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THE LAST CALL.

THE LAST CALL.

A Romance.

BY

RICHARD DOWLING,

**AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE WEIRD SISTERS,"
"SWEET INISFAIL," ETC.**

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

**LONDON:
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THE LAST CALL.

CHAPTER XX.

When Dora Harrington released herself from old Crawford's arms, he led her to a chair, and said: "I have no longer the shadow of a doubt that you are the daughter of my Dora. It was, indeed, a lucky chance which made me in my despair last night turn my steps towards the river. And now," he added, "the next thing is to get some nice comfortable place for you. This old rookery would never suit. Let us go and try if we cannot find a suitable, homely place, somewhere outside the City." "I told you, sir," said the girl timidly, "that when yesterday I found out all my money was lost in the bank, I had not a shilling to send a message to him." "To Lavirotte?" "Yes, sir." The old man took out a leather bag and handed it to her, saying: "This will be enough for the present. When it is all gone let me know." "But, sir," said the girl, holding the bag in her hand without opening it, "I do not want all this. A shilling will be sufficient for the present, if you will only let me go to the nearest telegraph office." "Nonsense, child," he said. "You cannot be without money in London. There is more where that came from. If you wish to go immediately to the telegraph office, you may as well start now. I will meet you in an hour at Ludgate Circus." The young girl descended the ladders through the gloom of the tower, and opening the deep sunken door, emerged into the broad morning sunlight. She went to the telegraph office and wrote out the following message:

"Cannot say how sorry you are not well. Could not telegraph yesterday. Would go over, but have no money."

When she had written out this message, she untied the string of the bag and poured the contents into her hand. She had expected to find a few shillings. She started with surprise. "Gold! All gold!" She counted. "Twelve pounds!" Then for a moment she stood in thought, tore up the telegram she had written, and walked quickly back to the tower. Here a difficulty presented itself. How was she to summon the old man from the top or from the pit? If he was above, the feeble sound of her hand beating against that door would never be heard, even at night. But now in the day, owing to the roar of traffic around, she could not make herself heard if he was in the pit beneath. What was she to do? This was the only door. Under the circumstances she did not care to ask the aid of any passer-by, lest it might anger the old man. Notwithstanding her conviction that the effort would be fruitless, she did knock at the massive door with her hand. There came no response. For a quarter of an hour she stood and knocked unavailingly. Then she turned to go, and hastened to Ludgate Circus. She had taken no heed of time, and when she got to the Circus she was horrified to find herself twenty minutes behind the time appointed. She glanced hastily round, but could not see the old man. Then she carefully examined with her eye each of the four sections that make up the Circus. She found no one she knew. The hurrying crowd and throng of vehicles 'confused her senses and her mind. The old man had not indicated to her the section in which he would meet her, and to her eyes, unaccustomed as they were to the ceaseless turmoil of traffic in the City, it seemed almost impossible to find anyone in that place. She waited half-an-hour vainly. Then she began to despair. Whither should she turn? That tower in Porter Street now seemed as inaccessible to her as the centre of the Great Pyramid. This dereliction of to-day was harder to bear than that of yesterday; for since her desperate resolve the previous night she had found a friend--nay, more, a close relative--who was also the friend of the man she loved, and who was willing and able to help her. Had she not with her the proof of this willingness and this ability? Then, as she betook herself once more in the direction of St. Prisca's Tower, she remembered he had said the money he gave her that morning would do for the present. She was therefore, of course, at liberty to employ the money as she chose. It was hers to use, for a grandfather had of course a perfect right to give his grand-daughter money, and the granddaughter had a perfect right to accept it. Once more she found herself in the doorway of the tower. She stood a while looking up and down the busy way, when all at once, to her great joy, she saw the old man approaching. "My dear child, where have you been? I have been greatly frightened about you." She then explained to him what had occurred--how she had not noticed the time slipping by, and how, when she found herself in Ludgate Circus, she was

twenty minutes too late. "Well, there's no harm done so far," said Crawford. "You sent your telegram, and now we shall go and look for a lodging." "No," she said, "I did not send it. I wrote it out and then tore it up. Did you know, sir, that all the money in this bag is gold?" "Yes," he said, "I keep my change loose always. Did you expect to find notes?" "Oh no, sir; but I thought as you were good enough to give this money you might perhaps allow me to do with it what I would most like. That is the reason I tore up my telegram." "Certainly," he said. "You may do with it exactly what you please." "Well then," said the girl, "will you consent to my going to Ireland this evening?" The old man started for a moment. "I suppose you mean," he said, "to Glengowra, to see Lavirotte." She coloured, and said: "Yes. If you do not object. He is ill, you know." "It is a long way for a young girl to go alone; too long I fear." "I am used to travelling," pleaded the girl, "I do not mind travelling in the least. I have travelled a great deal alone." "Give me a little time to think," said the old man. "I cannot decide at the moment. This is no place to stand any longer. Let us sit down somewhere. Come with me." Crawford led the way to a quiet room, where he ordered some light refreshment, and where they could speak without effort or restraint. They talked the matter over a little. At last he made up his mind. "I have resolved," he said, "that you should not go alone so long a journey." The girl looked disappointed; her eyes filled with tears. "Oh!" she cried, "I wish you would give me leave." "Nevertheless," said the old man, not heeding the interruption, "you shall go to Ireland this evening. I will go with you." They were alone. She took his dark, wrinkled hand in hers and kissed it, and cried, "Thank you, grandfather," and burst into tears. It was the first time the old man had been called grandfather, and the name seemed to re-awaken in his breast echoes of his old tenderness. He placed his other hand on her head, and drew her head down on his shoulder, saying softly: "Weep, if it is good for your heart, my child. These are healing tears. You are, as far as I know, the one human being saved to me out of the shipwreck of my life. I will go with you to-night. He will recover speedily, you may be sure, and I will afterwards do all I can for you and him." Then the detail of their journey was arranged. She was to get what things she required in lieu of those left with her landlady. He had some preparations to make too. That evening they both set out for Dublin on their way to Glengowra.

CHAPTER XXI.

The gold and silver plate and the jewels of the great Lord Tuscar were the wonder and admiration of Europe. Sovereigns envied him for their possession. They had not been the result of one generation. The Tuscars had for a couple of centuries been generals, admirals, statesmen, lawyers. They had, in fact, occupied every favourable position for earning high rewards and for wholesale plundering. They had plundered with a will. And now, in addition to fine estates in three English counties and a large slice out of "settled" Ulster, and one of the finest houses in London, Lord Tuscar had the largest collection of plate and jewels owned by any nobleman in the three kingdoms. No one had ever attempted even to estimate the value of his treasures. His house was situated close to the river, at no great distance from St. Prisca's Church. Those were times of troubles and dangers. Great houses had been ruined and great houses made in an incredibly short space of time. Men who had been at the zenith of power and riches yesterday were penniless exiles to-day, and the men who had subsisted upon the charity of foreign courts and foreign nobles a week ago, were now environed with all the circumstance and pomp of power and all the splendour of wealth. Now, one of the most remarkable things in connection with the great Tuscar treasure was, that for some years no one had seen more of it than the meaner exigencies of a great house required. Some said the great lord had pawned it. At this most people laughed; for was it not known that, gorgeous as was the state and luxury with which he surrounded himself, his income exceeded his expenses? Others said that although the time was over when monarchs playfully adopted the treasures of their nobles, the great earl had misgivings, and although one of the most favoured courtiers of the Merry Monarch, he had a morbid dread that his Majesty might unjustly covet those precious stores. Then there was an idea that as the Tuscars had been enthusiastic Royalists, and as the present earl was notoriously timid, he had, in dread of a second Commonwealth, sent his plate and gems over seas. However the matter stood, there could be no doubt that the treasure was not now at Tuscar House; and, moreover, it was alleged that only his lordship and one confidential person could tell the whereabouts of the hoard. It was towards the end of summer, and night. Most of London had retired to rest. A strong wind was blowing from the east. The city was ill-lighted where it was lighted at all, and the streets dangerous after dark; so that most people who were honest and had anything to lose kept indoors. It was not a fashionable part of the city, but it was not unprosperous. As the night went on the wind increased, until about ten o'clock. Then it blew fiercely. All at once in front of the shop of one, Farryner, baker to the King, was raised a cry: "Fire!" That was the beginning of it. In an incredibly short time, aided by the wind, Farryner's house was burned out; but, before it was finally reduced to ashes, most of Pudding Lane was in flames. Many of the houses were of wood, and offered no protest whatever against the development of the conflagration. An hour from the outbreak of the flames it was known Farryner

