

THE
STRANGE ADVENTURES
OF
LUCY SMITH

BY
F. C. PHILIPS

AUTHOR OF 'AS IN A LOOKING-GLASS' 'A LUCKY YOUNG WOMAN'
'JACK AND THREE JILLS' 'THE DEAN AND HIS DAUGHTER'
ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

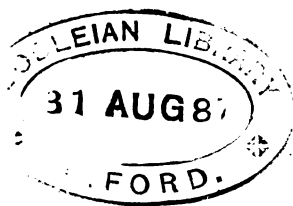
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TO
F. C. GROVE
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED
BY HIS FRIEND
THE AUTHOR

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF LUCY SMITH.

LUCY SMITH'S NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE story which I have to tell is more than strange. It is so terrible, so incredible, so entirely contrary to all that any ordinary reader of the 'Times,' or the penny papers, or of novels in three volumes, has ever heard of, that even now I have some doubt in telling it. I happen, however, to know that it is true. My husband, one of the few persons besides myself acquainted with it—for there were but five in all who knew all its details—is as confident that it is true

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as am I myself. So, after all, I need have little hesitation in giving my recollections of what happened.

My early life was uneventful and peaceful. Of my parents I have the dimmest memory; they died when I was a girl in words of three letters, frocks to the knees, infantine socks, and little shoes fastened with two straps and a button. There must have been something about their history—it could not possibly have been about mine—which had made their friends and relations angry. What it was I do not know to this day, nor have I ever been able to find out. I know that we lived in Croydon; and I have often hunted the Croydon streets to try and find our house, but have never succeeded.

Thus, then, the thread of my life practically begins when I found myself at a school, where I was just encouraged to persevere with my reading and taught to be good, to say my prayers, to always answer a question

by 'Yes, please,' or 'No, thank you,' and never to touch the slightest object, even a daisy on the lawn, without special permission first obtained.

I suppose I must have been a patient little child, for I did not resent this existence. I did not sneak out at the back door and try to run away into the world that lay beyond it; nor did I feel any wish that bears and wolves and lions might come and eat me. I suppose on the whole I was comfortable. I was never hungry; I was never cold at nights for want of sufficient bedding, and my chastisements never went beyond a sharp word, always atoned for very shortly after by a kiss and a reconciliation.

So time went on until I had developed to very nearly my full height, and began to feel strange fancies and wants within me which I could not fathom for myself. Why did I never go home like the other girls? Why did I never get any letters or presents?

Why did I know nothing whatever about myself beyond the fact of my own existence and surroundings?

I sat one day on a hot Saturday afternoon pondering these things under an old tree in a walled meadow at the back of our house. The more I pondered, the more exasperated I got, and I resolved that I would have matters out. So next morning I prepared myself for the fray, and immediately after breakfast told the eldest Miss Silverton that I wanted to speak to her.

Miss Silverton started, turned red, and then asked me abruptly and, for her, austere-ly, ‘What about?’

‘Nothing unpleasant between ourselves, dear Miss Silverton, but something about myself which I think you ought to tell me, if you know it. I want you to tell me how I came here, and who I am, and who my people are—that is to say, if I have any.’

This long speech and an application to

her smelling-bottle had enabled Miss Silver-ton to recover her composure.

‘My sister and I always meant to tell you everything some day,’ she said, ‘but there is really, my dear girl, very little to tell you. I will talk to my sister, and she shall remind me if I have forgotten anything; and you shall know all we can tell you about yourself to-morrow morning.’

With this promise I was quite contented, for the little old lady was always as good as her word.

Next morning after breakfast, when the cloth had been cleared and the maid had retired to the kitchen, the elder Miss Silver-ton produced a big bundle and placed it on the table. It smelt of lavender and of pepper, as bundles of preserved clothes often do. But she had not any letters of any sort or even a scrap of writing that I could see.

‘You were brought here one day,’ commenced Miss Susannah, ‘by a gentleman

who said he was your father, though he in no way resembled you ; for you have a fair complexion, while he was almost swarthy. He said he wanted us to take you as a pupil. My sister and I demurred to receive you—did we not, Dorcas?—on the most intelligible ground that you were far below the lowest limit of age mentioned in our prospectus, and fixed by the rules of our institution.’ Dorcas bowed a grave assent, and Susannah continued.

‘The gentleman, however—for his speech, appearance, and bearing were those of a gentleman—pressed his point. He had to leave next morning for Vienna. How could he possibly take you with him? He would want a skilled nurse. Besides, he had to travel night and day. Money was no object to him. And with this, my dear, he brought out a canvas bag full of sovereigns, which he said contained two hundred. “That will keep her with you for a few years, at any rate,” he

said. "Look how I trust you. Not but what I have heard good of you ; but I trust you implicitly. I shall leave this child with you because I am sure you will do your best to compensate her for the unhappy want of a mother. I leave the money with you because I was assured you were honourable, and now that I have seen you am certain of it. I cannot continue the discussion, ladies. Will you take the child on these terms or not?"

'We considered together for a minute, and replied that we would take you. He did not answer, after the fashion of a *roturier*, that he had thought we would, or that he was glad we saw it in a practical light, or anything of that kind. He said he was very much obliged to us indeed, and that we had kindly taken a great weight off his mind. And he then bowed and went away in his fly to the station. And when the London train was about to start he got into it. It seems he had brought you down from London.

And that, my poor dear child, is everything that we can tell you. We hunted through your little wardrobe high and low, but there was not a mark, not so much as an initial upon a single thing. They had all been cut out with a sharp pair of scissors.'

I turned a bitterly disappointed face down to the worn old carpet. I felt acutely that I must be the child of disgrace, whose shameful identity must be kept a profound secret. The two sisters with their kind little hearts—I use the word 'little' as a diminutive of tenderness, for the two dear good souls were full of infinite charity and tenderness—soon came to the end of what they must have felt was a disagreeable story for me to hear. 'We can tell you no more, my dear,' said Miss Dorcas. 'You remained with us. He had told us that we were to call you Lucy Smith. Of course we did not believe that that was your real name, for why cut a simple name like Lucy Smith out of all your things? The

money he left must have lasted very much longer than he had ever expected. You have no idea'—and here the old lady assumed the solemn look of one imparting a trade secret—'how cheap it is to keep a good little girl. Else we schoolmistresses should never live. Girls are not like boys. They do not wear out their boots, and tear their clothes, and ink their linen. They can do with a very little meat. They do not turn up their noses at bread and milk for breakfast. They do not break the windows, or the plates and dishes. Long before all your money had been spent, my dear, we had got to consider you as a sort of adopted child of our own, who would grow up and help us, and be a comfort to us and a companion, as you have done. There is a little of it left still. For the moment you began to be useful to us we considered that we ought not to take anything for keeping you. That little we have kept for you should you ever come to leave us,

which we hope you won't ; and for the matter of that, it is yours at this minute if you would like it.'

I looked at both sisters, and saw by their quiet, grave, earnest faces that they had told me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so far as they knew it. Then we all three had a cry. Then we kissed one another all round a number of times. And then we sponged our eyes with cold water and went out for a walk in the lanes. From that day and that hour my history was never again alluded to ; but I felt that somehow the clearing of matters up—if so it can be called—had strengthened our friendship. So I went on as a 'pupil-teacher,' gradually developing into an 'under-mistress' at the Miss Silvertons' select academy for young ladies, where the pupils were so select that the daughter of a tradesman was on no account received, even upon mutual terms of the most advantageous kind.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN I was about seventeen, tall and strong for my age, with great lumps of heavy hair of which I was proud, the Miss Silvertons used to tell me that I looked more like three or four and twenty than my real age, and it only needed a glance in my glass to enable me to see for myself that they were perfectly correct.

One morning during vacation we were sitting as usual in the garden after our mid-day dinner, under the shadow of the old walnut tree, with a little table between us to hold our pretences of industry, such as books or crochet or needlework. It was a hot, dreamy day, and the air was alive with

the murmur of insects. The swallows were dashing about overhead, and every now and again some huge dragon-fly would rustle by like a flash of living light. I certainly did not feel in an argumentative mood, but rather disposed to enjoy the sweet idleness of doing nothing, which is never so pleasant as when it has been deserved. I was therefore unpleasantly aroused from my mid-day dreams when Miss Susannah, speaking for herself and her sister, intimated that she had something important to say to me. It was a duty, however, to listen, and listen I did, feeling sure that whatever I might have to hear would be meant in all kindness.

Miss Susannah began by remarking that she and her sister were getting advanced in years, and if not as yet unfit for work, at any rate indisposed for it. They intended to retire, and sell the school as a going concern, and had fixed on Bognor as their future home. Of course there was no doubt that

the new purchaser, whoever she might be, would be glad to avail herself of my services, not merely for their actual value, but for the reason that I should be a link in the connection between the pupils, whom of course I knew, and themselves as incomers. But, on the whole, they recommended me to leave. I could soon get another engagement. Governesses who had been in a boarding school for the whole of their life were rare, and, in fact, jumped at. And Miss Dorcas actually indulged in the violent expression, 'But if rolling stones gather no moss, neither do stones buried out of sight;' and that for her part she considered a little motion and change good for young people, if not essential to them.

This was the substance of what they had to say. There was nothing to cry over. It was all very simple. Our leave-taking would be a happy one: we should remain the best of friends, correspond regularly, and

join our forces every now and again in the holidays, so that old memories might not drop. I saw the wisdom of what they said, and acquiesced.

‘And now, my dear,’ said Miss Dorcas, ‘I will tell you what we are going to do. We have no affection for the old furniture here, or for anything in the house, and our man of business has advised us to sell the thing, as he called it, “lock, stock, and barrel,” which means, we found, including all the household furniture and effects. Of course he is right. What shall we want with cups and saucers, and plates, and knives and forks, for thirty people or more? The very idea is ridiculous. At an auction they would fetch nothing, but to the incomer they will be useful. We shan’t even take away our old grand piano. What shall we want with a grand piano? It would fill up our room. We shall buy a little cottage. So we shall just go out with our boxes and our own books, and a little

plate and a few knick-knacks, and settle down together to end our days.'

'We've got the most charming little house at Bognor,' said Miss Susannah. 'It doesn't face the sea, but that's an advantage when you live there all the year round. I'm sure I don't want my windows blown in. We looked at the photographs of it first, and then we went down and took it at once. We shall furnish there, and try to be a little more bright and cheerful than our dull old rooms here are. Now that's just all about it, and what we have to say to you is this: we don't want you to stop with us for ever. Of course you must go out into the world again. That's the law of life. But we want you always to consider our house as your home. Stop with us while you are looking out for an engagement. Stop with us during your vacations. We have no relations in the world, and we have always considered you more or less as our own daughter—the daugh-

ter of both of us, I mean, of course,' said the good lady, almost colouring at the impropriety of her own remark. 'Now, don't let's talk any more about it to-day, but tell us to-morrow at breakfast, like a dear good girl, that you are going to do what we wish.'

'I shall tell you so to-morrow,' I answered firmly. 'In fact, I'm quite ready to tell you so now; but little pretences are sometimes pleasant and useful, so I'll pretend to think the matter over with all my might and main until to-morrow morning, and then give you an answer as solemnly weighed and as carefully set out as a Saturday afternoon essay.'

Then we laughed and laid aside our work, and began to stroll about on the lawn to and fro under the trees.

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I did not lie awake into the middle of the night considering the matter, as, I suppose,

I ought to have done if I had been worldly-minded. Neither did I in any way, formal or otherwise, implore any Divine light to guide my steps through uncertainty. The whole thing was so charmingly certain and simple in itself. It was only the little pretence of deliberation that had to be kept up.

Look at the difference between men and women shopping. A man knows the price that is asked. If he is indisposed to pay it he offers less. Perhaps his offer is accepted. Perhaps by mutual consent the arrangement is come to popularly known as splitting the difference. At all events, the affair is a matter of a few seconds. A woman will haggle for half an hour over a couple of yards of ribbon. She gains nothing by it, for the tradesman knows beforehand exactly what he means to take, and sticks fifty per cent. on to it. She talks him down this fifty per cent. with infinite protestation on his own part, and goes away thinking she has outwitted him. There never

but once was a woman of business. That was the Sibyl who sold the Roman king the Sibylline books ; but she was something more than human, which ordinary women certainly are not. So next morning, after our egg and bread and butter, and watercress and tea, with on this occasion, and in honour of its importance, shrimps and marmalade as *hors-d'œuvres*, I was solemnly asked my decision. I answered, with a brief but emphatic expression of my gratitude for the motherly care they had taken of me, that I did not like the idea of stopping in the old house after they had left it ; that new faces and a new order of things would jar painfully upon old memories ; that I should endeavour to get a situation as governess, and that by way of change I should try for a place in a family.

I was quite aware, I said, of the differences between a family and a school. At a school you had simply to do your work and to keep the rules. In a family you had to deal with

all kinds of personal peculiarities, difficulties, and prejudices. As a governess in a school you had a recognised position. As a governess in a family your salary was less than the wages of the cook and of the lady's-maid, and you were a sort of interloper, neither belonging to the domestic circle nor yet strictly excluded from it.

But I was young, and I should try the family, if it was only to see what it was like.

'You are quite right, my dear,' said Miss Susannah. 'Very early in life I myself determined that I would gain a thorough knowledge of the world so far as I possibly could. I acted upon this determination,' continued the old lady emphatically, 'with the same resolution as that with which I had formed it, and I have always found the knowledge which I thus acquired of the very greatest service to me.'

The dear old lady firmly believed in her own mind that she was speaking the words not

of wisdom only, but of wisdom and truth. Beyond checking the butcher's bill, and knowing to a penny the state of the joint finances of the establishment, she was as ignorant of the world as a butterfly on the first day of its existence, and as innocent.

Miss Dorcas, to use judicial phraseology, entirely concurred. She had, she said, always been content to be guided by her sister's opinion, which she was gratified to add had always been identical, except in mere matters of detail, with the opinion she should have formed for herself if she had been asked to do so. Her sister had shrewd common sense, while she herself was, she felt bound to admit, somewhat dreamy, and in fact a bit of a book-worm. But she flattered herself that when she brought her mind to bear on practical matters it was free from bias ; and she added in conclusion that she too had loved me as a daughter, and now that I was growing up began to feel that she loved me as a sister.

I was always to consider their home my home, and I was to recollect—and here her voice quavered a little—that they had no relations in the world whom they had seen or communicated with for many years.

‘We commenced as poor governesses together, my dear, and we worked always cheerfully, and sometimes, if I may say so, even a little bit harder perhaps than other people do, or than we needed to do ourselves. But we liked work ; and I remember a very great doctor down in the West telling me that the brain wants regular exercise every day just as much as the body. So I asked him whether he meant that I was to do a bit of work every day—say a chapter of Hallam’s “Constitutional History,” or of something of that sort. He laughed at me, and said I was to read exactly what I liked, just as I was to eat and drink exactly what I liked. “Only,” he added, “you mustn’t fancy that a morbid craving is a genuine

liking. Take wholesome literature exactly as you take wholesome food." He was a very clever man, and I am quite sure that by obeying him I have added a certain number of years to my life.

'So,' she concluded, with a profound shake of the head, 'work, my dear, as long as you ever can, go on working at something which suits your strength, and keep on at it. There's an old saying that all honest work is prayer, and is reckoned up as such ; and although I believe it isn't a Protestant proverb, I am sure it's as true as if it were.'

After this we did anything but pray, for we took a walk in the lanes, and spent the remainder of the day in doing nothing most systematically. Unless, indeed, it be hard work for three women who know nothing of the subject to discuss whether, without permanently maintaining a man-servant but retaining a big boy for two hours a day, you can afford to keep pigs, and poultry, and

pigeons, and bees. As we none of us knew anything on these points, and could only conjecture, we arrived at last at the state described by Leech in one of his best sketches as 'metaphysics,' which is that of a man talking about what he does not understand to another man who does not understand what he means.

So we ultimately dropped out of the discussion, or of its own accord it dropped us out of it, and we began to chat pleasantly about such soap-bubbles as interested all of us.

CHAPTER III.

So, as we had agreed, we duly inserted an advertisement in the 'Times' and in the 'Morning Post,' setting out my qualifications and my age, and artfully stating that I had been in the same school as pupil, pupil-teacher, and salaried assistant for the whole of my life. This kind of thing goes straight to the heart of the British matron, her first double-barrelled question always being, 'How long were you in your last situation, and why did you leave it?'

I got any number of answers. Some of them were evidently 'fishing' and tentative; some seemed to have been written out of mere wantonness. Others were preposterous. Let me give an illustration.

The wife of a country squire in Essex wrote to me. There were six girls ranging from sixteen downwards, and a boy of fifteen whom I should have to 'keep up' in his Latin, French, arithmetic, and elementary algebra during the time that he was home for the holidays. I should be required to take my meals in the day nursery with the head nurse, who was quite a lady, and the children. If I had any High Church proclivities, they would be considered an absolute bar. Each year that the family went to the sea-side, which was usually every other year, I could have a holiday during their absence. In fact, they would prefer that I should do so, as it would be more desirable for many reasons. My salary was to be ten pounds a year, payable quarterly.

I give this as a specimen of the meanness of which some English ladies can be capable when they think they are not likely to be found out. And yet we emancipated the

slaves, the bulk of whom upon a poll would have proved far more happy, free, and independent than any English governess.

But amongst the letters I at last found one that I liked. It came from a country solicitor in a large country town. It stated the number of his daughters (four), their ages (varying from thirteen to six), the exact subjects he required taught, and the exact salary he was prepared to give. And he then added that the family always went away for at least a month in the year, that I should not be required to go with them, that they would prefer that I did not stay in the house, and that I should receive an extra pound a week while they were away, fractions of a week to count as a whole.

Here evidently was a cool-headed man of business. I answered his letter most entirely in his own spirit, and within four days I was under Mr. Bulbrooke's roof.

I can dismiss the Bulbrookes very briefly,

as I stayed with them a very little time. Mrs. Bulbrooke was fussy, flabby, and fidgety, both mentally and physically. Mr. Bulbrooke must certainly have had more force of manner than of character, or else he was a 'mute inglorious' Eldon. He always spoke at the top of his voice. He would bellow for a servant whom he wanted as if he or she were three miles out in the adjacent parish. He had highly polished boots, a bald head, a round red face, sandy whiskers, a thick neck, and an obtrusive manner.

There is, I believe, a dilemma sometimes put by young men to their fellows of less acuteness than themselves : Would you sooner be a bigger fool than you look, or look a bigger fool than you are? I think Mr. Bulbrooke was not such a bully as he appeared. His manner was partly assumptive and partly habit. He found it useful. Indeed, I can quite believe him capable of having done many kind acts in secret, and

being ready to do more ; but his manner was what old ladies in Lincolnshire call 'rampagious.'

As for the children, I can easily sum them up. They were very much afraid of their father ; they were serenely indifferent to their mother ; they had no little vices or meannesses. But they were beyond doubt hopelessly slow-witted, if not in fact absolutely stupid.

The days went by. Mrs. Bulbrooke murmured her approval of my assiduity. Her husband used to shake hands with me every morning and evening, and incline his head without removing his hat if we encountered one another in the daytime. I had a sufficiently good bedroom, which was thoughtfully provided with small hanging shelves, a little writing-desk, and a dwarf easy chair. The Bulbrookes were not parsimonious or even close in details. And I was never remonstrated with on the number of composite

candles I consumed, or warned against the danger of reading in bed. When off duty I was as much my own mistress as I should have been in my own house.

I have described my surroundings. In doing so I have described my life ; for each day the wheel went round and made one revolution, and each day was exactly like its fellows that had preceded it. The real fact is that physically I had nothing to wish for, nor any comforts which I missed, but that for the rest I was entirely thrown upon my own resources.

At last came the time for the annual exodus to the sea-side, and I had my business interview with the master of the house, who by this time had begun to treat me somewhat as a lesser confidante. He had, he said, with his curious mixture of frankness, warm-heartedness, and swagger and bluster, done an uncommonly good thing. He had piloted a large Railway Bill and a Canal Bill in connection

with it through the committee of each House.

I did not know what he meant, but of course I understood that he had been doing prosperously. He was consequently, he said, going to take a longer holiday than usual, and he felt himself entitled to it. They were going to do Paris, Switzerland, Venice, and any other place that might suggest itself. I was to consider myself free for three clear months. He should pick up a high-class *bonne*, and have the children taught to speak French colloquially, so that they would not be exactly losing time.

For myself, he begged to hand me a cheque for my salary in advance for the three months in question, at the end of which time he and Mrs. Bulbrooke would expect to find me at my post or to hear from me.

Then he shook hands, gave me an open envelope with an enclosure, and departed. He had been better than his word. The

cheque was for twenty pounds more than my salary; and pinned to it was a piece of paper with the terse remark in his own handwriting, 'Never mind the difference. You have deserved a good holiday, and will find a holiday more expensive than you think.'

I had the tact, of course, not to hunt my employer out and thank him personally, but I wrote him a letter which I tried to make sufficiently business-like in its tone without losing a single tinge of the shade of gratitude which I felt was distinctly due to him. I took care to make certain that this was delivered, for I looked over the banisters and saw it done.

Next day the whole family set off immediately after breakfast, and I was left to myself. I packed my boxes, bestowed my little presents upon those of the servants with whom I had to do, ordered a fly, and was driven straight to the station.

Arrived in London, I put up with some trepidation at the Charing' Cross Hotel—a tremendous caravanserai with an infinite number of rooms that fairly bewildered me. I had seen these big places before, but had never until now crossed their portals; and I had heard of a lift and understood the principle of it, but had never before ascended or descended in one. It was as new an experience for me as a journey in a balloon.

One thing struck me as most business-like and sensible: the price of everything was fixed up everywhere, even to the length of placing over your bedroom mantelpiece a card denoting the daily charge for your room, and warning you that unless you gave notice before noon you would be charged for an additional day.

I thus felt more at my ease than I probably should have done in a place where I did not know how my money might be going. And I found also that there was an

immense drawing-room or ladies' room, with a piano, and easy chairs, and writing materials, and the illustrated papers, and a few novels for those who might want them ; so that I should have been comfortable enough if I had not been a little lonely.

I did not dream of going to the theatre, which I felt would be hardly decorous for me to do alone. So I wrote to the two dear sisters, telling them I was coming down to Bognor to see them, and I then took an omnibus to Hyde Park, where I walked about and admired the beauty of the scenery, or, to be more exact, of the artificial landscape making. Then I came back in the same fashion to Charing Cross, purchased 'The Last Chronicles of Barset,' read till bedtime, and went to bed early.

It was a comfort to have a little jet of gas in my room and candles on the mantelpiece, and other such things. The chamber was not like any in which I had ever slept,

or which indeed I had ever even seen before, but when I had locked my door and blown out the candles I felt quite secure with the gas jet alight. I had to clamber into bed, the proportions of the bedstead were so majestic, and for the first time in my life fell asleep almost instantaneously, upon a spring mattress and under curtains—both of which things were entire novelties to me. A spring mattress may perhaps be a great temptation to you to lie in bed longer than you ought, but the sleep you get upon it is as different from that afforded by ordinary bedding as is the scent of moss roses from that of the little white creeping rose, which twines itself all about the verandah, and will even scale the walls like ivy up to the very eaves.

Next morning I paid my bill at the bureau. It was correct to a penny, sufficiently moderate, and within a shilling or two of what I had expected it to be. I soon found myself in the train, armed with a news-

paper and my novel ; and before ‘ The Last Chronicles of Barse’ had come to an end—for I am by no means a quick reader—my few effects were on the platform at Bognor, and I was standing beside them and shaking hands with the two sisters.

CHAPTER IV.

MY week at Bognor was delightful, and I myself would willingly have stopped there for the whole of the rest of my holiday, but there were difficulties in the way which I had sufficient tact to perceive, and consequently to limit my stay to the time agreed upon.

The sisters were getting older. They had acquired the habit of sitting together one on each side of the fire or the empty grate for hours at a time, doing nothing, and never even interchanging a word. They liked extremely early hours at night and somewhat late hours in the morning, but were particularly anxious that this growing proclivity should not be noticed. Of course

I could not help noticing it, although I said nothing, taking care to come down from my room at just their time, and to profess myself abominably tired as soon as I saw them beginning to nod.

Then matters were further complicated by the fact that Miss Susannah had, in the winter just passed, had a smart attack of rheumatism, which had left her joints extremely tender, not to say sensitive; while Miss Dorcas had grown very deaf, and was irritated at not being able to conceal the fact.

So I certainly had no temptation to protract my visit, and we parted with the most honestly sincere affection on each side, I am sure, but at the same time with a certain feeling of relief that, under all the circumstances, was not at all to be unexpected.

I was surprised one morning, my holiday having scarcely begun, to receive a letter from Mr. Bulbrooke. It was characteristic.

He began cordially with a number of inquiries about myself. Then he told me as much as he knew about the family, which was, to put it mildly, very little. Having thus made it impossible to suppose that he had any fault or complaint to allege against myself, he plunged into business.

Mrs. Bulbrooke, it seemed, had developed asthma, or some other permanent affection of the lungs and chest. She was becoming what the French term *poitrinaire*, without being in any positive danger. The physicians had recommended permanent residence at Mentone, and he had taken a villa there. He added that there was a large finishing school within a few yards of the villa, to which of course it would be convenient that the girls should go, and so, by associating with other girls their own age, pick up French colloquially, even if it might not be the French of Fénélon.

Under the circumstances I was to con-

sider my engagement at an end. But he enclosed a cheque in lieu of six months' notice (it was a hundred guineas beyond that amount), and I was always to consider myself an old and esteemed friend of the family, and never to lose a chance of seeing them if I could possibly manage it in any way. He enclosed any number of photographs of himself and Mrs. Bulbrooke and the children, and he concluded in a manner that made me somehow feel as if he had slapped me vigorously between the shoulder-blades, and shouted out, 'Good cheer, my hearty, and good luck to you.'

I telegraphed with business-like promptitude to acknowledge his letter and to thank him, and next day I wrote a sufficiently long and friendly farewell, together with a special letter to one of the girls, who had always liked me, or seemed to like me, more than did her colourless sisters. And herewith, for all real purposes of my story, ends the

chapter of my connection with the house of Bulbrooke.

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I had picked up enough of business from the occasional words of wisdom dropped by Mr. Bulbrooke to know that money is always safer in a bank than about your own person, so I resolved when I went to London to find out a bank, and put my little wind-fall, which to me seemed a fortune, into it. Meantime I lingered, not unnaturally, over my departure from the sisters.

It is always painful, or, in ordinary parlance, a wrench, to leave people whom you like, and who like you, especially when your habits and tastes are almost identical. But things have to be done, and up to London I went. And I now wish to point out how, acting as I thought wisely, I in reality increased my difficulties in the terribly sharp trial through which I was about to pass.

Having no experience of lodgings, and entertaining, from all I had heard, a mistrust of landladies, I returned to my old quarters at the Charing Cross Hotel, and the next morning went up to the Bank of England, where Mr. Bulbrooke kept his private account, by way of showing the world that he always had a large current balance, and was above wanting interest on it. There I converted his cheque into crisp notes of five pounds each, with five pounds in gold.

Then, feeling as independent as if, like the advanced lady thinkers of these modern days, I had cut my hair short, wore square-toed lace-up boots, and generally affected an intensely masculine deportment, I made my way to Birch's, of which Mr. Bulbrooke had told me—a funny little shop, half sunk into the ground. Some strange kind of exuberance of spirits seemed upon me. When I asked for a basin of soup, I almost expected to be told that they did not serve

ladies, and was astonished to find that no demur was made.

I had my first basin of turtle soup, and am bound to say I liked it, although I have since been told that I ought to have found it intensely unpleasant, as you find your first oyster, your first olive, medlar, caviare on toast, really high woodcock, strongly devilled kidneys, or, if you are of the other sex, your first attempt at tobacco.

The turtle soup was a new experience. After it I had some marvellous little tartlets, about the size of half a crown, which I saw the gentlemen round about me come in and eat by the dozen, saying, when they had finished, 'eight,' 'fourteen,' or 'five-and-twenty,' as the case might be. I am not exaggerating, for these little tartlets seem to be rather the subtle aroma of pastry than the solid reality of it. To seriously talk of 'eating' them would be out of the question. And then I am almost ashamed to say I had

a small glass of punch. I had heard Mr. Bulbrooke mention Birch's punch with affection. It is extremely delicious, but I am quite positive that it in no way got into my head, for I walked all the way down from the Mansion House to St. Paul's Churchyard, stopping to look in at the shop windows, and indulging in the cheap pleasure of making imaginary purchases; and I know that my mind was perfectly clear, and that my face never flushed even for a second.

I looked in at the jewellers' shops, and those of the printsellers and artists' colourmen, and at the mercers with their magnificent silks, and the furriers with their costly jackets of sable trimmed with sable tail; and I must again insist, at the risk of repetition, that I took a sane and absolutely sober interest in all I saw.

I walked down the Strand to the Charing Cross Hotel. It was now about half-past four, and the day was showing symptoms of closing

in. I went to the bureau, and deposited there a proportion of my bank notes amounting to a hundred pounds. The balance I kept myself, meaning to make purchases the next day. Then, feeling thoroughly tired, I had a hot bath—one of the greatest luxuries in the world when you are at all physically fatigued, as Mr. Bulbrooke had once bluffly told me across the dinner-table, and had been corroborated in the statement by his wife, after a mild preliminary rebuke for the indelicacy of touching upon such a subject at all.

The hot bath made me feel lazy, and I spent the remainder of the day on the sofa in my little room, at any height of the lift. If I had been a man I should have smoked, and probably have interested myself in the prices of stocks and shares, or the latest betting in the next great race. Being a woman, I interested myself in a novel. It was a nautical story of some sort, with plenty of tar and

rope, and strange characters drawn together out of every rank and condition of life, from every quarter of the globe, and from all points of the compass.

Presently I found myself getting charmingly sleepy. So I placed a candle, matches, and my book on a table within my reach, left the window which looked towards the river open, and in a very few minutes was fast asleep. I had no dreams that night; which, in so far as facts are worth anything, seems to show of what little practical use dreams are in pointing out impending trouble.

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning I arose full of vigour and business-like determination. I apparelled myself uncompromisingly in black silk with plain cuffs and collar, and a small black bonnet with no decorations beyond the tulle cap. My boots and my umbrella were serviceable, and my gloves were the very darkest lavender. I might have been going, if women had all their rights, to take my seat at a Board of Directors.

