perfected a half-formed impulse—that I should call you my first wife to escape the scandal that would have arisen if you had come here as anything else."

"My love, that story won't do. If Mrs. Manston was burnt, Cytherea, whom you love better than me—could have been compelled to

live with you as your lawful wife. If she was not burnt, why should you run the risk of her turning up again at any moment and exposing your substitution of me, and ruining your name and prospects?"

"Why—because I might have loved you well enough to run the risk (assuming her not to be burnt, which I deny)."

"No—you would have run the risk the other way. You would rather have risked her finding you with Cytherea as a second wife, than with me as a personator of herself—the first one."

"You came easiest to hand — remember that."

"Not so very easy, either, considering the labour you took to teach me your first wife's history. All about how she was a native of Philadelphia. Then making me read up the guide-book to Philadelphia, and details of American life and manners, in case the birthplace and history of your wife, Eunice, should ever become known in this neighbourhood—un-

likely as it was. Ah! and then about the handwriting of hers that I had to imitate, and the dying my hair, and rouging, to make the transformation complete? You mean to say that that was taking less trouble than there would have been in arranging events to make Cytherea believe herself your wife, and live with you?"

"You were a needy adventuress, who would dare anything for a new pleasure and an easy life—and I was fool enough to give in to you——"

"Good Heavens above!—did I ask you to insert those advertisements for your old wife, and to make me answer it as if I was she? Did I ask you to send me the letter for me to copy and send back to you when the third advertisement appeared—purporting to come from the long-lost wife, and giving a detailed history of her escape and subsequent life—all which you had invented yourself? You deluded me into loving you, and then enticed me here! Ah, and this is another thing. How did you know the

real wife wouldn't answer it, and upset all your plans?"

"Because I knew she was burnt."

"Why didn't you force Cytherea to come back then? Now, my love, I have caught you, and you may just as well tell first as last, *what was your motive in having me here as your first wife?*"

"Silence!" he exclaimed.

She was silent for the space of two minutes, and then persisted in going on to mutter, "And why was it that Miss Aldclyffe allowed her favourite young lady, Cythie, to be overthrown and supplanted without an expostulation or any show of sympathy? Do you know I often think you exercise a secret power over Miss Aldclyffe. And she always shuns me as if I shared the power. A poor, ill-used creature like me sharing power, indeed."

"She thinks you are Mrs. Manston."

"That wouldn't make her avoid me."

"Yes it would," he exclaimed impatiently. "I wish I was dead—dead!" He had jumped

up from his seat in uttering the words, and now walked wearily to the end of the room. Coming back more decisively, he looked in her face.

"We must leave this place if Raunham suspects what I think he does," he said. "The request of Cytherea and her brother may simply be for a satisfactory proof, to make her feel legally free—but it may mean more."

"What may it mean?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, well, never mind, old boy," she said, approaching him to make up the quarrel. "Don't be so alarmed—anybody would think that you were the woman and I the man. Suppose they do find out what I am—we can go away from here and keep house as usual. People will say of you, 'His first wife was burnt to death' (or 'ran away to the Colonies' as the case may be), 'He married a second, and deserted her for Anne Seaway.' A very everyday case—nothing so horrible after all."

He made an impatient movement. "Which-

ever way we do it, *nobody must know that you are not my wife, Eunice.* And now I must think about arranging matters."

Manston then retired to his office, and shut himself up for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVENTS OF A DAY AND NIGHT.

§ 1. *March the twenty-first. Morning.*

NEXT morning the steward went out as usual. He shortly told his companion Anne, that he had almost matured their scheme, and that they would enter upon the details of it when he came home at night. The fortunate fact that the rector's letter did not require an immediate answer would give him time to consider.

Anne Seaway then began her duties in the house. Besides daily superintending the cook and housemaid, one of these duties was, at rare intervals, to dust Manston's office with her own hands, a servant being supposed to disturb the books and papers unnecessarily.

She softly wandered from table to shelf with the duster in her hand, afterwards standing in

the middle of the room, and glancing around to discover if any noteworthy collection of dust had still escaped her.

Her eye fell upon a faint layer which rested upon the ledge of an old-fashioned chestnut cabinet of French Renaissance workmanship, placed in a recess by the fireplace. At a height of about four feet from the floor the upper portion of the front receded, forming the ledge alluded to, on which opened, at each end, two small doors, the centre space between them being filled out by a panel of similar size, making the third of three squares.

The dust on the ledge was nearly on a level with the woman's eye, and though insignificant in quantity, showed itself distinctly on account of this obliquity of vision. Now opposite the central panel, concentric quarter-circles were traced in the deposited film, expressing to her that this panel too was a door like the others; that it had lately been opened, and had skimmed the dust with its lower edge.

At last, then, her curiosity was slightly re-

warded. For the right of the matter was that Anne had been incited to this exploration of Manston's office rather by a wish to know the reason of his long seclusion here, after the arrival of the rector's letter, and their subsequent discourse, than by any immediate desire for cleanliness.

Still, there would have been nothing remarkable to Anne in this sight but for one recollection. Manston had once casually told her that each of the two side lockers included half the middle space, the panel of which did not open, and was only put in for symmetry.

It was possible that he had opened this compartment by candlelight the preceding night, or he would have seen the marks in the dust, and effaced them, that he might not be proved guilty of telling her an untruth.

She balanced herself on one foot and stood pondering. She considered that it was very vexing and unfair in him to refuse her all knowledge of his remaining secrets, under the peculiar circumstances of her connection with him. She went close to the cabinet. As there was

no keyhole, the door must be capable of being opened by the unassisted hand.

The circles in the dust told her at which edge to apply her force. Here she pulled with the tips of her fingers, but the panel would not come forward.

She fetched a chair and looked over the top of the cabinet, but no bolt, knob, or spring was to be seen.

"O, never mind," she said, with indifference; "I'll ask him about it, and he will tell me." Down she came and turned away. Then looking back again she thought it was absurd such a trifle should puzzle her. She retraced her steps, and opened a drawer beneath the ledge of the cabinet, pushing in her hand and feeling about on the underside of the board.

Here she found a small round sinking, and pressed her finger into it. Nothing came of the pressure. She withdrew her hand and looked at the tip of her finger: it was marked with the impress of the circle, and in addition, a line ran across it diametrically.

"How stupid of me—it is the head of a screw." Whatever mysterious contrivance had originally existed for opening the puny cupboard of the cabinet, it had at some time been broken, and this rough substitute provided. Stimulated curiosity would not allow her to recede now. She fetched a turnscrew, withdrew the screw, pulled the door open with a penknife, and found inside a cavity about ten inches square. The cavity contained,

Letters from different women, with unknown signatures, Christian names only; (surnames being despised in Paphos).

Letters from his wife Eunice.

Letters from Anne herself, including that she wrote in answer to his advertisement.

A small pocket book.

Sundry scraps of paper.

The letters from the strange women with pet names she glanced carelessly through, and then put them aside. They were too similar to her own regretted delusion, and curiosity requires contrast to excite it.

The letters from his wife were next examined. They were dated back as far as Eunice's first meeting with Manston, and the early ones before their marriage contained the usual pretty effusions of women at such a period of their existence. Some little time after he had made her his wife, and when he had come to Knapwater, the series commenced again, and now their contents arrested her attention more forcibly. She closed the cabinet, carried the letters into the parlour, reclined herself on the sofa, and carefully perused them in the order of their dates.

"JOHN STREET, *October 17th*, 1864.

"MY DEAREST HUSBAND,

"I received your hurried line of yesterday, and was of course content with it. But why don't you tell me your exact address instead of that 'Post Office, Creston'? This matter is all a mystery to me, and I ought to be told every detail. I cannot fancy it is the same kind of occupation you have been used to hitherto. Your command that I am to stay

here awhile until you can 'see how things look' and can arrange to send for me, I must necessarily abide by. But if, as you say, a married man would have been rejected by the person who engaged you, and that hence my existence must be kept a secret until you have secured your position, why did you think of going at all?

"The truth is, this keeping our marriage a secret is troublesome, vexing, and wearisome to me. I see the poorest woman in the street bearing her husband's name openly — living with him in the most matter-of-fact ease, and why shouldn't I? I wish I was back again in Liverpool.

"To-day I bought a grey waterproof cloak. I think it is a little too long for me, but it was cheap for one of such a quality. The weather is gusty and dreary, and till this morning I had hardly set foot outside the door since you left. Please do tell me when I am to come.

"Very affectionately yours,

"EUNICE."

"JOHN STREET, *October 25th*, 1864.

"MY DEAR HUSBAND,

"Why don't you write? Do you hate me? I have not had the heart to do anything this last week. That I, your wife, should be in this strait, and my husband well to do! I have been obliged to leave my first lodging for debt —among other things they charged me for a lot of brandy which I am quite sure I did not taste. Then I went to Camberwell and was found out by them. I went away privately from thence, and changed my name the second time. I am now Mrs. Rondley. But the new lodging was the wretchedest and dearest I ever set foot in, and I left it after being there only a day. I am now at No. 20 in the same street that you left me in originally. All last night the sash of my window rattled so dreadfully that I could not sleep, but I had not energy enough to get out of bed to stop it. This morning I have been walking—I don't know how far—but far enough to make my feet ache.

I have been looking at the outside of two or three of the theatres, but they seem forbidding if I regard them with the eye of an actress in search of an engagement. Though you said I was to think no more of the stage I believe you would not care if you found me there. But I am not an actress by nature, and art will never make me one. I am too timid and retiring, I was intended for a cottager's wife. I certainly shall not try to go on the boards again whilst I am in this strange place. The idea of being brought on as far as London and then left here alone! Why didn't you leave me in Liverpool? Perhaps you thought I might have told somebody that my real name was Mrs. Manston. As if I had a living friend to whom I could impart it—no such good fortune! In fact my nearest friend is no nearer than what most people would call a stranger. But perhaps I ought to tell you that a week before I wrote my last letter to you, after wishing that my uncle and aunt in Philadelphia (the only near relatives I had)

were still alive, I suddenly resolved to send a line to my cousin James, who I believe is still living in that neighbourhood. He has never seen me since we were babies together. I did not tell him of my marriage, because I thought you might not like it, and I gave my real maiden name, and an address at the Post-office here. But God knows if the letter will ever reach him.

"Do write me an answer, and send something.

"Your affectionate wife

"EUNICE."

"FRIDAY, *October 28th.*

"MY DEAR HUSBAND,

"The order for ten pounds has just come, and I am truly glad to get it. But why will you write so bitterly? Ah—well, if I had only had the money I should have been on my way to America by this time, so don't think I want to bore you of my own free-will. Who can you have met with at that new place?

Remember I say this in no malignant tone, but certainly the facts go to prove that you have deserted me! You are inconstant—I know it. O why are you so? Now I have lost you I love you in spite of your neglect. I am weakly fond—that's my nature. I fear that upon the whole my life has been wasted. I know there is another woman supplanting me in your heart—yes, I know it. Come to me—do come.

"EUNICE."

"41, CHARLES SQUARE, HOXTON,
"*November* 19*th*.

"DEAR ÆNEAS,

"Here I am back again after my visit. Why should you have been so enraged at my finding your exact address? Any woman would have tried to do it,—you know she would have. And no woman would have lived under assumed names so long as I did. I repeat that I did not call myself Mrs. Manston until I came to this lodging at

the beginning of this month—what could you expect?

"A helpless creature I, had not fortune favoured me unexpectedly. Banished as I was from your house at dawn, I did not suppose the indignity was about to lead to important results. But in crossing the park I overheard the conversation of a young man and woman who had also risen early. I believe her to be the girl who has won you away from me. Well, their conversation concerned you and Miss Aldclyffe, *very peculiarly*. The remarkable thing is that you yourself, without knowing it, told me of what, added to their conversation, completely reveals a secret to me that neither of you understand. Two negatives never made such a telling positive before. One clue more, and you would see it. A single consideration prevents my revealing it here—just one doubt as to whether your ignorance was real, and was not feigned to deceive me. Civility now, please.

"EUNICE."

"41, CHARLES SQUARE,
"*Tuesday, November 22d.*

"MY DARLING HUSBAND,

"Monday will suit me excellently for coming. I have acted exactly up to your instructions, and have sold my rubbish at the broker's in the next street. All this movement and bustle is delightful to me after the weeks of monotony I have endured. It is a relief to wish the place good-bye—London always has seemed so much more foreign to me than Liverpool. The mid-day train on Monday will do nicely for me. I shall be anxiously looking out for you Sunday night.

"I hope so much that you are not angry with me for writing to Miss Aldclyffe. You are not, dear, are you? Forgive me.

"Your loving wife,
"EUNICE."

This was the last of the letters from the wife to the husband. One other, in Mrs. Manston's

handwriting andin the same packet, was differently addressed.