was burned out. Two hours later it was known that London was in flames. Now it could be seen that this was no incidental fire, to be dismissed finally at the end of the nine-days' wonder. This was a fire that would be remembered for years. Three hours after midnight it was obvious that, if the wind continued in its present quarter for any great length of time, the fire would become a matter which history could never ignore. By this time a large portion of the population in the neighbourhood afflicted were afoot. Now the fire leaped from street to street, as though with the agility of trained experience. Now, when new material came in its way, it shot upward in spires of flame. Later, these spires, bending under the pressure of the wind, made radiant viaducts for the fire across the darkened streets. And when they had done their deadly work, and the buildings opposite crackled and glowed, these huge beams of molten gold contracted as the source upon which they had fed failed them, and finally they made one wild, aspiring rush upwards when the roof fell, and the four walls of each house formed the crater of an iridescent volcano, which belched forth one huge mass of co-mingled smoke, and flame, and sparks, and flakes, and wands of fire. About this time the vast house owned by the great Lord Tuscar was threatened, touched, and fired. He, his suite and retinue, escaped by the river; and in a brief time, before the daylight yet broadened in the east, already red with the flames, Tuscar House was beyond hope. Now terror had fully seized the people. No efforts were made to save the buildings. Those who could escape with their lives, and a few of the most portable of their worldly goods, were considered lucky. Men and women might be seen hurrying through the streets frantically, moving west, carrying such of their possessions as could be borne a great distance. For now they had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to set a limit to the flames, and that the whole of London in a westerly direction might succumb. There had been a long, hot, dry season, and the houses burned bravely. They seemed but to need a touch from the fiery wind flying by to kindle them. Despair reigned supreme. Men and women went shrieking through the streets. The roar of the conflagration shook the air. The crash of falling houses made the solid ground tremble. People would not leave their homes until the flames had touched the walls, until the last ray of hope was obscured. Then such as were not encumbered with children or goods flew through the streets, shrieking like demented beings. One of those most alarmed by the magnitude of the calamity and the terrors of that night was the great Earl of Tuscar. When he entered his barge to row up the river his feet trembled, and he could scarcely keep himself upright. He was elderly, and had been in failing health for some time. Before they arrived at the stairs at Westminster he complained of feeling faint; and when at last the barge ran alongside, they had to carry the great Earl out, for he was dead. As the attendants were bearing the body of the great Earl from his barge, a solitary man stood on the leads of the tower belonging to St. Prisca's Church, watching the progress of the flames. Evidently he was very anxious, for his head and eyes moved continually from right to left. As each spot, which, a moment before had been black, sprang into flame, he shifted his feet restlessly like one feeling he ought to be gone, and yet daring to hope there was no need for flight. "If anything is to be saved," he said, "there is no time to lose." Again he ran his eye over the increasing area of the fire. "The walls of the tower may stand," he thought. "They are much thicker than is common. But the church itself must go if the wind does not abate. The Earl has already left, of course. The fire did not spare his stout walls, nor respect his greatness. He and I alone know where his treasure is hid. He will, of course, take measures to secure it after the fire. It could be nowhere safer than it is at present. No one suspects it is in the vault. People who saw the chests come believed they contained only the rescued archives of an abbey destroyed by Cromwell. But let me see. Supposing anything should have happened to him; supposing he was overtaken by the flames; suppose, from some cause or other, he should not be able to communicate the secret to anyone, how then could this treasure be discovered? How could it be so arranged that the secret might fall into no other hands than those entitled to know it, for may not I too perish in this terrible disaster?" He turned around, and leaving the embrasure in which he had stood, descended quickly to the room below. Here a light was burning, and it could be seen that he who had watched the fire from the roof was a clergyman. "How is it to be done?" he thought, and pondered some seconds. At last he lifted a small box, and, going to some bookshelves, took out a few volumes. In two of these volumes he wrote something. "It will not do," he thought, "to make this matter so plain that anyone may understand it. If the Earl is alive, by noon he will surely take some steps with regard to his treasure. If he is not alive, and I too have perished, it will be necessary some record should be left behind." He placed a copy of Chaucer, in which he had written something, in the bottom of the box, then a few indifferent books, and then "Mentor on Hawking," in which he had written something also; then a few more indifferent books, and finally a piece of paper bearing these words:

"Search diligently if you would know what John Henry Plantagenet James, eighth earl, knew, if he be dead." On the outside of the box he fastened a piece of parchment on which he wrote: "A box of books. Take this at once to the Earl of Tuscar, who will reward the bearer." Then he locked the box, and, putting it on his shoulder, descended the ladders of St. Prisca's Tower. As he did so he said to himself: "I have not been too soon. The air here is already hot. I can smell the fire close by." As he was about half-way down, a sudden light in one of the openings attracted his attention. He started, and cried: "The flames have already struck the church." Ere he reached the next loft it was but too plain the tower was already in flames. "My retreat cut off!" he exclaimed in despair. He looked down into the next loft. The floor and the foot of the ladder were alight, and exit was impossible. If there was any hope for him it must be upon the roof. He hastened thither. During the time he had been occupied with the books and writing, and in descending and ascending, the fire had made rapid, terrible progress. It had touched the Church of St. Prisca, and the smoke was already coming up the opening in the roof. It was quite plain now to the man

on the leads that he was doomed. There were people in the streets below, but they were as helpless as he. "I must die," he said. "Nothing can save me. There is but one chance for my preserving the secret." He approached an embrasure on the western side, and dropped the box into the street below. The box shot downward and was shattered into atoms. Some paltry pilferer, a few minutes later, snatched up the books and put them into his bag. The label on the box and the manuscript-slip inside were never seen afterwards. The books were carried to Kensington, whither a good deal of the salvage of the fire was brought; and the clergyman, who had tried to save the Earl's secret, fell a victim to the Great Fire of London on the 3rd of September, 1666.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was evening when Lionel Crawford and his grand-daughter arrived at Glengowra. Much of the excitement had by this time disappeared, and a tone of gentle disgust was to be observed among the inhabitants of that little town. Was it not provoking, townfolk thought, that such a splendid opportunity for invective and commiseration should be wholly wasted? Who could throw stones at Lavirotte if young O'Donnell did not? Who could pity young O'Donnell if he consented to receive the friendly overtures of Lavirotte. The whole thing was an abominable conspiracy against comfortable living in Glengowra. There was something to be grateful for, no doubt, in the first blush of that event at the cove, but it had led to nothing worthy of its parts; and a circumstance which had gone up the very largest of rockets, seemed destined to come down the most insignificant of sticks. When Lionel Crawford and Dora Harrington arrived in Glengowra and went to Maher's hotel, a new fillip was given to public curiosity. It was known by the speech of the grandfather and his grand-daughter that they were not of Irish bringing up. There was, of course, no reason why they should be in any way connected with the great event of that week. Yet, still it had been noised abroad that Lavirotte had telegraphed to a Miss Harrington in London, and here now had arrived an old man and a young girl with unfamiliar accents. The shrewd people of Glengowra made a connection between these facts, and came, in about ten minutes, to the conclusion that the young girl was Miss Harrington. In the back room of the Confectionery Hall, a man who had come out by the same train with the newly-arrived pair brought all news and surmises concerning them; and here, out of gratitude for small mercies, the company were for a time solaced by the fact that no one could offer a rational explanation of who the old man was. When Crawford and Dora were safely inside Maher's hotel, the old man asked to be shown to a private sitting-room. "For," said he to Dora, "I have been so long accustomed to the solitude of St. Prisca's Tower, that I cannot endure the company or curious gaze of strangers." He had no means of knowing up to this that Lavirotte's illness was not a natural one, or that he and his grand-daughter were the subjects of peculiar interest to the good folk of Glengowra. He rang the bell, and when the waiter came, said: "I should very much like to see the landlord, if you think he would oblige me by coming here." In a few minutes the proprietor entered the room. The old man lost no time in stating his case. He said: "We have come a long journey, and are tired. We are both deeply interested in a gentleman who is now lying ill here, Mr. Lavirotte, and are most anxious to know his present condition." The landlord looked from one to the other in some perplexity. "May I ask," said he, "the nature of the interest you take in Mr. Lavirotte?" The old man smiled, and said: "An Irishman's answer." "An Irishman's answer," said Maher, "is often kindly meant." He glanced significantly, first at the old man, and then at the young girl. "Perhaps you know," said Crawford, "that Mr. Lavirotte telegraphed to a lady in London, in whose affairs he is interested?" "I wrote out the message myself." He paused a moment. "Have I the honour of seeing Miss Harrington?" "This is Miss Harrington." "And you are, sir----?" He paused here. "Her grandfather." "May I ask you, sir," said Maher, "to step out with me for a moment?" "Oh, sir, he is worse," cried the girl, looking appealingly at the old man. Maher turned quickly upon her, saying: "I pledge you my word of honour, Miss Harrington, that, on the contrary, Mr. Lavirotte is much better; and that he has continued to improve ever since I telegraphed to you." "Then," said the girl, "his illness must have been sudden." "Rather sudden. If you, sir," he continued, turning to the grandfather, "will accompany me just down to the strand, I should feel greatly obliged. Miss Harrington will, if you approve of it, remain in this room until we come back, with my most emphatic assurance that Mr. Lavirotte is out of danger and getting on very well." Maher did not wish the girl to meet even a chambermaid, lest the whole of the story might reach her at the one time, and give her a most painful and unnecessary shock. The substance of the conversation between the two clerks at the back of the Confectionery Hall had by this time become public property; and, of course, the hotel proprietor was one of the first men to hear all news. Jaded as the old man was, he rose with alacrity, and accompanied Maher. As soon as they were in the open air Crawford turned on his companion, and said: "I am sure, sir, your intention is kindly. There is kindliness in your manner and face; but I hope you are not, through some benevolent motive, deceiving that child we have left behind." "I--deceiving her!" cried the landlord. "*I* am not deceiving her." "I do not understand," said the old man, "what you mean by laying such emphasis on the word *I*." "I mean, sir, that although I am not deceiving her