And now I must explain, for the benefit of such gentlemen as may do me the honour to read me, how I took out my money. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. I am bound to give details.

A man who has a bundle of bank notes puts them into his pistol-pocket and buttons them up. A woman has not got a pistol-pocket. Or else he puts them into an inner breast coat pocket, and then buttons up his coat, *more Britannicó*. Sailors going into dangerous quarters put their money between the sole of their foot and their shoe, lace up their shoe tightly, and tie it with a double knot. A sailor also invariably wears a flannel shirt. This has an inside pocket next the skin. Here Jack keeps his certificate of discharge, the last letter from his sweetheart, and other such treasures. It is singular that women, who devote so much more of their time to thinking over dress than do men, and who are always making startling and revolutionary experiments in fashion, should never have invented a safety pocket. Yet such is the fact. You have only to watch a woman in the street for a few minutes, and nine times out of ten you will discover exactly where

her purse is, and will of course know how to get at it.

My purse, I may tell my readers, was in a pocket slung between my topmost petticoat and the skirt of my dress. If any gentleman among my readers does not understand what I mean by this, he may safely ask any lady of his acquaintance, old or young, married or single.

Knowing, or rather having heard, that things in Tottenham Court Road were cheaper than elsewhere, I took a yellow omnibus from Charing Cross, and so made my way to the junction of that famous thoroughfare with Oxford Street. In the omnibus and seated next me during the journey was an old lady very respectably dressed. I should hardly have noticed her had it not been for the peculiar clearness and brightness of her eyes, the determination of her hard and forbidding features, and the general vigour of her appearance.

Where Tottenham Court Road joins Oxford Street I got out, made my way to a large draper's which seemed to me as good an establishment as any of the others, if not a better, and commenced my purchases. Into the details of these I need not enter. It is sufficient to say that I treated myself more or less to what young ladies would term an outfit, and sailors a rig-out. I was determined while I had my money to buy a sufficient wardrobe, and to have no more trouble about dress for at least a couple of years to come. So I purchased, not recklessly at all, but still, for an humble governess, somewhat heavily. I had brought out with me about thirty pounds, and when I paid my account I had left a five-pound note, two or three pounds in gold, and some silver.

The bulk of the things I ordered to be sent to the hotel with all possible despatch, but I then and there in the shop changed the gloves, the mantle, and the bonnet which I

was wearing for new articles of the same kind, leaving the old to be sent back with my other purchases. And I also took away with me a really handsome sunshade, which had taken my fancy, and a sealskin reticule bag with a beautiful morocco belt which I intended to do duty in future for a panier pocket.

Outside the shop and on the pavement I found the day still young, and as I had never seen the Zoological Gardens, but knew them to be a place to which a young lady might go without a chaperon, I asked a policeman their direction. Finding the distance to be little more than a short walk, I set to work to accomplish it on foot.

I must have got about halfway up Tottenham Court Road when a breathless draper's assistant, without his hat, and his pen behind his ear, came rushing up behind me and slapped me violently on the shoulder. I turned round and looked at

him with astonishment and indignation. 'How dare you, sir?' I cried.

'You'll know in a jiffy,' he retorted, blowing for breath, and wiping the perspiration from his puffy face with the back of his hand. 'You'll know, or I'll pretty soon have to teach you. You stop here till the officer comes, or it will be the worse for you.'

I had turned round, so that I was looking down the road, and I now saw a police constable coming up, not at the usual deliberate saunter, but at a brisk and business-like pace.

'What is this?' I asked as soon as he arrived.

'You know well enough,' he answered. 'Now just come back quietly and don't make any fuss, else it 'll just be the worse for you. Come along.'

I was paralysed with terror, and went back to the shop in a state of absolute bewilderment.

When I entered it under the control of the constable, although he had no physical hold on me, I was ushered into a back room, where I found two or three men, evidently counter assistants, and one who seemed to be a master or partner in the firm.

In the first place I was identified as the person who had made certain purchases that morning, taking away some and ordering the remainder to be sent to the Charing Cross Hotel. The constable who took notes asked me if this was true, and I said 'Yes.' I was then asked to produce my purse if I had it. I handed it to the constable, who opened it. How its contents had been changed I am unable to say. It now contained a small bundle of notes. Some of these the constable pointed out with contempt as being drawn upon the Banks of Elegance and of Engraving. Others were Bank of England notes apparently. But the constable and my accusers passed them

round and held them up to the light, and felt them as a miller feels his meal between the thumb and the finger, and pronounced them to be forgeries. In the money compartment was a little loose silver, a genuine half-sovereign, and a number of bronze medals which evoked the contemptuous exclamation, 'Hanover jacks!'

'Well,' said the constable, 'I think it's about as neat a case as ever I saw. We must ask for a remand, of course. It'll take some time, because it's quite clear she must be in with a gang of 'em. Now, sir, you must come round with me and prefer the charge.' But at this moment the door opened, and the partner to whom this remark was addressed received a whispered communication from a shopman.

'Just wait a minute, officer,' said he. 'I am told this is something very important. I'll be back in a minute.'

'Certainly, sir,' said the officer. And as

the proprietor went out the officer shut the door, and placed his back against it.

Then I felt my sight growing dim, and the room began to whirl round me. ‘Give me some water,’ I called out; ‘I feel faint.’

‘Bosh!’ retorted the officer.

Then the air turned black but full of lurid red sparks, and I felt as if something had cracked in my head, and I was somehow aware that I had fallen heavily on the floor, and then I was aware of nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I came to myself I had no idea whether hours or even days had passed. I opened my eyes dreamily and wearily. I was in bed, and in one of the most delightful rooms I had ever seen in my life. There were rooms far more expensively furnished in the Bulbrooke château, but none so prettily. I was on a light French bedstead of fancy ironwork, with gauze curtains looped up with bows of ribbon. On a table close by were medicines, wine, fruit, and flowers, and there were vases of flowers scattered about the room, on the mantelpiece, and on brackets. The French windows were open, and looked on to a balcony festooned with creepers ; and

in the open air beyond the swallows were darting to and fro.

There were a number of other things which I could only notice vaguely, such as a clock of Sèvres china, so far as I could judge, in the centre of the mantelpiece, a huge tiger's skin with great glass eyes in its head doing duty as a hearth-rug, a small fountain fixed against the wall tossing up a brisk jet of water, and on the walls a number of engravings and photographs of well-known pictures from the English Academy and the French Salon, framed with great white margins in an almost imperceptible gold beading.

Squatted on the hearth-rug was the most curious human being I had ever seen in my life—a little negress with a skin as black as jet, snow-white hair, and great staring eyes. The moment she saw me awake she touched a knob in the wall so close to her that she had not to rise to reach it. Wondering

what all this might mean, I lay still with my eyes half shut, and waited.

Almost immediately the door opened, and in came the old lady whom I had seen in the omnibus on my way to Tottenham Court Road. I was still so weak and bewildered that I hardly felt astonished at this coincidence, and only waited to see what might be going to happen.

She held up her finger to me, as if to enjoin silence. Then she came to my bedside, felt my pulse and nodded approval, held me up in bed with one arm and rearranged the pillows with the other, and then allowed me to sink gratefully back upon them. Then from a stoppered bottle on the mantelpiece she poured a few drops of a bright red fluid into a small tumbler of water from a carafe which was standing neck deep in a bowl of ice.

The liquid at first was green, of the deepest emerald, then it shifted through all

the prismatic hues of the opal, and then it turned a bright ruby red. She handed it to me and motioned me to drink it. It could not have been wine, of course, but it tasted to me like wine of some very rich and rare vintage. There was the aroma of the grape in it. And even as I drank it I felt the blood come to my lips and cheek, and my pulse quicken, and I became aware of new strength.

Then the old lady, who had seated herself in a great wicker chair, opened her mouth and said, 'How are you, my dear?'

'Almost well, thank you,' I answered, with some of the vigour of the cordial in my tone. 'But I have been dreadfully frightened.' And here the full memory of the whole thing came back upon me, and I turned round and buried my face in the soft pillows. Somehow or other I did not break into crying.

'You will soon be all right,' I heard her

voice say. And then I felt it was ungrateful of me to be childish, and I boldly collected myself and sat straight up in bed. 'You see,' said I, 'I am stronger than you might have thought.'

'Ah me!' she answered, 'you have had a terrible trial, and a more than usual shock. But you're young, and there is magic in youth. Could you stand on your feet if you tried?'

I tried, and found that I could stand on my feet—not with the full springy tread of ordinary days, but with firmness and confidence.

'Very good,' she answered. 'Now, I am a doctor.'

I opened my eyes at the statement, but a new wonder among so many was a little matter.

'I have lived many years in the East, where the wise women knew more of medicine than the men. There is a carriage at the

door, and you must come for a drive. In this room'—and she opened a side door—'is a warm bath waiting for you.'

I followed her in. There was a bath and a toilet-table with all its accessories ; and on another table were my clothes, neatly placed in order, and at the foot of the table my boots.

'Are you strong enough to take your bath by yourself and without my help ?'

I again nodded gratefully, and said 'Yes.'

'Then I will wait for you in the next room, but I shall leave the door open in case you feel faint again.'

I had never enjoyed such a delightful bath in my life. It was odourless, and apparently consisted of nothing but clear water, but it had some magical sort of soothing effect upon me ; and when I emerged from it I noticed that my skin had a bright, smooth appearance like that of highly polished ivory, and that through it the veins shone with the

most delicately blue tint. I could hardly recognise myself.

Then the old lady came in and began to bustle about. She dressed my hair, assisted me with my toilet, and, having again satisfied herself that I could be trusted to walk without assistance, led me down a wide staircase. This staircase ran round a square hall panelled with black oak and paved with encaustic tiles, and everywhere about the staircase and the hall were niches and brackets with statuettes and rare exotics, and quaint orchids blossoming in porcelain vases.

At the door was a large carriage of the kind Mrs. Bulbrooke used to call a barouche, with an immense pair of iron-grey horses in it, and on the box was a negro coachman. A negro footman let down the steps for us, opened and closed the door and clambered up to his seat, and we set off at a brisk pace down a long winding avenue of laurels. Then we passed a lodge where a woman was

holding the gate open for us, and so we emerged into a country road.

‘We are going to drive for about three hours,’ said my companion. ‘It will be as much as you can stand the first day.’

We dashed along through country roads, past cottages and alehouses, with here and there a villa or a lodge gate, and now and again a country church. But I noticed after some time that we had never passed a single sign-post. This a little roused my curiosity. So I turned to my companion and said naturally enough, ‘This is very beautiful, but in what part of the county are we? I need hardly say it is new to me, and I should like to know.’

‘I really do not know myself,’ she replied, ‘but I quite agree with you that it is very beautiful.’

So we rattled along amid all the glories of a truly English fine day, and I was too happy to ask further questions, or even to

talk. We must have driven in a circle, for we somehow returned to our own lodge gates by a different road. The evening clouds were gathering in, and the swallows beginning to fly low.

The drive had done me good, and I knew that I was the stronger for it; but I was also tired, and when it was suggested that I should have some supper and go to bed, I at once consented.

My companion and I had supper together. It was a dainty meal, though I cannot give its contents beyond remembering that there were ices and a huge cluster of hothouse grapes. Then my old friend saw me upstairs and into bed, and in a very few minutes I was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

I MUST have been made more than usually drowsy by my drive through the country air, or, as I conjectured without the least indignation at the idea, must have had some gentle opiate administered to me, for when I woke the clock on the mantelpiece was actually at half-past one, and I could see for myself, by the brightness of the sunlight and the length of the shadows of the furniture on the floor, that that must be about the time.

As before, there was every appliance of luxury round about me. On a table within reach were flowers, fruit, a small hand-bell, and one or two novels. On another table a miniature fountain tossed up its tiny jet.

The freshness and balminess of the room was something magical.

I felt much stronger, and boldly sat up in bed. Then, I am ashamed to say, I turned like a baby upon some hothouse grapes. Men tell you that they like a brandy and soda in the morning, and I believe they do. For my part, I had never known until then the marvellous pleasure of beginning the day with a cluster of purple grapes thickly powdered with their own bloom.

Then I got out of bed, put on a pretty peignoir that was waiting for me by the toilet-table, and made a demi-toilette. There was literally everything that could be wanted—tortoiseshell combs, ivory-backed brushes, unguents in pretty china vases, and scents in stoppered bottles of heavily cut glass. When I was satisfied with my appearance I ensconced myself in a large and comfortable easy chair, first touching the electric bell in the wall.

‘I must have this matter out now,’ I said to myself, ‘and have it out I will.’

Almost immediately the door opened, and my old friend entered.

‘I am glad to see you so much stronger and better,’ she said. ‘The drive and the sleep after it have done you good.’

‘All the good in the world,’ I said. ‘And now I want to ask you if you can spare me an hour for a serious talk?’

‘As many hours as you like, my child, if you are quite yourself. But that is what I am not quite certain of. Let me feel your pulse.’

I held out my hand, with a laugh.

‘It is regular,’ she said, ‘and not thready, but it is not so full as I could wish. We must have some more blood in you, and a little more iron. Iron,’ she added, with strange earnestness, ‘is the true seed of life. The alchemists wasted their time in trying to discover it in gold. With iron in your

blood the gold will fill your hands of itself. It will shower itself down upon you as it did upon Danaë.'

All this was but half intelligible to me, and I suppose my blank look of astonishment betrayed as much, for my companion broke into a laugh.

'You must not mind my chatter,' she said; 'it's a way I have. And now I have some news for you.'

'What is it?' I asked eagerly.

'Well, it is not exactly news. It does not concern any one you know or anything in which you are especially interested. But the doctor thinks that you are quite strong enough to be moved to the sea-side, and I agree with him. So I think the sooner we go the better. When shall we go?'

'The only seaside place I have ever been to is Bognor,' I answered.

'Well, I do not suppose you particularly care to go there again.'

‘I know some very nice people there,’ I answered, rather quickly and sharply.

‘Oh yes, yes. But we want a place that will set you up. We will say Torquay.’

‘As you please,’ I answered. ‘Of course I have heard of it, although I have never been there. But now, if you do not mind, I want to ask you a question or two.’

‘As many questions as you like,’ she answered, with a slight but still perceptible change in her voice and manner. ‘I do not promise, however, I shall answer them all.’

‘In the first place, then, how is it that I am here?’

‘Oh, that is easily told. You were in a very unpleasant position. You were accused of attempting to pass forged bank notes, and there is no doubt whatever that the notes were forged. I happened to be present and saw what was going on. The moment I looked at you I felt certain of your innocence, and I felt certain also that the circumstances

were so singular that a stupid jury of British shopkeepers would most certainly find you guilty. The idea of a mere child like you going into penal servitude seemed horrible to me. You do not know what penal servitude is. It is slow death in life. So I got hold of the beast of a shopkeeper and talked him over, telling him that I had known you from a child—an untruth which I think Heaven will pardon me. I paid him his bill and left him his goods, so that he got his value twice over, and then I took you away with me. I took you first of all to the Langham. You were in a strange condition. For an hour or two you would faint ; then you would start up and talk deliriously about all kinds of things, until you fell back exhausted. An hotel was not the place for you, so I exercised a little innocent craft. You had a rather stronger opiate than usual administered, and you were brought down here under its influence. Your system must have been terribly shaken, for you have

been here, in perhaps the very healthiest part of England, for nearly three weeks, and are hardly quite yourself yet.'

'I am very grateful to you,' I murmured. 'Think of what you have saved me from!' And I shuddered with terror. 'Were I to work for the rest of my life I could not repay you.'

'There is no occasion, my dear, to talk in that way; you owe me nothing. Being there, it was simply my duty to help you and to see you through your trouble. I should have been a callous wretch indeed if I had not done so.'

'But who are you? and is this house yours? and what am I to do next?'

'Too many questions at once, my dear. I am Mrs. Jackson. This house is mine for every intent and purpose. My orders are obeyed in it by everybody; and, as I have said before, you have nobody to thank. As for what you are to do next, that very much

depends on your own choice ; but it was my idea that we should go together to Torquay. And I think we had better start to-morrow morning. I am sure you can bear the journey.'

I could only repeat that I was very grateful, but that I did not want to be a burden upon unknown friends.

'You are a burden upon no one, and your friends are not unknown to you, as you already enjoy my confidence and I yours. And now we will get out into the garden.'

I took this as an order that the discussion was to be discontinued.

'You can come as you are,' she said ; 'the grass is quite dry. Here you are ;' and she pointed out on a small occasional table a broad-brimmed hat, a little pair of walking slippers, and a sunshade of a kind I had never seen before, with a handle so long and so tough that it could have been almost used as

an alpenstock. Mrs. Jackson told me afterwards it was mountain ash.

The windows of my room, I found, opened on to a balcony ; and from the balcony a flight of steps ran down into a large garden, surrounded on every side by a high wall. Mr. Bulbrooke had his ideas about gardening, and spent money lavishly in their realisation. But he had certainly never seen anything like this. Immense trees overshadowed a lawn as green as emerald and as soft as velvet. Flowers which I knew to be rare and costly were growing in profusion ; and there were seats pleasantly arranged, and arbours, and here and there a fountain tossing up a silver jet into a basin of water-lilies, amid the broad leaves of which gold-fish basked lazily in the sun's rays. It was like the garden in which Beauty's father stole his rose.

We strayed about together for some little time, and then sat down under an immense

chestnut. Mrs. Jackson selected a circular seat, with a little table before it. Then she blew a small silver whistle, and a little negro boy in quaint uniform, with a caftan and a fez, came running up and made a profound salaam.

She spoke a few words to him in a language which I did not understand, and he hurried away, reappearing almost immediately with a tray which he deposited before us, and upon which were ices, hothouse fruit, aërated waters in siphons, and some bottles, among which I recognised a little squat bottle fashioned like a flask, with a handle to it, and which my experience at Mr. Bulbrooke's enabled me to put down as containing hock of a rare vintage.

I enjoyed my meal as a schoolgirl might have done. The fruit and ices were delicious, and the hock was like what I can imagine nectar might be.

‘Drink as much of it as you please, my

dear,' said the old lady ; ' it is as harmless as lemonade : and if it should by accident make your cheeks flush a little, I am here to take care of you.'

I laughed and told her that I had tasted Steinberg Cabinet in flasks before, and that it was Mr. Bulbrooke's favourite vintage.

' Then Mr. Bulbrooke was not a bad judge,' she replied, with an approving laugh of her own. And therewith the matter dropped.

The shadows began to fall and the swallows to fly low, and from the fountains here and there a mist began to rise ; so we returned to the house, entering my room by way of the balcony, as we had left it.

' And now, my child,' said Mrs. Jackson, ' as there is a journey before us to-morrow, you had better have a bath and go to bed. Everything shall be left at your bedside that you can possibly want.'

I obeyed like a child. I made my way

into the next room, where a delicious hot bath was waiting for me, which, as I have described before, seemed to soothe and quiet all my limbs, while at the same time it made me most pleasantly drowsy.

I came back and clambered into bed. 'Do not put out the lights,' I said; 'I like to go to bed with a light.'

The old lady nodded assent and left me, and in a minute I was asleep.

Whether my sleep was natural, or whether the wine or anything else that I had taken had been drugged, or my bath medicated, I cannot of course say for a certainty, but I do not think so. I think all was natural; for when I woke in the morning I found myself thoroughly refreshed, which is never the case after an opiate, and without the least trace of headache. I was very anxious to get up. The clock over the mantelpiece pointed ten o'clock, so I must have slept soundly indeed.

I had hardly noticed the time, and again taking a look round the room, one of the doors opened and Mrs. Jackson entered.

‘I heard you wake, my dear,’ she said in her unmoved way, ‘and thought I would come in at once.’ (How she could have heard me wake I do not know, although it did not strike me as odd at the time that she should say so.) ‘And now, as I can see you are fit for the journey, we will dress and start for Torquay at once. I will be your lady’s-maid.’

She was very deft, and dressed me to perfection. I never saw my hair look so well. Then she selected a plain travelling dress and small bonnet, with an equally unobtrusive jacket.

‘The things you had at the hotel are all here, but it was scarcely worth while unpacking them.’

There they were, sure enough, awaiting me in the hall, and at the hall door was again

a carriage, with a couple of powerful horses. Behind, a kind of small four-wheeled cart was waiting for the luggage.

We were soon out of the garden gates and in the high road, along which we travelled at an easy pace. It was a glorious day, but I could hardly enjoy it, I was so puzzled to know where I was. As before, we never passed a single sign-post, or anything that I could identify afterwards, such as a roadside inn with a conspicuous sign. We seemed rather to travel by byroads, at the sides of which the hedges were thick, while here and there the trees on either side actually closed over our heads.

At last we came into a region of handsome detached villas, any one of which would have quite contented Mr. Bulbrooke, and some of which he might very well have envied their occupiers. Then we drew up at a roadside station, which I found was Chislehurst.

From Chislehurst we proceeded in a

reserved carriage to Charing Cross. At Charing Cross a man-servant was waiting for us on the platform, and conducted us to a brougham outside. The brougham proceeded by way of Piccadilly and Park Lane to Paddington, and at Paddington we found our luggage waiting for us on the platform, and again a compartment reserved, and supplied with every little luxury and comfort that can beguile a railway journey—novels of late date, illustrated papers, fruit and refreshment. I had given up now wondering at anything, and accepted the comforts thus almost magically showered upon me with complacency.

We had timed the train to a nicety. It was an express running direct to Bristol, with only one stoppage, at Swindon. I took my seat in a corner window, and my companion took hers nearly opposite to me. The whistle blew, and off we started.

First came interminable rows of squalid suburbs. Then we began to get into the

country, and my friend pointed out Windsor Castle to me on our left-hand side. After this I remember nothing except a stoppage at Swindon, where we had some ices brought us, and the view of the White Horse on the slope of the Berkshire hills. Then the country began to get more woody and less undulating, and at last we ran into Bristol.

At Bristol we got into another train, and almost immediately proceeded on our journey, but the evening was closing in. There was not much temptation to look out of the window, and I somehow fell asleep. When I awoke we had reached Torquay. Here again a carriage was waiting for us, and here again we were driven, only this time in a very few minutes, to a villa in its own grounds.

We were evidently expected, for tea and coffee and other things were waiting for us, but once again my companion took matters into her own hands. First she insisted on my taking a glass of wine. Then, again, I

had another hot bath. This one was just perceptibly scented with the rich lemon-like fragrance of magnolia. And then I found myself again in bed, with lights burning under pleasant shades in swinging cressets, and again I fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN the morning came, and I could look around me leisurely, I found I was surrounded by the same luxury as before. It was luxury of the highest kind, and so devoid of ostentation that at first it escaped your notice.

Rolled up at the foot of my bed, for instance, was an extra coverlet of fur in case of a chilly night. Examining it out of idle curiosity, I found it consisted of the finest sable-skins, each with its little pendent tail. It must have been worth some hundreds of guineas. The china toilet set and knick-knacks were genuine Dresden, with the two little blue crossed swords in proof of their

authenticity. The clock on the mantelpiece was a Le Roy in a massive buhl case, and it not only chimed the hours and quarters, but if touched in the night did duty as a repeater.

These are just a few of the things I remember. How they amazed me can be easily imagined.

My old friend came as usual, and assisted me to dress; nor did I like to ungraciously refuse her services, although I had now quite recovered my strength. Then she proposed a drive along the edge of the bay, through Paignton and Goodrington Sands to Brixham and back. I assented with pleasure, and we were soon being whirled along in a large open barouche, with two magnificent roan horses.

The sea air exhilarated me marvellously, and the sight of the sea itself, leaping and dancing under the sun, seemed to fill me with its own life. Once again I attempted to extract from Mrs. Jackson something

more as to the guardianship under which I was.

‘Silly child,’ she said, ‘you want to know everything too soon. You want to cut a hole in your drum to see how the noise is made. Can you not be happy with the present? Surely your own sense must tell you you are with friends. And what possible motive can either they or I have for injuring you?’

It was difficult to answer this direct parry, so I changed my tactics.

‘Well,’ I said lightly, ‘I suppose I shall know all in good time. Pray do not think me ungrateful for all these strange luxuries.’

‘You’re a dear, good girl, and you speak like a good girl ought.’ You shall thank the right person in time.’

‘And when will that be?’

‘I cannot exactly tell, but I shall hear, and will let you know at once. Probably within a fortnight. Look at the sea again.

“Time writes no wrinkle on its brow” like those it has written on mine. How glorious it is to be young! I would give a year of my life at this minute to have back a week of it such as it was when I was eighteen.’

And she clapped her hands together, and began to sing a strange song in a language I did not understand, and to a curious kind of tune, which at moments reminded me of Chopin, and at moments again of some of the wildest creations of Wagner.

I felt really afraid to ask her any more questions, so we rolled on until it became time to turn the horses’ heads and retrace our path.

‘We shall have dinner in about an hour,’ she said when we had gained my room. ‘Take my advice, and lie down till then. Sleep if you can, but first have a glass of this still hock. It is the choicest *Liebfraumilch*. Oh dear me! dear me!’

I took the wine, which was delicious indeed, and slept soundly after it. Then came the meal, which again, as I now know, must have taxed the resources of what may be called the art of cookery. I do not remember its details, but I recollect that again it finished with ices and a profusion of hothouse fruit, and that as it drew to a close rich bouquets of flowers were placed on the table, and made the air heavy with their scent.

We had some extraordinary tea, which Mrs. Jackson told me had been brought overland by caravan from Pekin to Moscow, and thence from Moscow to Calais by rail, so that its experience of the sea had been very short.

‘No sea-carried tea, my dear,’ she remarked, ‘is worth drinking. You may seal it up in lead as much as you please, but it gets a nasty flavour of tar about it all the same. This tea was packed in silver at

Pekin, and has kept its aroma fairly well, although it is not an early growth.'

I could only stare again in astonishment at this strange being, who seemed to do everything and know everything.

Just at that minute the clock on the mantelpiece struck ten. 'You are tired?' she asked, evidently expecting the answer 'Yes.'

'Not very ; but I think I should like to go to bed.'

'Well, you shall go to bed ; but I want to say something to you first. Think it over as you go to sleep, and give me your answer in the morning. Do you dream much?'

'Hardly at all, and never when I am quite well, and have been in the open air as I have been to-day.'

'Then you will lose the less. I want you to sell me your dreams.'

'Sell you my dreams !' I answered, with a laugh. 'How can I do so?'

‘Oh, you may take it in joke if you like. That will make it all the easier. What price do you want?’

I laughed again, fool that I was. ‘You, and perhaps other people, whoever they are, have been very kind to me, who am an utter stranger. You have saved me from ruin and disgrace. Of course you are talking in joke. If I could make you a present of the dreams, I would do so this minute.’

‘Will you sell them to me at twelve o’clock to-morrow morning? It is my fancy to buy them. Surely you will humour me?’

‘Of course I will. And now may I go to bed? The drive has tired me.’

‘Certainly, my dear child. I should like bed myself. Let me first see you safe in your own.’

Within a few minutes I was in bed, and within a very few minutes more was sound asleep. Again I am bound to say that I do not think I had been drugged. My sleep

was natural and refreshing, and I woke from it the next morning vigorous and with all my senses about me.

First came my bath, over which I loitered affectionately. Then I brushed my hair thoroughly and carefully, doing it up loosely. I remember myself feeling proud of the mass of it, and its weight, as it fell on the back of my neck. Then I chose a morning dress of white nun's cloth, trimmed with lace, with plain white collar and cuffs, and silver solitaires and brooch ; and as I looked at myself in the cheval glass I felt satisfied.

I made my way down the great oak stairs into the hall, and so out into a garden radiant with flowers. One side of it was a raised terrace, which commanded a view of the sea over the top of the surrounding wall, which was bright with the yellow stonecrop. The turf was like velvet. The flower-beds, as before, were filled with the choicest flowers, and once again in the centre of the

lawn was a fountain, tossing a great jet of water high up into the air. All this I more or less saw at a glance, but what interested me most was a red granite pillar about eight feet high. It was obelisk-shaped, and stood in the centre of a stone pavement formed by the intersection of two equilateral triangles, and thus in itself taking the shape of a star with six points.

Walking towards it, I saw that the pillar, its pediment, and the pavement were all engraved with strange Oriental characters. I was examining these when the old lady came up.

‘What language is this?’ I asked, pointing to the weird inscriptions.

‘Arabic, I believe, my dear,’ she answered carelessly, ‘but I am sure I cannot tell you for certain. English is about the only language I know, except a few words of Turkish for servants and others, which I have picked up in the Levant and at Con-

stantinople, just as you are bound to pick up a certain small amount of French if you stop for a week at a French watering-place.'

'And you have been in the Levant?'

'Certainly.'

'How I should like to go thither, and to see the mountains of Greece, and the Archipelago, and the Bosphorus, and the Golden Horn, and the Valley of Sweet Waters!'

'You shall see them all, if you like, some day, but I think you'll be disappointed. I know them all myself, and I can assure you that unless you want snow-capped mountains, about which I do not care, England, all in all, is the most beautiful country in Europe; and Devonshire, where we now are—although some people prefer Kent—the most beautiful part of England.'

Every time my companion opened her mouth she bewildered me by the marvellous extent of her knowledge and experience.

'And now,' she said, 'to change the

subject. You remember what I proposed to you last night ? ’

‘ Quite well.’

‘ And you have slept upon it ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Will you sell your dreams ? ’

‘ How on earth can I ? How can I sell what is not my own ? I have no control over them.’

‘ If I make a bad bargain, and, as the rustics in these parts say, buy a pig in a poke, the loss is mine. I shall not be so unreasonable as to quarrel with you. My part of the bargain shall be kept honourably, so you will have no cause to quarrel with me. Surely that is straightforward and fair.’

‘ Quite fair,’ I laughed.

‘ Very well, then. Will you sell me your dreams ? You shall have a pound a day for them—that is to say, a pound every twenty-four hours. That money shall be paid you every month in advance, wherever you may

be; and if the payments are dropped or discontinued, your dreams are to be your own again.'

Fool that I was, I broke out laughing again. I imagined that she must really be playing some little joke with me.

'We will finish the bargain at once,' I cried. 'Let us shake hands on it, like farmers do when they sell a horse.'

'We must be more business-like, my dear. I want it in writing.'

'Ten times over if you like.'

'Once will do. This way.'

I followed her across the lawn, or, to be more exact, walked by her side till we reached the windows of a large room on the ground-floor, opening on to the lawn. It was furnished like a library, with books behind glass doors and cases, and here and there on tables what I knew to be scientific apparatus, though I could not conjecture its purpose.