"THREE TRANTERS INN,
"CARRIFORD, NEAR FROOMINSTER,
"*November 28th*, 1864.

"DEAR COUSIN JAMES,

"Thank you indeed for answering my letter so promptly. When I called at the post-office yesterday I did not in the least think there would be one. But I must leave this subject. I write again at once, under the strangest and saddest conditions it is possible to conceive.

"I did not tell you in my last that I was a married woman. Don't blame me—it was my husband's influence. I hardly know where to begin my story. I had been living apart from him for a time—then he sent for me (this was last week) and I was glad to go to him. Then this is what he did. He promised to fetch me, and did not—leaving me to do the journey alone. He promised to meet me at the station here: he did not. I went on through the darkness to his house, and found his door

locked and himself away from home. I have been obliged to come here, and I write to you in a strange room in a strange village inn! I choose the present moment to write to drive away my misery. Sorrow seems a sort of pleasure when you detail it on paper—poor pleasure though.

"But this is what I want to know—and I am ashamed to tell it. I would gladly do as you say, and come to you as a housekeeper, but I have not the money even for a steerage passage. James, do you want me badly enough—do you pity me enough to send it? I could manage to subsist in London upon the proceeds of my sale for another month or six weeks. Will you send it to the same address at the Post-office? But how do I know that you . . . . . .

Thus the letter ended. From creases in the paper it was plain that the writer, having got so far, had become dissatisfied with her production, and had crumpled it in her hand. Was it to write another, or not to write at all?

The next thing Anne Seaway perceived was

that the fragmentary story she had coaxed out of Manston, to the effect that his wife had left England for America, might be truthful, according to two of these letters, corroborated by the evidence of the railway-porter.

And yet, at first, he had sworn in a passion that his wife was most certainly consumed in the fire.

If she had been burnt, this letter, written in her bedroom, and probably thrust into her pocket when she relinquished it, would have been burnt with her. Nothing was surer than that.

Why then did he say she was burnt, and never show Anne herself this letter ?

The question suddenly raised a new and much stranger one—kindling a burst of amazement in her. How did Manston become possessed of this letter ?

That fact of possession was certainly the most remarkable revelation of all in connection with this epistle, and perhaps had something to do with his reason for never showing it to her.

She knew by several proofs, that before his

marriage with Cytherea, and up to the time of the porter's confession, Manston believed—honestly believed—that Cytherea would be his lawful wife, and hence of course, that his wife Eunice was dead.

So that no communication could possibly have passed between his wife and himself from the first moment that he believed her dead on the night of the fire, to the day of his wedding. And yet he had that letter.

How soon afterwards could they have communicated with each other?

The existence of the letter—as much as, or more than its contents—implying that Mrs. Manston was not burnt, his belief in that calamity must have terminated at the moment he obtained possession of the letter, if no earlier.

Was then the only solution to the riddle that Anne could discern, the true one?—that he had communicated with his wife somewhere about the commencement of Anne's residence with him, or at any time since?

It was the most unlikely thing on earth that a woman who had forsaken her husband should countenance his scheme to personify her, —whether she were in America, in London, or in the neighbourhood of Knapwater.

Then came the old and harassing question, what was Manston's real motive in risking his name on the deception he was practising as regarded Anne. It could not be, as he had always pretended, mere passion. Her thoughts had reverted to Mr. Raunham's letter, asking for proofs of her identity with the original Mrs. Manston. She could see no loophole of escape for the man who supported her. True, in her own estimation, the worst alternative was not so very bad after all—the getting the name of libertine, a possible appearance in the Divorce or some other Court of law, and a question of damages. Such an exposure might hinder his worldly progress for some time. Yet to him this alternative was, apparently, terrible as death itself.

She restored the letters to their hiding-place,

scanned anew the other letters and memoranda, from which she could gain no fresh information, fastened up the cabinet, and left everything in its former condition.

Her mind was ill at ease. More than ever she wished that she had never seen Manston. Where the person suspected of mysterious moral obliquity is the possessor of great physical and intellectual attractions, the mere sense of incongruity adds an extra shudder to dread. The man's strange bearing terrified Anne as it had terrified Cytherea; for with all the woman Anne's faults, she had not descended to such depths of depravity as to willingly participate in crime. She had not even known that a living wife was being displaced till her arrival at Knapwater put retreat out of the question, and had looked upon personation simply as a mode of subsistence a degree better than toiling in poverty and alone, after a bustling and somewhat pampered life as housekeeper in a gay mansion.

"—Non illa colo calathisve Minervæ
Fœmineas assueta manus."

§ 2. *Afternoon.*

Mr. Raunham and Edward Springrove had by this time set in motion a machinery which they hoped to find working out important results.

The rector was restless and full of meditation all the following morning. It was plain, even to the servants about him, that Springrove's communication wore a deeper complexion than any that had been made to the old magistrate for many months or years past. The fact was that having arrived at the stage of existence in which the difficult intellectual feat of suspending one's judgment becomes possible, he was now putting it in practice, though not without the penalty of watchful effort.

It was not till the afternoon that he determined to call on his relative, Miss Aldclyffe, and cautiously probe her knowledge of the subject occupying him so thoroughly. Cytherea, he knew, was still beloved by this solitary woman. Miss Aldclyffe had made several private inquiries concerning her old companion, and there

was ever a sadness in her tone when the young lady's name was mentioned, which showed that from whatever cause the elder Cytherea's renunciation of her favourite and namesake proceeded, it was not from indifference to her fate.

"Have you ever had any reason for supposing your steward anything but an upright man?" he said to the lady.

"Never the slightest. Have you?" said she reservedly.

"Well—I have."

"What is it?"

"I can say nothing plainly because nothing is proved. But my suspicions are very strong."

"Do you mean that he was rather cool towards his wife when they were first married, and that it was unfair in him to leave her? I know he was; but I think his recent conduct towards her has amply atoned for the neglect."

He looked Miss Aldclyffe full in the face. It was plain that she spoke honestly. She had not the slightest notion that the woman who lived with the steward might be other than

Mrs. Manston—much less that a greater matter might be behind.

"That's not it—I wish it was no more. My suspicion is, first, that the woman living at the Old House is not Mr. Manston's wife."

"Not—Mr. Manston's wife?"

"That is it."

Miss Aldclyffe looked blankly at the rector. "Not Mr. Manston's wife—who else can she be?" she said, simply.

"An improper woman of the name of Anne Seaway."

Mr. Raunham had, in common with other people, noticed the extraordinary interest of Miss Aldclyffe in the well-being of her steward, and had endeavoured to account for it in various ways. The extent to which she was shaken by his information, whilst it proved that the understanding between herself and Manston did not make her a sharer of his secrets, also showed that the tie which bound her to him was still unbroken. Mr. Raunham had lately begun to doubt the latter fact, and now, on

finding himself mistaken, regretted that he had not kept his own counsel in the matter. This it was too late to do, and he pushed on with his proofs. He gave Miss Aldclyffe in detail the grounds of his belief.

Before he had done, she recovered the cloak of reserve that she had adopted on his opening the subject.

"I might possibly be convinced that you were in the right, after such an elaborate argument," she replied, "were it not for one fact, which bears in the contrary direction so pointedly, that nothing but absolute proof can turn it. It is that there is no conceivable motive which could induce any sane man—leaving alone a man of Mr. Manston's clear-headedness and integrity—to venture upon such an extraordinary course of conduct;—no motive on earth."

"That was my own opinion till after the visit of a friend last night—a friend of mine and poor little Cytherea's."

"Ah—and Cytherea," said Miss Aldclyffe,

catching at the idea raised by the name. "That he loved Cytherea—yes, and loves her now, wildly and devotedly, I am as positive as that I breathe. Cytherea is years younger than Mrs. Manston—as I shall call her—twice as sweet in disposition, three times as beautiful. Would he have given her up quietly and suddenly for a common p——. Mr. Raunham, your story is monstrous, and I don't believe it!" She glowed in her earnestness.

The rector might now have advanced his second proposition—the possible motive—but for reasons of his own he did not.

"Very well, madam. I only hope that facts will sustain you in your belief. Ask him the question to his face, whether the woman is his wife or no, and see how he receives it."

"I will to-morrow, most certainly," she said. "I always let these things die of wholesome ventilation, as every fungus does."

But no sooner had the rector left her presence, than the grain of mustard-seed he had sown grew to a tree. Her impatience to

set her mind at rest could not brook a night's delay. It was with the utmost difficulty that she could wait till evening arrived to screen her movements. Immediately the sun had dropped behind the horizon, and before it was quite dark, she wrapped her cloak around her, softly left the house, and walked erect through the gloomy park in the direction of the old manor-house.

The same minute saw two persons sit down in the rectory-house to share the rector's usually solitary dinner. One was a man of commonplace, middle-class appearance in all except his eyes. The other was Edward Springrove.

The discovery of the carefully concealed letters rankled in the mind of Anne Seaway. Her woman's nature insisted that Manston had no right to keep all matters connected with his lost wife a secret from herself. Perplexity had bred vexation; vexation, resentment; curiosity had been continuous. The whole morning this resentment and curiosity increased.

The steward said very little to his companion

during their luncheon at mid-day. He seemed reckless of appearances—almost indifferent to whatever fate awaited him. All his actions betrayed that something portentous was impending, and still he explained nothing. By carefully observing every trifling action, as only a woman can observe them, the thought at length dawned upon her that he was going to run away secretly. She feared for herself; her knowledge of law and justice was vague, and she fancied she might in some way be made responsible for him.

In the afternoon he went out of the house again, and she watched him turn away in the direction of Froominster. She felt a desire to go to Froominster herself, and, after an interval of half an hour, followed him on foot—ostensibly to do some shopping.

One among her several trivial errands was to make a small purchase at the druggist's. Opposite the druggist's stood the County Bank. Looking out of the shop window, between the coloured bottles, she saw Manston come down

the steps of the bank, in the act of withdrawing his hand from his pocket, and pulling his coat close over its mouth.

It is an almost universal habit with people when leaving a bank, to be carefully adjusting their pockets if they have been receiving money; if they have been paying it, their hands swing laxly.

The steward had in all likelihood been taking money—possibly on Miss Aldclyffe's account—that was continual with him. And he might have been removing his own, as a man would do who was intending to leave the country.

§ 3. *From five to eight o'clock, p.m.*

Anne reached home again in time to preside over preparations for dinner. Manston came in half an hour later. The lamp was lighted, the shutters were closed, and they sat down together. He was pale and worn—almost haggard.

The meal passed off in almost unbroken silence. When pre-occupation withstands the

influence of a social meal with one pleasant companion, the mental scene must be surpassingly vivid. Just as she was rising a tap came to the door.

Before a maid could attend to the knock, Manston crossed the room and answered it himself. The visitor was Miss Aldclyffe.

Manston instantly came back and spoke to Anne in an undertone. "I should be glad if you could retire to your room for a short time."

"It is a dry, starlight evening," she replied. "I will go for a little walk if your object is merely a private conversation with Miss Aldclyffe."

"Very well, do; there's no accounting for tastes," he said. A few commonplaces then passed between her and Miss Aldclyffe, and Anne went upstairs to bonnet and cloak herself. She came down, opened the front door, and went out.

She looked around to realise the night. It was dark, mournful, and quiet. Then she stood still. From the moment that Manston had

requested her absence, a strong and burning desire had prevailed in her to know the subject of Miss Aldclyffe's conversation with him. Simple curiosity was not entirely what inspired her. Her suspicions had been thoroughly aroused by the discovery of the morning. A conviction that her future depended on her power to combat a man who, in desperate circumstances, would be far from a friend to her, prompted a strategic movement to acquire the important secret that was in handling now. The woman thought and thought, and regarded the dull dark trees, anxiously debating how the thing could be done.

Stealthily re-opening the front door she entered the hall, and advancing and pausing alternately, came close to the door of the room in which Miss Aldclyffe and Manston conversed. Nothing could be heard through the keyhole or panels. At a great risk she softly turned the knob and opened the door to a width of about half an inch, performing the act so delicately that three minutes, at least, were occupied in

completing it. At that instant Miss Aldclyffe said,—

"There's a draught somewhere. The door is ajar, I think."

Anne glided back under the staircase. Manston came forward and closed the door.

This chance was now cut off and she considered again.

The parlour, or sitting-room, in which the conference took place, had the window-shutters fixed on the outside of the window, as is usual in the back portions of old country-houses. The shutters were hinged one on each side of the opening, and met in the middle, where they were fastened by a bolt passing continuously through them and the wood mullion within, the bolt being secured on the inside by a pin, which was seldom inserted till Manston and herself were about to retire for the night ; sometimes not at all.

If she returned to the door of the room she might be discovered at any moment, but could she listen at the window, which overlooked a part of the garden never visited after nightfall,

she would be safe from disturbance. The idea was worth a trial.