now (Lavirotte is really getting better), someone else may be deceiving her." "You perplex and disturb me," said the old man. "I have no clue whatever to your meaning. Pray, if you would be kind, be plain." "I take it for granted, sir, that you know Mr. Lavirotte." "I know Mr. Lavirotte, but not very well." For a moment or two the landlord was silent. His position was one of great delicacy and difficulty. He now held a profound hatred for Lavirotte, and the look of that gentle, confiding young girl had touched him keenly. He pitied her. "I hope, sir," he said, "if I am bold enough to ask you a few questions, you will be so kind as not to fancy it is through curiosity." "I will do anything," said the old man, "if you will only go on." "There is a rumour here, which may be true or false, that Mr. Lavirotte met Miss Harrington in London, and that they were good friends there." "I see what you are driving at. They are engaged to be married." "Precisely. You have not for some months past heard much of Mr. Lavirotte, have you?" "Absolutely nothing, except your telegram. Has he been ill all that time?" "No. He was not taken ill until a few hours before I sent that message to London." "What is the nature of his illness?" "He received an injury in a mysterious way, in a quarrel with another man, and neither he nor the other man will say anything about the quarrel, or the cause of it. But, of course, as in all cases of this kind, there is a general notion of what it was about. People say that jealousy led to it." "Jealousy of Miss Harrington? I did not understand there was any likelihood of his being jealous of her." "Nor is he, as far as rumour goes. The facts are that he attacked a young man in this place, and, after stabbing the young man, was rendered insensible himself, no one knows how." "Stabbing!" exclaimed the old man with horror. "Are you sure of that!" "There is no evidence he did. There is no doubt he did." "I am old," said Mr. Crawford, "and have lived a long time out of the ways of the world. I am slow, and do not understand. Out of pity to my infirmities, be simple with me. I know something very unpleasant is coming. Let me hear it at once." The two men had now reached the roadway that ran inside the storm wall. "It will rest you, sir, if we stand here and lean upon the wall. I will tell you everything I know in a few words. "The prettiest girl in this neighbourhood is a Miss Creagh. She is now in my house. One of the finest young fellows within twenty miles is Mr. Eugene O'Donnell. He is now lying in my house. He is the man Lavirotte stabbed. They were bosom friends. The story goes that about two months ago Lavirotte made love to Miss Creagh and was rejected. A little later O'Donnell made love, and was accepted. The wedding was to be in about a month, and to prevent it Lavirotte tried to murder young O'Donnell." "Good God!" said the old man, "what a dreadful story, and what a scoundrel he must be! It is the most horrible thing that ever came near me in all my life." "It is very bad, sir, indeed. You will now, sir, understand why I wished to speak to you alone. Shall we go back? I left orders that no one was to enter the private room, so that you can act now as you think best, and be quite certain that the young lady knows nothing of this most miserable affair. It is only right you should know that young O'Donnell is also doing very well, and no fears are felt about his recovery." In perfect silence the two men walked back to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lionel Crawford did not go straight to the room where Dora was. He turned into the coffee-room, and there stood a while pondering. Though he was a visionary, a dreamer, a philosopher, he had, before he became immersed in his present studies and pursuits, been, comparatively speaking, a man of the world. For although he had never mingled much in society, he had a tolerable knowledge of what people said and did. What would people say of such conduct as Lavirotte's? They would call it abominable. What would people say of Lavirotte? They would call him a scoundrel. Here was a dilemma. If this strange, this unknown girl, were not to marry Lavirotte but the other man, there seemed on the face of it to be no reason why he might not still marry Dora. It was quite certain his grand-daughter had no hint that Lavirotte's affections had strayed from her. This liking for Miss Creagh might have been only the errant fancy of an hour--of a day--of a week. It might turn out that the landlord had exaggerated the position of Miss Creagh in the matter, and that the encounter had been the result of heated blood, arising from some other cause. If things had only run on smoothly, without this wretched interruption of the fight, how satisfactory all would be. Here was Lavirotte, the owner of the tower, and he, the seeker for the treasure, already bound together in a kind of business contract. And here, then, as a second bond of union between the two, had come Dora. His grand-daughter was to be the other's wife if things had not been disturbed. If Lavirotte and he had shared the treasure equally between them, and then these two young people were married, the whole of the enormous fortune hidden under St. Prisca's Tower would, when he died, be theirs. It would be a thousand pities that such a match should be broken off. The most ordinary prudence pointed at the absurdity of such a step. It would be his duty to his grand-daughter, Lavirotte, and himself, to take care that no such misfortune might befall. The agreement which existed between him and Lavirotte had never been reduced to writing. Neither of them had desired that it should. He knew that such an agreement would not be binding in law. If the finding and retaining of all the treasure was contrary to the law, no instrument embodying the disposal of all the property between him and Lavirotte would

hold for one moment. It would be a cruel shame if, after all his years of inquiry and anxiety, when he was working on the mere traditional rumour that a great hoard was concealed somewhere in the city, the labour of that time and the labour of his later years in the tower should all go for nothing, or next to nothing. Lavirotte had been sceptical as to the existence of the treasure; had given him to understand he would not sink a penny in the speculation. If any difficulty arose between him and the owner of the tower now, that door might remain shut for a hundred years, until they were all dead, until the clue to the secret had been destroyed for ever. By some means or other this catastrophe must be avoided. It was too hideous even to think of. He must prevent it at any cost. How was he to prevent it? It was plainly his first business to see Lavirotte and ascertain all he could from him. No doubt the Frenchman would be more communicative to him than to others in whom he had no interest whatever. Of course Lavirotte would not recognise in him the grandfather of Dora, but they had been acquainted some time and were partners in his secret, in his great undertaking. No doubt by this time the girl was becoming impatient for news of some kind. He would go to her first and reassure her, and then seek an interview with Lavirotte. When he entered the room where Dora was, she came to him eagerly and caught his hand and said: "Have you seen him--is he better? What did he say?" "I have not seen Dominique yet," said the old man, using the other's Christian name for the first time. "Oh, you are good to call him Dominique. You have something to tell me." "I have nothing very new to tell you. It is quite true he is progressing most favourably, and there is no cause for alarm. This place is full of strangers, and the landlord thinks you will be most comfortable if you remain in this room a little longer until I see Dominique." "You will not be long. I am so impatient to know all--to see him if I may." "I will make all the haste I can," and with these words the old man left the room. When Lionel Crawford entered the injured man's room the latter was prepared to see him, as word had been sent up before that Crawford was coming. "It was exceedingly kind of you to come, Mr. Crawford," said the wounded man; "but, in the name of all that is mysterious, how did you find out I was hurt, or are you here merely by some extraordinary coincidence?" "Let us not waste time now," said the old man, "with idle matters. I am in a hurry. By a mere accident, which I will explain to you later, I found out you were ill. I lost no time in coming, as, for several reasons, I was anxious to see you." "I suppose," said Lavirotte, "you heard something of what has occurred since you came to this place?" "I will be candid with you," said Crawford, "and tell you all I heard." When he had finished, he said: "Is it true in substance?" The prostrate man admitted it was true in substance, and went on to explain: "I will tell you a little more about it than you seem to have heard, and what I am going to tell you will lessen me a good deal in your regard, for it will show you that the wind is constant compared to me. It is true I was engaged to someone in London. It is true that while I was engaged I fell in love with Miss Creagh. She would not have me. She accepted my dearest friend, Eugene O'Donnell, and in a moment of absolute madness I tried to take his life. He has forgiven me. We are friends again, and now I have only one great fear. It is that what has occurred may come to the ears of the girl I am engaged to in London, and so prejudice me in her opinion. For, you see, when I proposed to her she had a fortune of five thousand pounds, and now she has lost all that fortune in the terrible crash of Vernon and Son. If she heard of all this, it might make her think--in fact, it would look like it--that I made love to her when she had a fortune, and gave her up as soon as I found it swept away." "So that," said the other anxiously, "if you were up and about once more, and were free to travel, you would go to London, and, if you were in a position to do so, marry Miss Harrington." "That," said Lavirotte eagerly, "is the only thing I could do which would atone to her in any way for my vile fickleness. It would, at the same time, prove to my dear friend, O'Donnell, that I had not only abandoned all my pretensions to Miss Creagh, but that by marrying and going to London I had put a final barrier between myself and her, and gone into voluntary exile as a punishment for my crime. But, you see, as to marrying at present, that is completely out of the question. I was too poor before this affair, and now the whole town will turn against me, and I shall be obliged to leave the place. There will be no getting a crust for me here now." "But," said the old man, enthusiastically, "we must be very near our great fortune now. I work day and night, night and day. By day in the pit, by night on the top of the tower. I cannot be far off now. Another six months and I surely must reach the chests in which the great treasure is hidden." His voice had fallen to a whisper, and the intense excitement with which he contemplated his final triumph had caused the sweat to break out upon his forehead. He grasped the counterpane convulsively. He could scarcely breathe. This was the first time for years he had spoken of the matter. It was the second time in all his life. "You shall be rich," he said. "And I shall be rich. I have tried over and over again to estimate what may be the value of that hoard, and the more I think of it the greater, I am persuaded, it must be. At first I thought two hundred thousand pounds might be the outside limit. But the more I read the more it grew, until at last I have come to the conclusion that it must be somewhere between a million and a million and a half." The excitement of the old man was intense. His eyes were fixed, his attitude and manner that of one fascinated by some glorious vision. The splendour of the image he had conjured up drew him wholly away from the present time and his surroundings. He had forgotten Lavirotte, his own long journey, Dora, everything but the one colossal figure of wealth triumphant gleaming before his mental vision. The wounded man shook his head sadly and slowly on his pillow. "If I am to wait, Mr. Crawford," said he, dreamily, "until we reach the goal at which you aim, I greatly fear I must starve. This illness will exhaust all the money I have. Popular opinion will drive me from this town. I see nothing before me but ruin." The words seemed to recall the old man to the immediate circumstances of his position, but he did not clearly recover all he had said to Lavirotte before. "All my money is not yet gone. Does no means suggest itself to you of putting a little capital to some advantage? I don't think you can hope for much from your present occupation. Without any danger to our great project I could, I think, find a few hundred pounds if they would be of any permanent use to you." "A little while ago," said Lavirotte, in a melancholy tone, "I thought if I could get a few hundred pounds I should be able to

put it to very profitable use. I have a voice, if this accident has not taken it away, and all my friends said that if I could devote a couple of years exclusively to its cultivation, I might succeed as a singer." "You are not yet too old," said the other, with interest. "Take the money and try the experiment." "But I can have no excuse for taking from you money which I may never be able to repay." "You want no excuse," said Lionel Crawford, catching the injured man's hand. "Why should I not help the future husband of my grandchild?" "Your grandchild!" cried Lavirotte, in astonishment. "Who is she?" "Dora Harrington."