We sat down in a bay-window that looked out upon the garden. A circular seat ran round, forming the window into an alcove, and in the centre was a table with writing materials.

‘Are you going to draw up the agreement?’ I asked, looking at the display of pens, paper, and ink.

‘No, my dear, I have it with me. You had better read it before you sign it.’

She handed it to me. It was on a very small piece of exquisite white vellum, engrossed in a charmingly legible hand, and it ran as follows. I shall never forget the words :

‘I, Lucy Smith, for the consideration of seven pounds a week, payable monthly, and in advance, at the rate of twenty-eight pounds every four weeks, at any place which I may select, or to any agents I may name, agree to sell my dreams between the hours of sunset and sunrise to Rebecca Jackson and her

assigns. This agreement to come into force as and from this date, and to be mutual, the payment ceasing on my death, and my dreams, if any, immediately becoming fully and unconditionally my own upon any omission or default in the payments above mentioned, or in any one of them.'

It was in legal phraseology, no doubt, and yet any schoolgirl could have understood it. I broke out laughing again.

'Will you sign it at once?' she asked.

'Of course.'

A strange light seemed to leap up in her eyes. She stretched out her right hand and caught hold of my left wrist, and I felt one of her rings pinch me rather sharply.

'You have hurt me,' I called out as the blood started.

'Never mind,' she said ; and dipping the point of a clean quill in the drops that were trickling over my wrist, she thrust it into my right hand. 'Sign with that.'

I felt thoroughly scared, and hesitated.

‘Sign,’ she cried again imperiously, and her eyes gleamed upon me with a strange, deep lustre that terrified me.

I just remember signing as I was told, and I remember nothing more, for I discovered afterwards that I must have fainted. When I recovered I was lying on a couch in a pleasant little room looking out from under a verandah into the garden. A piece of flannel dipped in eau de Cologne and water lay on my forehead. My hair had been let down, and my dress was loosened. My boots also had been taken off, and an Indian shawl thrown over my feet. I could hear the ticking of a clock, but could not see it. Seated close by my side in an ordinary wickerwork chair was Mrs. Jackson, imperturbably reading a yellow-bound novel.

I started up and would have sprung to my feet, but she held up her finger and I somehow obeyed her.

‘You girls are all alike,’ she said in a tone of rebuke. ‘The doctor has been here to see you, and will be here again in the evening unless you are recovered.’

‘But what has been the matter with me?’ I asked.

‘Matter? Matter enough, and more than enough. You have been over-exerting yourself, and walking about on the lawn and everywhere else until you’ve had a *coup de soleil*—sunstroke, they call it. Luckily it was a slight one. We brought you in and laid you on the sofa, and the doctor said you had better lie there instead of being taken up to bed, as the least concussion might be dangerous. That was yesterday afternoon. You were delirious all that afternoon and evening, and all through the night. That is to say, you were not violent at all, but you rambled in your speech and persisted in talking. We stopped that by injecting a little morphia into you with a hypodermic syringe.

You will see the mark there on your left wrist. The morphia took effect at once, and then we were assured all danger was over, or we should have had down Sir Savile Storks from London. And so you have slept on until now. And now I am ordered to give you a glass of champagne with an egg in it, and to let you have a turn in the garden if you wish and feel strong enough.'

There were some tiny little bottles of champagne on the table, one of which with an egg exactly filled half a tumbler of heavily cut glass. I drank the cordial eagerly, and it seemed to give me strength. There could certainly be no drug in it unless the champagne were drugged, and this it seemed ridiculous to suspect when there were three or four of the little bottles on the table, all with the same gold seal and the same white label. They were Perrier Jouet, which I had often seen at the Bulbrookes'.

My cordial gave me new life. I put my

feet to the ground, rose upon them, and walked firmly across the room to the open window and out upon the lawn.

‘That is marvellous,’ said Mrs. Jackson. ‘I shall send round to the doctor, and tell him that he need not come again to-day. He will be astonished, I think, when he sees you to-morrow morning.’

I, too, was astonished. My physical strength had quite returned, and I felt thoroughly myself again. I adopted the advice, however, of my companion, that I had better not talk too much; so we did little more than stroll about on the lawn until the sundial fell across the hour of six. Then we sauntered in together, and had again a dinner which was a work of art. It reminded me of good-hearted Mr. Bulbrooke, and I began to tell the old lady about the time I had spent with the family, and how pleasant they all were, down even to the most refractory among the children.

I noticed, however, that my conversation hardly interested her, for she changed it somewhat abruptly, and began to ask me what I should like my husband to be when I married.

‘Not a curate,’ I laughed, ‘most certainly; and still less a lawyer. A soldier or a sailor for choice.’ I was not talking seriously, for I had never thought of the matter.

‘I am more than old enough to be your mother,’ she said, ‘and I am sure you know that I feel kindly towards you. God forgive me! I am not entirely my own mistress;’ and she broke out sobbing.

I sprang up and ran towards her, but she recovered herself with a marvellous effort.

‘There, my dear. I have been foolish. Old women sometimes are. I am sure I don’t know what set me off. My advice to you is not to marry at all. Keep your secrets to yourself. A husband is uncertain

at the best, and he is almost always unfaithful. A woman is old at thirty-five. A man is in his prime at fifty. When you have reached your prime your husband gets tired of you. Children are almost always a curse instead of a blessing. I have looked at your hand, my child, while you were asleep, and read the lines in it. Do not marry.'

'When did you learn palmistry? It is all foolishness, is it not?'

'Foolishness, you call it! There is as much truth in it as there is in physiognomy, in which we all believe, and which we practise every day of our lives. I learned it in Damascus, the oldest city in the world, from an old woman older than myself, and who, from her solemn and withered appearance, might well have been as old as the city.'

Content with this answer I allowed her once again to see me into bed, leaving an oil

lamp which threw out a still, gentle light from under its green shade.

‘Think well of me if you can,’ she said as she left the room.

‘Of course I shall,’ I answered ; ‘look how kind you have been to me.’ And in a very few minutes I was fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

I SLEPT heavily that night. The whole place seemed more or less drowsy even at its brightest. When I awoke I found a letter by my bedside, and lying next to it a tortoiseshell purse. I opened the letter, wondering what new turn in my chances it might portend. It had neither date nor address.

‘In the purse lying by the side you will find two hundred and eighty pounds in bank notes (all perfectly good this time) and twenty pounds in gold. You will find also that a little pocket has been stitched inside the bosom of your gown. Button the notes up in it and carry them there, and do not

have another accident. You can go whither you please. But as you are likely to suffer from lassitude, sick headache, and weariness, some seaside place will be the best for you. When you have settled down we shall be apprised of the fact, and shall take care that the agreed allowance of a pound a day is paid you regularly.'

The letter was in a bold round hand, and there was no signature to it.

On a small table was a sort of French 'breakfast in bed'—a little bottle of champagne, potted meats, Devonshire cream, and dainty biscuits of various kinds. I made a really satisfactory meal, considering the amount of excitement through which I had gone. Then I dressed myself leisurely and rang the bell. A servant appeared whom I had never seen before, a fresh, handsome countrywoman some thirty years of age, and she assisted me in packing my things, being actually strong enough to cord the boxes

herself with all the dexterity of a railway porter.

Matters being thus advanced, I asked her whether Mrs. Jackson was in the house. She looked at me straight in the face and said, 'The carriage is ready for you to take you to the station as soon as you want it.'

I was fairly exasperated, and stamped my foot on the floor.

'I asked you where Mrs. Jackson was!'
I repeated at the very top of my voice.

'The carriage is ready to take you to the station as soon as you want it.'

A third repetition would have sent me into a passion in which I should have lost my control. 'See that my boxes are taken downstairs at once,' I said.

'Certainly, miss,' she answered. And there was a perceptible hardening and dwelling of her voice on the word 'miss.'

I walked down into the grounds, but could see no one. The small gate and the

carriage gates were closed, so I waited under the portico, and almost immediately the barouche came dashing up, with the negro driver (whose features I remembered at once) on the box, and a black congener by him. He touched his hat and showed all his teeth.

I got into the carriage, taking a few things with me. Behind us was a nondescript sort of vehicle which carried the rest of my luggage. Then I noticed that on the seat in front of me was a magnificent basket of grapes, deftly packed for travel.

We rattled along through lovely green lanes and byroads, but, once again, never passed a single sign-post until we emerged into the main road, after pursuing which for some four or five miles I found that we were on our way to Dawlish. The carriage dashed into the sleepy little town, with its drowsy valley and drowsy stream running down the midst of the public gardens, and stopped at

the door of what I suppose was the principal hotel. It was in the main street, and would have commanded a pretty view of the gardens if that view had not been inconveniently intercepted by a large grocer's shop immediately opposite.

Before I knew what I was about the landlady came bustling out to receive me, and I found myself in the parlour.

‘We have been expecting you, Miss Smith, any day for some time past,’ she broke out, with genuine Devon garrulity. ‘Your rooms are ready for you upstairs. They have been waiting for you for a week, and I hope you’ll find them comfortable;—and, George’ (this to her husband, who stood by scratching his head), ‘see Miss Smith’s things brought in directly.—Come this way, miss.’

I followed her upstairs mechanically, and found the two most comfortable rooms had been prepared for me on the first floor.

One, the sitting-room, had a large bow-window looking out on to the gardens, a piano, and a profuse array of flowers in vases. On the table was an epergne filled with fruit. The bedroom, *en suite*, probably looked out on to some yards, for the windows were of roughly stained glass in leadwork.

Having expressed my satisfaction at all the arrangements made for me, I ordered my dinner for six, and finding fresh fish was procurable, boldly told the hostess to boil me the largest sole she could get, and to send it up with parsley and melted butter. This stray piece of wisdom I had picked up from Miss Susannah. Then I made a short toilette to remove my travel stains, and followed the course of the stream down to the sea.

A long embanked wall like a fortification runs for some miles eastward from Dawlish. It was erected to prevent the railway being bodily washed away. Along this I saun-

tered. I suppose I ought to have been thinking, but I am ashamed to say I really thought of nothing. I watched the seagulls scudding about, and now and again swooping down on a fish. I saw fishing boats shooting their seams. Now and again from the red sandstone and cliff a jackdaw would give a noisy chuckle, as if to express his opinion that it was not a bad world after all, but would be much better if it were handed over to him. But being told that I was nearly halfway to the Warren, I retraced my steps, and came leisurely back into the little town.

My dinner was excellent—a fact which I believe will console a man for many things. Mr. Bulbrooke used to say in his own way that he did not care twopence for company if he had a tender beefsteak, with new or mashed potatoes and a little greens—asparagus or spinach for choice—a bottle of sound port, and a ripe Stilton. And as I concluded

my dinner I began to understand that he was a philosopher, and in a kind of way ceased to wonder why life sat so lightly on him.

It was but a few yards from the hotel to a little strip of gravelled walk called the Parade, and about four times the length of the Lowther Arcade. The Parade is the King's Road of Dawlish. I walked up and down it till I had had enough of it, and, without staying to pay a visit to the two quaint little coves known as the Parson and Clerk, made my way back to the hotel. There was a reading-lamp in my bedroom, and as I had some novels with me, I read for a little while until the strain on my eyes tired me. Then I arranged a candle and matches, opened the window, turned out the lamp, and went to sleep.

Somehow or other I had a restless night. I was tormented with strange dreams, in which the negro coachman and old Mrs.

Jackson were mixed up, but with them was a third person whom I had never seen in my life—certainly not that I can remember. He was an old man who had once been tall, but was now round-shouldered and stooping. His eyes were black and piercing, and shone fiercely from under his long white hair and shaggy white eyebrows. His hands were white, with long thin fingers, but the skin was wrinkled with old age. He was dressed in a long gown of black velvet, with a small skull-cap of the same material. The only jewellery about him was an immense opal on his right-hand little finger. I had never seen such an opal before. It seemed to blaze with light, as if there were a furnace inside it; and its lustre filled the room, just as a jet of lime-light eclipses tapers.

The dream was confused; I can only give these facts about it. But it was a hideous nightmare, and I woke next morning with a racking headache. When I attempted

to put my feet to the ground I found myself strangely weak. It seemed to me as if I had no strength left, as if all power of volition had gone out of me—as if, in short, I ought to send at once for a doctor.

I rang the bell and inquired for the landlady. That kind-hearted woman started at the sight of me ; nor could I wonder at this when she had complied with my request to furnish me with the hand-glass. My face was pinched and haggard, and there were great black circles under my eyes. The worthy woman began at once to suggest all kinds of cordials and restoratives, and ultimately, under gentle pressure, I consented to take an egg beaten up in wine. Even then, however, she misdoubted my power of getting up. I must rest a little bit, she said, and see how I felt later on ; and she pressed me very much to send for a doctor.

This I refused, knowing that I could tell the doctor nothing unless I had to tell him

the whole truth, in which case he would probably want to pack me off to a lunatic asylum at once. I knew myself, by some sort of instinct, the cause of my sufferings; but to tell them to an unsympathetic and possibly incompetent man, in a small place like Dawlish, was out of the question.

I dressed and went out. Pretty little Dawlish was hateful to me. I felt as if I were leprous and unclean, as if I tainted the very air about me. There was the noisy brook hurrying down to the sea, and the gardens, and the stretch of Parade. I could not help thinking what the two dear old sisters would not give to be with me, each with her needlework and a novel. It was a beautiful day; but I felt utterly wretched. The gulls were flitting about on the sea verge, and a colony of old rooks had come down for a seaside excursion, and were picking up fat worms and little soft-shelled crabs, and cawing cheerfully to one another, as much as to say

that Bank Holiday does not come often, and when it does you ought to make a time of it.

The glorious air and weather seemed to restore me, and I sat down on an untenanted seat and began to consider what course I was to take. How was I to get out of this abominable bargain—abominable because I had never conjectured its full treacherous extent—without risk of being myself considered insane, and thus adding imprisonment in some *oubliette* of a madhouse to my present tortures?

The problem seemed to me insoluble. I sat looking at the sea and thinking the whole matter over and over for hours. At last I gave it up in despair.

If I commenced at the beginning, the story of the forged bank notes would tell against me. Even Mr. Bulbrooke would have shaken his head, and have remarked profoundly that things looked ‘dicky,’ and that a young

woman could not very well have a sheaf of 'duffing' notes about her without knowing how she came by them. People, he would have pointed out with a portentous wag of his great head, do not as a rule go about with their pockets stuffed with notes; and thieves who pick your pockets of good notes depart the moment their business is over, and do not run the risk out of mere malignity of stuffing your purse with forgeries and putting it back into your pocket.

Then, too, there was the whole of my subsequent story, which at times I could hardly credit myself. How was I to expect anybody to believe that? I thought the matter over and over again, and, as I have said, I gave it up at last in an agony of despair.

I went back to the hotel and had an early dinner. Then, by the advice of the landlady, I took a fly and was driven up the hill through Luscombe Park—one of the loveliest

seats in England. The evening air was blowing down seaward from the hills, and I was drowsy when I returned.

I remember undressing leisurely and getting into bed. I remember also putting my novel on one side, but leaving my candle alight in case I might wake again. The window was wide open, and I could catch the breath of the sea, and hear the long monotonous murmur of the waves upon the beach. Then I turned round and fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

THAT night came, as I was dreading when I got into bed, my first coherent dream. I found myself in a large garden, where tropical birds of strange hues flitted from tree to tree, a garden luxuriant in shrubs and flowers, with great magnolia blossoms, and heliotrope, and clumps of mignonette, and every here and there a great bower of glorious roses. Now and again a fountain would toss its jet into the air. The grass was like velvet, and the walks were gravelled with dry, white sea sand.

I roamed about wondering until I returned to the house which stood at one end of the grounds, with high walls hiding it

completely from the road, and everywhere about it a blaze of roses. I did not seem to have any fear at being alone in so strange a place, but I had a dim sense of curiosity upon me. I entered the hall through the porch. Hall and porch were lit by swinging lamps. I stamped my foot and called, but no one came. The staircase was also lighted, and again a dim impulse led me upstairs.

I seemed to know my way, though I could not tell how. I found a bedroom ready for me—a large room furnished with the most exquisite taste. I will not say more than this, for these memories are horrible and painful to me.

I undressed myself, noticed with surprise that every toilette requisite was ready for me, loitered leisurely over the last few minutes, and so scrambled into bed.

Next morning when I woke I was in my little bed at Dawlish, and I again had a

racking headache ; also, as the glass told me, there were again heavy black rings under my eyes. I dressed hastily, hurried down to the beach, took a machine, and had a splendid plunge in the sea, allowing the billows to roll over me and batter me and break upon me. Then I made my way back to the little hotel.

The bath seemed to put strength and life into me, but somehow I was wearied of Dawlish. You may say of Dawlish to one of its inhabitants as the Frenchman said to Voltaire of life, that it is a miserable little thing ; and if he is witty—which Dawlish people are not, being proverbially dull-headed—he will tell you that it is miserable enough, but that it happens to be all that the Dawlish people have got.

So when I returned to the inn I announced my intention of proceeding that afternoon to London. This there was just time to accomplish by catching the Flying

Dutchman at Exeter, so the landlord told me ; and I was soon on my way, with my one or two trunks in the guard's van, and a supply of light literature.

It was a tedious rattle into Exeter. But here I caught the express, and was whirled through the country faster, I believe, than a bird could fly to Paddington. We stopped at Swindon as by regulation, and then rushed through Didcot until we began to pass through acres upon acres of siding and shed, and at last I found myself at Paddington.

There was a bedroom at the hotel, of course, and I engaged it for three or four days. Then I ordered up some green tea and dry toast. Green tea is not good for you, I know ; but it acts on a woman when she wants a stimulant as brandy acts on a man. It pulls her together and settles her nerves.

After my tea I decided to more or less waste the day by going to bed and having a thorough sleep. I apprised the chamber-

maid of my intention, and had the blinds of the room and the curtains of the bed pleasantly arranged so as to exclude the light. Then I went to sleep again, wondering, as was now my normal condition, what on earth could be the matter with me.

During this sleep I had another strange dream. I was walking in a wood, but a wood of trees unlike any I had ever seen in England. They were gigantic palms with long pendent leaves, and they were entangled in a network of heavy scentless creepers, which hung in great tresses like ivy.

There was a small path, along which I kept, until at last I saw an open glade, down which ran a brook, spreading out into a small pool, on the edge of which quaint long-legged birds were wading—cranes and storks and herons. Instead of going near the water, I sat down on a piece of rock covered with tender lichen, and I suppose I fell asleep. At any rate, I fell into a day-dream.

I saw the old woman coming up towards me from the water-side, and she looked to me in the full daylight more repulsive than I could have imagined. She did not offer me her hand or address any words of greeting, but simply said, 'And how do you like your dreams?'

'I cannot tell you. At present I do not like them at all; but they may perhaps change. If they continue as they are they will get intolerable to me, and I shall go to some clergyman about them.'

'You may go to all the clergymen in the world. You are as helpless as a fish in a glass globe, which can only circle round and round until it dies. You will catch glimpses through the globe, but nothing more; and when you talk of priests remember this'—and she laughed contemptuously—'the physician can learn nothing from the priest that he does not already know. The magician can learn nothing from the physician. You

are a mere child as yet, not even a priest in intelligence, although no doubt all your hopes and desires for this world, and for the next, are very excellent and highly creditable to you.'

I wrung my hands bitterly, and fell at her feet.

'Help me,' I cried out, 'in mercy. Help me in the name of Christ.'

'I cannot help you if I would. I am powerless. But the One whose name you have uttered may.' Then she stretched out both her hands towards me, and I remember nothing more.

I woke with a start and looked at my watch. It was twelve. Somehow my dream had not so much wearied me as its predecessors had. It had been on the whole not so unpleasant. I rang the bell, and to my surprise the chambermaid entered with a letter. It was in a handwriting I did not know, and for

some unaccountable reason I did not open it.

Then I ordered a bath. Until I had had money I never knew the enjoyment of a hot bath. In schools and in private families it is mostly an unpleasant, if not a positively repulsive, process. After my bath came some coffee, and, to tell the truth, some brandy, for I felt weak. I took so small a quantity, however, that even the two dear old sisters would not have been scandalised.

Then I sallied out to attend to my money matters. I had by this time about three hundred pounds in my pocket, and there was another hundred at the bureau of the Charing Cross Hotel. I ordered a four-wheeled cab, and with commendable caution placed a commissionaire on the box beside the driver.

Then I proceeded to the Charing Cross Hotel, where I made inquiries for my hundred pounds, producing their receipt.

The man handed me over the money with the greatest politeness, and in reply to my question whether there was any account against me in the books, told me that a middle-aged gentleman, looking something like a solicitor, had called and settled it, and had left the receipt for me, taking away my luggage with him.

Here was another mystery. But these little complications of real life interested me and piqued my curiosity. There was nothing horrible about them, and I think I rather rested my brain than fatigued it by turning them over from different points of view.

Then I went to a bank in the Strand, or somewhere by the Strand, called Goslings, with some little squirrels over it, where I knew that the Miss Silvertons banked, mentioned their name, and said I wanted to open an account. They told me I could do so when they had heard from the Miss Silvertons, and in the meantime they would

take charge of my money for me, but could only give me a deposit note for it, of which I had better take very great care, as if I lost it, it would cause me some trouble.

I told them I would telegraph to the Miss Silvertons at Bognor asking them to write immediately, and the bald-headed portentous-looking clerk bowed his approval.

And now I felt very lonely and terribly in want of company. I looked into some shops, bought a few trifles, and decided to make my way back to my hotel. Here I lounged away the time in the ladies' reading-room. I should have liked to go to almost any other hotel, especially to one of the newer piles, such as the Grand or the Métropole; but I resolved to defer that part of the business until the next day, and to go that evening to the theatre.

I dined, and afterwards to the theatre I went. I remembered having heard so much about him from the Bulbrookes that I went

to see Irving, who, to tell the truth, a little disappointed me. I have since heard that he always disappoints you the first three or four times. But I anyhow saw enough to interest me; and the play was 'Hamlet,' which I knew thoroughly well before, and so was able to enjoy the performance the better.

Then I managed somehow to find a four-wheeled cab and get back to my hotel. I had accustomed myself now to the habit of burning lights in my room, and I do not think I could have got to sleep without them. It is a pure delusion that you go to sleep best in the dark—a delusion invented for the good of children, who are also told that they must not go near the fire in winter for fear they should be laid up with colds; and a number of other fables, pious and the reverse. Thank Heaven, I had no more dreams that night.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN I woke next morning I recollected the letter. It was still lying on the table where I had tossed it down. It had come by messenger, and the envelope was of the most fashionable device, but without crest or monogram.

I opened it and found the contents to be written in a clerkly hand, utterly devoid of character; but I had to read them several times before I mastered the full cruelty, the utter mercilessness of their purport.

‘ We know all about you, and we shall know wherever you are. You will not escape us, however you may try to hide yourself, nor is there any human power that can aid you.

Your money will be paid you regularly. We shall know who your bankers are, and shall forward it in every month. If ever you are in sudden want of a sum beyond your balance, you will also find, if you inquire, that it has been put to your credit. So no money cares need trouble you.

‘One piece of advice we give you with all seriousness : talk about what has happened to you to no one. You will not be believed, and we shall have to insist upon your dreams all the same, while you will in all probability find yourself locked up in a lunatic asylum for life.’

I threw the letter down. I clenched my fists. I stamped on the ground. Its cold-blooded brutality made me for the moment almost beside myself. In a state of bewilderment coupled with helpless rage, as that of a man who hears the door of his prison cell close upon him with the words that he is to be left to starve, I made a violent effort to

keep my mind clear for the day, at all events.

I paid my bill at the hotel and was driven down to Victoria, whence I arrived at Brighton at about three o'clock, putting up at the Grand Hotel. I remember strolling on the Parade, dining at the table d'hôte, and then going out again and making some little purchases of flowers and trifles. Then I returned to my room, and again thought things over. What was I to do with this money? I did not want it. I could hardly spend it all without wasting it. I did not like to save it, and so be partner to the curse I felt it carried; and for the same reason I abstained from giving it away in charity, lest it should take mischief with it whithersoever it might go.

And yet in the meantime I must live; and unless I used some of the money, at least a minimum, I should be driven to starvation. For, with this horrible secret on me, it would have been wicked in the extreme, as I firmly

believed, to resume my old pursuit of governess, and to associate, tainted as I felt myself, with innocent girls.

I opened the window and looked out at the night. It was a half-moon, and the sky was cloudless and brilliant with stars, while the flash of the waves on the beach soothed me as much as at Mr. Bulbrooke's did the rustle of a large aspen which grew near my bedroom windows.

I had been to a chemist and asked him for an opiate suitable to my age, and to a person unaccustomed to such mixtures. He had given me, he said, after a look at my eyes and feeling my pulse, a full dose of chlorodyne. Had I been suffering from sleepless nights? I told him I had been much troubled. He said, 'Ah! a little chlorodyne would be the thing for me. I seemed feverish, and had dark rings under my eyes. Would I look in next morning? He was afraid I should have to see a doctor.'

I just left the window a little open at the top to admit the glorious sea air, lit the lamp for the night, and went to bed. The chlorodyne, I suppose it was, soon began to take effect on me. I felt beautifully warm and drowsy. Then I began to doze, and then fell gently asleep.

Then ensued a dream so weird and horrible that I can only just indicate its outlines. I was in a large house built like a Greek mansion, with a great central court, around which were chambers, and above it a balcony, also running all round the hall, from which again sprang other columns to bear the weight of the roof. The walls, pillars, and floor were of the costliest marble, many varieties of which were strange to me ; but there were one or two huge pillars of solid malachite, worthy of the summer palace of the Czar.

There was every symptom about of luxury, with a wild Oriental strain in it. In the niches were huge divans covered with

strange skins, and wires from the roof coming down lower than the cressets bore baskets of magnificent flowers. Like Beauty in the palace of the Beast, I wonderingly ascended the main staircase and reached the gallery. Here doors of polished wood—camphor, teak, and walnut—opened into side apartments.

I passed all these by until at last I felt attracted by one which I recognised as being of the most magnificent boxwood from Asia Minor—the wood, for its density of grain and power of taking a high polish, everywhere employed by engravers in their art.

I touched the handle, and the door opened noiselessly on its hinges. I was in a sumptuous bedchamber, to which the one I had occupied in the strange house in the country was only fit to rank as a dressing-room. There were gentle lights, chairs and couches, skins scattered on the thick carpet, and statuettes in niches. I had just time to

notice these things as I hurriedly disrobed myself and climbed into the bed.

‘At least,’ said I to myself, ‘I will hope this night and in this strange place for a rest from evil vision.’ And if the reader objects that I was dreaming, I was dreaming ; any physiologist or medical man will assure him that such a condition is unfrequent, but not at all unknown, and that there is nothing more wonderful in it than in the recorded instance of the man who dreamed that he saw a procession pass before him of Oriental splendour which lasted for many hours, and waking with a start at its termination found that he had only been dozing for a couple of minutes.

I had not in my loathsome vision been many minutes in the room before the old man, whom I had seen before in those now hateful nights of mine, entered. I felt as powerless as a little mouse or bird fascinated by a rattlesnake. I could not move or

cry out. He looked at me complacently, stroked his beard, and rubbed his hands with their long fingers and hawk-like talons together in a ghoulishly self-possessed manner.

Then he took from the folds of his long robe a small silver censer and jewelled box. He placed the former on the table, took small pinches of powder from different compartments into which the box was divided, and placed them upon it. Then he spread his hands over the vessel, and the mixture burst into a light blue blaze with sparks of red, throwing out a dense smoke and an indescribable odour, which in my waking moments I could never recollect.

Then things followed in this horrible vision which I should forget and blot out of my mind, if I could, for ever. At times I hope the memory of them may be growing fainter. Sometimes I believe it is. I cannot dwell on them. I have never told them in

detail to a living being, nor shall I ever do so. Suffice it to say that I passed through tortures which for me, with a mind little more experienced than that of a child, seemed to combine in them all the worst horrors possible in hell—infamy, shame, physical degradation, mental struggles amounting almost to delirium, and all intensified, as is the anguish of a wound when touched with a powerful escharotic, by a consciousness of my absolute helplessness.

When I awoke my temples were throbbing. I looked in the glass, and again there were great dark rings round my eyes. My face was perceptibly haggard—or, to use an expressive phrase among the uneducated, drawn. My mouth was parched, my skin was dry and hot, and I was trembling like an aspen from weakness and exhaustion.

I managed to reach the bell and to stagger back again into bed. The chambermaid did not seem surprised when I told

her to bring me a small cup of coffee and some brandy. Apparently such an order from a single woman like myself was nothing new to her. My coffee and brandy came in due course, and I then wearily made up my mind to lie in bed a couple of hours or so longer, doze if I could, have a bath, and then turn straight out on to the pier, and try to invigorate myself with the sea air. This programme I followed out, and I am sure the sleep did me good.

CHAPTER XII.

ON the pier I chose a seat and recommenced a novel—I really forget by whom—which I had purchased the day before. Finding reading tedious, I laid down the book and looked round me. There were the usual sea, sky, clouds, houses, road, and beach, and people of the usual kind passing to and fro. Then I turned my eyes to the left of me, and saw seated on the same bench a young man whom I recognised at once. He had sat opposite to me the evening before at the table d'hôte, and I had somehow fancied he was looking at me during the meal more than was necessary, though, as I did not like

to watch him, I could not be sure. Let me describe him.

There was nothing remarkable about him. He was certainly not six feet high, but he was clearly over five feet ten. He was no Farnese Hercules, but he had a chest, arms, and shoulders of which Mr. Thomas Sayers, whose photograph Mr. Bulbrooke had once shown me, need not have been ashamed. He was plainly dressed in costume of a nautical cut, but of no nautical affectation about it. I took particular notice of his dress. It is a compliment which almost all women return to almost all men. He had a flannel shirt of a dull grey tint, a white waistcoat, a loose sailor's necktie, boat-ing shoes; and his other cloth vestments, including the light jacket, were of blue serge. His face and hands were bronzed, and there is really now nothing for me to add.

There is an old story told of Talleyrand,

who, at a congress where the representatives of all the great Continental Powers, and of the three or four score or so of trumpery duchies and electorates and margravates into which Germany was then split up, made their appearance smothered in decorations as thickly as a chimney-sweep on a May morning with rosettes, saw Castlereagh enter with nothing but the small star of the garter. 'Ma foi!' muttered the great Frenchman, with all the sarcasm of his voice, 'voilà un monsieur bien décoré!' I thought of this story when I contrasted my neighbour with the idlers who were lounging up and down in costumes of every colour, and of every degree of outrageous eccentricity.