She glided round to the window, took the head of the bolt between her finger and thumb, and softly screwed it round until it was entirely withdrawn from its position. The shutters remained as before, whilst, where the bolt had come out, was now a shining hole three-quarters of an inch in diameter, through which one might see into the middle of the room. She applied her eye to the orifice.

Miss Aldclyffe and Manston were both standing; Manston with his back to the window, his companion facing it. The lady's demeanour was severe, condemnatory, and haughty. No more was to be seen; Anne then turned sideways, leant with her shoulder against the shutters and placed her ear upon the hole.

"You know where," said Miss Aldclyffe. "And how could you, a man, act a double deceit like this?"

"Men do strange things sometimes."

"What was your reason—come?"

"A mere whim."

"I might even believe that, if the woman were handsomer than Cytherea, or if you had been married some time to Cytherea and had grown tired of her."

"And can't you believe it, too, under these conditions: that I married Cytherea, gave her up because I heard that my wife was alive, found that my wife would not come to live with me, and then, not to let any woman I love so well as Cytherea run any risk of being displaced and ruined in reputation, should my wife ever think fit to return, induced this woman to come to me, as being better than no companion at all?"

"I cannot believe it. Your love for Cytherea was not of such a kind as that excuse would imply. It was Cytherea or nobody with you. As an object of passion, you did not desire the company of this Anne Seaway at all, and certainly not so much as to madly risk your reputation by bringing her here in the way you have done. I am sure you didn't, Æneas."

"So am I," he said, bluntly.

Miss Aldclyffe uttered an exclamation of astonishment: the confession was like a blow in its suddenness. She began to reproach him bitterly, and with tears.

"How could you overthrow my plans, disgrace the only girl I ever had any respect for, by such inexplicable doings! . . . . That woman must leave this place—the country, perhaps. Heavens! the truth will leak out in a day or two!"

"She must do no such thing, and the truth must be stifled, somehow—nobody knows how. If I stay here, or on any spot of the civilised globe, as Æneas Manston, this woman must live with me as my wife, or I am damned past redemption!"

"I will not countenance your keeping her, whatever your motive may be."

"You must do something," he murmured. "You must. Yes, you must."

"I never will," she said. "'Tis a criminal act."

He looked at her earnestly. "Will you not support me through this deception if my very life depends upon it? Will you not?"

"Nonsense! Life! It will be a scandal to you, but she must leave this place. It will out sooner or later, and the exposure had better come now."

Manston repeated gloomily the same words. "My life depends upon your supporting me—my very life."

He then came close to her, and spoke into her ear. Whilst he spoke he held her head to his mouth with both his hands. Strange expressions came over her face; the workings of her mouth were painful to observe. Still he held her and whispered on.

The only words that could be caught by Anne Seaway, confused as her hearing frequently was by the moan of the wind and the waterfall in her outer ear, were these of Miss Aldclyffe, in tones which absolutely quivered:—

"They have no money—what can they prove?"

The listener tasked herself to the utmost to catch his answer, but it was in vain. Of the remainder of the colloquy one fact alone was plain to Anne, and that only inductively—that Miss Aldclyffe, from what he had revealed to her, was going to scheme body and soul on Manston's behalf.

Miss Aldclyffe seemed now to have no further reason for remaining, yet she lingered awhile as if loth to leave him. When, finally, the crest-fallen and agitated lady made preparations for departure, Anne quickly inserted the bolt, ran round to the entrance archway, and down the steps into the park. Here she stood close to the trunk of a huge lime-tree, which absorbed her dark outline into its own.

In a few minutes she saw Manston, with Miss Aldclyffe leaning on his arm, cross the glade before her and proceed in the direction of the House. She watched them ascend the rise and advance, as two black spots, towards the mansion. The appearance of an oblong space of light in the dark mass of walls denoted that

the door was opened. Miss Aldclyffe's outline became visible upon it, the door shut her in, and all was darkness again. The form of Manston returning alone arose from the gloom, and passed by Anne in her hiding-place.

Waiting outside a quarter of an hour longer, that no suspicion of any kind might be excited, Anne returned to the old manor-house.

§ 4. *From eight to eleven o'clock, p.m.*

Manston was very friendly that evening. It was evident to her, now that she was behind the scenes, that he was making desperate efforts to disguise the real state of his mind.

Her terror of him did not decrease. They sat down to supper, Manston still talking cheerfully. But what is keener than the eye of a mistrustful woman? A man's cunning is to it as was the armour of Sisera to the thin tent-nail. She found, in spite of his adroitness, that he was attempting something more than a disguise of his feeling. He was trying to dis-

tract her attention, that he might be unobserved in some special movement of his hands.

What a moment it was for her then! The whole surface of her body became attentive. She allowed him no chance whatever. We know the duplicated condition at such times—when the existence divides itself into two, and the ostensibly innocent chatterer stands in front, like another person, to hide the timorous spy.

Manston played the same game, but more palpably. The meal was nearly over when he seemed possessed of a new idea of how his object might be accomplished. He tilted back his chair with a reflective air, and looked steadily at the clock standing against the wall opposite him. He said didactically,

"Few faces are capable of expressing more by dumb show than the face of a clock. You may see in it every variety of incentive—from the softest seductions to negligence to the strongest hints for action."

"Well, in what way?" she inquired. His drift was, as yet, quite unintelligible to her.

"Why, for instance : look at the cold methodical, unromantic, business-like air of all the right-angled positions of the hands. They make a man set about work in spite of himself. Then look at the piquant shyness of its face when the two hands are over each other. Several attitudes imply 'make ready.' The 'make ready' of ten minutes to twelve differs from the 'make ready' of ten minutes to one, as youth differs from age. 'Upward and onward,' says twenty-five minutes to eleven. Mid-day or midnight expresses distinctly 'It is done.' You surely have noticed that ?"

"Yes, I have."

He continued with affected quaintness,—

"The easy dash of ten minutes past seven, the rakish recklessness of a quarter past, the drooping weariness of twenty-five minutes past, must have been observed by everybody."

"Whatever amount of truth there may be, there is a good deal of imagination in your fancy," she said.

He still contemplated the clock.

"Then again the general finish of the face has a great effect upon the eye. This old-fashioned brass-faced one we have here, with its arched top, half-moon slit for the day of the month, and ship rocking at the upper part, impresses me with the notion of its being an old cynic, elevating his brows, whose thoughts can be seen wavering between good and evil."

A thought now enlightened her: the clock was behind her and he wanted to get her back turned. She dreaded turning, yet, not to excite his suspicion that she was on her guard, she quickly looked behind her at the clock as he spoke, recovering her old position again instantly. The time had not been long enough for any action whatever on his part.

"Ah," he casually remarked, and at the same minute began to pour her out a glass of wine. "Speaking of the clock has reminded me that it must nearly want winding up. Remember that it is wound up to-night. Suppose you do it at once, my dear."

There was no possible way of evading the

act. She resolutely turned to perform the operation: anything was better than that he should suspect her. It was an old-fashioned eight-day clock, of workmanship suited to the rest of the antique furniture that Manston had collected there, and ground heavily during winding.

Anne had given up all idea of being able to watch him during the interval, and the noise of the wheels prevented her learning anything by her ears. But, as she wound, she caught sight of his shadow on the wall at her right hand.

What was he doing?

He was in the very act of pouring something into her glass of wine.

He had completed the manœuvre before she had done winding. She methodically closed the clock-case and turned round again. When she faced him he was sitting in his chair as before she had risen.

In a familiar scene which has hitherto been pleasant, it is difficult to realise that an added condition, which does not alter its aspect, can

have made it terrible. The woman thought that his action must have been prompted by no other intent than that of poisoning her, and yet she could not instantly put on a fear of her position.

And before she had grasped these consequences, another supposition served to make her regard the first as unlikely, if not absurd. It was the act of a madman to take her life in a manner so easy of discovery, unless there were far more reason for the crime than any that Manston could possibly have.

Was it not merely his intention, in tampering with her wine, to make her sleep soundly that night? This was in harmony with her original suspicion, that he intended secretly to abscond. At any rate he was going to set about some stealthy proceeding, as to which she was to be kept in utter darkness. The difficulty now was to avoid drinking the wine.

By means of one pretext and another she put off taking her glass for nearly five minutes, but he eyed her too frequently to allow her to throw the potion under the grate. It became necessary

to take one sip. This she did, and found an opportunity of absorbing it in her handkerchief.

Plainly he had no idea of her countermoves. The scheme seemed to him in proper train, and he turned to poke out the fire. She instantly seized the glass and poured its contents down her bosom. When he faced round again she was holding the glass to her lips, empty.

In due course he locked the doors and saw that the shutters were fastened. She attended to a few closing details of housewifery, and a few minutes later they retired for the night.

§ 5. *From eleven o'clock to midnight.*

When Manston was persuaded, by the feigned heaviness of her breathing, that Anne Seaway was asleep, he softly arose, and dressed himself in the gloom.

With ears strained to their utmost she heard him complete this operation; then he took something from his pocket, put it in the drawer of the dressing-table, went to the door and down the

stairs. She glided out of bed and looked in the drawer. He had only restored to its place a small phial she had seen there before. It was labelled "Battley's Solution of Opium." She felt relieved that her life had not been attempted. That was to have been her sleeping-draught.

No time was to be lost if she meant to be a match for him. She followed him in her night-dress. When she reached the foot of the staircase he was in the office and had closed the door, under which a faint gleam showed that he had obtained a light.

She crept to the door, but could not venture to open it, however slightly. Placing her ear to the panel, she could hear him tearing up papers of some sort, and a brighter and quivering ray of light coming from the threshold an instant later, implied that he was burning them. By the slight noise of his footsteps on the uncarpeted floor, she at length imagined that he was approaching the door. She flitted upstairs again and crept into bed.

Manston returned to the bedroom close upon

her heels, and entered it—again without a light. Standing motionless for an instant to assure himself that she still slept, he went to the drawer in which their ready-money was kept, and removed the casket that contained it. Anne's ear distinctly caught the rustle of notes, and the chink of gold as he handled it. Some he placed in his pocket, some he returned to its place.

He stood thinking, as it were weighing a possibility. While lingering thus, he noticed the reflected image of his own face in the glass —pale and spectre-like in its indistinctness. The sight seemed to be the feather which turned the balance of indecision: he drew a heavy breath, retired from the room, and passed downstairs. She heard him unbar the back-door and go out into the yard.

Feeling safe in a conclusion that he did not intend to return to the bedroom again, she arose, and hastily dressed herself. On going to the door of the apartment she found that he had locked it behind him. "A precaution—

it can be no more," she muttered. Yet she was all the more perplexed and excited on this account. Had he been going to leave home immediately, he would scarcely have taken the trouble to lock her in, holding the belief that she was in a drugged sleep.

The lock shot into a box-staple, so that there was no possibility of her pushing back the bolt. How should she follow him? Easily.

An inner closet opened from the bedroom: it was large, and had some time heretofore been used as a dressing or bath-room, but had been found inconvenient from having no other outlet to the landing. The window of this little room looked out upon the roof of the porch, which was flat and covered with lead. Anne took a pillow from the bed, gently opened the casement of the inner room, and stepped forth on the flat. There, leaning over the edge of the small parapet that ornamented the porch, she dropped the pillow upon the gravel path, and let herself down over the parapet by her hands till her toes swung about two feet from the ground.

From this position she adroitly alighted upon the pillow, and stood in the path.

Since she had come indoors from her walk in the early part of the evening the moon had risen. But the thick clouds overspreading the whole landscape rendered the dim light pervasive and grey : it appeared as an attribute of the air.

Anne crept round to the back of the house, listening intently. The steward had had at least ten minutes start of her. She had waited here whilst one might count fifty, when she heard a movement in the outhouse—a fragment once attached to the main building. This outhouse was partitioned into an outer and an inner room, which had been a kitchen and a scullery before the connecting erections were pulled down, but they were now used respectively as a brewhouse and workshop, the only means of access to the latter being through the brewhouse. The outer door of this first apartment was usually fastened by a padlock on the exterior. It was now closed but not fastened. Manston was evidently in the outhouse.

She slightly moved the door. The interior of the brewhouse was wrapped in gloom, but a streak of light fell towards her in a line across the floor from the inner or workshop door, which was not quite closed. This light was unexpected, none having been visible through hole or crevice. Glancing in, the woman found that he had placed cloths and mats at the various apertures, and hung a sack at the window to prevent the egress of a single ray. She could also perceive from where she stood, that the bar of light fell across the brewing-copper just outside the inner door, and that upon it lay the key of her bedroom.