CHAPTER XXIV.

This announcement of Lionel Crawford head an electrical effect upon Dominique Lavirotte. Notwithstanding Dr. O'Malley's strict orders to the contrary, the Frenchman sat bolt upright in the bed, looking ghastly in his bandages, and stared at the old man. "*You*, Dora's grandfather!" he cried. His eyes starting in their sockets, and bloodless lips remaining open when he had spoken. "*You*, Dora's grandfather! You are telling me a hideous lie. For what purpose are you telling me this hideous lie?" "Hush!" cried the old man, alarmed lest Lavirotte in his excitement should make allusion in similarly loud tones to his great secret. "You must not excite yourself. Someone may hear you, and then how should we be?" Lavirotte stared still, but uttered no word. The power of speech was taken from him by the nature of the statement made by the other man. Had this dark-visaged ogre come here to worm the history of his perfidy to Dora from him, in order to be avenged on him out of a confession from his own mouth? Was this man about to add to his mental tortures a storm of intolerable abuse, or, taking advantage of his helpless state, finish the work which the night of that encounter had left undone? "You seem to misunderstand my intention altogether. I assure you all I have said and have to say is for your good, for our good, for the good of our great object." Like all other men who have ever been possessed by the idea of discovering hidden treasure, all pursuits and considerations seemed of comparatively little moment compared with the thought which possessed him. Like all other such men, he dreaded more than anything else the chance that his secret might become known to anyone not absolutely essential to success. Lavirotte fell back, relieved and exhausted. There was no mistaking the wild earnestness of this strange-eyed enthusiast. "Go on," he said faintly. "There can be nothing simpler or, I think, better, than I suggest," continued Lionel Crawford. "I cannot say, I do not know, how long yet it may take me to get down to where the plate and jewels lie buried. It may be a year, it may be more or less, six months at least, and not farther off than a year-and-a-half. You are, unfortunately, sceptical of the existence of any such treasure. I am as sure it is there as though I myself had buried it." "Why not then use the money you speak of in employing men to dig for it under your superintendence?" asked Lavirotte, peevishly. "Do not talk so loud." Lavirotte had, because of his weakness, spoken almost in a whisper. "Do not talk such nonsense. Employ men to dig, and have the whole thing town-talk in twenty-four hours! Let a lot of mere day labourers within the magic spell, within touch of the thing I have brooded over and kept secretly apart from all the rest of the world for years and years! What profanation! I would rather forego all hope of ever enjoying final triumph than let the shrine of my dreams be defiled by unsympathetic hands!" The old man was once again back in dreamland, and unconscious that the present had any real existence, save that it was the roadway to the future. "But if there is any likelihood of long delay in--in finding this treasure" (Lavirotte believed his visitor would come on the chests of precious articles belonging to the great Lord Tuscar on the same day that someone else found the philosopher's stone), "you will want all the money you have, and cannot afford to give it to me for the purpose of spending it on a speculation which may be as likely to succeed as----," he was about to say "your own," but substituted, "the search for the North Pole. It seems to me that there is no earthly use in my even thinking of such a thing. I am beaten by fate, and the best thing I can do is to give in." This speech instantly recalled the old man to the subject in hand and the immediate surroundings of the case. Apart from his ruling passion--the hidden gold and stones--he was simple, almost childlike. But anything which touched his darling project roused up in him a fiery spirit of intelligence no one under ordinary circumstances could anticipate. "No, no!" cried he. "You must not even think of giving in. You must make up your mind to succeed. You must succeed, not only for your own sake, but for the sake of Dora as well." A faint smile came over Lavirotte's face. "Tell me more. Tell me more. You give me hope. You make me aspire." The peevishness was fading out of Lavirotte's manner and face. "It may be possible for me to redeem my character and my credit yet." "Of course it is quite possible, quite easy for you to do so. There is not the least difficulty about the matter. Is it a bargain?" After a little more talk it was arranged that Lavirotte should take the money as an advance on his share of the great Tuscar hoard. "And now," said Lavirotte, "dear Mr. Crawford, don't you think that in this matter of making love to one girl while I was engaged to another, I deserved the very severest instead of the most merciful treatment at your hands?" "Well," said the old man, "that's all past and gone now, and we all grow wiser as we grow older. It will, I suppose, be some days before you are up and about again. The landlord of this place has been very wise, and by his aid I have been able to

keep all knowledge of the circumstances of your case from Dora. There is no need why she should hear anything about it now, and as you are on the way to recovery, and we need not be anxious about your health, I fancy the best thing we can do is to get her away as quickly as possible from this. What do you think?" "I don't know," said Lavirotte, gloomily. "You see, if she does not hear the truth now it will be like practising another deceit upon her. I shall have to act a part, and not a very creditable one." Crawford became uneasy. He knew too little of Dora to be able to judge how she would receive the whole story, and it seemed now to him a matter of the first importance that he should lose no possible hold of Lavirotte. "You see," said he, "she will be shocked to learn that you have been hurt in an encounter, and are not ill in a natural way as she supposes. Then you will have to explain almost everything, and it might be better that portion of the explanation should be postponed." Lavirotte moved restlessly. "It is very difficult," he said. "I own it is very difficult. One hardly can know what to do. I want to spare her, of course, if I can; and I want to put myself right with her if I can." "Then," said the old man, with a sudden gleam of intelligence in his eyes, "let mercy for her prevail. You see you have been in fault. Suffer your own explanation to lie over for the present in order to spare her feelings. Later on you can put yourself right with her." Lavirotte sighed, and then asked, languidly: "What do you propose?" "That I should take her back with me to London at once, telling her that you are not allowed to see her in your present state of health; but that immediately on your recovery you will follow us to London, and that, in the meantime, I will take care of her." "Perhaps, after all," said the injured man, "that is the best plan." Now that the prospect of an immediate meeting between him and Dora grew dim, he lost interest in the conversation, and the excitement of anticipation being withdrawn, the weakness of his condition asserted itself. After some more talk, it was finally agreed between the two men that Lionel Crawford's suggestion should be carried out. Then it became the duty of the latter to inform Dora of this decision. He found the girl in a state of the greatest excitement and anxiety. "Oh!" she cried, "I thought you would never come. May I not see him now?" The old man took her by the hands and led her back to the seat she had risen from on his entrance. "My dear child," he said, "there is not the least cause for your anxiety about Dominique's health. He is progressing most favourably. But it would be exceedingly unwise that he should see you now." "But you said I might see him. You promised I might see him!" "Since I told you so I have been with him and learned more of his case. Although he is most anxious to see you, he is persuaded that doing so would be injurious now. He will be all right in a few days. We have talked the whole matter over. I intend assisting him to a much better position than he now holds. I am authorised by him to make all preparations for your marriage." The young girl coloured, partly by surprise and partly by bashfulness. Lionel Crawford saw that these words had made an impression favourable to his views. "If we want to get him well and make him happy soon," he continued, "he and I agree that the best thing to be done is that you and I should instantly set out for London." "But it is very hard to have to go without seeing him," said the girl, confused by the new and unexpected turn affairs had taken, and elated by the assurance that the difficulties of her lover's worldly position were at an end, and that when next they met it would be to part no more. The old man saw that he had carried his point. He rose briskly, and said: "The sooner we are off the better. There is no use in our staying here an hour. Being so near him when you may not see him would only add to your uncomfortableness. I will go and see at once how and when we are to get back. Wait for me here." As he reached the bar, he found two young men there. One was in the employment of the railway at Rathclare, the other in the post-office of that town. Their backs were towards him, and they did not hear him entering the room. "Maher told me," said the Railway, "that an old man and a young girl have come to see Lavirotte. That's the girl, no doubt, he made love to in London. Maher wouldn't tell me their names; but I'll find out all about them when I get to London." "You may not find it so easy, my young man," thought Lionel Crawford. "I have kept a secret for years."

CHAPTER XXV.