Just let me instance one who had rigged himself out in sand shoes, a boating suit of broad stripes of white and ultramarine—the pattern would very well have suited the upper roof of a verandah—and an immense pith helmet profusely chalked, from which a

yard or so of gauze hung down his back like a Chinaman's pigtail ; while, in case he should need further protection against the heat, he had thoughtfully provided himself with an umbrella of the brightest vermillion.

I turned unconsciously to look again at my neighbour, and our eyes met. He at once rose to his feet and lifted his hat.

‘We met last night at table d’hôte,’ he said. ‘The table d’hôte customs here are almost Parisian. You may talk to your neighbours, if you like it and they do. May I hope for the pleasure of sitting by you to-night?’

This was said so simply and naturally that it was out of the question to take it as an impertinence. Not even Miss Dorcas could have done so in her twenties.

‘Certainly,’ I answered, ‘if you can contrive it.’

‘I will turn down two seats,’ he answered, ‘and look out for you.’

I smiled assent, and we then talked a little about the weather and other such things until I rose to go.

‘Can I see you anywhere?’ he asked.

I conjured up a terrible falsehood on the spur of the moment.

‘Thank you, I am going shopping, and I am afraid I must go alone.’ He bowed acquiescence.

‘At least I may see you off the pier?’

‘With pleasure.’

So we walked on to the King’s Road, and I started on a fictitious shopping tour, from which I desisted as soon as I saw that he was walking away westward in exactly the opposite direction to myself.

I was tired and weak. You must recollect what I had been going through for now several days—sleep at night that was no sleep, and by day terror and anguish. But I intend to tell this story as simply as I can.

I made my way to Mutton’s, where I

refreshed myself with ices, a peach, and maraschino, which I knew even the dear old sisters themselves considered a permissible stimulant in a moderate quantity for persons out of their teens ; ‘ it being, my dear,’ Miss Susannah once said to me, ‘ refreshing and pleasant, while at the same time it really partakes more of the nature of a sweetmeat than of an intoxicating fluid.’

Then I considered what I should do. Time had to be killed before dinner. I give all these little details because my reader will better understand my state of mind when I assure him that all the details of this new life of mine, each of which would only a few months back have been an unheard-of pleasure, to be remembered tenderly for days, now only wearied me. I did something, in short, to avoid the alternative of lying in bed and doing nothing.

So, after wasting as much of the beautiful afternoon as possible, I again found

myself in the hotel. The day was an important one, and I can remember every incident in it. I went into the ladies' reading-room, which at that time of the day was practically deserted, and looked through all the papers ; then I went upstairs, lay down on my bed, and continued my novel. At last came the time to dress for dinner, and I must tax the reader with the details of the toilette, over which I took especial care.

I think I have never said that I was slightly over the middle height, with well-developed figure and limbs from my long, simple, healthy life in the country. My face and hands were sunburnt almost as those of a gipsy ; my hair was deep black, with a tinge of leaden blue in it if the light shot upon it askant. The colour of my eyes I could never determine. They are some sort of nondescript brown. So much for myself. Now for my apparel that evening.

I chose a white muslin dress I had not

worn before, high in the neck of course, where I fastened it with a minute brooch. I had not another article of jewellery about me, but after finishing my hair with unusual attention, I inserted in it a great Gloire de Dijon rose, which I must confess I had purchased and brought back for that purpose. The women of my own age, I am certain, were jealous and spiteful. I am equally certain that the duennas could see nothing with which to find fault.

It was to me a delightful dinner. It was the first time I had ever talked unreservedly with any man except kindly old Mr. Bulbrooke. My new acquaintance was adroit. He extracted a good deal from me without seeming to do so, and he told me all about himself most frankly. He had been an officer in the Rifle Brigade, and had served in India for six years. He had not had the chance of fighting—not even as subaltern of leading out a little expedition

against dacoits ; but he had had lots of fun with elephant and tiger, and with the bear, which he told me was the most dangerous of all big game ; and he made me open my eyes and laugh heartily when he described pig-sticking from its vivid and humorous side ; while I listened in wonder when he talked of going out before breakfast to shoot peacock for dinner—the idea of shooting peacock for dinner ! although certainly peacock are eaten at state banquets—and finally wound up by saying that the best sport India yielded was snipe-shooting round about the rice and indigo fields and along the course of the streams.

It seemed strange for a man who had shot such big game to single out snipe-shooting as his special delight ; but I have since learnt why it is. Any man with a steady nerve and a good double-barrelled rifle can put a couple of bullets into a tiger ; but taking aim at snipe, which dodge about

like butterflies, is far more trying to the temper than letting fly at something, to miss which ought to make you ashamed of yourself.

I asked him why he had left his regiment and come back if India was so delightful, and why he had given up military life with all its enjoyments.

The answer was simple. His father had died. He was the only son, with the exception of a younger brother who was a barrister, and he had been obliged to come back and see to the arrangement of the estates. He also added emphatically, and as if to prevent further questioning, that he hated his brother, and that his brother hated him equally cordially. Apart altogether from politics, in which he took no interest whatever—so little, indeed, that he would not give a couple of annas to be in the House of Commons—he thought that an English landowner ought to live a certain portion of every year among

his tenants, instead of leaving them wholly to the tender mercies (which are cruel) of a salaried agent, who constitutes himself a petty tyrant of the most odious kind, and endeavours to make himself a grand vizier, exacting exorbitant toll between the luckless tenant and the indolent or wholly absentee landlord. For this reason, when a share of the family estates had devolved upon him he had sold his portion, and was so absolutely a free man, with no duties of any kind imposed upon him.

‘No, Miss Smith,’ he said; ‘an English gentleman ought to think at least as much of his tenants as he does of his horses and his shorthorns. They are not pigs. The pig is stied and fed, and then turned out into bacon, which pays for his rent and food during his inglorious existence and leaves a profit afterwards. But a single child running in a village lane is of more value than a whole spinney full of pigs; although,’ he added,

with a laugh, 'my opinions would be thought quite revolutionary, if not in fact downright atheistical, if I were to expound them to a bench of county magistrates. That,' he added, 'is why I have declined the burden of a county estate.'

Table d'hôte was dissolving. It would not have done to be left alone with him, so I pleaded some excuse and beat a retreat. Why on earth can we English not have the same freedom as I have since seen in the United States, where, if a man is engaged to a girl, he may drive her out, take her to dinner at a restaurant, take her to the theatre, and even take her to a short supper afterwards—subject always to the consequences of being shot down in the street without notice, and buried without sympathy, if he be found sufficiently mad to betray his trust?

I fell asleep thinking of my new friend, as

I distinctly considered him. There were no hideous nightmares that night, and the roses in my cheek next morning were as bright as had been the rose in my hair the night before.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FORTNIGHT passed without any dreams. I began to wonder if my old demon were dead, but had the anxiety painfully removed by a notice that the first instalment of my yearly income had been placed to my credit at Goslings. Clearly, then, I was not free, and there was still trouble to expect. If ever a garden of fair flowers had an adder in it, it was my miserable life at this time.

A day or two more went on, during which my acquaintance with my new friend Captain Edwardes increased. I got to like him better and better. He rarely spoke about himself unless he was asked a question ; but as a talker I had not up to that time

met his equal—as I think I have said before.

He asked me one evening whether I thought the newspapers instructed the masses, and whether that was the reason why the newspaper with the largest circulation in the world enjoyed its position. I told him that I occasionally looked at the newspapers, and saw very little of instruction in them indeed. There were leading articles—usually four in number. The first two of them I generally considered dictatorial and occasionally offensive; and I added that I had heard from Mr. Bulbrooke, a large solicitor, that these leading articles were frequently written to order, and sometimes to influence the rates of the markets.

He laughed, and said he knew as much. But how about the remaining two?

I said the third was usually dull, respectable, and stuffed with useful information; and that I had noticed that this information

invariably came from stock works of reference, such as Chambers's 'Book of Days.'

He laughed again, and said that was so, for in his regiment, when the third article caused discussion and bets were laid, they had at first been in the habit of deciding the bet by 'The Book of Days,' which was part of the mess library, but had found the result a foregone conclusion. But what about number four?

I answered that I had tried to read it once or twice, but had never got more than halfway through it.

'Then what may you have read?' he asked, without the least tone of offence in the question.

'Oh, the two dear old sisters had plenty of books, most of them in very old-fashioned bindings. The oldest, I think, was Sir John de Mandeville's "Travels." Then there was Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" and "The Pilgrim's Progress," and [an idea suggesting

another similar to it] "Robinson Crusoe." And there were South's Sermons, which I liked very much, and Barrow's, of which I had only read one or two, and a number of other books. For instance,' I added, 'there was "De Lolme on the Constitution."'

'Have you read that last most orthodox treatise?'

'About six chapters of it. It was pedantic and tiresome. Besides, it seemed to me to be distinctly written with a motive. I think he wanted some sort of appointment under the Government.'

'And how about French novels?'

'I have read some of those of Erckmann-Chatrian.'

'Well, I will not pursue my investigation further. If you have read what you tell me, you have read a very great deal. What are you reading now?'

I blushed nervously and owned that I had been rather more than dipping into Trollope,

Walter Scott, Miss Braddon, and Ouida, of the last of which the sisters would hardly have approved.

‘Well, you have read a vast deal more than I have. I wish I had leisure to read so much. I think I can own up to Lever, and “Guy Livingstone,” and Miss Braddon, and a few more. Lever I like the best of the lot, out-and-out. I’ll bring you his “Lord Kilgobbin” to morrow morning. It’s full of laughter from beginning to end.’ Then we abandoned our seats on the pier and he quietly took command, I tacitly acquiescing.

‘The downs,’ he said, ‘are dusty. We will go a drive along the cliff.’

So along the cliff we went towards Rottingdean till we had gone far enough. We went very methodically, and came back in the same practical manner.

Then I told him that I rather wanted a little rest. Of course I did not ; but he could not very well leave me, and I did not want to

tax his kindness. So, to keep up appearances, we drove back to the Grand, and I went upstairs to my room.

I took care that evening not to dine at the table d'hôte, but I ascertained that he had done so. I had some light refreshment late in the evening, enjoyed the luxury of dish-bille and novels until I was tired, and then sought the quiet of my bed.

I fell sound asleep. The drive and the glorious fresh air had tired me. But before long the dreams began again. I shall now only speak of them as the dreams. I have said enough of them. And there was always between them a loathsome and hideous resemblance.

The next morning I was so prostrated that I sent for a doctor, giving instructions that the ablest in Brighton should be procured, and adding emphatically that I did not want a ladies' doctor or a physician in leading practice, but some young man who had made

his way, had got his position, and would treat a case boldly. These instructions I wrote out, and sent them down in an envelope to the manager.

In the afternoon came round a Dr. Mackenzie Erskine. He was about thirty-five; short, lithe, and muscular, with broad shoulders and a powerful physique, and his eyes gleamed like polished steel with a steady light blue tint.

He felt my pulse and my forehead. Then he put a little thermometer into my mouth, left it on my tongue for a minute and noted its registration. Then he put his face quite close to mine, looking into my eyes; and then he produced a round black disc with a little hole in the centre of it, put it close to my eye, put a similar one to his own, and looked through the two for at least a minute.

Then he took out a pocket-book. 'Where have you been living?' said he, 'and with what kind of people have you been stopping?'

and has your life been quiet and regular, or irregular and exciting? If you do not answer me these questions I cannot undertake to treat you.'

I told him the exact truth, that my life had been most quiet, simple, and regular, but that I had been troubled by horrible dreams that robbed me of sleep at night, and made my life a burden to me by day.

Then he asked very sharply and suddenly, 'Do you drink privately, or do you think you drink at meals more than is good for you?'

I replied most frankly that I did nothing of the sort, and suggested that he should with my full authority make any inquiries he chose at the hotel bureau.

'I must not conceal from you,' he said, 'that you are in a very critical state. You have a fever upon you, due to some mental shock or trouble; and I warn you that if you do not take the utmost care of yourself it is liable at any moment to develop into brain

fever, which will involve a most serious crisis for you. If you have any friends you had better communicate with them, but I fear you are hardly strong enough to write. Give me their addresses, or the addresses of some of them, and I will write myself in confidence to-night.'

Then he dropped his voice and said very quietly, 'Can I help you in any other way—say, for instance, money? If so, my services are at your disposal with pleasure.'

I answered him with a grateful smile that I had more money than I wanted, and he then left, saying he would send round an opiate which I was to be sure to take, and that he would come and see me the first thing in the morning.

As I began to doze that night while falling asleep after the opiate I saw the hideous old woman in my room, as distinctly as when I had seen her for the first time in the omnibus. She came and stood close by my pillow

and her aspect was menacing. But either my opiate protected me—which I doubt—or else there was no intention to molest me that night.

Next morning I was tenfold better. Dr. Mackenzie Erskine came round and declared as much, and said that what I wanted was rest, absence from excitement, and amusement in a quiet kind of way.

‘Don’t be frightened,’ he said, ‘but your nervous system is utterly below par, and I am going to dose you with strychnine and phosphorus until I am afraid you will taste the peculiarly unpleasant aroma of cheap lucifer matches in everything that you eat and drink. But it is not half so nasty as steel, and it will not discolour your teeth, on which, if I were a dentist, I should compliment you. I have taken the liberty of noticing them, Miss Smith,’ he added, ‘because sound teeth and sound hair are almost certain signs of a sound constitution and a sound life. You

will get over this attack, I pledge my reputation. But I cannot say how soon. Avoid lying in bed. Be in the open air as much as you can, and above all avoid solitude. Talk to the very first comer, about any subject whatever, sooner than allow yourself to feed upon your own thoughts.'

Then I made my toilette, and by the time I had reached the coffee-room it was twelve o'clock. Waiting there for some reason or other was Captain Edwardes.

We had now become such friends that there was no formality between us. He complimented me heartily and bluffly on my appearance, said he could see I had had a good night, for that there were not the usual rims of sleeplessness round my eyes which he had often noticed with distress, and then point-blank asked me what I was going to do for the day. I told him that I had no idea.

'Well,' he said, 'I have a little yawl

here—not much, but good enough. I may have friends coming out with me for a little knock about in the open, nothing more whatever. Will you join us? We shall be back before sunset.'

‘With the very greatest pleasure.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE 'little yawl' turned out to be, as I now know, a vessel of about seventy-five tons, with a crew on her of from a dozen to fifteen hands as nearly as I could make out.

We walked to the end of the pier, and then descended the steps to the lower stages. A four-oared cutter was waiting for us. Almost immediately we were alongside the yacht, from the gangway of which hung the daintiest of ladders, with a little rail of frosted iron. I was on deck in a moment. Then Captain Edwardes followed me and the rest of the boat's crew except one, and—for this was my first experience in sea life, and was a treat to me—I saw the tackle

slung down from the davits, and the boat hoisted up. Then up went the canvas, and the yacht slipped her moorings, and away we went.

In the first few minutes I was too pleased and happy even to think. I simply allowed myself to be influenced by the glories of the situation—above us the magnificent blue sky, with just here and there a fleck of cloud ; all round us the sea, which people persist in calling blue, but which is in reality a light shade of black whipped here and there into white foam. Now and again we passed a great mass of floating seaweed ; or some huge jelly-fish with a disc as large as that of a church clock, and its tentacles streaming out behind it. Then some sea-gulls would follow us, and the crew forward would throw them scraps of meat and biscuit, and keep them in our wake. It was like a pleasant dream.

I was leaning over the bulwarks watching

all this when I felt a hand laid lightly on my arm.

‘You are fond of the sea, Miss Smith. You have been playing it down on me. You must have been at sea before.’

‘I assure you, never.’

‘Then you take to it marvellously, and without compliments, are a born sailor. But I will ask you a question: how are we going now?’

‘I don’t know what you mean. We are going away from shore.’

‘Are we running or beating?’

‘You are talking Greek to me.’

‘Are we going with the wind or against the wind?’

I assumed a visage of profundity worthy of the two dear sisters combined. ‘As we are sailing, I presume we are going with the wind.’

‘Worthy of Pinnock,’ he answered. ‘Dear me, dear me! all the happiness of

life consists in learning things. And you have a lot to learn yet. Don't think me rude. I am only laughing, as if you had made a revoke at whist. We are sailing right straight dead in the teeth of the wind. The wind is blowing dead against us, and we are going dead against it.'

Then he took me back by the helm and showed me how we were tacking, keeling well up into the wind's eye until we had made a 'leg,' and then putting smartly about and still keeping up into the wind, and repeating the manœuvre, so doing in zigzag what it would be impossible to do in a straight line.

This was my first lesson in seamanship, although I can now, I flatter myself, navigate by compass and chronometer.

Out we went until the sun had a good deal more than passed the meridian. Then Captain Edwardes suddenly roared out, 'Lay to !' Something was done to the sails, I

could not tell what, and the yacht, which until then had been tearing her way through the water like a thing of life, stood motionless, although with all her canvas set.

‘I think it’s time, Miss Smith,’ he said, ‘for lunch.’

I acquiesced, and down we went into the saloon, where I found to my astonishment a stewardess, who showed me to a ladies’ cabin, and assisted me deftly in an impromptu toilette. Men talk about the boudoirs of women, but I never was in a boudoir, taking the general rule, which cost, square foot for square foot, one-third the money of the saloon of a yacht.

I need not give a description. The saloon was a little drawing-room, with its piano, bookshelves, vases of flowers, and even here and there such perishable articles as statuettes of Parian and plates of old blue china—clamped to the sides, I dare say, but not perceptibly so.

The lunch was one of which I need only say that I more than once wished that dear Mr. Bulbrooke were with us. There were strange potted meats, and different kinds of wines in small flasks, and hothouse fruit; and there were hot partridge and cold grouse, with peaches and apricots and grapes in great clusters. My reader must not put me down as a gourmand. Pray let him understand once and for all that I regard a well-prepared meal as I do a well-prepared party or any other well-prepared arrangement. It is a work of art. And people who devote themselves to a work of art deserve credit for it. A cook who is master of his profession is in my mind a higher artist than the gentleman who paints the blue boar for the sign-board of the village inn.

We lingered over lunch because an official dressed as the steward, and apparelled in a costume partly resembling that of an officer in the Queen's navy and partly that

of a head butler, appeared, and mixed and served out some champagne cup. Then we went on deck.

The land of course was out of sight. The sun was dipping. The night clouds had gathered. One or two of the larger stars were actually showing themselves.

‘It will be late for getting back into Brighton, Captain Edwardes,’ I said.

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘very late. We couldn’t possibly get back there to-night. And if we came back in the morning, all the dear old ladies in the hotel would be talking. Our nose is turned for Dieppe.’

I was staggered, but only for a moment. You must recollect what very strange and curious experiences I had had in my time.

‘And you are taking me to Dieppe without having asked my consent?’

‘Don’t be angry, my dear Miss Smith. All is fair in love and war. I give you my

sacred word of honour you are dealing with a gentleman, and I will satisfy you on that point in a very few minutes. Just come down below.'

I went down the companion into the saloon, and he followed me at a respectful distance. He took a seat directly opposite me.

'Miss Smith,' he said, 'I have meant you no mischief. I would not hurt a hair of your head, and if I heard any man speak evil of you I would shoot him as if he were a mad dog. I do not want to make myself ridiculous by going on my knees or throwing myself into any kind of male hysterics. I am a silent man with very few words about me, but all of them true. I think I have done wrong in making this cruise run into the night. It was recklessness. It was just the desire to have you with me anyhow. But I will put you ashore at any port you like, and nobody need know what has

happened. Need I again give you my word that you are safe with me?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘I think I am.’

‘Well, then,’ he replied, as if with a sense of relief, ‘let us go on. We ought to be at Dieppe in about two hours. You shall stop at the hotel, and I will sleep on the yacht. In the morning we will go round to the Consulate and see about things. Are you frightened any longer?’

‘What has the Consulate to do with it?’

‘Why, it’s where foreigners have to go when they want to do anything, from setting up a lollypop stall at the corner of the street down to getting married or making their will. We can get married at the Consulate by an English clergyman as regularly as we could at St. George’s, Hanover Square.’

I looked down, and for three or four minutes I kept silence.

‘You have not been quite fair to me. It is true that you pay me a high compliment

by suggesting that I should be your wife, but it was hardly honourable to put me in a position which, if I had refused you, would have compromised me hopelessly.'

'I can't help it,' he said. 'Please don't argue. I love you ; that's all I can say. I love you. And I mean what's straight and square. I dare say I have been foolish and romantic, or whatever else you like to call it, but that doesn't prevent my loving you honestly and sincerely. Will you marry me?'

'You had better go on deck,' I answered, 'and come down again in an hour's time.'

I deliberated very carefully. I did not love the man, but I could see he loved me, and I was quite ready and willing to make him a good wife. But behind me was my terrible secret. How could I marry him without telling it to him? Then if I told him? Upon one alternative he might think me mad. Upon the other he would certainly not wish to have me for his wife.

Well, the best way out of all difficulties is to tell the truth. And a number of motives weighed together on this occasion to make me do so. First of all, in spite of the trick he had played upon me, I really more than liked Captain Edwardes. Next, it would be a relief to tell my horrible tale to some one, and to get it off my mind. Then it would not matter to me after all, except so far as my own personal feelings towards him were concerned, how he might take my communication. An English officer is a gentleman, and will keep your secret far more scrupulously than your solicitor will. So in these calculations I made up my mind, and went straight up on deck without waiting for him to come down to me.

He came towards me with both hands held out, but I made no response to the gesture.

‘I have made up my mind,’ I said. ‘I will tell you to-morrow morning what I

think. As soon as we reach Dieppe, please take me to an hotel, for I am very tired. Meantime I may tell you that I forgive you the trick you have played me, although I think it was unworthy of you.'

His whole face lit up. 'Will you shake hands on the bargain, Miss Smith?'

'Certainly,' I replied, with a laugh, and held out my hand.

He did not shake it, but took it tenderly and kissed it, and then remarked that as far as he could make out by the pennon the wind had changed two points to the south.

What curious creatures men are !

CHAPTER XV.

It was now fairly night, and the sky was alive with stars. My companion sent below for hot coffee, and asked my permission to smoke a cigar. Then we paced the deck together, and he pointed out to me several of the leading constellations. Then we went aft by the binnacle, and I had a short lesson in steering by compass.

‘Here is the key of the saloon,’ he said, ‘and here is the key of the door into the steward’s cabin. Or, if you prefer it, here is the key of the state cabin, which has a lovely swing cot in it: Will you go below or will you remain on deck? Do whichever you like, my dear child.’

I was really intensely tired and cold. The night at sea is always very cold, and the day in summer always very hot. I took the key of the state cabin and thanked him. He came down with me and lit a swinging lamp, briefly said 'Good-night,' and left me.

The cabin was panelled in white, picked out with delicate sea-green and gold. Here and there were fixed looking-glasses. There were two little round windows on each side tightly screwed up. There was a bed with fittings of chintz and muslin that would have satisfied the sisters. There was a little shelf or else a set of hooks everywhere, and the floor was thickly carpeted.

I had just time to see all these things by the light of the lamp, and so to fall asleep, wondering dreamily whether I were again the victim of enchantment.

I was roused in the morning by a mixed din and rattle of voices and cordage, and also,

if I am frankly to tell the truth, by a most peculiar and unpleasant smell.

I looked out, and could see we were in a harbour full of vessels of every kind, from tiny fishing-boats up to great ocean-going three-masters ; and the peculiarly unpleasant smell evidently came from the harbour mud. There was a clock in the cabin which told me the time was nine. At the marble basin both hot and cold water were laid on. I could not help seeing I had been expected, or rather provided for, for the combs and brushes and sponges were all entirely new ; and this could hardly have been an accident.

When I had finished my toilette and made my way on deck, I found Captain Edwardes walking up and down. We shook hands, and he then suggested we should go ashore.

We began to make our way up the town. First he took me to a really good milliner's in what I supposed was the principal street. ' You will want to get some gloves and things,'

he said ; ' here's your purse. And get some pocket handkerchiefs. They're pretty in France.'

As he put the purse into my hand a curious shudder came over me, and I nearly fell. The whole of the Tottenham Court Road business came rushing back into my mind.

' What's the matter ? ' he said. ' Are you faint ? '

' No, thanks. I am all right.'

' You look strangely pale. Will you come to the nearest hotel ? '

' No,' I answered, ' I am perfectly well, and I won't be long.'

I went in and made my purchases. Dieppe, of course, is but a poor town, but to me it was new and wonderful, and the French millinery interested me almost as much as it would have done the two dear sisters.

Then we turned through the market, and he bought some flowers. A hideous old Normandy woman was plucking a fowl alive,

deliberately pulling out its feathers one by one. I started with something like a shriek.

‘It’s very brutal, is it not?’ he said. ‘But they say it makes the flesh white. The French have no idea of humanity to animals, and the Italians are still more cruel. That old woman will pluck her dozen of fowls to-day, or two dozen if they are wanted, and will most devoutly go to Mass next morning.’

I shuddered again, for I thought of the old woman of my own story. I had cast at the hag who was torturing the wretched bird a look of angry disgust, and she had replied with a *jettatura* from under her shaggy eyebrows that reminded me forcibly of the old hag of Tottenham Court Road, and seemed to chill my blood.

Then we turned down to the shore, where there was a sort of place something like a pier and something like subscription rooms, built upon piles, if I remember rightly, and close to the sea, which in winter-time must beat against it.

We went in and passed through a room where people were reading newspapers and novels, and another where they seemed to be doing nothing in particular except gossiping, and then I found myself in a P. and O. chair on a verandah overlooking the sea.

Captain Edwardes pulled a seat for himself close to me, took possession of it, and began at once.

‘Miss Smith,’ he said, ‘I think we both understand each other. I am afraid I have done very wrong in kidnapping you, but upon my word I could hardly help it, and I only know that upon the same provocation I should do it again. Well, now, I am going to put a question to you straight and fair. When the yacht slipped anchor at Brighton I had a marriage licence in our names in a little morocco case in my pocket, upon which any English clergyman anywhere on the Continent is bound to act. Now,’ said he, ‘we must go before the consul with the skipper and

mate of the yacht. The consul will soon be satisfied as to who we are, and then first thing to-morrow morning we'll be married at the Protestant church. It's as good a marriage as any in England, and in fact, if anything, better; for here they identify you and counter-identify you, and go through all kinds of formalities. It's no Gretna Green business, I can assure you.'

'I'll talk to you about it this afternoon if I am well enough,' I said, 'or at any rate to-morrow. I am afraid I cannot marry you at all.' And I felt myself turning deadly pale.

'Are you married already?' he asked, with something like a choking in his mouth.

'No! no! no!' I cried. 'I am not married.' And here I burst out sobbing like a great girl. 'I never loved any man or cared for any man. And I like you very much. But I can't marry you.' And then I went off into a fit of hysterics, for I felt the lump rising in my throat, and knew that I was laughing and crying at once.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN I came to myself I found I was in bed in a large room looking out on to the sea. I was, in fact, at the Hôtel Royale. It was six o'clock in the evening, and a silent, motionless French chambermaid, but with a pleasant face, ruddy and English, as are those of the Normandy girls, was seated knitting in the corner of the room.

‘Madame has fainted. The sun has been too hot for madame. But madame is better now. The doctor has been to see madame, and has bled her just the least little. The doctor says there is nothing to fear. He will return immediately.’

Was it strange, after all my many experi-

ences, that I should turn round with happiness to find myself in safety, and go to sleep again ?

Presently the doctor came. He was an Englishman, a ruddy, stout man about fifty, of the family doctor type, who had evidently noted down my case in his mind as summer cholera, or slight sunstroke, or something of the sort. He felt my pulse and shook his head very solemnly. Then he had a good look at my tongue. Then he said, dear old gentleman, that I was below par, and that what I wanted was a large wine-glass full of beef tea with a small wine-glass full of port every three hours, with some fruit, and some nice, nourishing, easily digestible brown bread biscuits. An egg in the morning with a little dry toast and some watercresses would be advisable. I must not take coffee, and the tea must be very weak, and on no account have any green in it.

I could not help laughing when he left.

He had done his very best to fathom my case, and he had dealt with the symptoms with a prudence and gravity worthy of any Gammer Gurton. And yet he had no more notion what it was from which I was really suffering than had the swallows which were darting past my window.

Soon after he had left Captain Edwardes came in. 'How are you, Lucy?' he asked. 'I shall call you Lucy now, and you must call me Arthur. I know what the doctor says, but do you feel yourself?'

'The doctor has told me nothing that I did not know already. He has only said that I am weak and ill. Has he told you anything?'

'No. He could tell me nothing more, except that you were to have eggs, and beef tea, and port wine and cream, and quinine and iron, and carriage exercise. He said it was a general weakness of the nervous system.'

‘He knows nothing about it,’ I cried, starting up in bed. ‘And yet why should I blame him? How could he possibly know?’

And I had another hysterical fit.

When I came to myself Captain Edwardes was seated by my side, and the *femme de chambre* at the foot of the bed. She looked at him for a moment, and then quietly left the room. He stooped over me, kissed me very gently on the forehead, and said, ‘It is your mind is uneasy, dearest. Tell me all about it. If there is anything against you in England, I do not care to know what it is. I am sure there is no harm in it. We will go and live wherever you like, or, if you prefer it, we will live nowhere, and roam from place to place.’

I looked at the clock. It was exactly eight. ‘I will tell you everything,’ I said, ‘and it will not take very long. But please do not look at me while I am telling you. Look at the floor. Do not lift your eyes to me

once, and do not say a single word, or else I shall break down hopelessly.'

'Exactly as you wish,' he said, and sat in silence to listen.

It was difficult to tell him ; it was terrible. But I had made up my mind to do it, and I did so. As I began to tell the story the hateful details of it all came back to me in their foul minuteness. I left hardly anything out. I went steadily and firmly on as if I were repeating a lesson, and when I had finished I said, 'That is all.'

The next moment I found my head on his shoulder and his arms round me, while he was raining kisses on my forehead. Then he gently placed me again among the pillows and sat down on the edge of the bed by my side, with my right hand in both of his. But there was a troubled, savage expression on his face.