The illuminated interior of the workshop was also partly visible from her position, through the two half-open doors. Manston was engaged in emptying a large cupboard of the tools, gallipots, and old iron it contained. When it was quite cleared he took a chisel, and with it began to withdraw the hooks and shoulder-nails holding the cupboard to the wall. All these being loosened, he extended his arms, lifted the cup-

board bodily from the brackets under it, and deposited it on the floor beside him.

That portion of the wall which had been screened by the cupboard was now laid bare. This, it appeared, had been plastered more recently than the bulk of the outhouse. Manston loosened the plaster with some kind of tool, flinging the pieces into a basket as they fell. Having now stripped clear about two feet area of wall, he inserted a crowbar between the joints of the bricks beneath, softly wriggling it until several were loosened. There was now disclosed the mouth of an old oven, which was apparently contrived in the thickness of the wall, and having fallen into disuse, had been closed up with bricks in this manner. It was formed after the simple old-fashioned plan of oven-building—a mere oblate cavity without a flue.

Manston now stretched his arm into the oven, dragged forth a heavy weight of great bulk, and let it slide to the ground. The woman who watched him could see the object plainly. It

was a common corn-sack, nearly full, and was tied at the mouth in the usual way.

The steward had once or twice started up, as if he had heard sounds, and his motions now became more cat-like still. On a sudden he put out the light. Anne had made no noise, yet a foreign noise of some kind had certainly been made in the intervening portion of the house. She heard it. "One of the rats," she thought.

He seemed soon to recover from his alarm, but changed his tactics completely. He did not light his candle—going on with his work in the dark. She had only sounds to go by now, and, judging as well as she could from these, he was piling up the bricks which closed the oven's mouth as they had been before he disturbed them. The query that had not left her brain all the interval of her inspection—how should she get back into her bedroom again—now received a solution. Whilst he was replacing the cupboard, she would glide across the brew-house, take the key from the top of the copper, run upstairs, unlock the door, and bring back the

key again: if he returned to bed, which was unlikely, he would think the lock had failed to catch in the staple. This thought and intention, occupying such length of words, flashed upon her in an instant, and hardly disturbed her strong curiosity to stay and learn the meaning of his actions in the workshop.

Slipping sideways through the first door and closing it behind her, she advanced into the darkness towards the second, making every individual footfall with the greatest care, lest the fragments of rubbish on the floor should crackle beneath her tread. She soon stood close by the copper, and not more than a foot from the door of the room occupied by Manston himself, from which position she could distinctly hear him breathe between each exertion, although it was far too dark to discern anything of him.

To secure the key of her chamber was her first anxiety, and accordingly she cautiously reached out with her hand to where it lay.

Instead of touching it, her fingers came in contact with the foot of a human being.

She drooped faint in a cold sweat.

It was the foot either of a man or woman, standing on the brewing-copper where the key had lain. A warm foot, covered with a polished boot.

The startling discovery so terrified her that she could hardly repress a sound. She withdrew her hand with a motion like the flight of an arrow. Her touch was so light that the leather seemed to have been thick enough to keep the owner of the foot in entire ignorance of it, and the noise of Manston's scraping might have been quite sufficient to drown the slight rustle of her dress.

The person was obviously not the steward: he was still busy. It was somebody who, since the light had been extinguished, had taken advantage of the gloom, to come from some dark recess in the brewhouse and stand upon the brickwork of the copper.

The fear which had at first paralysed her lessened with the birth of a sense that fear now was utter failure: she was in a desperate posi-

tion and must abide by the consequences. The motionless person on the copper was, equally with Manston, quite unconscious of her proximity, and she ventured to advance her hand again, feeling behind the feet, till she found the key. On its return to her side, her finger-tip skimmed the lower verge of a trousers-leg.

It was a man, then, who stood there. To go to the door just at this time was impolitic, and she shrank back into an inner corner to wait.

The comparative security from discovery that her new position ensured, resuscitated reason a little, and empowered her to form some logical inferences:

1. The man who stood on the copper had taken advantage of the darkness to get there, as she had to enter.

2. The man must have been hid in the outhouse before she reached the door.

3. He must be watching Manston with much calculation and system, and for purposes of his own.

She could now tell by the noises that Manston

had completed his re-erection of the cupboard. She heard him replacing the articles it had contained—bottle by bottle, tool by tool,—after which he came into the brewhouse, went to the window, and pulled down the cloths covering it; but the window being rather small, this unveiling scarcely relieved the darkness of the interior.

He returned to the workshop, hoisted something to his back by a jerk, and felt about the room for some other article. Having found it he emerged from the inner door, crossed the brewhouse, and went into the yard. Directly he stepped out she could see his outline by the light of the clouded and weakly moon. The sack was slung at his back, and in his hand he carried a spade.

Anne now waited in her corner in breathless suspense for the proceedings of the other man. In about half-a-minute she heard him descend from the copper, and then the square opening of the doorway showed the outline of this other watcher passing through it likewise. The form

was that of a broad-shouldered man enveloped in a long coat. He vanished after the steward.

The woman vented a sigh of relief, and moved forward to follow. Simultaneously, she discovered that the watcher whose foot she had touched was in his turn watched and followed also.

It was by a woman. Anne Seaway shrank backward again.

The unknown woman came forward from the further side of the yard, and pondered awhile in hesitation. Tall, dark, and closely wrapped, she stood up from the earth like a cypress. She moved, crossed the yard without producing the slightest disturbance by her footsteps, and went in the direction the others had taken.

Anne waited yet another minute—then in her turn noiselessly followed the last woman.

But so impressed was she with the sensation of people in hiding, that in coming out of the yard she turned her head to see if any person were following her in the same way. Nobody was visible, but she discerned, standing behind

the angle of the stable, Manston's horse and gig, ready harnessed.

He did intend to fly after all, then, she thought. He must have placed the horse in readiness, in the interval between his leaving the house, and her exit by the window.

However, there was not time to weigh this branch of the night's events. She turned about again, and continued on the trail of the other three.

§ 6. *From midnight to half-past one, a.m.*

Intentness pervaded everything; Night herself seemed to have become a watcher.

The four persons proceeded across the glade, and into the park plantation, at equi-distances of about seventy yards. Here the ground, completely overhung by the foliage, was coated with a thick moss which was as soft as velvet beneath their feet. The first watcher, that is, the man walking immediately behind Manston, now fell back, when Manston's housekeeper,

knowing the ground pretty well, dived circuitously among the trees and got directly behind the steward, who, encumbered with his load, had proceeded but slowly. The other woman seemed now to be about opposite to Anne, or a little in advance, but on Manston's other hand.

He reached a pit, midway between the waterfall and the engine-house. There he stopped, wiped his face, and listened.

Into this pit had drifted uncounted generations of withered leaves, half filling it. Oak, beech, and chestnut, rotten and brown alike, mingled themselves in one fibrous mass. Manston descended into the midst of them, placed his sack on the ground, and raking the leaves aside into a large heap, began digging. Anne softly drew nearer, crept into a bush, and turning her head to survey the rest, missed the man who had dropped behind, and whom we have called the first watcher. Concluding that he, too, had hidden himself, she turned her attention to the second watcher, the other woman,

who had meanwhile advanced near to where Anne lay in hiding, and now seated herself behind a tree, still closer to the steward than was Anne Seaway.

Here and thus Anne remained concealed. The crunch of the steward's spade, as it cut into the soft vegetable mould, was plainly perceptible to her ears, when the periodic cessations between the creaks of the engine concurred with a lull in the breeze, which otherwise brought the subdued roar of the cascade from the farther side of the bank that screened it. A large hole—some four or five feet deep—had been excavated by Manston in about twenty minutes. Into this he immediately placed the sack, and then began filling in the earth, and treading it down. Lastly, he carefully raked the whole mass of dead and dry leaves into the middle of the pit, burying the ground with them as they had buried it before.

For a hiding-place the spot was unequalled. The thick accumulation of leaves, which had

not been disturbed for centuries, might not be disturbed again for centuries to come, whilst their lower layers still decayed and added to the mould beneath.

By the time this work was ended the sky had grown clearer, and Anne could now see distinctly the face of the other woman, stretching from behind the tree, seemingly forgetful of her position in her intense contemplation of the actions of the steward. Her countenance was white and motionless.

It was impossible that Manston should not soon notice her. At the completion of his labour he turned, and did so.

"Ho—you here!" he exclaimed.

"Don't think I am a spy upon you," she said, in an imploring whisper. Anne recognised the voice as Miss Aldclyffe's.

The trembling lady added hastily another remark, which was drowned in the recurring creak of the engine close at hand. The first watcher, if he had come no nearer than his original position, was too far off to hear any

part of this dialogue, on account of the roar of the falling water, which could reach him unimpeded by the bank.

The remark of Miss Aldclyffe to Manston had plainly been concerning the first watcher, for Manston, with his spade in his hand, instantly rushed to where the man was concealed, and, before the latter could disengage himself from the boughs, the steward struck him on the head with the blade of the instrument. The man fell to the ground.

"Fly!" said Miss Aldclyffe to Manston. Manston vanished amidst the trees. Miss Aldclyffe went off in a contrary direction.

Anne Seaway was about to run away likewise, when she turned and looked at the fallen man. He lay on his face, motionless.

Many of these women who own to no moral code show considerable magnanimity when they see people in trouble. To act rightly simply because it is one's duty is proper; but a good action which is the result of no law of reflection shines more than any.

She went up to him and gently turned him over, upon which he began to show signs of life. By her assistance he was soon able to stand upright.

He looked about him with a bewildered air, endeavouring to collect his ideas. "Who are you?" he said to the woman, mechanically.

It was bad policy now to attempt disguise. "I am the supposed Mrs. Manston," she said. "Who are you?"

"I am the detective employed by Mr. Raunham to sift this mystery—which may be criminal." He stretched his limbs, pressed his head, and seemed gradually to awake to a sense of having been incautious in his utterance. "Never you mind who I am," he continued. "Well—it doesn't matter now, either—it will no longer be a secret."

He stooped for his hat and ran in the direction the steward had taken—coming back again after the lapse of a minute.

"It's only an aggravated assault, after all," he said, hastily, "until we have found out for

certain what's buried here. It may be only a bag of building rubbish ; but it may be more. Come and help me dig." He seized the spade with the awkwardness of a town man, and went into the pit, continuing a muttered discourse. "It's no use my running after him single-handed," he said. "He's ever so far off by this time. The best step is to see what is here."

It was far easier for the detective to re-open the hole than it had been for Manston to form it. The leaves were raked away, the loam thrown out, and the sack dragged forth.

"Hold this," he said to Anne, whose curiosity still kept her standing near. He turned on the light of a dark lantern he had brought, and gave it into her hand.

The string which bound the mouth of the sack was now cut. The detective laid the bag on its side, seized it by the bottom, and jerked forth the contents. A large package was disclosed, carefully wrapped up in impervious tarpaulin, also well tied.

He was on the point of pulling open the folds

at one end, when a light-coloured thread of something, hanging on the outside, arrested his eye. He put his hand upon it; it felt stringy, and adhered to his fingers. "Hold the light close," he said.

She held it close. He raised his hand to the glass, and they both peered at an almost intangible filament he held between his finger and thumb. It was a long hair; the hair of a woman.

"God! I couldn't believe it—no, I couldn't believe it!" the detective whispered, horror-struck. "And I have lost the man for the present through my unbelief. Let's get into a sheltered place. . . . Now wait a minute whilst I prove it."

He thrust his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and withdrew thence a minute packet of brown paper. Spreading it out he disclosed, coiled in the middle, another long hair. It was the hair the clerk's wife had found on Manston's pillow nine days before the Carriford fire.

He held the two hairs to the light: they

were both of a pale brown hue. He laid them parallel and stretched out his arms : they were of the same length to a nicety. The detective turned to Anne.

"It is the body of his first wife," he said, quietly. "He murdered her, as Mr. Springrove and the rector suspected—but how and when, God only knows."

"And I!" exclaimed Anne Seaway, a probable and natural sequence of events and motives explanatory of the whole crime—events and motives shadowed forth by the letter, Manston's possession of it, his renunciation of Cytherea, and instalment of herself—flashing upon her mind with the rapidity of lightning.

"Ah—I see," said the detective, standing unusually close to her : and a handcuff was on her wrist. "You must come with me, madam. Knowing as much about a secret murder as God knows, is a very suspicious thing : it doesn't make you a goddess—far from it." He directed the bull's-eye into her face.

"Pooh—lead on," she said, scornfully, "and

don't lose your principal actor for the sake of torturing a poor subordinate like me."

He loosened her hand, gave her his arm, and dragged her out of the grove, making her run beside him till they had reached the rectory. A light was burning here, and an auxiliary of the detective's awaiting him: a horse ready harnessed to a spring-cart was standing outside.