It was a sore disappointment to the town of Glengowra when it found that its two interesting visitors had left, and left suddenly; having had, as far as current accounts went, no communication whatever with anyone in the place but the landlord of the hotel and Lavirotte, neither of whom would give any information as to the strangers or their business. It was not, of course, until the next day that it became generally known two strangers had arrived and gone away. Kempston, the fussy little magistrate, said it was a shame, a part of a scandalous plot to defeat justice, and that someone or other ought to be punished all the more severely on this account. The police became more gloomy and suspicious, and silent, and the general townsfolk, visitors included, felt that they had been robbed of an exciting item in the programme of crime. Dr. O'Malley was no exception to the general protest, but he took a rather different view of it. "I am told," he said to Lavirotte, "that two highly mysterious and attractive strangers arrived last night. An old man, attractive, because venerable, and all that. A young girl, a seraph, a sylph, a miracle of beauty, attractive because of her loveliness. The old man has an interview with Maher.

The old man has an interview with you. The two slope. Let us say, for argument sake, 'Confound the old man, but what about the nightingale, the bride of Abydos, the seraph?' Here am I, Dr. Thomas O'Malley, one of the lights of my profession, and a man who may at any time be called into consultation at the bedside of Royalty, and yet I am not permitted to be fascinated. You know, Lavirotte, I am not in the least curious, but who was this goddess, and why was I not permitted to see her?" Lavirotte raised his hand and let it fall on the counterpane with a gesture of deprecation. "Even I was not permitted to see her, O'Malley." "But all those who did see her say she was adorable, divine. You arch hypocrite, you know all about her, and will not speak. At this moment there may be a telegram awaiting me at home, announcing that I have been created a baronet. How, in heaven's name, am I to get on without a Lady O'Malley? And once I am a baronet, a man of my appearance, parts, and position would be so assailed by ambitious and designing spinsters, that I should be compelled, in sheer self-defence, and in order to prevent myself committing bigamy, to turn my back upon the whole brood. What spite have you, Lavirotte, against this dark-eyed wonder, that you would not give her a chance of becoming Lady O'Malley?" Lavirotte affected to be languid, and said: "I really cannot give you any information, and you said I was not to talk much." "I'll take very good care you do not talk much while *I* am present. *I* never let anyone talk too much in my presence." "Look here, O'Malley," said the invalid, "I really must ask you to let me alone on this subject. I'm not equal to it just at present." "I know, my dear fellow. I won't worry you. I'm the least curious man in the world. As your medical adviser, I would recommend you, with a view to relieving your mind, to tell me all about this matter. But, as your friend, I would advise you to tell me nothing at all of it, unless you wish it all over the town in an hour." The busy little doctor left and proceeded to the room of the other patient. Here he found Mrs. Creagh with O'Donnell. She had insisted upon dividing the work of nursing with her daughter, and made the girl go home and lie down for some hours. Under the circumstances of Mr. O'Donnell's business difficulties, his wife did not dare to leave him. She had paid a flying visit the morning after the encounter, and gone back to Rathclare the following day. After the position in which her husband had been found that night, she did not dare to leave him for an hour. Like a brave woman she faced all the world for his sake, and although no one blamed him for the ruin which had overtaken him, the pair were pitied universally, and pity is harder to bear than blame. The doctor found his second patient doing remarkably well; in fact, much better than could be expected. Of course, Mrs. and Miss Creagh had been cautioned, with all the others who might visit the sick room, to say nothing of the Vernon disaster. "Let me see," said the cheery little man; "let me see. I think you said your wedding was fixed for a month after the accident. Well, if you don't want to be all right until a month, I'll have to give you some powerful medicine to keep you back. It's amazing, ma'am," he said, turning to Mrs. Creagh, who sat smiling pleasantly at the bedside. She was a plump, fair, good-looking woman, between fifty and sixty, with a genial, round face, and a gracious, cordial manner, which are better in a sick room than all the medicines in the Pharmacopœia. "It is amazing, ma'am, how these young men will get well in spite of us doctors. We can generally manage to polish off the old people in a handsome, becoming, and professional way; but these young people are dead against us--or alive against us, what's worse. Whenever, Mrs. Creagh, you hear of a doctor dying of a broken heart, it is *always*--mind, I say *always*--because of the stubbornness of the young people. Ordinary men die of broken hearts because of love, or business, or something of that kind; but when a patient defies prussic acid, nux vomica, or aqua pura, it is all up with one of our profession." "By-the-way, O'Malley," said O'Donnell, "have you got a couple of hours to spare to-day?" "My dear fellow, pending the arrival of the official documents appointing me Surgeon-in-ordinary to the Queen, I can spare you a couple of hours." "Then I'd be very much obliged to you," said O'Donnell, "if you'd run into Rathclare and see the old people. I am very anxious about them. I know the governor always has his hands full of business, and that my mother does not wish to be away from him, but I cannot help wondering why neither of them has come out. I am greatly afraid there must be something the matter with the governor. Of course Mrs. Creagh or Nellie writes twice a day, and we hear once a day; but I can't make out how neither of them has come here." "I'm sure your father is in excellent health," said O'Malley; "but if it will relieve your mind in the slightest degree, I shall go in by the next train and come out with news." O'Malley went straight to the railway station and took the first train leaving Glengowra for Rathclare. He of course knew, or guessed, why it was neither father nor mother came to visit the son; but under the circumstances it was best to humour Eugene and see Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell. He found the old couple in the small library behind the dining-room. The window of this looked into the garden in the rear, and so was shielded from prying eyes. "Dr. O'Malley," cried the woman, rising to her feet, "have they been writing me lies? Is he worse?" The old man was sitting at the table, on which lay a few open ledgers. In his hand he held a quill pen, with which he was making, tremorously, figures on a large sheet of ruled paper. At his wife's words he dropped the pen on the paper and looked up. Then, hearing the noise of the pen fall, he looked down again, and cried: "Confound it, I have blotted the sheet." At that moment the traditions of a lifetime of business were all upon him. He stood in the centre of the ruins of his beloved city, laid low by earthquake; the fiery heat of all his years of commercial toil were focussed on him then. He was making out *his bankrupt sheet*. The doctor replied instantly, taking no notice of what the old man had said: "On the contrary, Mrs. O'Donnell, I am come to tell you, thinking you would be glad to hear it by word of mouth from me, that your son is getting on infinitely better than I had ever dared to hope. You may make your mind quite easy that he will be up and about sooner than we thought at the best." The woman threw herself into a chair and burst into tears. "Mary," said the husband, looking at her in perplexity as he sopped up the ink with a piece of blotting-paper, "I was so busy I did not hear. What did he say?" "He said that all is well at Glengowra," said the woman, through her sobs. "He means, Mary," said the old man, "that Eugene is dead." She dried her eyes, ceased her sobs, and looked up. "No, James, no. He said Eugene is better--getting on as well as can be expected, and

that he will soon be up and about once more." The father put down his pen, leaned back in his chair, covered his face with his hands, and said in a feeble, tremulous voice: "It would be better if my boy was dead." Mrs. O'Donnell made a gesture of silence and caution to the doctor. Then she rose and beckoned the latter to follow her out of the room. When they were in the hall she said: "The shock, the business shock, has been too much for his brain, I fear. Ever since that awful night they found him in the strong-room with the revolver I am in dread if I leave him for even a minute. I must go now. God bless you for coming. Good-bye. Be good to my boy." That evening, when O'Malley called to see Lavirotte, he told him the scene he had witnessed that day in the library at O'Donnell's. All at once the Frenchman became strangely excited. He sat up in the bed, and cried out: "I have it, O'Malley; I have it. I have done a great wrong to those people, but I think I see my way to setting it right again." "Lie down, you maniac," said the doctor, pushing him softly back. "Do you want to burst your bandages, or bring on fever? What do you mean?" "Mean!" cried the other. "I mean to sell my last shirt rather than that Eugene's father should come to ruin." "Keep quiet," said the doctor. "Keep quiet, or you will surely bring on delirium." "I have the means of doing it," cried Lavirotte, fiercely, "and I will do it." By this time O'Malley was bathing the injured man's head copiously. "If he gets delirium," thought the doctor, "it's all up with him." "I see the money," cried Lavirotte, excitedly shaking his arms in the air. "Half a million if it's a penny! That will clear James O'Donnell, the noble, honourable James O'Donnell, the father of my best, my dearest friend Eugene. Come here, Eugene, and take it, every sovereign, every sou. It is all yours. Take it, my boy; clear the old man, marry Nellie, and God bless you and her, and then the devil may have me if he will only have the goodness to wait so long." "Delirium," said the doctor, "has set in, and he will die."

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was late that evening when O'Malley left Lavirotte. The doctor gave instructions that if the delirium increased he was to be called. In the case of the Frenchman, two things puzzled the energetic little doctor. Although unquestionably the patient was raving mad, his pulse was normal, and his skin moist. When the nurse came up to the sick room, she could find no sign whatever of delirium. Lavirotte seemed as calm and collected as any judge on the bench. He asked was the doctor gone, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, said to the nurse: "Bring me a pencil and some paper. I want to write a couple of short notes." "Are you not afraid it would be too much for you, sir?" remonstrated the nurse. "No, no," said the other, decisively. "There is something on my mind, and I cannot sleep unless I get rid of it, so the sooner you get me what I want the better." The woman left the room, and in a few moments returned with what he required. Then, on the back of a book, he wrote the two following notes:

"My Dear Mr. Crawford,

"Since I saw you last I have thought of a matter which makes it of vital consequence we should not lose an hour in realising your great hope. I therefore beg of you to do all you can in furtherance of the scheme. Let me hear from you by return of post. The moment I am able to move I shall follow you to London. "Give my dearest love to Dora; say I am very sorry they would not let me see her when she was so near to me, and that to-morrow I will write her as long a letter as my strength will allow.