'This is too strange, too strange all of it, not to be true ; even if it were not you,

my own, who were telling me. There is some horrible devilry in this. We are not fighting man ; we are fighting the powers of darkness. But we *will* fight them, and get the best of them. And I will wring this old scoundrel's neck from his shoulders with my own hands. I shall never be allowed to swing for it. And now you have told me everything I will leave you for the night ; and to-morrow, when I have thought things over, we will see what course to shape. I will send the maid back to sit up with you.' Then he again kissed me tenderly and left.

There were no dreams that night.

Next day he sat in my room for some time.

'I have telegraphed,' he said, 'to Strasburg for a curious old man, a very intimate friend of my father's, and a brother student with him at Leyden and Paris. He can tell us about this business if anybody can. Meantime, my darling, be happy.' Then he

kissed me and left me, and again I had a happy dreamless night, and the next night was like it. My persecutors must surely have been aware that there was mischief brewing for them.

I could only wonder how it would all end, and vaguely hope for the best.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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THE
STRANGE ADVENTURES
OF
LUCY SMITH

BY
F. C. PHILIPS

AUTHOR OF 'AS IN A LOOKING-GLASS' 'A LUCKY YOUNG WOMAN'
'JACK AND THREE JILLS' 'THE DEAN AND HIS DAUGHTER'
ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES
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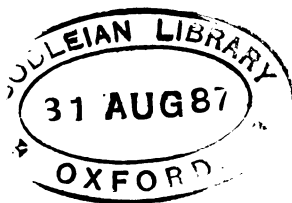
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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF LUCY SMITH.



CAPTAIN EDWARDES' NARRATIVE.



CHAPTER I.

My name is Arthur Edwardes. I was the second son in a Welsh family. Our estates were near Cardiff, and my father owned slate quarries, and was one of the members for the county.

My destination was settled early in life. My eldest brother was to succeed my father in the slate quarries and the county membership. I was put into the Rifle Brigade with the distinct promise that I should always have a handsome allowance, but that

if I wanted to marry I must look out for myself.

I liked my regiment and I liked my brother officers, and I never knew what it was to want fifty pounds. When a man in the line can say that he says a very great deal.

I was out in India when I received the news that my eldest brother had died. My father, one of the most sensible men in the world, wrote out to tell me of the fact, and, of course, to remind me of the difference it made in my position. But at the same time he urged me to remain with my regiment. It would be a good school for me, and he should like to see me retire with a high rank, or to feel certain that I should do so. He was a very singular man, in whom strong affection was blended with an equal amount of common sense as impenetrable as hardened steel.

‘ I am only a dealer in slates for house-

tops, my dear boy,' he said, 'but I am a rich man—richer than you might believe. If your brother had lived you would have found, when I died and you retired, that you were quite able to hold your own in the county, and even, if you chose, to hunt the hounds at your own risk.

'I am only thinking of what is best for you. Stop on till you can retire with general's rank. Marry. I am sure you will make a good choice, and that you will look after the estates when I am gone. I am, as you know, now sixty, but I either shoot or hunt six days every week. My yacht is always in commission in the summer, and you will be glad to know that I can eat a beefsteak and onions for my breakfast, and take a pint of beer with it. You have never written to me for money, and, to tell you the truth, I am glad you have not done so. It has made my mind easier about you, and has satisfied me that you know what is due

to the family, as I was always certain you did. It is the first duty of a gentleman to tell the truth, the second to resent an insult, the third to keep out of debt. In these matters I am proud of you, as your mother would have been were she left.

‘I am told in India that you shoot snipe, and that you can get from fifty to a hundred head in a morning. I envy you the sport. I am still strong enough to go about after the grouse, and the day before yesterday, unless Evan Evans be a bigger liar than usual, I tramped twenty-five miles, which is not bad for a man of my age, and three times I killed right and left. I take a glass of claret at lunch, three at dinner, and my usual whisky and water before I go to bed. The gout, which killed your poor grandfather, has not worried me as yet, even in my little toe-nail.

‘I go to quarter sessions, and I turn up every Sunday morning at church. Old

Jenkins preaches a capital sermon, and I like to listen to him. I wish I could see you and shake hands with you, but things are best as they are. I fancy I have been writing a random kind of letter, and that my ideas, like the birds towards the end of the season, are a little wild and apt to scatter. But you're a good shot, or used to be, and you must bring them down one by one, right and left. I have nothing to add except, as I think I have said before, that I was never in better health, and of course, my dear son, that you may draw at reason as you please.

‘Your affectionate Father,

‘HUGH EDWARDES.’

This was the last letter I had from my father. About three weeks afterwards I received a telegram from the family lawyer to say that he had been practising a new hunter for the next season, that the horse

had thrown him and fallen upon him, and that he had been picked up dead.

And here I must add the fuller particulars as I afterwards learnt them when I returned. My father was a man whose courage and determination rose higher in proportion to the difficulties they had to meet. He was a typical Welshman, not brave only, but obstinate in proportion to his bravery. The horse was a four-year-old iron-grey, wonderfully strong and sound, but considered vicious. My father had resolved to purchase him for the next hunting season, and was trying him over some stone walls. The brute when put to the jump reared. Several times my father brought him to his feet again by striking him between the ears with his crop; but at last the struggle between man and beast became one of life and death. The horse reared again, staggered, and fell over backwards. My father was picked up a crushed mass.

The horse lay helpless with his back broken, and had to be slaughtered on the spot.

Of course I went at once to my colonel. He expressed all due sorrow, and added his hope, for himself and the rest of the officers, that I should not leave the regiment. He was a blunt man.

‘My dear Edwardes,’ he said, ‘we don’t want to lose you. You are a smart officer, and for the Queen’s sake I should like to see you stop in the regiment. I’m an older man than you are, and I have seen more of death and trouble than you. Your trouble is a very great one, and I am sorry for it, and here’s my hand on it. But I wish you could stop in the regiment. You are high up now, and you’re a great help to me, and you keep the younger fellows in order. I can give myself leave in safety if I know you are in quarters. I know all will go right. I am a poor man, with nothing but my half-pay to look forward to, and you are now a

very rich man; indeed. Of course a marching regiment is a humdrum life, and perhaps it is wrong of me to try and persuade you to devote your days to it. But if you can see your way to stop with us, I hope to Heaven you'll do so.'

I took six months' leave of absence, and came back to England. And here let me say my last words about my father. He and I had always loved each other dearly. We thoroughly understood each other. There had never been an angry interview or even a difference of opinion between us. I had been prudent, and had never had occasion to write to him for money, but he had been always placing money to my account beyond the stipulated allowance. I think if ever a father and a son loved one another, it was my father and myself.

I considered matters for a few weeks and made up my mind how to act. My regimental life had unfitted me for the position

and duties of a wealthy squire with an important estate in the county. I had no desire to be a Deputy Lieutenant, or High Sheriff, or a Colonel of Yeomanry ; and to sit on the Bench at quarter sessions and try poachers, or even to be a member of Parliament—the very idea of any of these things wearied me.

Of course the first person I saw was my younger brother, Hugh, who had left Trinity Hall and been called to the Bar, and was sedulously attending quarter sessions and going circuit. I do not wish to be unkind, and I may say in excuse that Anglo-Indians often come back with their hearts warmer than the hearts they find at home.

I found my brother colourless—that is the only word by which I can describe him. He had neither faults nor virtues. He was a prim young man of five-and-twenty, who seemed to go through his daily life as if he were a clock wound up for the purpose. He

was decorous, guarded, and utterly unsympathetic.

We had a long interview at his chambers in the Temple. He began, correctly enough from his own point of view, by assuming that I should settle down on the estates, and that he would have the income—a very liberal one—allowed him under my father's will.

I told him that to settle down on the estates after our father's death would be hateful to me. The estates were mine, I reminded him, subject to a large settlement on himself. Would he like to take them subject to a rent-charge to myself, which of course could be arranged if times were bad?

I wonder why brothers so often hate one another? There was something about this brother of mine that made me instinctively hate him, although I knew and felt it was wrong to do so. He replied bloodlessly that he liked the law and was getting on at it; that he had been definitely promised silk

if he stuck to his profession as soon as he was thirty-five, and that he meant to follow his profession.

‘I shall probably stand for Parliament,’ he said, ‘at the next general election, and I may assure you that if I stand I shall get in. Besides, I dislike a country life altogether. I hate it. Why cannot you go down and take my father’s place? I would not be a county squire for the world. I would as soon live among jockeys in a racing stable, or troopers in a cavalry barrack.’

This was intended to be insolent, and I knew as much, so the interview terminated for the time, and we arranged to meet again in about a month.

I spent this month more or less idly, but as befitted respect for my father’s memory. First I arranged all matters at the Horse Guards. I saw there was no alternative but to send in my papers. Then I obtained an introduction to a very eminent and shrewd

firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields—Messrs. White, Jackson, Jackson, and Grey—and put myself unreservedly in their hands. I ascertained what I had not known until now, that either through negligence or intentionally the entail had lapsed, so that my brother and myself were co-heirs. My ignorance in all these matters may seem strange, but any man of the world can tell you that army men know nothing of law, and that, if they think they know anything about it, they are sure to be wrong.

Thus, then, my position was perfectly simple. I was entitled to half my father's lands in their value, and half of all his personal property—stocks, shares, plate, pictures, and so on. My thankless young brother had the other half.

Having armed myself with this information, I went down to Brighton and waited till I heard from him.

He played the waiting game himself. He

kept writing to ask me to come and see him. Then he wrote to say that probate duty must be paid, and that if I did not attend to matters he must take them into his own hands. So up to town I came.

When I had once again got face to face with him it did not take long to settle matters. I think the whole thing occupied four months, which, after all, is not long for an estate which I may say, without presumption, would have amply supported a peerage. My poor father had, indeed, refused a peerage twice. There were slate quarries and coal mines, and a large amount of house property in Cardiff, and land in its outskirts growing every day more valuable for building purposes. There were a good many acres of moor worth only a fancy price for grouse shooting, and so uncertain in value. But there was also a large sum of money invested in railway debentures and in guaranteed loans. When the reckoning had been

taken, and the whole estate realised, I found myself a richer man than I had ever imagined I should be even if I had been sole heir.

I distinctly remember the final meeting with my brother in Lincoln's Inn Fields. His lawyers were present, and so were mine—for we had each employed independent advice; and so of course were the solicitors of my poor father, at whose offices the interview took place.

Every kind of necessary document was signed, and when the proceedings were over my brother and I formally shook hands. He remained, I presume to discuss matters of detail with the lawyers affecting his interest, and in no way my own. I turned down from Lincoln's Inn Fields into Fleet Street, and drove to the 'Rag.'

For the next fortnight or so I did nothing. It was about the beginning of May. I ran down to Folkestone, where I knew I should find a number of friends. I was now a rich

man, who could sign a cheque without much troubling myself, so I took quarters at the Pavilion, went over to Cowes, and bought a roomy sea-going yacht of between eighty and ninety tons, engaged a crew, and set myself to work to master the difficulties of navigation, which were as novel to me as those of brigade exercise must be to a yachtsman, although, if Lamont of Knockdow is to be believed, walrus-hunting and pig-sticking are sports that vary very little in detail.

CHAPTER II.

NAVIGATION, of course, can no more be learnt in a month than can fencing, or billiards, or chess ; but, if you give your mind to it, you can pick up a very great deal in three or four weeks—quite enough to enable you to take your vessel to any place on the French coast, although not to attempt the Mediterranean or the coast of Norway.

I took to yachting wonderfully. First, of course, there was the novelty of it. Then the precise discipline of the thing, its place for every rope, its regular hours, and its other minutiae were all akin to my previous habits. More particularly I may mention the strict attention to cleanliness and tidiness.

7 A good regiment on parade is, of course, perfect and faultless down to every boot, button, glove, and belt.

But the exquisite tidiness of a yacht is far superior to that of a regiment. The head housemaid with her staff may have left the suite of drawing-rooms in perfect condition, the groom of the chambers may have come in, thrown round his lordly and accurate eye, and rearranged the exact angle of a sofa, or exchanged the position of a couple of vases, and yet the immense chambers have not about them the beauty and peculiar charm of a single piece of Dresden china without a chip or flaw in it. And so a yacht well kept is the perfection of simple neatness.

This is one of the things that gives yachting its charm; and it also reminds us, as some old Greek philosopher said, that when men have to exercise what are commonly considered the functions of women, they beat women wholly out of the field,

making even better cooks and better dress-makers. It is merely because they are less lazy than women, take more pride in their work, do it more conscientiously, and do not cackle about it when it is done like an old hen over a windy egg.

My first summer I ran up the coast of Norway and paid a flying visit to the Faroes and Iceland. We reached Hammerfest, had a good time of it, and came bowling back with an almost due south wind. Then I laid the vessel up for the winter at Wivenhoe, and first thing the next spring, before the regular summer scorch had even threatened, ran through the Straits and up the Levant to the Dardanelles. When I threw anchor again in Southampton Water I had really done everything that it is worth the while of a European yachtsman to do. There remained more ambitious voyages only—to run across the Herring Pond, the South Sea Archipelago, Rio, and San Fran-

cisco. But I had had enough of the sea for a bit, and I came up to London, took rooms at Fenton's, and lived for some weeks on the joint and a pint of claret at the 'Rag.'

Early in the spring the 'Carlotta' was thoroughly overhauled and put into commission. I had begun to know something of yacht hands. Your Solent men are good for racing, but they dislike long voyages and hard work, and a Solent man gives himself as many airs as a fashionable jockey—which in effect is what he is.

Your Essex men, of whom Lord Brassey thinks so highly, are honest, patient, and clever sailors, but they have a soft streak in them, and the moment it blows begin to wish themselves at home, sitting over the fire, with a round or so of dripping toast and a great basin of tea.

So, having first secured a competent skipper and first mate in the Port of London,

which I managed to do after some trouble, I went with them up to Leith and Dundee, and we got together as good a crew as could be wished, all old hands out of the mercantile marine, delighted at the idea of no cargo work, good rations, good wages, and a smart, handy vessel to be considerably overmanned.

And thus it had come about that I had found myself at Brighton, although what precise whim took me to that great restaurant of watering-places I cannot undertake to say. Brighton is not the place a yachtsman would choose. To take a mere matter of prudence into account, it is a very dangerous shore; and if a nasty wind sets dead inland and you are not in good holding, of which there is very little at Brighton, the only thing to do is to up canvas and beat out.

However, whims are unaccountable. To Brighton I went, spent some days ashore for change, and so, as things happened, came to

meet Miss Lucy Smith at the Grand Hotel. On the day I took her out for what it was understood was to be a short sail, but which, through some complications of events, turned out to be a long run, I was in a frame of mind which I can only describe as impish. I had devoted the day before to a lesson in tandem, in which I am even now anything but a proficient: my blunders of the reins and the double thong had made me dissatisfied with myself, and generally disposed to take my revenge upon society; and I was also in that reckless kind of mood which sometimes comes upon a man, and makes him ride for a fall or swim out till he is tired, trusting to chance and his natural strength for getting to shore again.

So much for what happened up to the time the 'Carlotta' found herself at Dieppe, and my companion gave me the story of her life, which sufficiently explained, even to a barrack-banged, sea-tossed man like

myself, her intense state of nervousness, and her evident weak health.

When I had heard the tale, I said to myself, this matter must be taken in hand at once. There is nothing on earth like good resolutions. But the more I considered the affair the more I saw my utter inability to take it in hand myself. You might as well have asked me to sit down in the organ-loft at Haarlem and play a voluntary, or to take to pieces a chronometer that had stopped and say what was wrong in it. And so I took the common-sense course of telegraphing at once to Strasbourg for old Althaus, of whom I had heard my father speak many times.

My father in his nineteen and twenties had spent several months at Paris, Leyden, Munich, and other foreign towns, resolutely wasting his time, but otherwise doing himself no manner of harm ; for he did not drink, he had a positive dislike for gambling, and

whatever company he might be in he never forgot his self-respect.

While at Leipzig he had somehow broken the small bone of his arm, and one of the students there had neglected his own work to keep him company, and, so to say, wait upon him during the period of mishap and recovery, which lasted about three weeks.

In this period the two men became close friends. They smoked together and drank lager together—my father being a healthy subject, and in no danger of inflammation or fever—and they played chess; and occasionally, as my father had often told me with a twinkle in his eye, they had talked mysticism, and even metaphysics.

The friendship became closer than ever—perhaps because there was nothing in common between the two men. The very difference of their physical constitution, habits, and studies—if my father could be

said to study—made them take to each other the more. When my father left Leipzig the two corresponded. Althaus had an income of his own—about sixty pounds a year in English money—which he more than doubled by writing for German scientific journals, although they pay miserably.

His mode of life was simple. He used to rise in the morning and work in his laboratory, a little garret on the sixth floor, which my father described to me as reminding him of an alchemist's workshop. He would work on with a cup of coffee, heated over a spirit lamp, and a biscuit, and perhaps a repetition of the frugal meal after midday, until his clock struck six. Then, unless some very important process was going on in any of his retorts or other apparatus, he would sally out to a *Gasthaus* and dine off bacon and sauer-kraut, or sausage and fried cabbage, with a great bock of lager, and perhaps one or two more.

Then—for, according to his own very limited ideas, he enjoyed the good things of this life, believing, unhappily, that there is no other in store for us—he would drink one, or perhaps two glasses of schnapps, smoke tobacco of the strength and texture of dry hay out of a polished china bowl, and perhaps play a game or two of chess. Then he would return to his garret and go to bed.

My father could never tempt this strange being to London, although he had been so far successful as to get him to Paris when he wanted to visit the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes and the medical schools, and more particularly the Veterinary College at Alfort. This of course was decades before the days of Pasteur.

Then, according to my father's account, he had pressed money on Althaus, begging him to come and live in England comfortably, and to have a laboratory properly furnished and equipped, with an assistant

devil to scrape the crucibles, and rake out the furnace, and wash the retorts and alembics, and keep the stores in order, and blow the bellows; but young Althaus had only shaken his head.

‘If,’ said he, ‘the man is not equal to his work he will be in my way. If he is equal to it he may steal my discoveries, however carefully I try to hide them. And I mean to discover great things.’

My father shook his head in return, and admitted that there was a good deal of common sense in this. So he came back to England alone, while Althaus, as he used to put it in telling the story, remained in his laboratory, always making smells, and occasionally explosions.

However, the two corresponded until my father’s death, for there were letters from him down to the latest among my father’s papers, and it was by the aid of these that I was now, happily for me, able to trace him.

I knew that he was almost polyglot, so I sent a long letter in English—long, urgent, and beseeching—of which, however, the substance can be very briefly stated indeed.

I told him Miss Smith's story, of course in unscientific language. I gave him my word of honour as an English officer that I had good reason to believe it absolutely true. I begged him to come over, not only for the sake of science, but in the sacred interests of humanity, adding emphatically but truthfully that I believed the bulk of English doctors to be hopelessly ignorant, while those who knew better than their fellows were afraid of incurring the dreadful charge of scientific heterodoxy by even listening to a recital of facts which did not exactly fit in with their recognised textbooks. And I am afraid I referred to Jenner and vaccination.

I got a letter back by return of post. Althaus was deeply interested, and would

set out at once. He was engaged in some researches on platinum, and the other metals of the same group, such as iridium. Platinum was the most marvellous metal in the world ; and iridium, which he believed to be identical with it, the most curious and puzzling.

But metals were not human beings. They had not lives or nerves, and he would leave his metals to themselves, and come at once. I might expect him almost upon receipt of his letter. The communication was, of course, that of a man of science, but it might have been written by a financier or a general equal to his work, it was so simple, precise, and brief.

CHAPTER III.

THE day after the letter Althaus arrived himself with a small valise and a courier's bag, the latter containing in one compartment pipes and tobacco, and in another some books and a few scientific instruments, apparently carefully protected in leather cases. He spoke English slowly and with a strong German accent, but with perfect accuracy. I complimented him, and he answered simply that he had learned the language by reading English books which had been necessary to him, and had not been translated.

I asked him if he knew Russian in the same manner, and he said yes, it was neces-

sary. Russia at Moscow and St. Petersburg endowed science most liberally, and when a man who had in any way made his mark wanted to publish a book the Government would help him. More than that, he said, the Russian Government spent large sums of money in promoting scientific research, and would always pay imperially for good work. I asked him about England, and he shook his head.

‘You have had very few scientific men,’ he said, ‘worthy of the name since the days of Henry Cavendish, who timed himself to death with his own repeater; and John Hunter, who boiled down the Irish giant. Your scientific men, if they practise medicine or surgery, think only of making guineas. Or if they devote themselves to chemistry or physiology, or any branch of study other than medicine or surgery, they like to read papers to ladies and guardsmen at champagne picnics, which they actually call

scientific meetings, and to write trashy papers in the magazines in which the novels of your ephemeral novelists are spun out, or to get some job under Government with a pension attached to it, or an inferior order of knighthood.

‘It is the daily work of your scientific man in England not to toil in his laboratory as a man ought, and to keep his results to himself until he has verified them and is certain of them and of their value. No. He makes it his *métier* to chatter like the idiots in the “*Précieuses Ridicules*” of Molière, until he has chattered himself into your *salons*. Bah!’ And he took an enormous pinch of snuff.

He might have been any age, for he had that clear complexion, unwrinkled skin, and perfect teeth and hair which tell of a life of the very strictest temperance. His features were clearly cut, and his forehead with the whole upper part of his head of abnormal size. Beyond this nothing struck me about

him except the keenness of his eye, the vivacity of his voice, the animation of his manner, and his simplicity and absence of self-consciousness.

‘Have you ever slept on a vessel?’ I asked him.

He broke into excitable German. ‘Ach! mein lieber Gott im Himmel! Nein, nein! I will see it to-morrow after we have seen our patient.’

It was now nine in the evening, and I talked with the professor till ten, at which hour he told me he invariably retired. Before he went he said a word of warning.

‘Do not let your medical men know that I am here. I shall not alter their treatment or in any way have anything to do with it unless I am convinced it is absolutely wrong. Then of course I should take the responsibility on myself. Meantime I am only a lay friend of yours who knew your father before you were born, and am nearly old enough

to be your grandfather. I have entered myself in the hotel books as Herr Althaus simply, and none of these Frenchmen have ever heard of me, so we will keep our little secret.'

I nodded assent, and it being settled that no more business was to be talked that night, we had up a little fat, pot-bellied bottle of the rarest Steinberg, over which the professor many times sedately shook his head, with pious remarks and ejaculations somewhat inconsistent with his beliefs as otherwise genially expressed. And then we parted for the night with a grip of the hand. He was a wonderful old man. The strength of the muscles of his fingers fairly astonished me, and made me wince like a schoolboy.

Next morning, after the ordinary attendants had come and gone, I took Professor Althaus upstairs to Lucy's room, and he sat down, and we all three had a very long talk.

She had expected his arrival and knew its object, so she spoke unreservedly, although without unnecessary detail. He kept putting a number of curious little questions, which of course must have had a very definite object, although no layman and possibly very few medical men indeed could have understood their drift. Then he remarked profoundly that he would go out, take me with him, and see about some simple things—old women's medicaments, he added, with a dry small chuckle—herbs and other such simples which could do no harm, as they would be put into a bottle and need only be smelt. 'The wise men,' he concluded, 'cannot possibly object to that.'

The professor and I walked out together, and we went to a chemist's and had a mixture prepared and put into a stoppered bottle, of which I can only say that it smelt to me suspiciously like a compound of eau de Cologne and sweet-briar. It was at once

sent back to the hotel, and Althaus and I pursued our walk.

He took the nearest turning to the beach ; looked out for a boat upside down ; spread his handkerchief out on it for protection against the tar, and solemnly seated himself. I laid myself down on the shingle at his feet and waited. He was silent for several minutes. Then he whistled, terribly out of tune, an air from 'Der Freischütz.' Then he was silent again for about an equal time. Then he began.

'My dear young Edwardes, this is a very strange case.'

'I know it is, professor.'

'Call me Herr Althaus, if you are to call me anything but my simple name—the English fashion, and the best.'

'Certainly, Herr Althaus. But what about the case? I have told you all I know about it, and you know all that Lucy can tell you. Is there any hope of relief?'

A painful silence, which seemed to me interminable.

‘Such cases are very rare. You cannot read of them in books or scientific journals. But I have heard of them, and have talked them over with men far more experienced than myself ; and I have seen one, that of a boy whom they used in his dreams for clairvoyance. But there, they meant the boy no harm. They wanted him to discover a rich lode of tungsten, and actually enough the boy did so. Things are not necessarily untrue because a few pedants laugh at them.’

‘And how soon can we commence any active steps?’

‘To-morrow at the hour of noon, more or less, and not till then. You may be present the whole time. Indeed, I should prefer it. But there will be practically nothing for you to do. I must now go and get a camera. Some ink in a saucer, or in the palm of the hand would be better. But I

shall want a little child, and there is the difficulty. A girl of about twelve would be the best ; but I suppose that is out of the question. Can you get an intelligent, blue-eyed, curly-headed boy of about ten or twelve, and bribe him with fruit and bonbons to come here for an hour? We must make the boy do, though the girl—ach, mein Gott! those stupid priests! and actually when we are doing good and working in the cause of Heaven—would have been far more sympathetic and plastic.'

I told him I could get the very boy he wanted, if nothing were to be done that he could much chatter about. He was the son of a boatman, a widower with whom my skipper had made acquaintance. The grandmother kept house, and hardly ever went beyond the doors except to haggle in the market or at the ships, and the children ran about on the beach. But they were respectable, intelligent, and very quick.

He reflected for a few minutes. 'The thing shall be done on the yacht,' he said ; ' we will run no risk of interruption. No one will think anything of our taking the boy on board the yacht. Can you manage that ? '

' Oh, I can manage that easily.'

' Then let you and me and the boy and the worthy skipper be on board the yacht at an hour before noon to-morrow, so that we may be at work as the sun turns the meridian ; and tell your skipper to manage to send all the hands on shore, on some excuse or other, from eleven till two in the afternoon at least, and to keep watch on deck while we are below, that there may be no interruption. If interruption occurred, this old demon—may his brain be smelted and his heart be roasted ! —would at once know what we were at, and we might have to begin work all over again.

' Bring also with you a photograph of the poor dear Fräulein, taken as recently as

possible, and a large lock of her hair. I will provide everything else. You may tell her that the photograph and the hair are for us to hunt down her enemies. And now I must go and make some curious purchases. Will you come with me?'

'No; I will get my part of the work done. You look to your purchases. How soon shall we meet?'

'In a couple of hours,' said the professor. 'The drugs I want are not ordinarily considered dangerous to humanity, or even potent, and I shall have no difficulty in procuring them.'

When I got back to the hotel he was waiting for me, and a porter was with him with a wooden box rather larger than a despatch box, but otherwise plain.

'Let us come at once,' said he, 'on board the yacht, and stow this carefully. You have arranged for the child to be on board at the time I mentioned?'

I nodded.

‘It is well. To-morrow, my son, we will fight this brute with his own weapons, but luckily with weapons far stronger than his own. Wretch ! he hardly knows the craft in which he dares to dabble. I wonder he has never yet been torn in pieces by the Powers he trifles with.’

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT morning the professor and I and the boy were in the saloon a good half-hour before the time appointed. The crew had all been sent ashore with the exception of the skipper and the cabin boy, and had gone in the long-boat. The boy was now sent ashore in the dingey upon some trifling errands, with the most explicit assurance that he would be rope's-ended if he returned before three hours were over.

The skipper, a stolid man who had confidence in me and was wholly devoid of curiosity, had his orders to remain on deck, to haul up the companion, and on no account to let anybody come aboard.

‘There’s no mischief going on, skipper,’ I said.

‘Not likely, sir,’ he replied in his broad, soft Essex tongue, and with an expansive smile rippling over his great hairy features. ‘We’ve cruised together many a league, you and I, sir, by buoy, light, and compass.’

‘But you must see that we are left quite alone.’

‘All right, sir.’

Down the three of us went into the cabin. Then Althaus commenced proceedings.

First he lit the swing-lamp; then he locked the companion door, and the door forward into the steward’s cabin and waist; then he closed every port-hole most carefully, so that but for the lamp we should have been entirely in the dark. Then he took hold of the boy by the wrist with his finger on his pulse, and said in French, ‘You are not afraid of us two gentlemen, my boy?’

‘Mais non, m’sieu.’

‘Then here are three francs for you. Put them into your pocket.’

The lad's eyes opened like great tea-saucers, and he promptly acted on the hint, counting each franc and biting it between his hard, shining teeth before he stowed it away.

Then Althaus produced a great box of cheap bonbons, such as the children of the poor affect, and six francs more, which he placed on the lid of it in a circle.

The boy's eyes fired with wonder. He could not realise that such a gift was for himself.

‘You shall have that box and those francs all for yourself in an hour from now, my little brave, if you do exactly as you are told. But ’—and Althaus lifted his finger warningly—‘if you are obstinate and make a little pig of yourself we shall put you ashore.’

‘I will be very good, m'sieu—as good as if I were at Mass.’

There was a quaint twinkle in Althaus' eyes. He took the boy gently by the shoulders and placed him in the centre of the small end of the cabin table. Then from his stores he produced a large saucer, or rather basin, which looked as if it were of pure silver, and placed it under the boy's eyes. Into this, out of a large stoppered bottle (warning me to keep as quiet as my impatience would permit me, and on no account to disturb the boy's attention) he began to pour some fluid which immediately sent out a strong smell of magnolia blossoms. He kept on filling the vessel till it was nearly an inch deep. The colour at first was iridescent like that of opal. Then it turned ruby red. Then it changed to malachite green. Then to the deepest lapis-lazuli purple. Then it simmered and effervesced. Then, as the effervescence subsided, I saw that it was the very deepest black, and lustrous as a mirror, but that, strangely enough,

although it threw back the light of the swinging lamp, no object in the cabin was reflected in it.

Althaus' eyes met mine, and with, as I thought, unnecessary sternness, he lifted his forefinger and motioned me to silence and stillness. I had never seen a man so changed. He looked keen and triumphant, with the fierce light in his eyes of a man who sees certain success before him. He stood as erect as if he were only one-and-twenty, and he was as alert and watchful as a French swordsman fighting *à outrance*.

'Look,' he said to the boy, 'do not lift your eyes. Only speak when I ask you questions. What do you see?'

The boy replied in a voice which betrayed neither terror nor interest. Althaus might have been asking him the hour of the day or the nearest route to the market-place.

'Nothing, m'sieu.'