"You have come—I wish I had known that," the detective said to his assistant, hurriedly and angrily. "Well, we've blundered—he's gone—you should have been here, as I said! I was sold by that woman, Miss Aldclyffe — she watched me." He hastily gave directions in an undertone to this man. The concluding words were, "Go in to the rector—he's up. Detain Miss Aldclyffe. I, in the meantime, am driving to Froominster with this one, and for help. We shall be sure to have him when it gets light."

He assisted Anne into the vehicle, and drove off with her. As they went, the clear, dry road showed before them between the grassy quarters at each side, like a white riband, and

made their progress easy. They came to Churchway Bower, where the highway was overhung by dense firs for some distance on both sides. It was totally dark here.

A smash: a rude shock, In the very midst of its length, at the point where the road began to drop down a hill, the detective drove against something with a jerk which nearly flung them both to the ground.

The man recovered himself, placed Anne on the seat, and reached out his hand. He found that the off-wheel of his gig was locked in that of another conveyance of some kind.

"Hoy!" said the officer.

Nobody answered.

"Hoy, you man asleep there!" he said again.

No reply.

"Well, that's odd—this comes of the folly of travelling without gig-lamps because you expect the dawn." He jumped to the ground and turned on his lantern.

There was the gig which had obstructed him, standing in the middle of the road; a jaded

horse harnessed to it, but no human being in or near the vehicle.

"Do you know whose gig this is?" he said to the woman.

"No," she said, sullenly. But she did recognise it as the steward's.

"I'll swear it's Manston's! Come I can hear it by your tone. However, you needn't say anything which may criminate you. What forethought the man must have had—how carefully he must have considered possible contingencies! Why he must have got the horse and gig ready before he began shifting the body."

He listened for a sound among the trees. None was to be heard but the occasional scamper of a rabbit over the withered leaves. He threw the light of his lantern through a gap in the hedge, but could see nothing beyond an impenetrable thicket. It was clear that Manston was not many yards off, but the question was how to find him. Nothing could be done by the detective just then, encumbered as he

was by the horse and Anne. If he had entered the thicket on a search unaided, Manston might have stepped unobserved from behind a bush and murdered him with the greatest ease. Indeed there were such strong reasons for the exploit in Manston's circumstances at that moment that, without showing cowardice, his pursuer felt it hazardous to remain any longer where he stood.

He hastily tied the head of Manston's horse to the back of his own vehicle, that the steward might be deprived of the use of any means of escape other than his own legs, and drove on thus with his prisoner to Froominster. Arrived there, he lodged her in the police-station, and then took immediate steps for the capture of Manston.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVENTS OF THREE HOURS.

§ 1. *March the twenty-third. Mid-day.*

THIRTY-SIX hours had elapsed since Manston's escape.

It was market-day at Froominster. The farmers outside and inside the corn-exchange looked at their samples of wheat, and poured them critically as usual from one palm to another, but they thought and spoke of Manston. Grocers serving behind their counters, instead of using their constant phrase "The next thing, please?" substituted, "Have you heard if he's caught?" Dairymen and drovers standing beside the sheep and cattle-pens, spread their legs firmly, readjusted their hats, thrust their hands into the lowest depths of their pockets, regarded the animals with the utmost keenness

of which the eye was capable, and said, "Ay, ay, so's: they'll have him avore night."

Later in the day, Edward Springrove passed along the street hurriedly and anxiously. "Well, have you heard any more?" he said to an acquaintance who accosted him.

"They tracked him in this way," said the other young man. "A vagrant first told them that Manston had passed a rick at daybreak, under which this man was lying. They followed the track he pointed out and ultimately came to a stile. On the other side was a heap of half-hardened mud, scraped from the road. On the surface of the heap, where it had been smoothed by the shovel, was distinctly imprinted the form of a man's hand, the buttons of his waistcoat, and his watch-chain, showing that he had stumbled in hurrying over the stile, and fallen there. The pattern of the chain proved the man to have been Manston. They followed on till they reached a ford crossed by stepping-stones—on the further bank were the same footmarks that had shown themselves beside the

stile. The whole of this course had been in the direction of Creston. On they went, and the next clue was furnished them by a shepherd. He said that wherever a clear space three or four yards wide ran in a line through a flock of sheep lying about a ewe-lease, it was a proof that somebody had passed there not more than half-an-hour earlier. At twelve o'clock that day he had noticed such a feature in his flock. Nothing more could be heard of him, and they got into Creston. The steam-packet to the Channel Islands was to start at eleven last night, and they at once concluded that his hope was to get to France by way of Jersey and St. Malo,—his only chance, all the railway stations being watched.

"Well, they went to the boat: he was not on board then. They went again at half-past ten: he had not come. Two men now placed themselves under the lamp immediately beside the gangway. Another stayed by the office door, and one or two more up East Street—the short cut to the pier. At a quarter to eleven the mail-bags were put on board. Whilst the

attention of the idlers was directed to the mails, down East Street came a man as boldly as possible. The gait was Manston's, but not the clothes. He passed over to the shaded part of the street: heads were turned. I suppose this warned him, for he never emerged from the shadow. They watched and waited, but the steward did not re-appear. The alarm was raised—they searched the town high and low—no Manston. All this morning they have been searching, but there's not a sign of him anywhere. However, he has lost his last chance of getting across the Channel. It is reported that he has since changed clothes with a labourer."

During this narration, Edward, lost in thought, had let his eyes follow a shabby man in a smock-frock, but wearing light boots—who was stalking down the street under a bundle of straw which overhung and concealed his head. It was a very ordinary circumstance for a man with a bundle of straw on his shoulders and overhanging his head, to go down the High Street of Froominster. Edward saw him cross

the bridge which divided the town from the country, place his shaggy encumbrance by the side of the road, and leave it there.

Springrove now parted from his acquaintance, and went also in the direction of the bridge. As far as he could see stretched the turnpike-road, and, while he was looking, he noticed a man to leap from the hedge at a point two hundred, or two hundred and fifty yards ahead, cross the road, and go through a wicket on the other side. This figure seemed like that of the man who had been carrying the bundle of straw. He looked at the straw: it still stood alone.

The subjoined facts sprang as it were into juxtaposition in his brain:—

Manston had been seen wearing the clothes of a labouring man—a brown smock-frock.

So had this man, who seemed other than a labourer, on second thoughts: and he had concealed his face by his bundle of straw with the greatest ease and naturalness.

The path the man had taken led to Palchurch, where Cytherea was living.

If Mrs. Manston was murdered, as some said, on the night of the fire, Cytherea was the steward's lawful wife.

Manston, at bay, and reckless of results, might rush to his wife, and harm her.

It was a horrible supposition for a man who loved Cytherea to entertain; but Springrove could not resist its influence. He started off for Palchurch.

§ 2. *One to two o'clock, p.m.*

On that self-same mid-day, whilst Edward was proceeding to Palchurch by the foot-path across the fields, Owen Graye had left the village and was riding along the turnpike-road to Froominster, that he might ascertain the exact truth of the strange rumour which had reached him concerning Manston. Not to disquiet his sister, he had said nothing to her of the matter.

She sat by the window, reading. From her position she could see up the lane for a distance of at least a hundred yards. Passers-by were

so rare in this retired nook, that the eyes of those who dwelt by the way-side were invariably lifted to every one on the road, great and small, as to a novelty.

A man in a brown smock-frock turned the corner and came towards the house. It being market-day at Froominster, the village was nearly deserted, and more than this, the old farm-house in which Owen and his sister were staying, stood, as has been stated, apart from the body of cottages. The man did not look respectable: Cytherea arose and bolted the door.

Unfortunately he was near enough to see her cross the room. He advanced to the door, knocked, and receiving no answer, came to the window; he next pressed his face against the glass, peering in.

Cytherea's experience at that moment was probably as trying a one as ever fell to the lot of a gentle woman to endure. She recognised in the peering face that of the man she had married.

But not a movement was made by her, not a sound escaped her. Her fear was great; but had she known the truth—that the man outside, feeling he had nothing on earth to lose by any act, was in the last stage of recklessness, terrified nature must have given way.

"Cytherea," he said, "let me come in: I am your husband."

"No," she replied, still not realising the magnitude of her peril. "If you want to speak to us, wait till my brother comes."

"O, he's not at home? Cytherea, I can't live without you! All my sin has been because I love you so! Will you fly with me? I have money enough for us both—only come with me."

"Not now—not now."

"I am your husband I tell you, and I must come in."

"You cannot," she said, faintly. His words began to terrify her.

"I will, I say!" he exclaimed. "Will you let me in, I ask once more?"

"No—I will not," said Cytherea.

"Then I will let myself in!" he answered, resolutely. "I will, if I die for it!"

The windows were glazed in lattice panes of leadwork, hung in casements. He broke one of the panes with a stone, thrust his hand through the hole, unfastened the latch which held the casement close, and began opening the window.

Instantly the shutters flew together with a slam, and were barred with desperate quickness by Cytherea on the inside.

"D——n you!" he exclaimed.

He ran round to the back of the house. His impatience was greater now: he thrust his fist through the pantry window at one blow, and opened it in the same way as the former one had been opened, before the terror-stricken girl was aware that he had gone round. In an instant he stood in the pantry, advanced to the front room where she was, flung back the shutters, and held out his arms to embrace her.

In extremely trying moments of bodily or

mental pain, Cytherea either flushed hot, or faded pale, according to the state of her constitution at the moment. Now she burned like fire from head to foot, and this preserved her consciousness.

Never before had the poor child's natural agility served her in such good stead as now. A heavy oblong table stood in the middle of the room. Round this table she flew, keeping it between herself and Manston, her large eyes wide open with terror, their dilated pupils constantly fixed upon Manston's, to read by his expression whether his next intention was to dart to the right or the left.

Even he, at that heated moment, could not endure the expression of unutterable agony which shone from that extraordinary gaze of hers. It had surely been given her by God as a means of defence. Manston continued his pursuit with a lowered eye.

The panting and maddened demon—blind to everything but the capture of his wife—went with a rush under the table: she went over it

like a bird. He went heavily over it: she flew under it, and was out at the other side.

> "One on her youth and pliant limbs relies,
> One on his sinews and his giant size."

But his superior strength was sure to tire her down in the long run. She felt her weakness increasing with the quickness of her breath: she uttered a wild scream, which in its heartrending intensity, seemed to echo for miles.

At the same juncture her hair became unfastened, and rolled down about her shoulders. The least accident at such critical periods is sufficient to confuse the overwrought intelligence. She lost sight of his intended direction for one instant, and he immediately out-manœuvred her.

"At last! my Cytherea!" he cried, overturning the table, springing over it, seizing one of the long brown tresses, pulling her towards him, and clasping her round. She writhed downwards between his arms and breast, and

fell fainting on the floor. For the first time his action was leisurely. He lifted her upon the sofa, exclaiming, "Rest there for a while, my frightened little bird!"

And then there was an end of his triumph. He felt himself clutched by the collar, and whizzed backwards with the force of a battering-ram against the fireplace. Springrove, wild, red, and breathless, had sprung in at the open window, and stood once more between man and wife.

Manston was on his legs again in an instant. A fiery glance on the one side, a glance of pitiless justice on the other, passed between them.

It was again the meeting in the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

A desperate wrestle now began between the two men. Manston was the taller, but there was in Edward much hard tough muscle which

the delicate flesh of the steward lacked. They flew together like the jaws of a gin. In a minute they were both on the floor, rolling over and over, locked in each other's grasp as tightly as if they had been one organic being at war with itself—Edward trying to secure Manston's arms with a small thong he had drawn from his pocket, Manston trying to reach his knife.

Two characteristic noises pervaded the apartment through this momentous space of time. One was the sharp panting of the two combatants, so similar in each as to be undistinguishable : the other was the stroke of their heels and toes, as they smote the floor at every contortion of body or limbs.

Cytherea had not lost consciousness for more than thirty seconds. She had then leapt up without recognising that Edward was her deliverer, unfastened the door, and rushed out, screaming wildly, "Come! Help! O help!"

Three men stood not twenty yards off, looking perplexed. They dashed forward at her words. "Have you seen a shabby man with a smock-

frock on lately?" they inquired. She pointed to the door, and ran on the same as before.

Manston, who had just loosened himself from Edward's grasp, seemed at this moment to renounce his intention of pushing the conflict to a desperate end. "I give it all up for life—dear life!" he cried with a hoarse laugh. "A reckless man has a dozen lives—see how I'll baffle you all yet!"

He rushed out of the house, but no further. The boast was his last. In one half-minute more he was helpless in the hands of his pursuers.

Edward staggered to his feet, and paused to recover breath. His thoughts had never forsaken Cytherea, and his first act now was to hasten up the lane after her. She had not gone far. He found her leaning upon a bank by the roadside, where she had flung herself down in sheer exhaustion. He ran up and lifted her in his arms, and thus aided she was enabled to stand upright—clinging to him. What would

Springrove have given to imprint a kiss upon her lips then!