"Yours, most devotedly,

"DOMINIQUE LAVIROTTE."

The second was to this effect:

"DEAR MR. O'DONNELL,

"I am too weak to write you a long letter. I hope you will take the will for the deed. I cannot tell you how sorry I am for all that has lately occurred, and how deeply I sympathise with you in the business troubles which, because of no fault of your own, have come upon you. "You know, of course, that Eugene and I are the greatest friends on earth. From news which I received to-day, and which I had little expectation of ever hearing, I have reason, good reason, to hope that within a very short time I am likely to come into possession of an enormous fortune--a fortune so large

that it will make me one of the richest men in the kingdom. You are a man of business. To be precise, I expect about half a million. Need I tell you what my first, my greatest pleasure, will be in this? It will be to place the whole of it absolutely at the disposal of my best friend's father, so that he may be led carefully out of the present storm into the calm waters of prosperous trade, in which his honour and his industry have already made his name a household word in Ireland. "This note has run out much longer than I expected. Good-night, my dear Mr. O'Donnell. God bless you.

"Dominique Lavirotte."

When he had finished his two letters he enclosed them in envelopes, directing the latter first. Then suddenly he thought of what at first sight seemed an insuperable difficulty. How was he to address Crawford's letter? If he wrote on the envelope, "St. Prisca's Tower, Porter Street," there was little doubt that in due time the letter would be returned to him through the dead-letter office. Yet St. Prisca's Tower was the only address he knew for Crawford in London. How stupid it was of him not to have asked for an address. At the time, he had thought Dora or the old man should write to him first. Since they had left, this idea had occurred to him, and now he felt himself hopeless of communicating it to Crawford for the present. No postman would in his senses think of knocking at the massive door of that solitary tower, and if a postman, touched with lunacy, did knock with his knuckles, he would never receive a reply. He was fairly beaten. In this matter every hour was of value, of the highest value; and here he was paralysed by an unpardonable stupidity of his own. "Will you ask Mr. Maher," he said to the nurse, "if he would be good enough to step this way? I want a word with him." When the landlord entered, Lavirotte said: "Mr. Crawford, who was here last night, left for London without giving me his address. Can you think of any means by which I might be able to find it out at once? The matter is of very great importance." The landlord looked with a keen glance at the sallow face and bandaged head of the prone foreigner. Before Crawford left, he had made a confidant of Maher to the extent that all would yet be well between Lavirotte and his grand-daughter, and he had bound Maher, as an honourable man, to silence. He had, moreover, tried to persuade Maher that Lavirotte might not be quite so black as circumstances represented him. Still the other could not help regarding Lavirotte with a feeling the reverse of cordial. There could, however, be no harm, he thought, in helping Lavirotte in this matter. He said: "Mr. Crawford came first-class." "Yes." "From Euston?" "From Euston." "Then telegraph to Euston, address Mr. Crawford, first-class passenger Irish mail, Euston." The difficulty was solved, and in a few minutes Lavirotte had forwarded the telegram, asking to what address he should send a letter to him in London. At the same time he posted his letter to Mr. O'Donnell. There was little or no chance of his receiving a reply that night, as the Glengowra office would, in all likelihood, be shut before it could be forwarded there. Next morning the answer came:

"Address letter to the Cygnet Hotel, Porter Street, E.C."

Lavirotte's letter to Mr. O'Donnell was delivered the morning after it was written. He put it aside as the work of a man not responsible for his actions; and yet, since it contained the first suggestion that it was possible his business might be saved, he felt a slight tenderness towards it, as a man, whose powers are altogether small, out of proportion to his ambition, feels a tenderness towards the one person who believes in his strength. Immediately after it became generally known that Vernon and Son had stopped payment, Mr. O'Donnell had asked a few of his best friends to come and advise him as to his position. He explained to them that as far as the business in Rathclare was concerned, he was perfectly solvent and capable of carrying it on, but that, as he understood the affairs of Vernon and Son were in a desperate and disgraceful way, and as the company was unlimited, he should be certainly ruined by the "calls." He would, he told them, be quite content to lose all the money he had invested in Vernon and Son, if he might only keep on the Rathclare business as it was going; but that, of course, he was liable to the creditors of the bank up to the very last penny he had, and the chances were a thousand to one that, when Vernon and Son were completely wound up, he would find himself as poor as the poorest man in the parish. Then he asked what they would recommend him to do with respect to the business. They tried to persuade him that things were sure to turn out much better than he anticipated, and they advised him to keep the business running exactly as it now was. He had adopted their advice, but his heart was no longer in his work, and he wandered about the place which he had reared from the foundation to the roof, and he looked at the trade which he had created, with a faltering step and a lack-lustre eye. The evening of the day he got Lavirotte's letter was that following Dr. O'Malley's call. Mrs. O'Donnell had, in the few days between Eugene's hurt and this, tried to induce the father to go out to Glengowra and see their son. But he had declined, saying: "It would do neither him nor me any good. I can be of no use whatever to him now, after all my big promises to him. The boy's prospects are ruined, and, of course, for the girl's sake, that marriage must be broken off." This evening the mother felt more than ever anxious to see her son, and she made a strong appeal to the old man to take the train and run down to Glengowra for an hour. "No," he said, wearily. "Let me be, let me be. The very sight of the boy would be a reproach to me. He must see I was a fool to venture all my money, all my credit, with Vernon and Son." "Don't say that, James. You know he is the best and kindest son that ever lived. Besides,

don't you see, as I told you before, it has all been kept from him?" "Then it will be all the worse to hear him talk about his marriage and his prospects. I could not stand it, Mary. I should go mad. I should let it all out to him, and kill him. My poor boy!" "Well," said the mother, "come down to Glengowra, and don't see him at all. He need not know you are there. Come with me--just for company." The poor woman was torn between devotion to her husband and affection for her son. She durst not leave the old man alone at home, and her heart was breaking to see her only son, her only child, the infinity of her maternity. At this suggestion of his wife's, that he might go to Glengowra without seeing his son, the old man looked up. "Wait a moment," he said, and lifted a paper-weight off some letters of the morning. He took up Lavirotte's and read it over carefully once more, then thrust it into his pocket, and said: "Very well, Mary. Come along." He uttered these words more brightly and briskly than any he had spoken since the great crash had come upon him. When the old couple arrived at Glengowra, they went straight to the hotel. The mother ascended to her son's room. The father sent his card up to Lavirotte. He was requested to walk upstairs. When he entered the room Lavirotte asked the woman to retire. "Mr. Lavirotte, I got your letter this morning, and I am extremely obliged to you for your kind words and for your offer of such enormous help. I most sincerely hope you may get your fortune; for, from all I have heard from Eugene, no one in the world could deserve better. I have come especially to thank you for your kind offer; but, of course, Mr. Lavirotte, you know I could never accept it. I am a doomed man." "You shall, you must accept it," cried the prostrate man, energetically. "I should care no more for all the money in the world than for a handful of pebbles on the beach below. With the money in my possession, should I see my friends wanting it? Besides, the sum I am to come into will be so great that even largely as you have suffered through that bank, I shall be able to spare you what you want to make good the breach, and still leave myself in absolute affluence." The manner of the Frenchman was one of utter self-possession, and it confounded Mr. O'Donnell to find one so apparently sane talking such trash. "May I ask you," said the old man, "if it is a fair question, from what source you expect to acquire this fortune?" "I am under an oath of secrecy in the matter, and cannot tell you. But since I have been hurt, the person who is working the affair for me, or rather on our joint behalf, has paid me a visit, and assured me there is not the least prospect of failure or miscarriage, and that at the end of six, and certainly in less than eighteen months from this, I should be in possession of my share, not less than half a million sterling." The figures six and eighteen months appealed to certain possible exigencies in the mind of Mr. O'Donnell, and carried his mind away from the main prospect of the consideration to the details. "I suppose," he thought, "they will make the first 'calls' light, so as to get all they can out of the poorer shareholders. Then they will go on increasing the sums of the 'calls' as the poorer ones drop off, and this they cannot do under a certain time. Of course, I can pay the 'calls' up to a certain point, but when they reach the end of the poorer shareholders, and have to fall back on the five or six men of large means, I shall certainly be ruined. But I do not think they can reach the point at which I should be left absolutely penniless before eighteen months." Lavirotte and Mr. O'Donnell talked on for half-an-hour in the same strain. The Frenchman was careful to adhere strictly to his vow to Crawford, and yet to say such things to the merchant as in the end convinced him there was at least something in the statements made by his son's friend. At last he looked at his watch, and saw there was no time to lose if they would catch the last train to Rathclare. After a cordial parting with the Frenchman he went down, and found his wife waiting for him. By this time both were radiant. One had firm faith in the recovery of her son, the other full assurance of the salvation of his position.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. O'Donnell got home that evening in remarkably good-humour. Lavirotte had explained to him that his own hope of coming into this money had been absolutely nothing until the visit from the man who was working with him. So that here were two men who knew all about a certain chance, believing thoroughly in it. Why should not he, a third, who knew absolutely nothing about the matter, accept their judgment? What a splendid thing it would be if, after all, the firm which he had created did succeed in weathering the storm! He had said nothing to his wife about the matter on his way to the station, in the train to Glengowra, or from the Glengowra station to his own home. He thought he would preserve the good news--by this time it had taken the substantial form of news in his mind--until they were quietly seated in his little library, where many of the projects leading to his fortune had been devised. When at last he reached that haven, he found the writing-table littered with the ledgers he had left upon it, and between the leaves of one of these ledgers was the completed rough balance-sheet he had made out. Mrs. O'Donnell was astonished to find her husband in such good-humour. She could in no way understand it, for he had not even seen their boy or noticed the progress towards recovery he was making. "The run has done you good, James," she said. "I told you it would. Why, it has been as much to you as good news." "I should think it has," he said; "in fact, Mary, I have heard the very best news while I was in Glengowra. I have every reason to hope we may be able to save the business, anyway."