'Good boy. Keep on looking. Pre-

sently you will see something pretty and something droll.' Then he hurriedly placed on the table six glass lamps, as it seemed to me in a circle, but I noticed that he arranged three first in a triangle, and then arranged the other three in a similar triangle, working back the reverse way, and interlacing the two figures. Then he lit them. They sent up a pure white light, with a strange odour which I could not at all recognise, but which was in no way unpleasant.

Then behind the lamps the professor placed a small brazier, apparently of silver, and applied a light to it. The charcoal in it immediately flickered up.

All this time the boy, as dutiful as if he had been mesmerised or charmed, never lifted his eyes for the fraction of a second from the ink before him. He evidently believed something was going to happen, and believed it firmly.

The brazier must have been thin, for its

centre was already showing red-hot with the flames beneath. Althaus, again motioning me to silence, reproduced the silver box and threw some powders from it on the heated surface. Up shot a column of smoke, which spread out into a cloud and made the cabin darkness hardly visible. Then he threw upon the flames the photograph I had given him, which withered up in an instant as if it had been cast into a furnace. The boy remained immovable.

Next the professor produced half the lock of hair, and cast it in on the ashes of the photograph. 'Do you see anything now?'

'Yes,' replied the boy, as quickly as if in answer to a magnetic stroke. 'I see a lady.'

'Where is she?'

'In a large room.'

'Now be good. Do not move. Look again. Do you still see the lady?'

'Yes.'

'Go on looking. Do you see an old man?'

The boy hesitated, and I seemed to feel a curious sensation as if the floor of the room were moving under me.

‘Do you see an old man?’ repeated Althaus firmly.

‘Yes, I do. Oh, a wicked-looking old man.’

‘Where is he?’

‘He is in a big room like this, but with shelves all round, and bottles and horrible-looking things, and he is first taking down one thing from the shelves, and then another.’

Althaus grasped me firmly and peremptorily by the wrist. ‘Is he very old?’

‘Older than grandfather, but taller, and his hair is longer, and he stoops much more. And oh!’—here the boy called out again, not in terror, but in curiosity—‘there is an ugly old woman with him like one of the beggars in front of the cathedral at Rouen, and they are both looking about among the bottles.’

Again my wrist was grasped.

‘Leave the room. Are you on the stairs?’

‘Yes, m’sieu.’

‘Descend the stairs. Are you in the hall?’

‘Yes, m’sieu.’

‘What do you see again?’

‘Great stuffed monkeys and crocodiles and snakes.’

‘Good, my boy. Courage! Do you see the hall door?’

‘Yes, m’sieu.’

‘Open it. Are you in the garden?’

‘Yes, m’sieu.’

‘Do you see the garden gate?’

‘Yes, m’sieu.’

‘Pass out along the road. Turn to the left. Run. Run as quickly as you can. Run with all your might, or perhaps they will run after you.’

‘I am running, m’sieu, but oh, I am out of breath! Oh, I am out of breath! Oh that terrible old man! Oh that frightful old woman!’

‘Silence, my child; they shall not harm you. Do you come near a village?’

‘Oh yes, m’sieu.’

‘What do you see?’

‘A village green, with children.’

‘Is there a sign-post there?’

‘Yes, m’sieu.’

‘With how many limbs?’

‘Three, m’sieu; only three.’

‘Look at the one in the direction from which you came. Spell me the letters on it. What does it say? Quick!’

The boy in his French pronunciation spelt out ‘To Crowthorpe.’

‘Now the other.’

Again he spelt out with difficulty ‘To Chislehurst.’

‘Now the third.’

This was more easy: ‘To London.’

‘Good boy,’ cried Althaus. ‘*Brave enfant*. Little corporal.’ And he caught the child up in his arms and ran up on deck where the skipper was waiting.

'Take the boy,' he said, thrusting him into that functionary's arms, 'and put him down in your bunk. You will find he will go to sleep at once. Stop with him and watch him, please.'

The skipper looked to me for approval, and obeyed instantly.

Then Althaus turned to me with a strangely solemn face. 'We have got our finger,' said he, 'on the tarantula in his hole, the viper in his lair, the *pieuvre* in his cave. God allows no other monsters to live at all such as these. And this one is worse than them all. But we have our fingers now round his throat. And'—here the old man shut his eyes and his voice dropped—'he ought to die! Such monsters should not be allowed to live!'

He spoke in a deep, low, earnest voice, with the enthusiasm of one of the old Hebrew prophets, denouncing at the risk of his life the sins of his nation. I was bewildered.

‘You do not see the fitness of things,’ he continued; ‘you will see it presently. Let us come back to the hotel. Let us see Miss Smith.’

We made our way back to the hotel in silence, I marvelling over what I had witnessed, he evidently proud that his experiment had succeeded, and determined that it should bear fruit.

CHAPTER V.

WE found Lucy, so Althaus told me, calmer, quieter, and better. Indeed, he declared there was a perceptible increase of strength.

‘I think, my dear, you will have no more dreams for some time, and in all probability never. When was the last?’

‘Three nights ago, but it was not quite so bad as usual.’

‘Strange,’ he said, looking at me; ‘it was the day before I arrived. Well, our patient is weak. We must not stop with her and tire her.—Ask the doctor when he comes if you may have a glass of champagne and water every hour. Tell him, my child, you

have a strange craving for it. Drink a whole glass, and a large one, and let it be all champagne with no water, for you are getting better. And it is justifiable to commit a little pious fraud now and again upon these old Diafoiruses. If he says no, or wants to give you half the quantity, say nothing, but do as I tell you all the same. Do not read; and sleep as much as you can.'

Then the professor took me by the arm, and we went and sat down on a seat on the *plage*, which was wholly unoccupied, with not even a *bonne* and children near it. Indeed, everybody seemed to be on the beach and in the gardens of the Casino, except a few valetudinarians who were being wheeled up and down in Bath chairs.

'You and I,' said he, 'must go and drag this old fiend out of his hole. There is little or no danger, nor would either of us fear it for a moment if there were. He will cower

and tremble before us, and whine for mercy like a hound. If I find it necessary I shall make him swear by an oath, which if he breaks, his spirits will tear him to pieces. We will start to-night.'

We started that night without disturbing Lucy, who we were assured was sleeping peacefully, but we gave the most careful instructions as to her care and treatment should there be any change in her symptoms for the worse. Then we left by the night boat.

We made our way to Newhaven, and from Newhaven to Chislehurst.

At Chislehurst we stopped at a small hotel known as the Crown; and when we had engaged rooms and were soon seated quietly together, Althaus with some schnapps and I with a cigar, I burst out at once as the waiter closed the door, 'When shall we begin? To-day, of course.'

'Patience, my dear young friend.

Certainly not to-day. Your nerves are unstrung by excitement and by your voyage. You must have rest, nature's own rest. We will begin to-morrow. Now we will walk out into the village.'

We carried out the professor's suggestion and went out into the village, which is a straggling kind of place. Before many minutes we had tumbled on the very house the boy had described. A high brick wall, as high as those in the London suburbs such as Twickenham and Richmond, screened it from the road and ran all round it, being coped at the top by a formidable chevaux-de-frise of broken glass.

In one of the carriage drives on the left-hand side was a small wicket, with a latch cut in the very centre of the door. There was no name painted up on the gateway or pilasters; and immediately behind the wall poplars and cedars and Scotch pines, evidently extending some distance into the

grounds, rendered a view of the house impossible.

‘No fool,’ said Althaus musingly. ‘He has picked out a splendid place. He could hardly have made himself a better if he had tried to build one from his own damnable designs.’

The old man spoke with a certain enthusiasm, and with no moral feeling one way or the other—exactly as a naturalist might point out a puff-adder and observe complacently that it was a remarkably fine specimen, and that if it were in good condition, and not torpid from a recent meal, its bite would certainly be fatal to a strong healthy man in less than seven minutes, and to a horse in about thirty. Science is a curious passion with its votaries.

‘But what are we to do?’ I asked.

‘Nothing to-day, as I have said. We shall find him to-morrow at noon. And now talk no more of the subject to me. I am

like one of your sporting guns ready cleaned, which will tarnish almost immediately if you handle it with a warm hand. Pursue me with your warm, eager tongue; *mein lieber Gott im Himmel!* I shall be tarnished to-morrow morning, and unfit for use. To-morrow we have to fight. Your energy will be of the body. You are young and strong. Take wine, food, tobacco—all in moderation. Dismiss things from your mind, and trust to me for success. But, *ach!* talk to me not to-night. Question me not. These poor old brains of mine must be scoured and edged in the laboratory of meditation till——’ and here the strange light leaped into his eyes which I had once or twice seen before, and transformed his whole face. ‘They are true and edged as a blade from Damascus itself, the holy city of Eliezer. Talk no more of this. You will unfit me for to-morrow’s work.’

So we went back to the hotel and dined,

and after dinner Althaus sent down for a long clay pipe of the kind commonly known as churchwarden, and carefully washed it out, and then smoked through it many pipes of mild tobacco, remarking at intervals with a grunt that his nerves would take care of themselves.

But before we parted for the night he went to his drug-chest, and produced and showed me a substance.

‘What is that?’ he asked.

‘A lump of camphor, is it not?’

‘And that?’

‘A lump of charcoal.’

‘And that?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Because you have never seen so large a piece before. It is simply gum benzoin, a variety of gum arabic.’

He ordered up three soup plates and a large jug of water. We were living liberally, and the servants made no demur to any

eccentricity. He filled the three soup plates with water. In one he placed the benzoin, in another the charcoal, in another the camphor. All three trembled on the surface and then moved to the edge of the plate, where they adhered. He looked at me demanding silence.

I could see nothing, but I watched. In two or three minutes the camphor was agitated. Then it began to quiver—violently for so small a piece—and then it commenced to travel round and round the vessel in which it was confined, taking its course from east to west with a motion as steady as that of a machine, and rotating at the same time upon its own axis.

‘Explain me that,’ said the professor.

I shook my head hopelessly.

‘Why does the camphor move, and why do the charcoal and the gum stand still? Come, it is a problem for a schoolboy.’

I shook my head again.

‘Well, you have seen it. You would not have believed it if you had only been told it, even by myself. You would probably have betted against the thing happening at your own regimental mess. You may bet upon it in safety any time you please, when all troubles are over, and you are married to that lovely girl. Look again. The camphor is still going round and round as sedulously as a planet, while the charcoal and the gum are still. There is no magic in this. But now let us brace up our brains by sleep, for to-morrow we shall want magic in earnest. Good-night. Go to bed at once, and go to sleep as soon as you can. Wash yourself thoroughly from head to foot in cold water, without any soap or mixtures, and take care if you can help it that you do not scratch or abrade your skin by so much as would equal the bite of a small gnat. Avoid even shaving yourself to-morrow. This is important. Again good-night. We will rise’—and he

took a memorandum from his pocket—‘at six to-morrow morning and walk for an hour. Saturn will have set for some time, and Jupiter will rise, though he will not be visible at five minutes to seven. We will pay that most benevolent planet our deepest respects, and will go out on to the lawn and watch him back to his couch.’

So we parted for the night, and for a moment a curious suspicion crept over my brain. Was he mad himself? Was he pretending to do more than he could do, or know, or had even read of in his old books of alchemy? But I remembered my father’s long acquaintance with him. I remembered the success on board the yacht, and I dismissed the idea as unworthy and ungenerous.

I fell asleep almost instantly. Perhaps the professor may have played some little tricks on me without my knowledge. At all events, I neither dreamed nor stirred in the night. I awoke to the moment, refreshed

and vigorous, and I descended to find Althaus in the hall, awaiting my arrival with an eye radiant like that of a hawk, and a step as noiseless and lissom as that of a panther. A wonderful old man, indeed.

LUCY SMITH'S NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I woke in the morning after my long conversation with Professor Althaus and Captain Edwardes, I felt strangely refreshed and clear in my mind. I might almost have been at school again. I had no horrors, no dreads, no anticipations. I went to the window and opened the curtains, and the pleasant sun came streaming in, and with it came the noise and twitter of small birds.

My senses somehow were keener than usual, and I could hear the little creatures hopping from place to place on the window-sill. I tried to distinguish differences in their note, but I was unable to do so.

One is often told that the most delightful pleasure in the world is to get into a comfortable bed and go to sleep. For myself, I believe that there is a higher physical pleasure—merely physical, but in its way unsurpassed. It is to wake slowly and deliberately, and with all your faculties about you, and then to begin quietly to think what you are going to do for the day.

I dressed and went out. I roamed a little upon the beach, and then in the Casino grounds, and then I loitered into the Casino itself, and looked at some papers and had an ice. It was dreary to wait for my deliverance, but I trusted that the end was coming, and, in common phraseology, I held on.

At last I strolled back to the hotel. There I found a telegram which for the time, at all events, relieved me. It ran thus :

‘Althaus and I have found out everything. At this minute you are quite safe. Worry about nothing. You will be troubled no

more. We shall be with you soon. We are hurrying.'

How strange this was! Could dear Dr. Althaus really have liberated me? It seemed wonderful that he should have been able to do so, and yet he was a scholar and a learned man, and a gentleman, and kind, so that I felt I ought to believe in him. He had seemed very quiet and reticent; but I felt sure that when he put his hand out, there would be in it the whole strength of his wrist.

Then a curious idea came into my head. My life up to now had been a succession of puzzles and difficulties. How was I to trust in anything? How was I even to trust in myself? I had no strength, no knowledge. I had nothing to help me in any way. Wherever I went, my hideous, ghastly, abominable troubles might follow me. I had no security whatever against their renewal. I was powerless, hopeless, helpless. I felt

worse than a slave. Arthur's telegram was certainly reassuring, but what if he were too sanguine?

On the table was a little plate of sugar. I took a lump from it and placed it at some distance from the plate. A fly came down and settled on the lump. I hurriedly clapped a wine-glass over the fly. 'Poor little fly,' said I, 'I will let you loose very soon, but why cannot you let me loose? Is there no magic in the world, little fly? Do you not know curious things? Have you not been in strange places? Can you not help me?'

The fly walked about the lump of sugar and nibbled at it. Then I lifted up the glass and it took its departure, having no notion of how it had got under the glass, or what the glass was, or even, so far as I could see, that it had ever been imprisoned at all. The glass had no more troubled it than the great vault of heaven troubles us—that is to say, what used to be understood by the

vault of heaven. For, of course, every little girl who is going to Girton some day now knows that space extends infinitely in all directions, or that, as Kant demonstrated, we cannot help thinking of it as doing so, and are consequently bound to believe that it does.

I understood, of course, rather more of myself than did the fly, but it was not so very much more after all; nothing to be particularly proud of. I have a meaning in all this, though I am not at all sure that I am bringing it out.

That night I had no dreams. Next morning I went out on to the beach and roamed about listlessly. You must remember that I had only been a poor English governess, and that to be at Dieppe with money, to be able to do whatever I pleased, was a strange thing for me, and indeed a new existence.

I roamed about the beach again. I

loitered in the Casino, and at last I began to feel thoroughly happy. There was a place by the shore where a number of bathing tents were pitched, and where bathers were indiscriminately disporting themselves, happily, pleasantly, and innocently, as is the habit of bathers at French watering-places.

I did not feel disposed to bathe, but I sat down opposite the tents and watched the little crowd enjoying themselves. A curious sense of freedom permeated me, and made me feel thoroughly happy and forgetful of my terrible troubles. I looked up at the sky. It was one vast expanse of blue, except where a few short white clouds were hurriedly flitting across it, hardly moderating their pace sufficiently to throw their shadow. The sea was a brilliant turquoise. Towards the horizon it broke away into green, and then into misty shades of white.

I began to feel a strange desire to travel. I wondered if I could get rid of my horrible

affliction, and realise my hopes, and lead for the rest of my days a happy life.

In this frame of mind I made my way back to the hotel, and by inquiry at the bureau I contrived to have brought up to me a number of dilapidated volumes about yachting and cruising. I am bound to confess that either I was stupid or they did not teach me very much. Everything that was in them told you how to tie a rope three times over. It may be very useful at times to perform this operation, but because you can do so it does not follow that you are fit to take part in a run from Liverpool to New York. So I gave the business up. There was nothing else to be done. I would have done anything if I could to please Arthur by picking up yachting terms and reproducing them, but I had really very little chance. The language of a craft is altogether unintelligible to the uninitiated, and a governess on a fore-castle would not be less ridiculous

than a boatswain, however well meaning, in a nursery full of little girls.

It was still bright daylight. I lay looking dreamily at the open casement, listening listlessly to the murmur of sounds that floated through it, too comfortable to even move my arm, but with my mind at last untroubled as I began to realise that Arthur and kind Dr. Althaus, wherever they might be at the moment, would allow no evil to even threaten me.

How long I lay like this I cannot say. No clock met my eye anywhere, nor through the open window had I heard one chime. But of one thing I was sure—that I was quite safe, and being carefully watched, so the lids closed over my eyes, and I slept again.

CAPTAIN EDWARDES' NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER VII.

‘WE had better,’ said Althaus, ‘as I told you last night, be at his house at noon exactly. I rather think he suspects there is trouble about for him, but has no idea of what it is or who we are. Did you notice the garden doors last night?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you anything that would force open the carriage gates or the wicket?’

I smiled. ‘I have got the very thing from the ostler;’ and I showed him a small crowbar which you could carry in the pocket of a shooting coat. It was of stout iron and about a foot and a quarter in length, as thick

as an ash walking-stick, and in every respect a most formidable weapon.

‘That,’ said I, looking at it almost with affection, ‘will wrench any ordinary door off its hinges, or force open any ordinary obstacle as easily as a pickaxe will pull up a paving stone.’

‘Very well,’ replied Althaus, ‘that is all we want. We have only to get face to face with him. And, my dear fellow, once again, no violence. Leave his punishment to God.’

I wrung my old friend by the hand, and we said no more of what was to be done that day until we found ourselves upon the scene of action, and standing in front of the gates that led into the road.

From noon to one in a Kent village is the dulllest hour in the day. During those sixty minutes the rustics dine. They leave off work at the stroke of twelve with ideas before them of such flesh-pots as their imagination can comprehend. At about five

minutes to one they are draining the last drops of ale out of their pots and flagons, and wiping their mouths with the backs of their hands. The only person during that hour who has his wits about him is the beer-shop keeper, whose mind is intent upon the back of his door and his piece of chalk. We were therefore entirely alone and unnoticed.

There was a great hanging bell with a chain.

‘Pull,’ said the professor.

I did so. We did not even hear a dog bark. But the bell clanged noisily, and up above the wall and out of the trees that hid the house rose a noisy chattering flock of birds, evidently unaccustomed to the sound.

‘I now begin to think,’ said Althaus, ‘that he knows who we are and why we are here. We will give him two minutes by your watch, and will then burst his doors.’

For two minutes we waited.

‘One more ring,’ said Althaus; ‘give him

a chance, although he must have heard the last.'

I rang again, and we waited another two minutes. It was now exactly six minutes past twelve. I looked at the professor, and he nodded. I put the little crowbar between the lock of the latchet and the body of the gate. I gave one short wrench, and the gate flew open before us.

We passed through it, closed it behind us, and found ourselves on a semicircular gravel walk running round the lawn. In the centre of the sweep was the house which I had heard Lucy describe.

We walked briskly up to the door. As we approached it opened, and we saw standing in the doorway the old man of whom we had so often talked. He looked steadily enough at me, and as if by lifting his hand he could strike me to the ground. Of me he evidently had no fear. But when his features fell on Althaus he suddenly became

confused and nervous, and apparently full of terror.

‘You know why we are here?’ asked Althaus in measured tones.

‘I do.’

‘You know what we want?’

‘I do.’

‘What is your decision?’

‘It shall be as you wish. I swear it. Now leave me. You terrify me.’

‘If you attempt to deceive me,’ said Althaus, ‘you will pay dearly for it. Now come into the house.’

The old man tremblingly obeyed. ‘What do you wish me to do first?’ he asked.

‘We have come,’ said Althaus firmly, ‘for a piece of writing on vellum which you have.’

‘A piece of writing on vellum?’

‘You know perfectly well the one I mean,’ thundered Althaus. ‘It is signed “Lucy Smith.”’

The old man tremblingly thrust his withered hand into the recesses of his long robe, and handed Althaus what seemed like a piece of parchment.

My friend took it from him and looked at it; then rolled it up and thrust it into his own bosom.

‘Is there more you would have of me?’ asked the old magician in a hollow voice.

‘Yes,’ said Althaus, looking at him with a glance of intense scorn. ‘Make your peace with God while you have yet time; and may He forgive you some portion of the evil to which your accursed life has been given. Down on your knees, dog! Down, and humble yourself for the mercy you have never shown! Your life is spared this time; but as there is a God in heaven, if ever you attempt anything of this kind again—and I shall know of it, you dog, if you do—I will kill you as I would a reptile. You don’t doubt my power to make my words good?’

‘I recognise your power,’ answered the old man submissively.

‘And I shall exercise it if necessary,’ said Althaus. ‘Nothing shall persuade me to spare you if you put to a bad use the reprieve I have given you.—And now, Edwardes, let us depart. This den is stifling. The very atmosphere that wretch breathes is full of contagion.’

We turned to go, when suddenly Althaus appeared to recollect something.

‘Come here,’ he said to the magician.

The old man obeyed, and tottered across the room. Althaus seized his left hand, and dragging him towards him, whispered something in his ear.

What the professor said I know not, nor did I ever inquire; but it must have been of strange and serious import, for on hearing it the old magician uttered a fearful cry—a cry so shrill and so piercing that it rang in

my ears for days afterwards—and fell down in a fit or faint, and lay motionless.

‘He is dead!’ I cried.

‘Not he,’ replied Althaus, feeling his pulse. ‘He’ll come to, presently. Poor fool, to attempt to dabble in arts like these. I think I somewhat astonished him. You may sleep contentedly to-night, my dear Edwardes, our dear Miss Lucy will never be troubled again.’

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE we had made, as sailors term it, three or four hundred yards, I felt extremely ill.

‘What is the matter, Edwardes?’ asked Althaus. ‘I see you stagger. Stop!’

He put his hand to his breast and produced a small vial of heavily cut white glass. As he took out the stopper the air seemed to become filled at once with the scent of cloves. He dropped three drops of the contents of this bottle into the palm of his left hand, touched their surface with the little finger of his right hand, and motioned to me to open my mouth.

I did so, and felt a something fluid touch

my tongue. Then, for a moment, there was a blaze, as if light were flashed before my eyes. Then I found myself standing erect, with all my natural sense of life and muscular power restored. Althaus looked at me with earnest eyes. 'It is,' said he, 'the nearest approach we have, though far off indeed, but still the nearest, to the elixir of life. Have you your strength again?'

My answer was to lift myself to my full height and look him in the face.

'Good,' answered he. 'And now let us hasten back to Dieppe.'

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We paid our bill at the hotel, packed hurriedly, and caught the next London train. Arrived at Charing Cross, we had exactly time to dash to Victoria, where we secured a carriage to ourselves. I may fairly own, and I am not ashamed of it, that my nerves for the time were thoroughly shattered. There was a buzzing in my ears, my pulse beat

irregularly, and the scenes we had gone through kept rising up again as vividly before my mind as if they were being re-enacted.

I did all I could to steady myself, but my efforts were far from being successful.

Althaus himself was as completely unmoved as if he had just concluded some small business bargain, or got rid of some troublesome little matter which had been standing over longer than he had intended. He had armed himself with a big bottle of light Rhine wine, a pound or so of mild tobacco, and a meerschaum bowl at the end of a long cherry stem. He now smoked and drank with the solemn deliberation of a machine which has wound itself up to do less than its accustomed work in its accustomed time.

I somehow guessed that the professor did not wish to talk, so I held my peace—resolved, however, one day that he should explain everything to me, in so far as I could understand it.

When the journey from Newhaven to Dieppe was about half over, the dear old man laid down his pipe and opened his lips.

‘Son of Sheitan!’ he said, in a tone of intense satisfaction, ‘and yet the brute was bold. At least not bold so much as reckless, to have thus dabbled with magic. I wonder his familiars did not stand better by him. He must have somehow neglected or offended them. That, however’—and here he laughed grimly—‘is his own matter. Tell me, Edwardes, do you recollect everything that has happened since we started together on this joint excursion into the land of the devils?’

‘Everything,’ I answered.

‘Do you think you shall forget it?’

‘Never.’

‘Do you wish to remember it?’

‘Certainly. It is wonderful.’

‘Very good then, my dear young friend, you and I must have some talk to-morrow morning—not on board this beastly rolling

boat, but when we get back to the hotel. And now I am an old man, and I am feeble. *Ach!* the days are coming when I shall be imbecile, and my attendants will have to pacify me with sugar-plums as if I were a baby that knows not its letters. Wake me, my young friend, at the pier. Slap me on the back in your English fashion. Chide me, and say, "Get up, old sleepy-head." *Ach!* that old carrion! Well, my dear Edwardes, there is an Anglo-Saxon proverb, "If you would take supper with the devil you must have a long spoon." His spoon was not long enough; that is all.' And in a few minutes the professor was snoring like a sailor turned in from the second dog-watch.

LUCY SMITH'S NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME hours passed. It may have been a day, or a couple of days. I cannot tell. Dr. Althaus had ordered me to take no account of time, to be sure that all was going well, and to wait their return in confidence.

I had strictly acted upon his advice, or rather orders. I knew that Arthur had the fullest confidence in him, and had known of him for years. So really—strange as it may seem—I should have had to make inquiries to find out how long Arthur and he had been away. I had roamed about the town, sat at the Casino, bought fruit, and otherwise killed time. And I ought to add that I had

felt a distinct confidence coming over me that all was well, that they would very soon be with me again, that they would bring good news, and that, to put things briefly, we should have a good time of it as soon as we were once again all together.

It was in this frame of mind that I returned to the hotel, to be informed by the *concierge* at the door that a lady had been to see me.

‘What sort of lady?’

Indeed, the *concierge* could not say. She could not even say if the lady were young or old, for she had a thick veil of black Brussels lace—oh! most magnificent lace—which she kept down. But the lady had asked for me.

‘Where is she?’ said I.

She had made some inquiries about me, which the *concierge* had answered, seeing her to be a friend of mine. She had wanted to know when I came in, and when I went

out, and with whom I was staying. Oh, that the lady was a lady of the most elegant, a lady of the Faubourg St. Germain, the *concierge* should opine, although, as it happened, she was not followed on this particular occasion by her man-servant.

I was puzzled and uneasy. In the first place, I had never in my life known any one in Paris, or even in France. That alone made the thing strange. In the second place, I had certainly never known nor been known to any such leader of society as the *concierge* described. And then I reflected again whether she could be mistaken in her estimate of my visitor. This, of course, complicated the matter still more. For hotel porters in France, and, as I have since ascertained, in the United States, and with them almost all the other employés of the hotel, gain after a year or two's service an instinctive knowledge of human nature that is something marvellous. They, as I have

heard Arthur say, can at once detect a duke in a travel-stained suit of tweed, and a faro-mounter dressed, if such a thing were possible, by Poole himself. They know their company.

‘Did she say anything more?’ I asked.

‘She inquired at what hour she could see mademoiselle to-morrow, and I replied probably at half-past ten; and she said she would call.’

‘But she left no name, or card, or letter?’

‘None whatever. Absolutely none.’

‘Good. I am not sure at all that I shall see her, but let me know when she comes, and bring up her name or her card, and, if possible, ascertain her business.’

‘It shall be done, mademoiselle, as mademoiselle desires.’

I could see that my treatment of this incident had produced a bad impression on the mind of the *concierge*. I, a mere girl,

with next to no luggage at all, and certainly without a maid, and coming in the company and under the care of a young gentleman, whose relations with me were simple enough on the face of it, but certainly admitting of more interpretations than one, was giving myself airs as great as if I had belonged to the court of the Empire in its most brilliant days. Had I seen the lady I should doubtless have been *écrasée*. Could anything be more *gauche*, more stolid, more nearly barbarian, when I had had of the lady herself, from those who had seen her with their own eyes, and had had the honour of conversing with her (and of receiving a napoleon from her), accounts the most assuring, but as truthful as the Holy Mass itself?

So when I went to sleep that night my conduct in the hotel was no doubt freely discussed, and a highly adverse verdict taken upon it; for your French, in a great way or a small, put everything to the *plébiscite*,

even if they be only three farm labourers discussing the chances of the wine crop and the probabilities of the reappearance of that punishment for sin and infidelity, the phylloxera.

However, the 'grande dame' of the *concierge* was soon dismissed from my mind. There must be some mistake about it. Smith is so common a name. I might be any Miss Smith. At all events, I would see her next morning if I felt disposed. If not, I could plead headache or some other excuse. Perhaps, after all, she was only an agent or tout from some man-milliner, or perfumer, or *modiste*, which would account for the solicitude shown in her behalf by the *concierge*. Why need I trouble myself.

I woke next morning early and feeling stronger than ever. I was beginning to learn something of French habits. I had a cup of coffee with some milk and a pistol. Then I dressed myself and ordered

an open *fiacre*. I was happy because I knew that Arthur would return as soon as possible, and that meantime I had nothing to fear or to trouble me. So I drove along the *plage*, and had the thorough benefit of what I shall always think is the most glorious air in the whole Channel—certainly far finer than that of Eastbourne, as I had often heard Mr. Bulbrooke declare, making the concession graciously, as one who can afford to be magnanimous and yield a point or two to the nation we beat at Waterloo.

I returned to the hotel at about half-past ten, and had just taken off my bonnet and jacket when the chambermaid came and told me that the lady awaited me in the *salon*.

I opened the folding-doors, passed through them, and to my utter horror found myself face to face with Mrs. Jackson—not Mrs. Jackson as I had always before seen her, but Mrs. Jackson brilliantly dressed in

the first style of Parisian fashion ; Mrs. Jackson trembling with excitement, and with a fierce wild light in her eyes ; Mrs. Jackson looking terrible with concentrated rage and hatred.

CHAPTER X.

ALTHOUGH I knew nothing at this moment of all that had happened, I was yet not so terrified as I might have been. I was sure the visit meant me no good, but I made up my mind to have the matter out.

The table was between the two of us. I screwed up my courage, looked Mrs. Jackson full in the face, and said, 'Sit down.'

'I shall not.'

It was difficult to answer this, but at last I did so.

'Then you may stand where you are. Now what is your business, sorceress?'