They walked slowly towards the house. The distressing sensation of whose wife she was, could not entirely quench the resuscitated pleasure he felt at her grateful recognition of him, and her confiding seizure of his arm for support. He conveyed her carefully into the house.

A quarter of an hour later, whilst she was sitting in a partially-recovered, half-dozing state in an arm-chair, Edward beside her waiting anxiously till Graye should arrive, they saw a spring-cart pass the door. Old and dry mud-splashes from long-forgotten rains disfigured its wheels and sides; the varnish and paint had been scratched and dimmed; ornament had long been forgotten in a restless contemplation of use. Three men sat on the seat, the middle one being Manston. His hands were bound in front of him, his eyes were set directly forward, his countenance pallid, hard, and fixed.

Springrove had told Cytherea of Manston's

crime in a few short words. He now said solemnly, "He is to die."

"And I cannot mourn for him," she replied with a shudder, leaning back and covering her face with her hands.

In the silence that followed the two short remarks, Springrove watched the cart round the corner, and heard the rattle of its wheels gradually dying away as it rolled in the direction of Froominster.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EVENTS OF EIGHTEEN HOURS.

§ 1. *March the twenty-ninth. Noon.*

Exactly seven days after Edward Springrove had seen the man with the bundle of straw walking down the streets of Froominster, old Farmer Springrove was standing on the edge of the same pavement, talking to his friend Farmer Baker.

There was a pause in their discourse. Mr. Springrove was looking down the street at some object which had attracted his attention. "Ah, 'tis what we shall all come to," he murmured.

The other looked in the same direction. "True, neighbour Springrove; true."

Two men, advancing one behind the other in the middle of the road, were what the farmers referred to. They were carpenters, and bore

on their shoulders an empty coffin, covered by a thin black cloth.

"I always feel a satisfaction at being breasted by such a sight as that," said Springrove, still regarding the men's sad burden. "I call it a sort of medicine."

"And it is medicine . . . I have not heard of anybody being ill up this way lately? D'seem as if the person died suddenly."

"May be so. Ah, Baker, we say sudden death, don't we. But there's no difference in their nature between sudden death, and death of any other sort. There's no such thing as a random snappen off of what was laid down to last longer. We only suddenly light upon an end—thoughtfully formed as any other—which has been existen at that very same point from the beginnen, though unseen by us to be so soon."

"It is just a discovery to your own mind, and not an alteration in the Lord's."

"That's it. Unexpected is not as to the thing, but as to our sight."

"Now you'll hardly believe me, neighbour, but this little scene in front of us d'make me feel less anxious about pushen on wi' that threshen and winnowen next week, that I was speaken about. Why should we not stand still, says I to myself, and fling a quiet eye upon the Whys and the Wherefores, before the end of it all, and we d'go down into the moulderen place, and are forgotten?"

"'Tis a feelen that will come. But 'twont bear looken into. There's a backward current in the world, and we must do our utmost to advance in order just to bide where we be. But, Baker, they are turnen in here with the coffin, look."

The two carpenters had borne their load into a lane close at hand. The farmers, in common with others, turned and watched them along the lane.

"'Tis a man's coffin, and a tall man's, too," continued Farmer Springrove. "His was a fine frame, whoever he was."

"A very plain box for the poor soul—just the

rough elm, you see." The corner of the cloth had blown aside.

"Yes, for a very poor man. Well, death's all the less insult to him. I have often thought how far the richer class sink into insignificance beside the poor on extreme occasions like this. Perhaps the greatest of all the reconcilers of a thoughtful mind to poverty—and I speak from experience—is the grand quietness it possesses him with when the uncertainty of his life shows itself more vividly than usual."

As Springrove finished speaking, the bearers of the coffin went across a gravelled square facing the end of the lane, and approached a grim and massive archway. They paused beneath it, rang a bell, and waited.

Over the archway was written in Egyptian capitals,

"COUNTY GAOL."

The small rectangular wicket, which was constructed in one of the two iron-studded doors, was opened from the inside. The men severally

stepped over the threshold, the coffin dragged its melancholy length through the aperture, and both entered the court, and were covered from sight.

"Somebody in the gaol, then?"

"Yes, one of the prisoners," said a boy, scudding by at the moment, and who passed on whistling.

"Do you know the name of the man who is dead?" inquired Baker of a third bystander.

"Yes, 'tis all over town—surely you know, Mr. Springrove? Why Manston, Miss Aldclyffe's steward. He was found dead the first thing this morning. He had hung himself behind the door of his cell, in some way, by a handkerchief and some strips of his clothes. The turnkey says his features were scarcely changed, and just caught the early sunlight shining in at the grating upon him. He has left a complete account of the murder, and all that led to it. So there's an end of him."

It was perfectly true: Manston was dead.

The previous day he had been allowed the use of writing materials, and had occupied himself for nearly seven hours in preparing the following confession.

"LAST WORDS.

"HAVING FOUND man's life to be a wretchedly conceived scheme, I renounce it, and to cause no further trouble, I write down the facts connected with my past proceedings.

"After thanking God, on first entering my house, on the night of the fire at Carriford, for my release from bondage to a woman I detested, I went, a second time, to the scene of the disaster, and, finding that nothing could be done by remaining there, shortly afterwards I returned home again in the company of Mr. Raunham.

"He parted from me at the steps of my porch, and went back towards the rectory. Whilst I still stood at the door, musing on my strange deliverance, I saw a figure advance from beneath the shadow of the park trees. It was the figure of a woman.

"When she came near, the twilight was sufficient to show me her attire: it was a cloak reaching to the bottom of her dress, and a thick veil covering her face. These features, together with her size and gait, aided also by a flash of perception as to the chain of events which had saved her life, told me that she was my wife Eunice.

"I gnashed my teeth in a frenzy of despair; I had lost Cytherea; I had gained one whose beauty had departed, whose utterance was complaint, whose mind was shallow, and who drank brandy every day. The revulsion of feeling was terrible. Providence, whom I had just thanked, seemed a mocking tormentor laughing at me. I felt like a madman.

"She came close—started at seeing me outside—then spoke to me. Her first words were reproof for what I had unintentionally done, and sounded as an earnest of what I was to be cursed with as long as we both lived. I answered angrily; this tone of mine changed her complaints to irritation. She taunted me with a secret she had discovered, which concerned

Miss Aldclyffe and myself. I was surprised to learn it—more surprised that she knew it, but concealed my feeling.

"'How could you serve me so?' she said, her breath smelling of brandy even then. 'You love another woman—yes, you do. See how you drive me about! I have been to the station, intending to leave you for ever, and yet I come to try you once more.'

"An indescribable exasperation had sprung up in me as she talked—rage and regret were all in all. Scarcely knowing what I did, I furiously raised my hand and swung it round with my whole force to strike her. She turned quickly —and it was the poor creature's end. By her movement my hand came edgewise exactly in the nape of her neck—as men strike a hare to kill it. The effect staggered me with amazement. The blow must have disturbed the vertebræ: she fell at my feet, made a few movements, and uttered one low sound.

"I ran indoors for water and some wine; I came out and lanced her arm with my pen-

knife. But she lay still, and I found that she was dead.

"It was a long time before I could realise my horrible position.

"For several minutes I had no idea of attempting to escape the consequences of my deed. Then a light broke upon me. Had anybody seen her since she left the Three Tranters? Had they not, she was already believed by the parishioners to be dust and ashes. I should never be found out.

"Upon this I acted.

"The first question was how to dispose of the body. The impulse of the moment was to bury her at once in the pit between the engine-house and waterfall; but it struck me that I should not have time. It was now four o'clock, and the working men would soon be stirring about the place. I would put off burying her till the next night. I carried her indoors.

"In turning the outhouse into a workshop, earlier in the season, I found, when driving a nail into the wall for fixing a cupboard, that the wall sounded hollow. I examined it, and dis-

covered behind the plaster an old oven which had long been disused, and was bricked up when the house was prepared for me.

"To unfix this cupboard and pull out the bricks was the work of a few minutes. Then, bearing in mind that I should have to remove the body again the next night, I placed it in a sack, pushed it into the oven, packed in the bricks, and replaced the cupboard.

"I then went to bed.

"In bed, I thought whether there were any very remote possibilities that might lead to the supposition that my wife was not consumed by the flames of the burning house. The thing which struck me most forcibly was this, that the searchers might think it odd that no remains whatever should be found.

"The clinching and triumphant deed would be to take the body and place it among the ruins of the destroyed house. But I could not do this, on account of the men who were watching against an outbreak of the fire. One remedy remained.

"I arose again, dressed myself, and went down to the outhouse. I must take down the cupboard again. I did take it down. I pulled out the bricks, pulled out the sack, pulled out the corpse, and took her keys from her pocket and the watch from her side.

"I then replaced everything as before.

"With these articles in my pocket I went out of the yard, and took my way through the withy copse to the churchyard, entering it from the back. Here I felt my way carefully along till I came to the nook where pieces of bones from newly-dug graves are sometimes piled behind the laurel bushes. I had been earnestly hoping to find a skull among these old bones; but though I had frequently seen one or two in the rubbish here, there was not one now. I then groped in the other corner with the same result—nowhere could I find a skull. Three or four fragments of leg and back-bones were all I could collect, and with these I was forced to be content.

"Taking them in my hand, I crossed the

road, and got round behind the inn, where the couch-heap was still smouldering. Keeping behind the hedge, I could see the heads of the three or four men who watched the spot.

"Standing in this place I took the bones, and threw them one by one over the hedge and over the men's heads into the smoking embers. When the bones had all been thrown, I threw the keys: last of all I threw the watch.

"I then returned home as I had gone, and went to bed once more, just as the dawn began to break. I exulted—'Cytherea is mine again!'

"At breakfast-time I thought, 'Suppose the cupboard should by some unlikely chance get moved to-day!'

"I went to the mason's yard hard by, while the men were at breakfast, and brought away a shovel-full of mortar. I took it into the out-house, again shifted the cupboard, and plastered over the mouth of the oven behind. Simply pushing the cupboard back into its place, I waited for the next night that I might bury

the body, though upon the whole it was in a tolerably safe hiding-place.

"When the night came, my nerves were in some way weaker than they had been on the previous night. I felt reluctant to touch the body. I went to the outhouse, but instead of opening the oven, I firmly drove in the shoulder-nails that held the cupboard to the wall. 'I will bury her to-morrow night, however,' I thought.

"But the next night I was still more reluctant to touch her. And my reluctance increased, and there the body remained. The oven was, after all, never likely to be opened in my time.

"I married Cytherea Graye, and never did a bridegroom leave the church with a heart more full of love and happiness, and a brain more fixed on good intentions, than I did on that morning.

"When Cytherea's brother made his appearance at the hotel in Southampton, bearing his strange evidence of the porter's disclosure, I was

staggered beyond expression. I thought they had found the body. 'Am I to be apprehended and to lose her even now?' I mourned. I saw my error, and instantly saw, too, that I must act externally like an honourable man.

"So at his request I yielded her up to him, and meditated on several schemes for enabling me to claim the woman I had a legal right to claim as my wife, without disclosing the reason why I knew myself to have it.

"I went home to Knapwater the next day, and for nearly a week lived in a state of indecision. I could not hit upon a scheme for proving my wife dead without compromising myself.

"Mr. Raunham hinted that I should take steps to discover her whereabouts by advertising. I had no energy for the farce.

"But one evening I chanced to enter the Travellers' Rest inn.

"Two notorious poachers were sitting in the settle, which screened my entrance. They were half-drunk—their conversation was carried on in the solemn and emphatic tone common to

that stage of intoxication, and I myself was the subject of it.

"The following was the substance of their disjointed remarks.

"On the night of the great fire at Carriford, one of them was sent to meet me, and break the news of the death of my wife to me. This he did; but because I would not pay him for his news, he left me in a mood of vindictiveness. When the fire was over, he joined his comrade. The favourable hour of the night suggested to them the possibility of some unlawful gain before daylight came. My fowl-house stood in a tempting position, and still resenting his repulse during the evening, one of them proposed to operate upon my birds. I was believed to have gone to the rectory with Mr. Raunham. The other was disinclined to go, and the first went off alone.

"It was now about three o'clock. He had advanced as far as the shrubbery, which grows near the north wall of the house, when he fancied he heard, above the rush of the waterfall, noises

on the other side of the building. He described them in these words, 'Ghostly mouths talking—then a fall—then a groan—then the rush of the water and creak of the engine as before.' Only one explanation occurred to him: the house was haunted. And, whether those of the living or the dead, voices of any kind were inimical to one who had come on such an errand. He stealthily crept home.

"His unlawful purpose in being behind the house led him to conceal his adventure. No suspicion of the truth entered his mind till the railway-porter had startled everybody by his strange announcement. Then he asked himself, had the horrifying sounds of that night been really an enactment in the flesh between me and my wife?