"Thank God!" cried the woman devoutly. There was a tone of incredulity in her voice. It was not easy to imagine that, after all the hideous certainties of ruin they had been facing for days, there was any prospect these certainties would melt away before doubts that might be shaped into hopes. They were now both seated in their accustomed easy-chairs. The old man caught the arms of his firmly, as though he now saw no reason why it should come under the hammer and pass away for ever from him. "Yes," he said; and then he told her all that had passed between him and Lavirotte, enjoining her to strict secrecy. Then the wife lifted up her voice in praise of Lavirotte, and thanksgiving for their great deliverance, and bargained with her husband for one thing--namely, that she should be allowed to tell the good news to Nellie. "For," said the mother, "she heard the bad news, and bore it like a true-hearted woman! Of course if she was only to think of him, she must have been very sorry to hear it, but when we remember it affected herself too, it must have been harder still to bear. Eugene never heard the bad news. It is only now fair she should hear what Lavirotte promises." It was there and then settled that the hopes aroused that evening should be made known to Ellen Creagh. Next day Mrs. O'Donnell found herself under no necessity of keeping close to her husband, for he was not only not depressed and hopeless, but active, cheerful, and full of projects for the future. So she went early to Glengowra, and, having taken the girl aside, told her all. Nellie clasped her hands in mute stupefaction, and when she did speak at last, could say only: "Mr. Lavirotte! Mr. Lavirotte! Has he really promised to do this, and do you think the thing is in his power? I never felt more bewildered in all my life." Yes, it was enough to make one think one was dreaming. This Lavirotte had asked her to marry him. He had said her refusal would ruin him. O'Donnell had asked her to marry him, and she had consented. Then this Lavirotte had sought O'Donnell's life. In the struggle both had been badly hurt. O'Donnell had forgiven Lavirotte. Upon this came the absolute ruin of O'Donnell's father, and the consequent ruin of his son also. By this commercial catastrophe the possibility of his marrying her was indefinitely postponed, and at the very moment when it might be supposed a man in Lavirotte's position, and of his excitable temperament, would nourish hope anew of succeeding where he had failed before with her, he offered to rescue the father from ruin, and reinstate the whole family in affluence! "It is incredible," she said, after a long pause. "I cannot believe it possible." "But it is true," said Eugene's mother. "Believe me, my dear, it is true. My husband, after all his years and years in business, is not likely to make a mistake or be misled in such matters." "It may be true," said the girl, "but I cannot believe it." All things were now going on well with everybody. The old merchant was no longer in dread of bankruptcy. Lionel Crawford had got an additional hold on Lavirotte. The two wounded men were progressing rapidly towards perfect health. Lavirotte had forsworn his fickleness, and declared himself devoted to Dora. The two men who had met in a struggle for life had shaken hands by proxy, and sworn friendship anew; and Nellie and Dora passed the happy days in the full assurance of the devotion of their lovers, and the speedy approach of their marriages. The time went quickly by. Dr. O'Malley called regularly at the hotel, and regularly reported favourably of the patients. Now Lavirotte wrote a few lines every day to Dora, and she every day a long letter to him. And every day came Nellie to sit a while with Eugene, and hear his voice, and go away with strengthening consciousness that daily he grew more like his own self. Once more Lionel Crawford was happy at his old work, excavating at the base of the old tower with increased vigour, and getting rid of the fruits of his toil with greater despatch. Nothing, indeed, but good seemed to have come of that dark night's work. It is true that the police were still a little bitter over their disappointment, and that the townsfolk observed a more reserved attitude towards those connected with that affair. But if those chiefly concerned in the matter were content, the police and the people might be dismal and disagreeable if they pleased. In the town of Rathclare, besides Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell, there was another person greatly pleased with the turn things had taken. This was Mr. John Cassidy, a gentleman of slight build, pale, small, impertinent, pretty face, the nose of which turned up slightly. He had an exquisitely fair moustache, an exquisitely fair imperial, and the most exquisitely made clothes a man on a hundred pounds a year could afford to wear in a provincial town in Ireland. He had what he believed to be a very pretty English accent, although he never had been out of Ireland. He wore a delicate yellow watch-chain purely as an ornament, for its use had no existence. He wore an eye-glass for ornament also. He had never been seen to smoke a pipe, and never much more than the tenth part of a cigar at a time. He was always scrupulously neat and consciously pretty, and spoke of the whole female sex as "poor things," as though it grieved him to the soul he could not make every woman alive absolutely happy by marrying her. He really wasn't a scamp, and had no offensive accomplishments or acquirements. He had a ravenous curiosity, particularly in love affairs. How it came to be that a man who devoted so much of his time to the courtship of others, should have himself the time to break and cast away all female hearts he encountered, no one could tell. It was the great prerogative of his genius to be able to do so. The chief source of his present amiable condition of mind was that he found himself about to start in a few days for London, and that, by way of an introduction to that vast place, he carried with him the clue to a mysterious love affair in which he was not a principal, and which he had sworn to follow up. He had sworn to his friend of the Post Office that he would discover what girl Lavirotte was sweet on in London before he had made love to Nellie Creagh, and his efforts in such a case hitherto had seldom failed. He had no heart and no tact, but instead of these a wonderful power of going straight at the mark, and in a case of this kind demanding of a woman point-blank: "Is it a fact that Mr. Lavirotte, while engaged to you, asked Miss Creagh to marry him? I'm interested in all subjects of this kind." Mr. John Cassidy had up to this been employed in the head office of the railway at Rathclare, and was now about to separate himself from his dear friend, a clerk in the Post Office, and go to London, where something better had offered, and where he should have, he hoped, for the sake of womankind, a larger female audience to hearken to his attractions, and where, moreover, he should have a very handsome mystery of his own particular pattern to solve.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The gloom of irreparable ruin had fallen on the house of Vernon. The deeper its business affairs became investigated the more ghastly appeared the inevitable finish. At first people were doubtful as to whether the result of the failure would be this or that or the other, in connection with Mr. Vernon's social position. Now it seemed there was no longer any room for speculation. Bankruptcy of the worst kind would be the end. All at once a still more startling rumour got abroad. At first people whispered it only in quiet places, and only to confidential friends. Then gradually a murmur arose. Finally, within a month of the failure of the bank, and before yet the accounts had been fully investigated, people had been heard to say openly that William Vernon ought to be made the object of a criminal prosecution and put in the dock. The panic of fear which had kept people's mouths shut, upon this suggestion, disappeared at once; and where there had been, a few hours before, but hints and faint whispers, and timid words of acquiescence, there was now a loud, clear, articulate demand for the impeachment of William Vernon. There was, on the day of the bank's failure, scarcely less talk of that disaster than there was now of the passionate desire that this fraudulent speculator should suffer at the hands of the law. An evening paper hinted that steps of the kind ought to be taken at once. Next morning, Mr. William Vernon was not to be found. He had left Dublin--Ireland--for some place unknown abroad--Mexico it was supposed. A few days after the flight of Vernon, the accountants, in whose hands the bank affairs had been placed, made a report, and upon this report was based the first call. It was not a heavy one. It ruined only a few people, and drove only one man mad. James O'Donnell met this call promptly and cheerfully. It did not strain him in the least. He had put most of his savings into Vernon's bank, but then he was a man of large prudence, and held a considerable reserve of ready money. Indeed, after he had paid the first call he had still at command what people in moderate circumstances would consider a very large sum. When he got the acknowledgment from Dublin, he showed it to his wife with a buoyant laugh, and said: "You see, Mary, I am not yet quite a bankrupt. Up to this I have met every engagement, this included, and, please God, I shall be able to meet all." Although it had been hoped that there would have been no delay to the marriage of Eugene and Nellie, a variety of circumstances made it desirable that a postponement of about a month should take place. In the present posture of affairs it would have been impossible for Mr. O'Donnell to settle money on his son; or, indeed, to give him anything worth speaking of, beyond the salary he drew in connection with the firm. When Eugene had recovered sufficient strength to bear the shock, he had been told of the misfortune which had overtaken his father in business. When he heard it he made little of it. He thought little of everything except his approaching marriage. It was Nellie who broke the news to him. She had been timid, fearful, as she approached the subject. She had prepared the way by saying that all those people who were dear to him were in good health and spirits, but that a certain unpleasant thing had occurred--a very unpleasant thing--a terribly unpleasant thing of a purely business nature; in fact, his father had lost a vast sum of money--all his savings. The young man looked grave, and said he was very sorry for the poor old man; but that--as long as the business held they should be more than comfortable, and that he was sure Nellie did not want riches such as would be his if this misfortune had not arisen. What exactly had happened? She told him all. He was serious, and said it was too bad--too hard on the governor, who was the best of men. In an interview later with his father, the latter told him that for the present he was not in a position to make any settlement whatever, but that if his son was contented to marry on his present salary, there would be no opposition. The son said he would be more than contented; that he had no extravagant habits or expensive tastes, and that he and Nellie could manage very well on the five hundred pounds a year his father allowed him. The old man said he had felt quite sure his son would be satisfied; but what would Nellie say, in the face of former promises he, the father, had made? The young man laughed a strong, joyous, wholesome laugh, and told his father that Nellie would marry him on a pound a week. "For you know, sir," he said, "she is not used to luxuries. She does not want them, and she is the most sensible, as she is the best, girl in the world." Then Eugene's father told his son of what Lavirotte had promised. "I am not surprised, father, to hear he has offered to help us. I always told you he was true as steel." At the word steel he winced, but recovered himself instantly. "People here don't like him, because they can't understand his quick southern ways. But the longer you know him the better you like him, and the more you'll trust him." When Eugene spoke to Nellie on the subject of his father's conversation with him, she confirmed his anticipations, and said: "You know, Eugene, that five hundred pounds a year is a great deal more than a girl like me could ever reasonably have hoped for. Why, it's a small fortune to one who has been a poor governess, and who never knew what it was to have even one hundred pounds a year." He took her in his arms and kissed her, and called her his own true, loyal darling, his best of girls, his wisest sweetheart, his only sweetheart. "And if the worst comes to the worst, Nellie, even supposing that the Lavirotte affair never turns up, you know I am young and once more strong, and if we had to go to America, love, I could hoe a field, or split rails, or conduct a car, or heave on a winch, or get a crust for the two of us somehow; and if the two of us