'I have come to know why you have not

been keeping your bargain, why you have not been doing your duty, why you are living here luxuriously on money paid you for a purpose which is definite, and which you understand as well as I do, and why you yet refuse to honestly do your duty in a simple matter.'

Looking back now, I almost wonder that I did not laugh at her accusing me of want of honesty in not fulfilling the filthy bargain into which, in most utter ignorance of its vile character, I had been entrapped.

'I shall decline to answer any of your questions, liar, thief, and witch! So you need ask me no more. And now there is the door by you; you had better go back to those who sent you.'

'I shall not go back. I shall stop with you until you have submitted yourself, and have signed a second document that I have brought with me for that purpose. The first was gentle. We meant kindly by you,

and would have treated you well if you had been straightforward with us. You would soon have found yourself practically free. Some one else would have been selected to fill your place, and your income would have continued for your life. As it is, you have chosen to provoke us, and now that I am here you defy us. We can punish as certainly as we can reward, and when we punish we do so after deliberation and without mercy. I am in no hurry, and I tell you frankly that I intend to wait here for your answer, and to have it from you in writing.

‘Now I know the exact position of these apartments. If you attempt to retreat into your bedroom I will follow you. If you attempt to ring the bell in this room you notice that you will have to pass me, and I warn you fairly that you will not pass me alive. I will strangle you.’

I looked at her in amazement, and saw

to my surprise what I had not noticed before, that in spite of her age she was as lissom and muscular as a tiger-cat, and that her threat to strangle me was one which she would have been perfectly well able to carry out, and which I might take as seriously meant.

‘You will not be the first troublesome girl I have had to silence ; but,’ she added contemptuously, ‘I think you will be about the weakest. When I have strangled you I shall put you on your bed. Then I shall lock the bedroom door on this side, and put the key in my pocket. Then I shall walk down the stairs and leave orders at the bureau that you want some strong tea in two hours’ time. I shall do this very politely. When I am once in the street my escape would be a matter of certainty, even if I had only the ordinary stupid powers of humanity to help me. So you see I have nothing to fear, and you have everything.

Now sit there and consider. I will wait. Oh, you bread-and-butter English school-girl !' This was spoken with personal hatred. 'I have always wondered what he can ever have seen in you, with your big splay feet, and your red hands, and your great stupid sheep's face, and your bleat of a voice. Now consider.'

I sat, and I did consider. But I did not consider the matter from the point of view she had ordered me. I wondered how I could get out of the room. That idea, after a couple of minutes, I abandoned as wholly impossible. I reflected if there was any means whatever by which I could summon assistance. That, too, was hopeless. I was as helpless as a mouse in a trap. The only thing to do was to attempt to gain time in the chance of a waiter or a chambermaid coming without being summoned.

'You ask me to decide a very great matter,' I said. 'It is the whole of my life.'

‘The more necessary that you should decide it at once, and not waste time over it, as you are clearly doing and intend to do. If your time is not of value—and I dare say it is not, either to yourself or any one else—my time is of value to me. Do not stir from the chair in which you are. I will keep my eyes on the clock, and if I have not your answer to the minute I shall be as good as my word. And remember again, if you attempt to summon help I will strangle you.’

I think about ten minutes had passed when I heard, as did she, a heavy step coming along the passage. In a second she was behind me, and a light shawl or something of the sort, that felt like muslin, was round my neck and twisted at the back of my head.

‘If you open your mouth,’ she whispered, ‘I will strangle you on the spot.’

She could have fulfilled her threat easily.

The muslin, or whatever it was, was twisted round my neck as I have since heard they twist a bowstring in the East—the method is believed to have been invented or discovered by the Thugs. It is absolutely certain ; there is no escape from it, any more than there is for a mustang fairly lassoed.

The steps died away in the distance and did not return. Then she removed the shawl from my neck.

‘I will be just to you,’ she said. ‘I am really in a way sorry for you, although it is more than you deserve. Two minutes have been wasted by the clock, and you must have been a little upset. Perhaps, however, you are now convinced I am in earnest, so I can afford to be generous with you. I will give you another full quarter of an hour over the time I mentioned. Do not stare at me in that childlike way. If you look at me you will think of me, which will do you no good. It is the future you have to think of.’

I could think of nothing. I was getting dazed and silly, and there was a ringing in my ears, and the moment I tried to look at any object fixedly the room began to whirl round and round.

And now I wish to say one thing more—a very serious thing—and to say it as shortly as possible and with all reverence. I tried to pray for help. Somehow or other I could not form a prayer. I could not even remember the Lord's Prayer, which I had known by heart long before I could read. I tried again and again to remember it. I could not recollect even its first two words.

The ringing in my ears had continued, but it had now become an immense booming, like that of some great cathedral bell. Strange lights and fires flashed before my eyes. I could see nothing but these coruscations, hear nothing but the boom of the bell.

Then suddenly I heard a terrible crash,

which seemed to rouse me to my senses. The door was open. Arthur and Professor Althaus were in the room, and two or three other men with them. Then I felt Arthur's arms round me, and he carried me into the bedroom and laid me on the bed. And after that I was just aware that my face and hands were being sponged with eau de Cologne, and that I was being fanned. And then I remember nothing more.

CAPTAIN EDWARDES' NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER XI.

WE landed at Dieppe, giving orders for our small supply of luggage to be taken up to the hotel. Althaus took me by the arm. 'It is all right,' said he. 'Trouble not your mind. Miss Smith is alive and well, and no doubt expects us. But I think'—and here the old man looked curiously at me—'there is still a little more work to be done.'

'What can it possibly be?' I asked impatiently. 'For Heaven's sake do not mystify me, Professor Althaus! I have had enough of mystification.'

'I do not wish to mystify you, my son.

I would speak certainly if I knew certainly. I am only guessing. But let us hurry.'

In three or four minutes we were on the steps of the hotel.

'Is Miss Smith in?' I asked.

'Oh yes, sir; and a lady is with her.'

Althaus looked at me.

'What sort of lady?' I continued.

'An old lady, sir, very handsomely dressed. She came in her own carriage.'

Althaus and I exchanged glances. I did not wait for him, but tore up the stairs, he following at the best of his speed.

I tried the door, found it open, and dashed into the room. In a chair at the further end of the table was seated Lucy, apparently in a swoon or fit, for her head had fallen forward on her chest. Standing near the door and watching her from across the room was the old woman I had so often heard her describe. I recognised the hag at once.

She turned round on me with an angry

gleam in her eyes concentrated of every evil passion. It is idle, of course, to say that I felt no fear, but it was certainly not for myself. I seized her right wrist in my right hand and twisted the arm round mercilessly. She had to fall upon her knees, or the arm must inevitably have been dislocated at both shoulder and elbow. There she was groveling before me on the carpet, unable to move a quarter of an inch. She just essayed a slight struggle, and I gave the arm only the portion of an extra turn. She uttered a shriek of pain, and then remained motionless.

Having thus secured my prisoner in so firm a grip that I had no occasion to even cast an eye on her, I turned to look at Lucy. Althaus had lifted her on to the couch, and, with a promptitude really commendable for so aged a bachelor, had cut her dress bodily open with his pocket-knife, giving the lungs and heart free play.

He was now standing by her head with

his hand on her pulse, and he nodded to me cheerfully. In another second the room was full of maid-servants, and among them a waiter or two.

‘Hold this woman,’ I roared to a stout porter. ‘I charge her with attempt to assassinate and robbery.’

‘Bien, m’sieu.’ He was a giant, and an Alsatian, whose principal duty it was to carry the heavy baggage.

Then I went towards Lucy and Althaus. ‘She has been dreadfully frightened,’ said the professor, ‘but that is all. I know the symptoms perfectly. They are those of collapse from terror.—Here, you mademoiselle, take Miss Smith and undress her gently. If her clothes give you any trouble, take the scissors and cut them off as you see I have done. Put her into bed. The most responsible of you sit by her, and let another be within call.’

I myself carried her to the bed, and

the women with most implicit obedience flocked into the bedroom and closed the door behind them. Then Althaus came and stood by me, and for a second or two we looked in curiosity at the reptile coiled and twisted on the floor. The Alsatian said nothing. Alsatians are, as compared with other Frenchmen, a taciturn race. But he was evidently amused. If his thoughts could have been formulated, they would certainly have been in colloquial English, 'Here's Queer Street of some sort.'

Althaus rang the bell sharply. Three chambermaids appeared at once, as if they had sprung up out of the earth. There was a mystery evidently: the whole hotel knew as much, and the spirit of Eve was all abroad.

'One of you send for a *sergent de ville*,' said the professor. 'One of you will be enough for that affair; and send at once, or I shall report you at the bureau.'

The women tossed their heads indignantly and left the room. Then Althaus shut the door, and sat down near it so as to command it.

‘Keep your hold on her,’ he said to the giant, ‘but do not hurt her unless she struggles.’

The giant grinned and nodded. The old woman darted at both of us a viperine flash of her eye.

In a very few seconds there arrived the hotel proprietor in a state of immense excitement, followed by a couple of *sergents de ville*. The landlord wanted to know what all this disturbance was about in the oldest hotel in Dieppe—an hotel which since its foundation had been patronised by the illustrious House of Orleans, whose names were all in its books. We English seemed to think we could do as we pleased. He would show us English if we turned an hotel upside down we should have to pay for it. Why were

we treating a respectable lady, evidently a lady of distinction, in this outrageous manner?

‘You shall know, my brave,’ said Althaus calmly, ‘if you will wait to be told instead of chattering like an old washerwoman at her tub; and if you want it your bill shall be paid in your own money, and we will go in an hour, so hold your tongue. Sergeant’—and here Althaus came by me and laid his finger on my arm, although no one saw him do so—‘I and my friend here, Monsieur Edwards, an English gentleman, whose yacht, the “Carlotta,” is lying in the harbour, charge this woman here’—the old woman here shifted and turned a curious eye upon him—‘first with attempting to obtain money and jewels by menaces, having no legal claim to the same; secondly, with attempted violence to a young lady now lying in that bedroom helpless with terror; thirdly, with being an escaped or released *forçat*, whose *dossier* I have no doubt I can produce.’

The senior *sergent de ville* assumed a grave air; the junior stood at military attention, waiting upon events.

‘Will the two messieurs come round with me to the bureau and make a written statement?’

‘Certainly,’ said Althaus; ‘and if it is thought proper at the bureau we are quite willing that the English consul should be sent for. But there is the yacht belonging to Monsieur Edwardes in the harbour, and we are quite ready that she should be detained, or that the authorities should take any proceedings that may please them.’

The *sergent* was evidently puzzled. We might be telling him the truth or we might be bouncing him. He stared at us, bit his moustache, and said it was an affair very serious.

‘It is, *Monsieur le Sergent*,’ answered Althaus, ‘and that is why my friend and

myself wish every formality to be observed. May we now come with you ?'

The *sergent* had no objection, but we must first prefer our charge against the old lady.

Round to the *Bureau de Police* we went. I can speak French as well as most men who spend a month or two in France each year. Althaus spoke it with the precision of a scientific book, and of course with a broad German accent.

I began to think, after about an hour and three quarters, that the formalities at that *Bureau de Police* would never have an end. Each and every official was as punctilious as a Garter King at Arms, and a smile which I suppressed was going to flit over my face as I thought of Toinette fencing with her master in the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme.'

The commissaire, having heard what Althaus had to say and what I had to say, asked me whether I accused madame of

attempt to assassinate, or of theft, or of attempted theft, or of all. Now, even in the army I had picked up enough law to know that when a slight charge will serve your purpose it is injudicious to prefer a grave one. You only arouse sympathy in favour of the prisoner. So I said that I charged her with attempting to obtain valuables by menaces ; that at present, until the lady whom she had frightened into fits could make a statement, I was not in a position to prefer any other charge, but that the charge I had mentioned I most distinctly preferred and would abide by.

It was well, said the commissaire. I must understand that I must give some security for my good faith in the matter. Did I know the British consul ?

I said I did not, but I was sure he would answer for me, and I should be glad if they would send for him at once.

This confident answer seemed greatly to

relieve the official mind. The commissaire considered. Then he gave his decision in most precise French, first asking me if I had the sum of fifty napoleons.

I answered that on board the yacht was more than five hundred pounds in English notes and gold—the ship's money-chest—the whole or any portion of which I would deposit as bail. If *Monsieur le Commissaire* would send down a *sergent de ville* with me, I could find the money at once, and we would return with it.

The commissaire opened his eyes. Five hundred francs, he said, in English money would be quite sufficient for the purposes of justice. I might go down with a *sergent* who would give me a receipt for the money, and I might then consider myself, together with my friend and the young *mademoiselle anglaise*, at perfect liberty.

I bowed to the commissaire, who bowed to me in return graciously enough,

and accompanied by the professor and a *sergent de ville*, I went down to the yacht, the old woman remaining in custody.

On board the yacht we opened the eyes of the *sergent* by two or three *petits verres* of a certain curious old cognac, and we found also that he did not object to about half a dozen cigars from a shop which I do not hesitate to say is the best in Bond Street. We then went to the locker, next the chart and instrument locker, and produced the yacht's money-chest, paying over the amount named in sovereigns, which happened to be fresh out of the Mint, and remember that police officers may possibly have families, and are certainly always in need of petty cash, their wages being small and their work arduous.

Having then handed over to us the receipt for our bail, the *sergent* scraped his left foot and flourished his cheese-cutter cap a good deal and departed; evidently with the im-

pression that if we were not lords in England, we ought to be, which perhaps made him wonder whether our political proclivities might not have given the Government of Lord Gladstone offence, and whether our yachting trip might not be a courteous kind of exile ; in which case he doubtless argued with himself that evening, over one of the cigars and a glass of absinthe at his favourite *estaminet*, it might be worth his while to communicate privately with the chief of the central bureau at Great Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER XII.

ALTHAUS and I then went back to the hotel. The doctor in attendance had left a letter for the professor, which he read. 'The report,' says Althaus, 'is highly favourable. He says that the crisis is over, that there will be three or four days of equilibrium, and that these will be followed by an astonishingly rapid recovery ; and he has given her the very medicine which of all others he ought to have prescribed.'

'What is that?' I asked out of curiosity.

'Musk,' said Althaus.

'Musk !' I replied, 'why, it is a scent.'

'So it is,' said Althaus, 'and a pretty potent scent too. But it is twenty times

more potent as a drug than as a scent, and it acts directly upon the nervous centres.'

'Well,' I said, 'I am glad you approve of his treatment.'

'My dear boy, French surgeons and physicians, or even foreigners who have studied in French schools, have not their equals upon an average in Europe.'

'And how do you account for that?'

'I should have to deliver myself of a lecture. But one great thing beyond all question is the universal practice of vivisection. And now let us talk no more shop. I will go upstairs and look round, and come back and report results.'

He came back and reported results. Lucy was asleep: there was no fever, and her pulse was regular and not at all weak. In ten days at the very latest she would be fit to set to sea in the yacht, or, indeed, to do anything.

'That is all, my friend,' he said. 'I am

glad to tell you so much in so few words; and I can tell you no more, except that I am informed that she has asked after both of us repeatedly, and, on being assured that we are well, has—so says the *femme de chambre*—smiled very graciously and observed that it is well.'

We passed out of the hotel into the great market-place. Then we roamed towards the Casino. My mind was at ease; that of Althaus was in its regular and normal condition—ready and steady.

At the Casino we played billiards. The professor was not a man who despised the lighter side of life at all, and he would as soon play a game of billiards for an hour as read the latest scientific treatise on some hitherto undiscovered microbe or as yet untried drug; and he played billiards remarkably well. I know that I enjoyed the game, and that I had to play my level best to win.

The billiards over, he said, 'Let us walk ;' and I turned out with him on to the *plage*.

'The human brain,' said the professor meditatively, '(and, indeed, any brain anywhere near it in its organisation,) is the most marvellous mechanism known. To account for it without design is almost impossible. But to grant design, of course, is to grant everything. Grant design in the brain, you must grant it everywhere else. And then—*ach !* ridiculous !—there is an end of science, and we are delivered over to the priests bound hand and foot. I have studied the brain more or less all my life, and the more I study it the more I marvel, and the less I find myself able to understand. Let me tell you some things.'

Of course I acquiesced, and I shall now allow Althaus to continue without interposing my own *obiter dicta* of wonder and requests for further explanation.

'A Prussian officer,' said Althaus, 'is

thrown from his horse and fractures his skull. They trepan him and put in a large silver plate, making a beautiful operation of it. When he recovers he remembers all his science—everything he has ever been taught. He remembers his mathematics, his languages—which were numerous, for he was an accomplished man and in the Staff Corps. He remembers even the minutest detail of military drill and discipline. But he has forgotten his own name; he has forgotten where he was born, whether his father and mother are alive, whether he has brothers and sisters, what was his regiment, who was its colonel, and even what is his nationality—the last thing in the world one would think a Prussian likely to forget. All these things have slowly, gradually, and with great difficulty to be brought back to him.

‘This looks distinctly as if the scientific or purely intellectual brain were one, and the practical or ordinary brain of daily life

entirely another. And yet we know that in many cases, as in that of an engineer or a surgeon, they act in unison and are apparently identical.

‘Let me take another instance. A married lady, still in the prime of life and perfectly healthy, sustains a very sudden and severe shock. She is told without any warning, or attempt to even break the matter, that her brother, an officer in the English army, has been hacked to pieces by the Afghans. She faints, and lies for many days unconscious. When she recovers, I will not say her senses, but herself, she is sane and insane for alternate periods of twenty-eight days, varying exactly with the mutations of the moon, so that her friends can tell to the hour at what period it will be necessary to put her under restraint. I am no astrologer, but that the moon has an influence on all animated life in this globe is a fact for schoolboys. Ask any old lady who has the

quartan ague, or an old gentleman who has the gout. A more familiar instance I need not mention.

‘These are what Bacon would call *instantiæ lampadis*. They hold out a great torch to us. But as yet we only understand them imperfectly. And now,’ said the professor, ‘I am thirsty. My soul is in my stomach, and it craves greedily for a large bock of lager. The old man is rendered powerless. May the worms have his carcass, and all the devils what may be left of his cancerous soul! As for the old woman, the authorities will deal with her. Violence, attempt at assassination. No explanation or assignable motive. She will go to *travaux forcés à perpétuité*. Not all her little stock of skill will get her out of it. And now, my son, we have talked enough, or, at least, I have talked enough. Our patient could not be doing better. Let us for our part enjoy ourselves. The body needs sleep, we know ;

the brain, which does the work of the body or supplies the motive power for that work, and does its own work as well, requires twice as much sleep as does the body. Let us allow our brains to doze, or let us, as you English put it, believing yourselves to be the only industrious people on the face of the earth—let us be idle for a bit. Come, you shall teach me to play poker.’

‘I cannot play poker myself,’ I answered, with a most truthful laugh.

‘*Quel dommage!* And I have been burning to learn poker for some months past. Well, we will play piquet.’

And we did play piquet, at which I found myself a baby in the professor’s hands.

‘People talk of whist,’ he said ; ‘it is not a bad game. But piquet has less chance in it than any game at cards whatever. If two men play at it habitually, you will, after a week or two, be able to predict within five at least how many games out of the next

hundred the best player will win. But,' he added, dropping his voice, 'that presumes that they are gentlemen, and play fairly. And it is very seldom indeed you find a Frenchman who does not take advantage of you at cards, exactly as you will never find an Englishman on the turf who will not try to persuade you to take less or to give more than the market odds. I know you do not gamble, my dear young friend. Don't begin.'

'I'm not likely to begin,' I said, with a laugh. 'I don't care for it. But I like a stray bet now and again on a particular event.'

'Good,' grinned Althaus. 'That does you no harm. It is not the getting drunk now and again that hardens a man's liver and softens his brain. It is the steady soaking from morning to night every day of the week. Your men who kill themselves with drink are the men who are never seen drunk in their lives.'

‘I shall not kill myself with drink, professor.’

‘I think not. There are two deaths, for one of which a good man and a fearless should pray. One is to die peacefully and painlessly with his friends round him and in full possession of all his faculties—as Socrates died. The other is to die suddenly but also painlessly, as by some violent accident. Your English belief is that you should pray to be preserved from sudden death. Why, if your mind is clear and you do not want time to make up your accounts? And your mind *is* clear if it is clear to yourself. Your own conscience has been given you for your guide, and if you go to the conscience of another man you throw away the torch Heaven gave you to ask that other man for a flicker from his own, which is certainly no better than yours.’

CHAPTER XIII.

Two days later we attended before the tribunal in the Rue des Tribunaux. The matter was evidently, so far as I could make out, looked upon as one of considerable importance. In London there would have been a magistrate on the bench in ordinary morning dress, a clerk below him, and an usher. Here there were three judges in strange bonnets like Lancer shakos, with extraordinary robes and bands, and below them an official of the court—its *greffier*—similarly rigged out, but less gorgeously. Gendarmes and *sergents de ville* to any number completed the *entourage*.

First was heard the evidence of the surgeon as to Lucy's present condition.

Then I gave my account of what I had seen. Althaus followed. Then some of the servants at the hotel corroborated generally, and added a few minute details of their own. Then the old woman was interrogated by the court.

‘What is your name?’

‘Rebecca Jackson.’

‘What nationality?’

‘English.’

‘Married or single?’

‘A widow.’

‘What made you go to the hotel and ask to see Miss Smith?’

No answer.

The question was again repeated without an answer.

‘Do you decline to answer?’

‘Yes.’

‘The court takes that as presumptive of your guilt. Wicked woman! you were there with some evil purpose which you

dare not avow to the court, and you now defy justice in the person of the judges of the court.'

There was a silence for three or four minutes while the judges conferred. Althaus whispered quietly to me, 'They have some strong card up their sleeve.'

Then the president spoke. 'Were you convicted exactly eighteen years ago, by the Tribunal Correctional of the Seine, for carrying on an extensive traffic of a most infamous character in the abduction of young girls for exportation to Belgium, Holland, and England?'

'I deny it.'

'Do you deny it solemnly before this tribunal?'

'It was long ago.'

'Do you deny it?'

'It may have been.'

The president banged his desk. 'Do you deny it?'

‘No.’

‘Were you sentenced, as there were no extenuating circumstances, to seven years’ *travaux forcés*?’

‘I may have been.’

The president again referred to a paper before him. ‘Within two months after your liberation were you not sentenced again to seven years’ *travaux forcés* for a similar offence?’

‘You know, if you have the *dossier*,’ she answered fiercely, ‘and you would not believe me if I contradicted it.’

‘Good,’ said the president; ‘you are insulting the tribunal, which can afford to disregard your insults; but the tribunal is arriving at the truth. Did you after that leave France for the United States of America?’

‘I did.’

‘What did you do there?’

‘I shall not state.’

‘Did you follow any honest calling?’

‘I shall not state.’

‘Two years later were you keeping a *maison tolérée* in Brussels?’

‘I may have been.’

‘Had you by this time acquired money?’

‘I had enough upon which to live.’

‘Where did you next go to?’

‘To London.’

‘What did you do there?’

‘I lived in lodgings as a private woman—lived quietly and respectably.’

The president looked up and down the *dossier* two or three times, but asked no more questions. Then he finally conferred with his colleagues, and then said, ‘This tribunal finds that you have been guilty of a most grave assault. The tribunal is ignorant of your motive. The young lady assaulted is so seriously injured and disorganised as to be unable to attend, but the tribunal has evidence sufficient to enable it to deal with

you even in her absence. You have a character notoriously infamous. You have been many times before this convicted to the knowledge of the tribunal, and doubtless in many other times also, of which the tribunal has not cognizance. You decline to state anything that gives the tribunal any genuine information about yourself. The tribunal therefore assumes everything against you for the worst, for honest people have no reason to fear the tribunal, or to hide their doings from it. The tribunal finds that you have attempted to rob this young English lady. It finds also that you have attempted so to rob her with circumstances of brutal outrage. It finds also that in such attempt you were reckless, and in effect did not care whether you took her life or not. The tribunal sends you for trial before the Supreme Court of Assizes of the Seine Inférieure, which will sit next week. If you want money for your defence, it will be

allowed you out of such moneys as have been found among your own effects.'

The judges rose and left the court. Mrs. Jackson took no notice of them, but she gave Althaus and myself an ugly look as she was removed.

'It will be *travaux forcés à perpétuité* with her *dossier*,' said Althaus as soon as we were in the open air. '*Gott im Himmel!* what a tarantula!'

But—for I may as well get rid of the subject at once—the sentence was not *travaux forcés à perpétuité*, nor anything of the sort. The old woman was lodged that night in a secure cell. Next morning she was found dead. She had obviously died from strangulation, and yet there were no signs of violence. The good surgeon was puzzled. He opened her mouth to look at her throat. She had rolled her tongue up from the tip backwards and forced it into her throat as firmly as if it were wedged

there, and had so gone, strangled by her own fingers, to meet her last reckoning of all.

It was a relief to have got rid of the hag, and to know that there would be no more trouble with her. She and her accursed employer were altogether and finally out of our paths. All that was to be done now was to restore Lucy to health as soon as possible.

It was the end of September, and the cruising season was practically over ; so after dinner, when Althaus had lit his great china bowl of dry tobacco, and I my cigar, we took counsel.

‘ Whither shall we go, and what shall we do ? ’ I said.

‘ It will soon be too rough weather for your yacht,’ said the old man, who really knew something of everything. ‘ Besides, Miss Lucy will want rest rather than the excitement of voyaging. She has had a

most serious shock to her system, and must for some time be nursed, fondled, and otherwise treated like a child. Then, too, she is weak at present, and for many reasons the marriage must be deferred. My advice is that we lay the yacht up here in good charge and make our way straight to Paris. The French physicians are extremely clever, especially in the management of nervous cases, of which they have a very large supply and experience. We will go to Paris, and put up at one of the old-fashioned hotels in the Rue de Rivoli. As mademoiselle gains strength she shall be taken about, and shall thoroughly enjoy herself. Then, of course, you can get married at the Embassy, or at one of the Protestant churches. But the Embassy, I think, would please her; and recollect that, for some time to come, she must be pleased and amused as carefully as she must be nursed and fed. The only way to keep her mind from what has happened,

and to prevent her wandering back and dwelling upon what she has passed through, and to prevent also her confused recollection making things worse than they are, and so driving her into melancholy which might possibly be permanent, is to give her every day something new to do, and something new to think of.

‘When a financier or banker believes he is going to die—becomes hypochondriac, in point of fact—the best thing he can do is to dismiss both his doctor and his cook, and to send for a new cook at once. Gentle but constant change—not a turbulent change, but a pleasant, rippling, gurgling one—is what our patient wants, and you can give her that as well as any one. And I will not desert you until our patient is perfectly restored. There is no self-denial in this, for my old crucibles and my metals of the platinum, gold, and iridium group can very well wait till I

return. They will not catch lumbago or rheumatism.'

I assured my dear old friend how grateful I was to him, and we then had our evening game of billiards, and so parted for the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DAY or two afterwards I said to Althaus, 'My dear professor, we are lying here as idle as the yacht herself. There is nothing for us to do here, and there is nothing to be gained by stopping.'

'The minds of friends jump,' said Althaus, with a laugh, from behind his big china bowl. 'I was thinking the same thing myself, and was just about to speak to you on it.'

'Very well, then, let us leave here. The yacht can lay up in the harbour well enough, and you and I and Lucy will go away together, and not return here again till the sea is purple and the cuckoo has come.'

‘Well,’ said Althaus, ‘I thought you had made up your mind to take my advice and go to Paris. Why not start at once? I have not pressed you, because I thought you were loitering, but that your mind was really determined.’

‘You are right, professor, and I have been ungrateful and wrong. We will start for Paris to-morrow morning.’

‘Good,’ said Althaus. ‘Of course Miss Lucy comes with us?’

‘Of course.’

‘Then let us settle everything to-night, and retire to bed in marching order. The yacht will guard herself till our return, or until you send for her.’

‘Most certainly.’

‘You and I can pack to-night before we turn in.’

‘Most certainly, if we go upstairs sober.’

‘Good. It is now only four in the day. I will go and stretch my old legs and stroll

through the fish market, and see if I can discover any curious fish, or better still, any of those rare varieties that sometimes make their way up here from the Mediterranean. Do you know I have seen here in Dieppe and eaten here the sword-fish, the great sea-lamprey, and once or twice the fresh anchovy? Shade of Brillat Savarin! the fresh anchovy, daintily grilled over charcoal, and served *à la blanchaille anglaise*. Go, my son, see Miss Lucy and consult her as to our plans, see to your packing, and do as you please after that till we meet at dinner.'

I went up to see Lucy.

'Lucy,' I said, 'do you feel well enough to move from here to-morrow?'

'Certainly; I feel quite strong again. I did not like to tell either of you for fear Dr. Althaus might be angry, but for three or four days past I have been taking long walks.'

I started.

She laughed so light-heartedly that I had no longer any doubt as to her strength.

‘Have you really been out of the house?’ I inquired.

‘No, no, no. Do you think I would disobey dear Dr. Althaus? I have waited until you have both gone out, and then I have walked like a sentry up and down the long passage here, with a chambermaid seated at the top of the stairs to see that no one should surprise me. And after each walk I have felt, as she told me the Americans say, an inch or two taller ; and then I have gone back to bed like a good little schoolgirl—a much better little schoolgirl than any that was ever under my charge. And I have been eating, oh ! quite greedily. The landlady came up and told me that if I did not order what I liked myself, she herself was to make a guess at what would be likely to suit me, and was to send it up to me ; so I succumbed to the inevitable. And I have

been eating fruit, better than any that I ever had even at Mr. Bulbrooke's, except the hothouse grapes of his own growth. And besides the fruit, I have been having all kinds of what girls call goodies. So I am as strong as a giant, or giantess. I believe I could play a sett at lawn tennis to-morrow morning. I never was better in my life, darling. You see there's been the change of air, and the loving, tender nursing, oh ! and ever so many other things, and above all the getting rid for ever of those horrible dreams. You told me that I was rid of them for ever, and that my tormentors were powerless, and so did Dr. Althaus, but some day you must tell me how you did it—some long afternoon when we have nothing to do.'

'You shall be told everything before long,' I said. 'You shall be told every single thing very soon after we are married. There is, indeed, very little for me to tell you. How the horrible thing began and what it

was like you know already. You know too that the old man is powerless for evil, and that Mrs. Jackson is dead; so there is a clean sweep of the decks. And now you and I and Althaus are here together. First we will get married, and then—then—why, then we will just in a quiet, harmless, innocent manner, but still, for all that, the most resolute manner in the world, go on the Spree. Althaus is a German, and the navigation of the Spree is only one of his infinite accomplishments. But we must have business first and pleasure afterwards, and we are all three going to Paris that you and I may be married at the British Embassy. That is a dry bit of business that had better be settled out of hand.'