"The words of the other man were,—

"'Why don't he try to find her if she's alive?'

"'True,' said the first. 'Well, I don't forget what I heard, and if she don't turn up alive my mind will be as sure as a bible upon her murder, and the parson shall know it,

though I do get six months on the treadmill for being where I was.'

"'And if she should turn up alive?'

"'Then I shall know that I am wrong, and believing myself a fool as well as a rogue, hold my tongue.'

"I glided out of the house in a cold sweat. The only pressure in heaven or earth which could have forced me to renounce Cytherea was now put upon me—the dread of a death upon the gallows.

"I sat all that night weaving strategy of various kinds. The only effectual remedy for my hazardous standing that I could see, was a simple one. It was to substitute another woman for my wife before the suspicions of that one easily-hoodwinked man extended further.

"The only difficulty was to find a practicable substitute.

"The one woman at all available for the purpose was a friendless, innocent creature, named Anne Seaway, whom I had known in my youth, and who had for some time been the

housekeeper of a lady in London. On account of this lady's sudden death, Anne stood in rather a precarious position, as regarded her future subsistence. She was not the best kind of woman for the scheme; but there was no alternative. One quality of hers was valuable: she was not a talker. I went to London the very next day, called at the Hoxton lodging of my wife (the only place at which she had been known as Mrs. Manston), and found that no great difficulties stood in the way of a personation. And thus favouring circumstances determined my course. I visited Anne Seaway, made love to her, and propounded my plan.

* * * * * * *

"We lived quietly enough until the Sunday before my apprehension. Anne came home from church that morning, and told me of the suspicious way in which a young man had looked at her there. Nothing could be done beyond waiting the issue of events. Then the letter came from Raunham. For the first time in my life I was half-indifferent as to what fate

awaited me. During the succeeding day I thought once or twice of running away, but could not quite make up my mind. At any rate it would be best to bury the body of my wife, I thought, for the oven might be opened at any time. I went to Froominster and made some arrangements. In the evening Miss Aldclyffe (who is united to me by a common secret which I have no right or wish to disclose) came to my house, and alarmed me still more. She said that she could tell by Mr. Raunham's manner that evening, that he kept back from her a suspicion of more importance even than the one he spoke of, and that strangers were in his house even then.

"I guessed what this further suspicion was, and resolved to enlighten her to a certain extent, and so secure her assistance. I said that I killed my wife by an accident on the night of the fire, dwelling upon the advantage to her of the death of the only woman who knew her secret.

"Her terror, and fears for my fate, led her to watch the rectory that evening. She saw the de-

tective leave it, and followed him to my residence. This she told me hurriedly when I perceived her after digging my wife's grave in the plantation. She did not suspect what the sack contained.

"I am now about to pass into my normal condition. For people are almost always in their graves. When we survey the long race of men, it is strange and still more strange to find that they are mainly dead men, who have scarcely ever been otherwise.

"ÆNEAS MANSTON."

The steward's confession, aided by circumstantial evidence of various kinds, was the means of freeing both Anne Seaway and Miss Aldclyffe from all suspicion of complicity with the murderer.

§ 2. *Six o'clock p.m.*

It was evening—just at sunset—on the day of Manston's death.

In the little cottage at Palchurch was

gathered a group consisting of Cytherea, her brother, Edward Springrove, and his father. They sat by the window conversing of the strange events which had just taken place. In Cytherea's eye there beamed a hopeful ray, though her face was as white as a lily.

Whilst they talked, looking out at the yellow evening light that coated the hedges, trees, and church tower, a brougham rolled round the corner of the lane, and came in full view. It reflected the rays of the sun in a flash from its polished panels as it turned the angle, the spokes of the wheels bristling in the same light like bayonets. The vehicle came nearer, and arrived opposite Owen's door, when the driver pulled the rein and gave a shout, and the panting and sweating horses stopped.

"Miss Aldclyffe's carriage!" they all exclaimed.

Owen went out. "Is Miss Graye at home?" said the man. "A note for her, and I am to wait for an answer."

Cytherea read in the handwriting of the rector of Carriford:—

"Dear Miss Graye,

"Miss Aldclyffe is ill, though not dangerously. She continually repeats your name, and now wishes very much to see you. If you possibly can, come in the carriage.

"Very sincerely yours,

"John Raunham."

"How comes she ill?" Owen inquired of the coachman.

"She caught a violent cold by standing out of doors in the damp on the night the steward ran away. Ever since, till this morning, she complained of fulness and heat in the chest. This morning the maid ran in and told her suddenly that Manston had killed himself in gaol—she shrieked—broke a blood-vessel—and fell upon the floor. Severe internal hæmorrhage continued for some time and then stopped. They say she is sure to get over it: but she herself says no. She has suffered from it before."

Cytherea was ready in a few moments, and entered the carriage.

§ 3. *Seven o'clock, p.m.*

Soft as was Cytherea's motion along the corridors of Knapwater House, the preternaturally keen intelligence of the suffering woman caught the maiden's well-known footfall. She entered the sick chamber with suspended breath.

In the room everything was so still, and sensation was as it were so rarefied by solicitude, that thinking seemed acting, and the lady's weak act of trying to live a silent wrestling with all the powers of the universe. Nobody was present but Mr. Raunham, the nurse having left the room on Cytherea's entry, and the physician and surgeon being engaged in a whispered conversation in a side chamber. Their patient had been pronounced out of danger.

Cytherea went to the bedside, and was instantly recognised. O what a change—Miss Aldclyffe dependent upon pillows! And yet not a forbidding change. With weakness had come softness of aspect: the haughtiness was

extracted from the frail thin countenance, and a sweeter mild placidity had taken its place.

Miss Aldclyffe signifed to Mr. Raunham that she would like to be alone with Cytherea.

"Cytherea?" she faintly whispered, the instant the door was closed.

Cytherea clasped the lady's weak hand, and sank beside her.

Miss Aldclyffe whispered again. "They say I am certain to live; but I know that I am certainly going to die."

"They know, I think, and hope."

"I know best, but we'll leave that. Cytherea —O Cytherea, can you forgive me!"

Her companion pressed her hand.

"But you don't know yet—you don't know yet," the invalid murmured. "It is forgiveness for that misrepresentation to Edward Springrove that I implore, and for putting such force upon him—that which caused all the train of your innumerable ills!"

"I know all—all. And I do forgive you. Not in a hasty impulse that is revoked when

coolness comes, but deliberately and sincerely:—as I myself hope to be forgiven, I accord you my forgiveness now."

Tears streamed from Miss Aldclyffe's eyes, and mingled with those of her young companion, who could not restrain hers for sympathy. Expressions of strong attachment, interrupted by emotion, burst again and again from the broken-spirited woman.

"But you don't know my motive. O, if you only knew it, how you would pity me then!"

Cytherea did not break the pause which ensued, and the elder woman appeared now to nerve herself by a superhuman effort. She spoke on in a voice weak as a summer breeze, and full of intermission, and yet there pervaded it a steadiness of intention that seemed to demand firm tones to bear it out worthily.

"Cytherea," she said, "listen to me before I die."

"A long time ago—more than thirty years ago—a young girl of seventeen was cruelly betrayed by her cousin, a wild officer of six

and twenty . . . He went to India, and died.

"One night, when that miserable girl had just arrived home from Germany with her parents, she took all the money she possessed, pinned it on an infant's bosom, together with a letter, stating, among other things, what she wished the child's christian name to be; wrapped up the little thing, and walked with it to Clapham. Here in a retired street she selected a house. She placed the child on the doorstep and knocked at the door, then ran away and watched. They took it up and carried it indoors.

"Now that her poor baby was gone, the girl blamed herself bitterly for cruelty towards it, and wished she had adopted her parents' counsel to secretly hire a nurse. She longed to see it. She didn't know what to do. She wrote in an assumed name to the woman who had taken it in and asked her to meet the writer with the infant, at certain places she named. These were hotels or coffee-houses in Chelsea, Pimlico,

or Hammersmith. The woman, being well paid, always came, and asked no questions. At one meeting—at an inn in Hammersmith—she made her appearance without the child, and told the girl it was so ill that it would not live through the night. The news, and fatigue, brought on a fainting-fit. . . . ."

Miss Aldclyffe's sobs choked her utterance, and she became painfully agitated. Cytherea, pale and amazed at what she heard, wept for her, bent over her, and begged her not to go on speaking.

"Yes—I must," she cried between her sobs. "I will—I must go on! And I must tell yet more plainly! . . . . you must hear it before I am gone, Cytherea." The sympathising and astonished girl sat down again.

"The name of the woman who had taken the child was *Manston*. She was the widow of a schoolmaster. She said she had adopted the child of a relation.

"Only one man ever found out who the mother was. He was the keeper of the inn in

which she fainted, and his silence she has purchased ever since.

"A twelvemonth passed—fifteen months—and the saddened girl met a man at her father's house. Ah, such a man! Inexperience now perceived what it was to be loved in spirit and in truth! But it was too late. Had he known her secret he would have cast her out. She withdrew from him by an effort, and pined.

"Years and years afterwards, when she became mistress of a fortune and estates by her father's death, she formed the weak scheme of having near the son whom, in her father's lifetime, she had been forbidden to recognise. Cytherea, you know who that weak woman is!

* * * * * * *

"By such toilsome labour as this I got him here as my steward. And I wanted to see him *your husband,* Cytherea! It was a sweet dream to me. . . . . Pity me—O pity me! To die unloved is more than I can bear! I loved your father, and I love him now."

That was the burden of Cytherea Aldclyffe.

"I suppose you must leave me again—you always leave me," she said, after holding the young woman's hand a long while in silence.

"No—indeed I'll stay always. Do you like me to stay?"

Miss Aldclyffe in the jaws of death was Miss Aldclyffe still, though the old fire had degenerated to mere phosphorescence now. "But you are your brother's housekeeper?"

"Yes."

"Well, of course you cannot stay with me on a sudden like this. . . . . Go home, or he will be at a loss for things. And to-morrow morning come again, won't you dearest, come again—we'll fetch you. But you mustn't stay now, and put Owen out. O no—it would be absurd." The absorbing concern about trifles of daily routine, which is so often seen in very sick people, was present here.

Cytherea promised to go home, and come the next morning to stay continuously.

"Stay till I die then, will you not? Yes till I die—I shan't die till to-morrow."

"We hope for your recovery—all of us."

"I know best. Come at six o'clock, darling."

"As soon as ever I can," returned Cytherea, tenderly.

"But six is too early—you will have to think of your brother's breakfast. Leave Palchurch at eight, will you?"

Cytherea consented to this. Miss Aldclyffe would never have known had her companion stayed in the house all night, but the honesty of Cytherea's nature rebelled against even the friendly deceit which such a proceeding would have involved.

An arrangement was come to whereby she was to be taken home in the pony-carriage instead of the brougham that fetched her. The carriage to put up at Palchurch farm for the night, and on that account be in readiness to bring her back earlier.

§ 4. *March the thirtieth. Daybreak.*

The third and last instance of Cytherea's subjection to those periodic terrors of the night which had emphasised her connection with the Aldclyffe name and blood, transpired at the present date.

It was about four o'clock in the morning when Cytherea, though most probably dreaming, seemed to awake,—and instantly was transfixed by a sort of spell, that had in it more of awe than of affright. At the foot of her bed, looking her in the face with an expression of entreaty beyond the power of words to portray, was the form of Miss Aldclyffe — wan and distinct. No motion was perceptible in her; but longing—earnest longing—was written in every feature.

Cytherea believed she exercised her waking judgment as usual in thinking, without a shadow of doubt, that Miss Aldclyffe stood before her in flesh and blood. Reason was

not sufficiently alert to lead Cytherea to ask herself how such a thing could have occurred.

"I would have remained with you,—why would you not allow me to!" Cytherea exclaimed. The spell was broken: she became broadly awake; and the figure vanished.

It was in the grey time of dawn. She trembled in a sweat of disquiet, and not being able to endure the thought of her brother being asleep, she went and tapped at his door.

"Owen!"

He was not a heavy sleeper, and it was verging upon his time to rise.

"What do you want, Cytherea?"

"I ought not to have left Knapwater last night. I wish I had not. I really think I will start at once. She wants me, I know."

"What time is it?"

"A few minutes past four."

"You had better not. Keep to the time agreed upon. Consider, we should have such a trouble in rousing the driver, and other things."

Upon the whole it seemed wiser not to act on a mere fancy. She went to bed again.

An hour later, when Owen was thinking of getting up, a knocking came to the front door. The next minute something touched the glass of Owen's window. He waited—the noise was repeated. A little gravel had been thrown against it to arouse him.

He crossed the room, pulled up the blind, and looked out. A solemn white face was gazing upwards from the road, expectantly straining to catch the first glimpse of a person within the panes. It was the face of a Knapwater man, sitting on horseback.

Owen saw his errand. There is an unmistakable look in the face of every man who brings tidings of death. Graye opened the window.

"Miss Aldclyffe . . . . .," said the messenger, and paused.

"Ah; and is she dead?"

"Yes—she is dead."

"When did she die?"

"At ten minutes past four, after another effusion. She knew best, you see, sir. I started directly, by the rector's orders."

EPILOGUE.

Fifteen months have passed, and we are brought on to midsummer night, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven.

The picture presented is the interior of the old belfry of Carriford Church, at ten o'clock in the evening.

Eight Carriford men and one stranger are gathered there, beneath the light of a flaring candle stuck on a piece of wood against the wall. The eight Carriford men are the well-known ringers of the eight fine-toned old bells in the key of F, which have been music to the ears of Carriford parish and the outlying districts for the last four hundred years. The stranger is an assistant, who has appeared from nobody knows where.

The eight natives—in their shirt-sleeves, and without hats—pull and catch frantically at the

dancing bell-ropes, the locks of their hair waving in the breeze created by their quick motions: the stranger, who has the treble bell, does likewise, but in his right mind and coat. Their ever-changing shadows mingle on the wall in an endless variety of kaleidoscopic forms, and the eyes of all the nine are religiously fixed on a diagram like a large addition sum, which is chalked on the floor.

Vividly contrasting with the yellow light of the candle upon the four unplastered walls of the tower, and upon the faces and clothes of the men, is the scene discernible through the screen beneath the tower archway. At the extremity of the long mysterious avenue of the nave and chancel can be seen shafts of moonlight streaming in at the east window of the church—blue, phosphoric, and ghostly.

A thorough renovation of the bell-ringing machinery and accessories had taken place in anticipation of an interesting event. New ropes had been provided; every bell had been carefully shifted from its carriage, and the pivots

lubricated. Bright red "sallies" of woollen texture—soft to the hands and easily caught—glowed on the ropes in place of the old ragged knots, all of which newness in small details only rendered more evident the irrepressible aspect of age in the mass surrounding them.

The triple-bob-major was ended, and the ringers wiped their faces and rolled down their shirt-sleeves, previously to tucking away the ropes and leaving the place for the night.

"Piph—h—h—h! A good twenty minutes," said a man with a streaming face, and blowing out his breath—one of the pair who had taken the tenor bell.

"Our friend here pulled proper well—that 'a did—seën he's but a stranger," said Clerk Crickett, who had just resigned the second rope, and addressing the man in the black coat.

"'A did," said the rest.

"I enjoyed it much," said the man, modestly.

"What we should ha' done 'ithout ye, words can't tell. The man that d'belong by rights

to that there bell is ill o' two gallons o' wold cider."

"And now so's," remarked the fifth ringer, as pertaining to the last allusion, "we'll finish this drop o' metheglin and cider, and every man home-along straight as a line."

"Wi' all my heart," Clerk Crickett replied. "And the Lord send if I ha'n't done my duty by Master Teddy Springrove—that I have so."

"And the rest o' us," they said, as the cup was handed round.

"Ay, ay—in ringen—but I was spaken in a spiritual sense o' this mornen's business o' mine up by the chancel rails there. 'Twas very convenient to lug her here and marry her instead o' doen it at that twopenny-halfpenny town o' Cres'n. Very convenient."

"Very. There was a little fee for Master Crickett."

"Ah—well. Money's money—very much so, —very—I always have said it. But 'twas a pretty sight for the nation. 'A coloured up like any maid, that 'a did."

"Well enough 'a mid colour up. 'Tis no small matter for a man to play wi' fire."

"Whatever it may be to a woman," said the clerk, absently.

"Thou'rt thinken o' thy wife, clerk," said Gad Weedy. "She'll play wi'it again when thou'st get mildewed."

"Well—let her, God bless her; for I'm but a poor third man, I. The Lord have mercy upon the fourth . . . . Ay, Teddy's got his own at last. What little white ears that maid hev to be sure! choose your wife as you d'choose your pig—a small ear and a small tale—that was always my joke when I was a merry feller, ah,—years agone now! But Teddy's got her. Poor chap, he was getten as thin as a hermit wi' grief,—so was she."

"May be she'll pick up again now."

"True—'tis nater's law, which no man shall gainsay. Ah, well do I bear in mind what I said to Pa'son Raunham, about thy mother's family o' seven, Gad, the very first week of his comen here, when I was just in my prime.

'And how many daughters has that poor Weedy got, clerk?'" he says. 'Six, sir,' says I, 'and every one of 'em has a brother!' 'Poor woman,' says he 'a dozen children!—give her this half-sovereign from me, clerk.' 'A laughed a good five minutes afterwards, when he found out my merry nater—'a did. But there, 'tis over wi' me now. Enteren the Church is the ruin of a man's wit, for wit's nothen without a faint shadder o' sin."

"If so be Teddy and the lady had been kept apart for life, they'd both ha' died," said Gad emphatically.

"It went proper well," said the fifth bell-ringer. "They didn't flee off to Babylonish places—not they." He struck up an attitude—"Here's Master Springrove standen so: here's the married woman standen likewise: here they d'walk across to Knapwater House: and there they d'bide in the chimley corner, hard and fast."

"Yes, 'twas a pretty wedden, and well attended," added the clerk. "Here was my lady herself—red as scarlet: here was Master Sprin-

grove, looken as if he half-wished he'd never a-come,—Ah, toads o'em !—the men always do ! The women do stand it best—the maid was in her glory. Though she was so shy, the glory shone plain through that shy skin. Ah, it did so's."

"Ay," said Gad, "and there was Tim Tankins and his fine journeyman carpenters, standen tiptoe and peepen in at the chancel winders. There was Dairyman Dodman waiten in his new spring-cart to see 'em come out—whip in hand—that 'a was. Then up comes two master tailors. Then there was Christopher Runt wi' his pickaxe and shovel. There was wimmenfolk and there was menfolk traypsen up and down church'ard till they wore a path wi' traypsen so—letten the squallen children slip down through their arms and nearly skinnen o' em. And these were all over and above the gentry and Sunday-clothes folk inside. Well, I sid Mr. Graye dressed up quite the dand. 'Well Mr. Graye,' says I, from the top o' church-'ard wall, 'How's yerself?' Mr. Graye never

spoke—he'd dressed away his hearen. Seize the man, I didn' want en to spak. Teddy hears it, and turns round: 'Right Gad!' says he, and laughed like a boy. There's more in Teddy."

"Well," said Clerk Crickett, turning to the man in black, "now you've been among us so long, and d'know us so well, won't ye tell us what ye d'come here for, and what your trade is?"

"I am no trade," said the thin man, smiling, "and I came to see the wickedness of the land."

"I said thou wast one o' the devil's brood wi' thy black clothes," replied a sturdy ringer, who had not spoken before.

"No, the truth is," said the thin man, retracting at this horrible translation, "I came for a walk because it is a fine evening."

"Now let's be off, neighbours," the clerk interrupted.

The candle was inverted in the socket, and the whole party stepped out into the churchyard. The moon was shining within a day or two of full, and just overlooked the three or four vast

yews that stood on the south-east side of the church, and rose in unvaried and flat darkness against the illuminated atmosphere behind them.

"Good-night," the clerk said to his comrades, when the door was locked. "My nearest way is through the park."

"I suppose mine is too?" said the stranger. "I am going to the railway station."

"Of course—come on."

The two men went over a stile to the west, the remainder of the party going into the road on the opposite side.

"And so the romance has ended well," the clerk's companion remarked, as they brushed along through the grass. "But what is the truth of the story about the property?"

"Now look here, neighbour," said Clerk Crickett. "If so be you'll tell me what your line o' life is, and your purpose in comen here to-day, I'll tell you the truth about the wedden particulars."

"Very well—I will when you have done," said the other man.

"'Tis a bargain; and this is the right o' the story. When Miss Aldclyffe's will was opened it was found to have been drawn up on the very day that Manston (her sly-gotten) married Miss Cytherea Graye. And this is what that deep woman did. Deep? she was as deep as the North Star. She bequeathed all her property, real and personal, to '*the wife of Æneas Manston*' (with one exception): failen her life to her husband: failen his life to the hairs of his head—body I would say: failen them to her absolutely and her heirs for ever: failen these to Pa'son Raunham, and so on to the end o' the world. Now do you see the depth of her scheme? Why, although upon the surface it appeared her whole property was for Miss Cytherea, by the word '*wife*' beën used, and not Cytherea's name, whoever was the wife o' Manston would come in for't. Wasn't that rale depth? It was done, of course, that her son Æneas, under any circumstances, should be master o' the property, without folk knowen it was her son or suspecting anything, as they would if it had been left to en straightway."

"A clever arrangement. And what was the exception?"

"The payment of a legacy to her relative, Pa'son Raunham."

"And Miss Cytherea was now Manston's widow and only relative, and inherited all absolutely."

"True, she did. 'Well,' says she, 'I shan't have it,' (she didn't like the notion o' getten anything through Manston, naturally enough, pretty dear). She waived her right in favour o' Mr. Raunham. Now, if there's a man in the world that d'care nothen about land—I don't say there is, but *if* there is—'tis our pa'son. He's like a snail. He's a-growed so to the shape o' that there rectory that 'a wouldn' think o' leaven it even in name. 'Tis yours, Miss Graye,' says he. 'No, 'tis yours,' says she. 'Tisn' mine,' says he. The Crown had cast his eyes upon the case, thinken o' forfeiture by felony,—but 'twas no such thing, and 'a gied it up too. Did you ever hear such a tale?—three people, a man and a woman, and a Crown—neither o' em in a mad-house—flingen

an estate backwards and forwards like an apple or nut? Well, it ended in this way. Mr. Raunham took it: young Springrove was had as agent and steward, and put to live in Knapwater House, close here at hand—just as if 'twas his own. He d'do just what he d'like—Mr. Raunham never interferen—and hither to day he's brought his new wife Cytherea. And a settlement ha' been drawn up this very day, whereby their children, heirs, and cetrer, be to inherit after Mr. Raunham's death. Good fortune came at last. Her brother, too, is doen well. He came in first man in some architectural competition, and is about to move to London. Here's the house, look. Stap out from these bushes, and you'll get a clear sight o't."

They emerged from the shrubbery, breaking off towards the lake, and down the south slope. When they arrived exactly opposite the centre of the mansion, they halted.

It was a magnificent picture of the English country-house. The whole of the severe regular front, with its columns and cornices, were built

of a white smoothly-faced freestone, which appeared in the rays of the moon as pure as Pentelic marble. The sole objects in the scene rivalling the fairness of the façade, were a dozen swans floating upon the lake.

At this moment the central door at the top of the steps was opened, and two figures advanced into the light. Two contrasting figures were they. A young lithe woman in an airy fairy dress—Cytherea Springrove: a young man in black stereotype raiment—Edward, her husband.

They stood at the top of the steps together, looking at the moon, the water, and the general loveliness of the prospect.

"That's the married man and wife—there, I've illustrated my story by rale liven specimens," the clerk whispered.

"To be sure how close together they do stand! You couldn' slip a penny-piece between 'em—that you couldn'! Beautiful to see it, is'nt it—beautiful! . . . . But this is a private path and we won't let'em see us, as all the ringers be goen there to a supper and dance to-morrow night."

The speaker and his companion softly moved on, passed through the wicket, and into the coach-road. Arrived at the clerk's house at the farther boundary of the park, they paused to part.

"Now for your half o' the bargain," said Clerk Crickett. "What's your line o' life, and what d'ye come here for?"

"I'm the reporter to the *Froominster Chronicle*, and I come to pick up news. Good-night."

Meanwhile Edward and Cytherea, after lingering on the steps for several minutes, slowly descended the slope to the lake. The skiff was lying alongside.

"O Edward," said Cytherea, "you must do something that has just come into my head!"

"Well, dearest—I know."

"Yes—give me one half-minute's row on the lake here now, just as you did on Creston Bay three years ago."

He handed her into the boat, and almost noiselessly pulled off from shore. When they

were halfway between the two margins of the lake, he paused and looked at her.

"Ah, darling, I remember exactly how I kissed you that first time," said Springrove. "You were there as you are now. I unshipped the sculls in this way. Then I turned round and sat beside you—in this way. Then I put my hand on the other side of your little neck—"

"I think it was just on my cheek, in this way."

"Ah, so it was. Then you moved that soft red mouth round to mine—"

"But dearest—you pressed it round if you remember; and of course I couldn't then help letting it come to your mouth without being unkind to you, and I wouldn't be that."

"And then I put my cheek against that cheek, and turned my two lips round upon those two lips, and kissed them——so."

THE END.

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