She shut her eyes and put her hands over her face, and I could see her chest heaving violently. What idiots we men are, except in matters of real physical danger, when a man, if he be worthy of the title, will turn on

the enemy as the boar of Calydon would have done ! Here was I utterly demoralised by a girl's crying, although there was really nothing in the world for her to cry about.

I waited and let her have her cry out. I did not see what else to do. I have read some novels, and of course I am aware that I could have 'strained her to my bosom,' that I could have 'rained kisses on her marble brow,' that I could have 'poured out' all kinds of 'impassioned vows,' in still more 'impassioned accents.' Let any man try any of these methods with a woman in a fit of crying, and let him see what the result will be. I will tell him in an old proverb which I had somehow heard when I was only a boy of four : 'Hold a guinea-pig up by its tail for five minutes by the church clock, and its eyes will drop out.' There is a mine of wisdom in that proverb. I sat and waited.

Presently Lucy stopped crying, and then I came and sat down close by her, put both

her hands together, and took them between both of mine.

‘Now look here, Lucy, my dear ; you must not excite yourself, or you will get weak, and the kind professor wants to have you strong as soon as possible. There is nothing whatever about which you need, as the Scotch say, “greet.” Our enemies are absolutely disposed of. You can never be harmed by them again. You have not another enemy in the world, as no one knows better than yourself. How I love you, you know also. Althaus looks on you as he might look, or rather would look, on a daughter, if he had one. He is a dear, noble old man, as staunch as steel, and as genuine as refined gold. If we were to come across the Bulbrookes, they would be delighted to see you. The two old sisters would welcome you, as you know, with tears of affection. Everybody who knows anything of you, darling, loves you and likes

you, and the first thing we will do, after our honeymoon, is to see the people who have been kind to you. I, as I have told you, have only one relation in the world who has chosen to quarrel with me, not without reason at all, but for reasons which do him infinite dishonour. So the whole coast is clear before us. We will spend this Christmas in New York, or somewhere where they keep up Christmas after the old fashion. But I think New York is the best of all, and we will then pass the first three months of the year in sunny Florida or in glorious Jamaica—for Jamaica is to the world what the Isle of Wight is to England; and then, dearest, you shall choose everything for yourself. What do you say?’

‘All I have got to say is that you are very kind and good to me. You are very strong, strong in every way; and I am very weak, weak in every way. You have saved my life. You have saved me from some-

thing much worse than death—from a living death on earth. I can only say I am very grateful to you. “Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”’

‘I have always approved of those sentiments,’ I said, ‘and I am glad you adopt them. And now, as a little change is always good, let us go and walk along the quay.’

So we went out and walked along the quay. It was still, of course, broad daylight. I pointed out to her the yacht lying a long distance off at the other side of the harbour. Then we looked at the vessels, and I told her a few things about their rig and tonnage, and so on.

Then we strolled back again, and were making our way to the hotel when we met Althaus, who said he had gone back to the hotel, and finding we were out had come in search of us.

‘I have taken the liberty,’ said he, ‘of fixing the time for dinner at seven o’clock. We thus avoid supper, which is always an unwholesome meal unless it follows upon excitement, such as a dance or the theatre, in which case it acts as an opiate and sedative. We will go to the Casino for half an hour.’

So to the Casino for half an hour we went, Althaus justifying his intrusion by the mild vermouth, and I mine by absinthe. Lucy watched me compound my absinthe with extreme curiosity. When I had finished it she said, ‘What is the effect of that extraordinary stuff? It is not any common sort of spirit or wine. It was quite clear, as clear as crystal, till you added to it water as clear as itself; then it turned milky; then it ran through all the colours of the opal, and then I noticed—indeed, could not help noticing—that it smelt horribly. I could almost believe it to be magical.’

‘It is almost magical, my dear child,’ I

answered ; ' it is a deadly poison. A large dose of it—not one of those little liqueur glasses, but an honest half-pint—would kill a man to a certainty. Its effect is on the heart. It stops the heart's action, and so lowers the pulse. Frenchmen drink it to cool themselves, and it will cool you most undoubtedly, much more rapidly and effectually than will any pastrycook's ice. But its habitual use to any extent has only one end. Luckily it is excessively nasty—that is, unless you choose to persuade yourself that you like it.'

I felt her trembling as she hung on my arm. ' Was it ever considered a magical drug, Arthur ? '

' No, dearest, not that I know of, but the professor can tell us. I believe it is a sort of cousin to the southernwood, which is an innocent enough little garden shrub with a delightful smell. But ask the professor.'

' It is,' said Althaus—and he meant business, for he put down his pipe and pushed

away his vermouth—‘a very curious and mischievous drug indeed—a drug like musk, which you have been taking, my dear, but which is not a drug to be trifled with. Its action, as Arthur has just said, is like that of hemlock, directly upon the heart. It lowers the heat of the heart instantly. If the dose is large, or if the patient is weak, it may stop the action of the heart altogether. An immediate death may be the result, as if by an electric shock. Those who take it habitually in small quantities first become lazy and indifferent to their affairs, then imbecile, and ultimately hopelessly paralytic.’

‘What is the explanation of all this?’ I asked.

‘There is no explanation,’ replied Althaus. ‘We only know that the facts are beyond dispute. Here in France, when a man takes to drinking absinthe regularly, his relations and friends give him up, and his business connections drop him, as they

would in England a man who took to openly drinking brandy at all hours of the day. That is all I can tell you.'

'It is horrible,' said Lucy, with a shudder.

'But,' said Althaus meditatively, as ignoring his pipe he motioned to me for one of the cheroots that I was that day smoking, 'there are funnier things than that about the stuff—things which are puzzles to me, and which I should like some day to work out.

'In the first place, as Miss Lucy has remarked, when you mix your perfectly colourless and transparent absinthe with your perfectly colourless and transparent water you get a dense result of milky white, as white as the whitest porcelain or native Parian. Then over and through this opaque white fluid begins to coruscate an aurora borealis, of every tint in the rainbow or in the fire-opal. Then these colours die out, and the entire solution becomes a dirty yellowish white, ugly to look at and un-

wholesome to swallow. Now the alchemists attached immense importance to colour, and in many respects they were not wholly wrong. For light is the source of all life and of all existence, save that of the dull rock or stone; and colour is the child of light. For things have no colour of their own, but take their colour from the light which falls upon them.'

'Things have no colour of their own, Althaus?' I asked.

'Certainly not. The light falls upon things, and as it recoils from them upon our eye it gives us the notion of colour. What is the true colour of the sea? You have looked at it often enough. You ought to know. Is it black, or dark purple, or green, or blue, or dirty yellow, or what? Come, veteran yachtsman, tell us. Old Homer called it wine-coloured or wine-eyed, and so avoided the difficulty. For what is the colour of generous wine as you toss it about

in its flagon?—black, or crimson, or red, or purple-blue? Name it, child. And that is why this absinthe has changed its hues in this way.' Here we rose to go back to the hotel.

We let Lucy pass in first and make her way upstairs. Althaus and I remained under the porch.

'You know,' said he, 'I believe in magic to a certain extent. I am a natural magician. As old Lucretius said nearly two thousand years ago, whenever men who are mostly fools come across a thing they cannot understand, they at once ascribe it to supernatural agency.

Quorum operum causas nulla ratione videre
Poesunt, et fieri divino numine censent.

'Now, I have never held in the *divinum numen* yet. It may or may not exist. If it exists, it is benevolent to those who are intelligent and walk humbly in its ways. "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall

be opened unto you." That has been my decalogue. Work for others and not for yourself, who are but a unit, has been my creed. And thus have I, my dear son, picked up things, while that old villain has been wasting his evil life. *Ach!* Love nature. Love all things that live. Harm nobody. Bear in mind that you must die, and that death may come at any minute, probably sooner than later, and in the form of a man of business who cannot wait. So, my friend, will you be happy. Happier still if those whom you love, love you in return. Where,' he called out savagely and angrily, 'is that dull Bavarian of a waiter who provides us with candles?'

CHAPTER XV.

WE made a most pleasant and happy trio, as befitted our last night together at Dieppe. Althaus ate snails—they were very fine snails, with the purple bands beautifully marked upon their shells—and lectured us learnedly on their history, telling us how they were brought in by the Romans, who were the best judges of eating and drinking in the world at their time, and who so esteemed the edible snail that they carried him with them wherever they planted a new colony.

Then he waxed eloquent in praise of crayfish *à la Bordelaise*, and amused us both immensely by pointing out that the lobster,

with its exquisitely clean and white flesh, never kills its own meal, but is a scavenger, a 'picker up of unconsidered trifles,' by no means cleanly or particular in its tastes.

It seemed—I speak with all reverence—as if we had somehow tapped the dear old man, and come upon a stream of culinary erudition hitherto unsuspected even by myself.

'And yet,' said he, 'after all I am a simple man. Give me a pickled herring and some rye bread, if the rye is not spurred, or a pork chop and some sauerkraut which you can smell all the street off, and I enjoy a banquet fit for Olympus.'

'Professor Althaus,' I replied, 'you are perverse. You know the old Socratic paradox, and of course believe in it, as I do. If you know that two and two make four, it is impossible for you to act on the practical assumption that they will come to five. If you pretend to act upon it you are only

playing a part, either out of fun, or for some evil purpose. You know that as well as I do.'

'There are a great many things, my dear Edwardes, which I do not know one quarter as well as you do. One of them, I see, is the "Memorabilia" of Xenophon, and another the "Dialogues" of Plato. Yes, I agree with the old hemlock-drinker—the first recorded martyr in the cause of scientific truth—that if you know what is right and act against your knowledge—if, as Protestants say, you sin against the light—you must do so wilfully; and that to sin wilfully against the light is in all human probability the sin of which we are told that it has no forgiveness either in this world or the next. But this is doctrinal theology, and a discussion of doctrinal theology at meals is forbidden even in Carmelite convents. There are some more of these dear snails still nestling among the vine leaves. Let me have them, my son. They

are nourishing and good for old age.' And the professor looked so portentously solemn that Lucy and I burst out laughing, until he too laid down the mask and joined us.

'Laughing,' said he, 'is a wonderfully good and wholesome exercise. It has a peculiar effect of its own upon the valves of the heart. And there is considerable truth in the saying that those live the longest who laugh the most often and the most heartily. But laugh at something worth laughing at. I have often wondered whether the story told by Buridanus is true or not. Any way, it is exquisitely funny.'

'What is it?' asked Lucy.

'Why, a countryman was going along the road, and he saw a donkey, evidently very hungry, going in front of him and in quest of provender. Presently the donkey came to a portion of the road where a gigantic thistle, a beautiful thistle, grew on the right-hand side of the road, and an

equally gigantic thistle, an equally beautiful thistle, exactly opposite on the left-hand side. Herr Donkey paused to consider which of the two thistles was finest and most succulent. On this question, by the conditions of the problem, he can come to no solution. Which thistle is he to choose? He pauses to make up his mind. But there is no reason why he should make up his asinine mind for the thistle on his left hand rather than for the thistle on his right, or for the thistle on his right hand rather than for the thistle on his left. So he stands unable to make up his mind. And the very reasons which made him so stand unable to decide have kept him standing there to this day, and will keep him standing there to the day of his death.'

The story was told by old Althaus so gravely and comically that Lucy broke into a ripple of laughter at once.

'You imagine,' said Althaus, 'that we

old men who study science, and always have our noses over the crucible and our fingers among the charcoal tongs, are dull dogs, morose and chilly. You are quite wrong. We are always face to face with Nature; and the more you see of Nature the more you become instinct with life. And the more life there is in you, the greater will be your powers of happiness and enjoyment, down to what are perhaps their crudest forms, such as fun and horse-play. *Ach, mein Gott!* and I am lecturing. Son of mine, forgive me, and pass me the Steinberg. This Steinberg,' continued the old man, looking lovingly through it at the light, 'is from grapes, each of which was selected by hand, and was without a flaw. Wonderful! And yet the trouble might easily have been spent upon worse objects.'

Althaus finished his Steinberg as if he were performing a religious or sacrificial duty, but I need hardly say with a full

cognizance of the irony of all that he had been saying. And then he lit his china bowl and I my cigar.

‘Half an hour of tobacco,’ said the professor, ‘will do Miss Lucy no harm if she abstains from coffee.’

Lucy replied that she did not want coffee, preferring the professor to all the coffee in the world. So we sat for half an hour and talked about nothing—about places to which we had been, and old recollections, and pictures and books which we liked or disliked as the case might be. And it occurred to me how delightful it would be next year for us to find ourselves all sitting together in the same way under my own verandah in England. Thinking of the past or speculating as to the future must tax the brain more than contemplating the present, for you will certainly find that either operation almost immediately makes you sleepy.

I felt this drowsiness coming over me, so

I somewhat unfairly and dictatorially packed Lucy off to her room, and then took Althaus' arm and went out with him into the street.

‘Althaus,’ I said, ‘the girl is well again—as well as you or I.’

‘Of course she is.’

‘Thanks to you entirely, Althaus.’

‘Thanks to her strong constitution, to the benevolence of Nature, and to the admirable nursing she has had.’

‘Well, I am too happy to-night to argue with you. Let us play one single game at billiards and then virtuously retire, that we may be in time for the Paris train to-morrow.’

So we went and played billiards, and I committed a pious fraud. We agreed to play a hundred up, and Althaus won. I managed it so cleverly that he believed in his victory and was fairly delighted.

‘You are love-engrossed,’ said he. ‘You are playing far below your form. I have

beaten you by twenty points, when you could easily have given me—ah, more than fifty!’

‘Queen Mab has been with me, Althaus,’ I said.

‘Oh, I have read your “Romeo and Juliet.” Well, well, let us go to bed, to journey happily and comfortably together to-morrow. Kirschwasser? Yes. There is prussic acid in it, and it steadies the nerves marvelously.’ The old professor’s eyes sparkled. Then as we reached the hotel he solemnly addressed the waiter.

‘Waiter, as you value your good character in this world and your happiness in the next, you will see that we do not miss the train to-morrow morning. Yours, waiter of mine heart, will be a laborious task. But verily the labourer shall find that he has been deemed worthy of his hire.’ And then he wrung my hand and trotted up to bed for the night. What a wonderful old man!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE waiter accomplished his task next morning with military precision and exactitude. We had all of us had our coffee and pistols, and were in the hall with our luggage carefully packed, and fit for transport to St. Petersburg if necessary, ten minutes before the agreed time. Lucy's step was firm and elastic, her eyes were bright, and the roses in her cheek were those of health and happiness.

Althaus was as radiant and full of life as a fourth form public schoolboy home for the midsummer holidays. He was scrupulously attired as a tourist, down even to so minute a detail as a gigantic field-glass slung over his

shoulder, and the stem of his china bowl thrust itself obtrusively out of his breast coat pocket. His hands he carried in his trousers pockets, and he kept on whistling snatches from the overture to 'Fra Diavolo.'

Again I say it, wonderful old man !

I do not want to dwell on the details of our journey. Lucy and I were married at Paris at the Embassy, as had been arranged ; and if the ceremony was rather civil than ecclesiastical in its general features, we did not regard it with any the less reverence on that account. Our quarters were in the Rue de Rivoli, at a comfortable old-fashioned hotel where Althaus was well known.

He had, it seems, some years before succeeded in curing the landlord thoroughly of a most obstinate quartan ague, the periodical returns of which had driven the poor man nearly mad with pain.

'*Ach !*' the professor said to me, 'how it does fossilise a man, how it does make a

pedant, a Diafoirus of the worst type of him, to bring him up in any school so exclusively that its formulæ become to him a sacred shibboleth ! Fifteen years ago but few people knew of the wonderful properties of the eucalyptus, the Australian blue gum tree—a tree as valuable to the world as the quinine plant or the opium poppy. Everybody laughed at it. I cured our good friend here of his ague with eucalyptus gum and decoction of eucalyptus leaves. That was some few years ago. Now every medical man knows when to use eucalyptus and how to use it, and they all use it freely. What humbugs many of them are ! My dear Edwardes ’—and here his voice dropped into an earnest tone—‘ each one of us ought to regard such little knowledge as he may have picked up as a sacred trust, to be used for the good of humanity without distinction of race, creed, or person. These pedants regard their miserable quantum of superficial information as a piece of private

property of their own, on which they are justified in making the highest possible percentage, so that, if possible, they may multiply it a thousandfold, and be wealthy, and live in a large house with a château in the country. Oh ! but it sickens me !'

We had no more scientific conversations in Paris, Althaus and I. But the three of us spent a most delightful seven days more there, and then made our way to England, and somewhat recklessly perhaps, not being crowned heads or plenipotentiaries extraordinary, took up our quarters at Claridge's, from which noted hostel as a base of operations Althaus had his first survey of London. He was evidently astonished, for he said next to nothing, which for him was always a strange sign.

He dined with me at my old club. We went, all three of course, to the principal theatres, to Lucy's intense enjoyment. One day when it was rather chilly I took the

professor to the Tower, and thought I should never get him out. Next day, however, I discovered a still greater reserve of obstinacy in him when, after considering what would interest him most, I marched him round to the Museum of the College of Surgeons, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he stood at least half an hour before the skeleton of the Irish giant.

Late in the year as it was, we managed to dine at Richmond, and also at Greenwich ; and the Botanical and Zoological Gardens transformed my dear friend into a very schoolboy with pure scientific delight.

'It is a noble country,' said he, 'a noble country, where science needs not subsidising from the State, but can thus magnificently support itself. I know, ah ! well do I know, the Jardin des Plantes and the Jardin d'Acclimatisation. But what are they to these ? Bah ! nothing.'

At Kew, where I managed through in-

terest to obtain permission for myself and a distinguished foreign *savant* to inspect the herbarium, and to visit parts of the gardens from which as an inflexible rule the public is excluded, the old man's delight knew literally no bounds.

‘Son of mine,’ said he, ‘this London of yours—with its British Museum, and its South Kensington Museum, and its Zoological Gardens, and its Botanical Gardens in the Regent’s Park, and its Botanical Gardens at Kew, and its Museum of the College of Surgeons, and its Christy Collection, and its admirable Geological Museum in what I think you call Jermyn Street, and its Patent Museum, besides that compact Museum of Sir John Soane in your fields of Lincoln’s Inn, has finer collections than any city in the world ; to say nothing of your King’s Library, or, as you all call it, your British Museum Library ; to say nothing of your absolutely unique collection of old weapons and armour

at the fortress of the Tower—ought to be the seat of the first university in Europe. And yet the London University is—*ach!*’ and he looked volumes in one glance—‘a body without a single professor of European note, and that does not even pretend to do more than to examine for degrees. It is shocking!’

We decided for the present to postpone our visit to the United States, and to settle somewhere in the country, and within a week I found the kind of place we were in search of. It was on the South-Western line, as nearly as might be midway between London and Southampton. Let me describe it.

It is a large, rambling, red brick house, with heavily mullioned windows and slate roof of the Tudor period. But with the exception of the grand oak staircase, and the oak panelling in the hall and reception rooms, it was gutted some fifteen years ago, and reconstructed with all the most approved

appliances known to sanitary science, from self-ventilating chimneys in the roof down to self-flushing drains under the floors.

The garden, which is large, bears everywhere the mark of age. Nothing but lapse of years, for instance, could give you turf so deep and velvety, or mulberry trees of such antiquity, hooped together with iron like Herne's oak in Windsor Forest, and yet bearing each year heavy crops of fruit. To the walls with a southern and an eastern aspect, covered with trained wall-fruit, there seems no end ; as also none to the forcing-houses, down even to an orchid-house of which a Chamberlain himself might not think unworthily.

I took it as it stood, stock, lock, and barrel, with the pigeons in their cote, the poultry in the yard, the cows in the shed, the ducks and geese on the pond in the long meadow, and even the goats which were doing nothing on a piece of waste ground at

the rear. However, they were Syrian goats, with silky wool, pendulous ears, and so perhaps entitled to be aristocratic and idle.

I took the horses too, but of them I got rid with promptitude, replacing them with others of my own selection. The pictures inside the house I had no wish to replace. They were all of them genuine, and some of them by famous masters. My favourites are three or four undoubted 'old Cromes,' which I am told will in a few years be worth five times what I have given for them. I shall not part with one of them for any money.

We have persuaded Althaus to remain with us. Lucy most ingenuously suggested the method. 'Have down a scientific builder, dear, from London. Do not let the dear professor know what he is here for, but let him at once make you plans for a chemical laboratory in its own piece of ground, with all the latest appliances in the

way of ventilation, furnaces, gas apparatus, and other things he has spoken about.'

I took the hint and did so, and when the architect had prepared his plans I persuaded that gentleman to remain with us under pretence of completing them.

One morning Althaus, having evidently girded himself up for the battle, announced very sternly and resolutely that he was going back to Strasburg in the first week of the following month, to complete his series of researches upon the platinum and iridium group.

'That is a great pity, Althaus,' I said, 'for in less than three months you will be so much better able to complete them here.'

Never before had I in my own person puzzled the old man. He stared at me in blank bewilderment. 'What on earth do you mean?' he asked.

'You have noticed some building going

on at the edge of the garden, between the garden and the big meadow?'

'Yes: what is it intended for? I thought it would be for some new greenhouse or hot-house, or something of the sort.'

'Althaus, Althaus! you do not even know the one thing you have been studying all your life. When one thrusts it close under your nose it is out of focus, and you are bewildered by it, although you would recognise it at once at a reasonable distance. Here are you, who have been watching the masons every day since they turned the first turf of the foundations, and yet you do not know for what that new building is intended.'

'*Ach! mein Gott im Himmel!* and I do not indeed,' grunted Althaus in the most dissatisfied of tones.

'It is a cottage for you,' said I, 'where you may spend as much time as you like, and make as many smells and explosions as

you please, if you will promise not to take up your abode in it altogether. Here are the plans and elevations. Let us come and see how they are getting on with their work.'

I handed the roll of papers to my friend, but he took it mechanically, not attempting to unroll them, and we walked in silence towards the works together.

As we came up I signalled to the men to stop work. They did so, and we walked round and round, and in and about in silence. Then Althaus burst out.

'*Himmel!* there is no such laboratory in Europe! There is the concrete floor where the furnace will be fitted, and there are all the fixtures for the still, so that I shall never be short of distilled water; and there is the sand-bath, and the acids and vapour cupboard; and I see now where the shelves and presses and everything will be, down to the smallest detail. Never was a laboratory so arranged. Why, twenty men accustomed

to their work could work in it together easily.'

'I do not think twenty men ever will work in it, my dear Althaus. It is your laboratory, and it will be ready for use, I am assured, by the end of next month. Those are the plans and elevations of it, which you can look over at your leisure. For myself, I have taken, or mean to take when on shore, to the rearing of pigs and poultry and pigeons, and the cultivation of grapes and peaches. Come and look at the money I am throwing away in improving the hothouses.'

I turned the subject thus lightly because the old man's eyes were full of tears, and he was evidently deeply moved. A laboratory such as this must always have been the dream of his life. And here, while still within life's prime, he had got the very thing for which he had always been longing.

So we strolled over the hothouses, and Althaus thoroughly approved of their con-

struction, and was especially delighted to find that there was not only an orchid-house—orchid-houses were not so universal then as they have since become—but also an aquatic house, where I was going to lay down the Victoria lily and the Blue Nile lotus.

‘What bats we men of science are,’ he said, ‘except when we are actually at work on our own particular subject! Now, if I had only said to myself in a spirit of true inquiry, “Althaus, what is our young friend erecting?” I must needs, by inspection and consideration of the exterior of yonder building alone, have found out that it was intended for a laboratory. And yet the whole thing has been going on under my very eyes, and I have seen nothing of it. I deserve to stand on the stool with the sugar-loaf cap on my head.’

‘You deserve to come indoors with me,’ I answered, ‘and to have a glass of Schnapps.’

And this sound advice was acted upon.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WEEK later Althaus and I went to London for forty-eight hours. I wished to see my lawyers, and Althaus was desirous of meeting a brother professor who was making a short stay in England.

We reached home on our return about three in the afternoon, and on our arrival my wife's maid informed me that her mistress was extremely unwell.

'You got my telegram, sir, at the club last night?' she asked.

'No, I did not go there. Where is your mistress?'

'In bed, sir. I sent for Dr. Reader this morning, and he has given her a composing draught, and is coming in again this evening.'

I hastened to Lucy's room, and found her in floods of tears.

‘What is the matter, my darling?’ I asked.

‘Oh, Arthur!’ she cried, ‘those terrible dreams have returned—last night and the night before. Oh, I have suffered agonies!’

‘Great Heaven! Thank God we have Althaus with us. Don’t be afraid, my sweet one. All will yet be well. I will be with you again in a moment.’

I hurried down to the professor. ‘That devil is at his work again,’ I said.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that the dreams have returned, and my wife is half out of her mind.’

‘It is incredible. Let us go to her at once.’

‘My dear Mrs. Edwardes,’ said Althaus, ‘your husband has told me what you have said. Are you quite sure of this?’

‘As if there could be any doubt!’ cried poor Lucy through her tears.

‘Have courage, my child. Your husband and I will start immediately, and it shall be ended this time once and for all. We shall be back to-morrow night. I will go and see Dr. Reader before we leave. You will not be troubled to-night. Take old Althaus’ word for that. You believe me, don’t you?’

‘Of course I do. I should be most ungrateful if I doubted you for an instant.’

.
On the morrow we again stood in front of the gates of the magician’s house. This time we did not stop to ring the bell, but forced the gate and entered. We walked up to the house. The front door was not locked, so we opened it and went in. The room on the right hand of the door was open, and seated there we saw the old man.

He first caught sight of me, rose to his feet, and came into the hall; and when he saw Althaus he turned livid and trembled violently from head to foot. He stretched

out his hands before him wildly as if in terror and deprecation.

Then Althaus, looking at him sternly and without an element of mercy in the wrath that streamed from his eyes, asked, as an inquisitor might ask an admitted heretic, 'Why have you broken your promise?'

'I have not broken it,' he gasped.

'Liar!' cried Althaus. 'I will not bandy words with you. You knew the consequences. You must have known that I should keep my word.'

Althaus seemed to swell to twice his natural height. He was a tall man, nearly six feet, who at fifty must have had the physique of a Thorwaldsen. The magician seemed to wither up under his gaze. He swayed for a minute to and fro, then reeled, then stretched out his hands, groping as if like Elymas suddenly struck with blindness. Then I saw a ghastly change come over his features. They had turned livid, as I have

said. Now all colour went out of them. An ashy hue flitted across them. Then their tint died out altogether, and gave way to a foul, dirty green, like that on the belly of some loathsome reptile.

Then the blood gushed violently from his ears, eyes, nose, and mouth, and fell splashing on the tessellated pavement of the hall. For a second or two I watched him in astonishment and terror. The next he had crashed forward on his face with a sound as of breaking and splintering bone and bruising flesh.

There he lay prone in the centre of a large pool of blood which kept spreading round him like a circle, and in which the whole scene all round was reflected as in the foul stew of some witch's caldron.

Althaus looked at the body for a moment with apparent curiosity. Then he rolled it over on its back with his foot. Then again he looked at me significantly. The old

magician was dead. And, as we stood by him, my friend and I could see how in his agony and terror he had clenched his hands until the fingers had forced their way into the palms, and where each fist lay on the pavement was shaping itself a dark pool of black blood.

I felt faint and sick and giddy, as if I had been witnessing some scene of torture or execution, and the professor noticed the change over my face, for he spoke at once, and his tone was solemn.

‘In the net which he spread privily,’ said my old friend, ‘has his foot been taken. And his soul is with the devils, to whom he long since made it over. Earth is rid of a monster which was more venomous than any viper, more merciless than any basilisk, and for killing which we shall not go without our reward ; for ’—and here his voice dropped—‘the whole of to-day, Edwardes, our lives have been in the hollow of our hands. But

there is no magic now. The foul thing is lying putrid in its own ooze and slime.'

It was a ghastly sight.

We hurriedly looked round the hall. At one end of it was a large purple curtain, heavy with gold embroidery. Althaus went towards it. He must have had far more physical strength than I had ever given him credit for, for with one hand he rent it down from its fastenings. We threw this strange pall over the body, and strode side by side to the open door, down the gravel path, through the little wicket, and into the road.

It seemed to do me good to be in the air again, and to hear the birds calling to each other, and to see the insects darting by and overhead.

.

Exactly a year has passed since the events I have just endeavoured to describe. Lucy is walking up and down the broad gravel path, and by her side is a great Alsatian

nurse carrying a boy proportionately as sturdy as herself. The yacht is being got into commission in the Solent, for we shall start for the Riviera as soon as Lucy is allowed to venture on the journey.

Althaus is quite reconciled to remaining with us. Should he spend the whole day in the laboratory, not even putting in an appearance at luncheon or at dinner itself, nothing is said. This makes his mind easy, and he assures me that his *magnum opus* on the platinum group is all but ready for the press.

‘And what is more,’ he adds, with a strange fire in his eyes, ‘it is I the dreamer who shall have the laugh at you the practical man before I have done. I shall make many thousands of pounds, which, having not a relation in the world, I shall leave to your little son, as some small return for the princely munificence which has enabled me to make the discovery, and so to place my name on

the roll of chemists before I die. Son of mine, what is iridium?' He has often told me, although he does not recollect it.

'Hardest metal known,' I answer, with the promptitude of a village schoolboy. 'A point of iridium will scratch hardened steel or the surface of a diamond; is principally used for pointing gold pens, which it renders practically indestructible; has hitherto only been discovered in very small quantities. That's about all, Althaus.'

'Right enough so far as it goes,' said Althaus. 'Let me add to it. Has since been discovered to exist in considerable quantities in the ores of palladium and osmium, and has been separated from them, smelted, and produced in its metallic form by Herr Althaus, of Strasburg, who has patented the process, and affirms that he can produce the metal to any amount from the refuse of platinum ores.'

'Is that so, Althaus?'

‘True as the blessed noonday, son of mine.’

‘Then let us come into the house and drink a bottle of your favourite Steinberg to the success of the discovery, which will not make you more famous than you were, but will certainly make you as rich as any English coal-owner—which is saying a good deal. Come into the house, and let us tell Lucy, who owes everything to you, as I do.’

THE END.

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