mean, above all things, to be together, what are all other things to us compared to our being together?" She was of the same opinion, and so it was settled that at the end of the month to which the marriage had been postponed, it should take place as quietly as possible, but otherwise as though no trouble had overtaken the house of O'Donnell. By this time Lavirotte was established in London. Lionel Crawford had taken lodgings for Dora in Charterhouse Square, and Lavirotte lived in one of the streets leading from the Strand towards the river. John Cassidy was now regularly installed in his London situation, and had taken a genteel lodging in Bloomsbury. His fellow clerks did not, as a rule, live so near the great centre of London. They had rooms in Peckham, Islington, Kennington, and such ungenteel neighbourhoods. But no man with any pretensions to be handsome, a gentleman, and a lady-killer, could condescend to associate his name with such haunts of rabble London as Peckham, Islington, and Kennington. Up to this he had not been able to devote much time to what he was pleased to call "the Lavirotte mystery." A variety of other matters claimed his most careful attention. On his arrival in London, he found that his coats, and collars, and ties, and socks, although the very best that his money would allow him to get in Rathclare, were not at all the right things for a man of his antecedents in the matter of the fair sex. His clothes were, it is true, equal if not superior to those worn by the mere common, ordinary clerks with whom he was bound to associate, and whose coarse and ungenteel ways he was for a portion of the day obliged to endure. But then the clothes, which in Rathclare had been those of a man of distinguished fashion, were, to his chagrin, in London no more than those proper to a mere common clerk. This was a terrible revelation to a sensitive soul. Of course it could be remedied in the future; but how terribly the fact reflected upon the past, and fancy the figure he should have made in Rathclare if he, when there, had only known as much as he did now. Imagine how ladies would have stared and admired if he had but appeared in a costume such as he was now hastening to assume. Dainty shoes, clocked socks, trousers that fitted the limb as the daintiest of gloves fit the hands of the daintiest of duchesses, coat and waistcoat which could only be put on before meals and when the lungs were empty, collars and scarfs designed by Royal Academicians and tenderly executed by tradespeople who might, if they would, have written sartorial epics; such were the splendours now preparing for his exquisite person. Apart from the cares born of his tailor and outfitter, certain other little matters had to be arranged about his room. A Japanese letter-rack had to be purchased and hung up for the reception of his prospective love-letters. Open work, china dishes of elegant hues, although of cheap manufacture, had to be obtained and set forth for the reception of rose-leaves, photographs, and cards. The portraits of celebrated beauties had to be hung up, so that, should an acquaintance drop into his room, he might have an opportunity of showing his visitor the counterpart of his dearest friends. His fellow-clerks were coarse enough to consider him a humbug. His superiors at the office did not know whether he was an ass or not; but the clerks and the superiors agreed that he had two priceless virtues--he could tot all day long without making an error, and there was not a spot of extraneous ink on any folio of his books. By this time Lavirotte was thoroughly restored to health. Daily he paid a visit to Dora. The course of their true love was running with idyllic smoothness. No suitor could be more tender, enthusiastic, constant-minded than he. Dora's life was one long daydream. Her former solitary life in London now seemed to her like a dreary unreality, forced upon her imagination merely that her present life might stand out in glory against so gray and sad a background. Since Lavirotte left London of old, the place had grown dull and dismal around her. Now the whole city was bright and joyous once again. Instead of being a vast chasm filled with unfamiliar things and unfriendly forms, and dark with her inner solitude, the buildings now were full of vital beauty, and the people of courteous friendliness. Although she looked forward with pleasant anticipations to the time when she would not be even temporarily separated from Dominique, she could not persuade herself that the future would be more happy than the present. She seemed to want nothing now beyond just a little more of his society. Meanwhile Lavirotte had availed himself of Lionel Crawford's offer and taken the money, and was getting lessons. But, in addition to these, he was now busy in another way. The idea of the treasure mastered him as completely as it had the old man. He seemed to take but a second-rate interest in his own affairs, and every hour he could spare from the lessons and Dora was devoted to helping Crawford in his work at St. Prisca's Tower. He had said to Crawford: "There is no knowing when these poor O'Donnells will want the money. You said we should have it in six to eighteen months. We must have it sooner, much sooner, as soon as ever we possibly can." And so he bent himself to the work as he did to any other work he took in hand--wholly, passionately, fiercely. The old man said he would kill himself. He swore he did not care so long as he might succeed. Now that he had entered fully into the scheme of Crawford, and was actively helping him, he, too, felt the wild pleasure of the search; the inexorable determination of not sharing the secret with anyone. No; it was their secret, and they two, unassisted by anyone who might betray them, should alone reach the golden goal. So absorbed was he in the work at the tower that he could think of little else, and felt rather put out when one morning he received a letter from Eugene O'Donnell, saying that he and Nellie were to be married on Wednesday next week, and asking him to come over a day or two beforehand, as became a best man. About this time Mr. John Cassidy found himself arrayed according to his taste, with his room in order for the reception of anyone he might care to ask in, and with his hands free to follow up the Lavirotte mystery.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Nothing could have been quieter than the marriage at Rathclare. There was no display of any kind, no wedding-breakfast, no rejoicings. The men employed by Mr. O'Donnell had proposed subscribing and giving the bride a present, until they were told that anything of the kind would be inopportune. The presents which private friends sent were, out of respect to the few people who called, set forth in the dining-room. But, upon the whole, neither before nor after the marriage, was there anything connected with it which could give the people of Rathclare the least pretence for uncharitableness. The bride and bridegroom drove away from the house early in the afternoon, with the intention of spending a short time on the Continent, and then returning to Rathclare. When they had gone, not more than half-a-dozen guests remained at O'Donnell's. Among these was Lavirotte, who had promised to stay with the old folk that night. There was a very quiet dinner, and before one o'clock the old man and Lavirotte found themselves alone in the dining-room. "I have been waiting for this opportunity, sir," said the Frenchman, "when we should be quiet and alone, with no chance of interruption, in order that I might speak to you about the matter which is nearest my heart." The old man looked at Lavirotte gratefully, and said: "You are alluding to the property you spoke to me of?" "Yes," said Lavirotte. "I am still in no position to talk freely of the matter; but this much I can tell you, that since I saw you last I have made it my business to ascertain as closely as possible our chances of success." "And they are?" said O'Donnell, leaning forward and looking at his guest eagerly. "Excellent, most excellent. Nothing could be better. Ever since I left Glengowra I have devoted all my time to their furtherance, and I have come to the conclusion that, although I cannot now say with certainty the exact amount, no more than a few months need pass before you shall be in command of any sum of money you may require." "Thank God!" cried the old man, throwing himself back in his chair, clasping his hands, and looking upwards. "You do not know what a blessed relief your words are to me; for no longer ago than this morning I had news from Dublin to the effect that there is to be another and an immediate call, and that this will be at least double the former one." "How soon is this likely to come upon you? How soon shall you want the money for this call?" "Within a few weeks. What distresses me most of all is other news which accompanies what I have already told you, to the effect that although the first demand had been very freely met, the general impression, the conviction, was that the second demand would be met by very few indeed in full, and that all of those who met it in part, and many of those who met it in full, would be absolutely ruined." "I do not exactly know the full meaning of what you tell me," said Lavirotte. "Will you explain?" "Nothing is simpler. Let us say a man held one one-hundred pound share. When the bank stopped, having lost all its capital and a vast quantity of the money lent to it and deposited in it, this man's hundred pounds was then not only gone, but the rest of his fortune also (the bank being unlimited) if the whole of his fortune was necessary to pay the last penny to the lenders and depositors." "That's very hard," said Lavirotte. "Very hard--cruel. Now, the first call, let us say of fifty pounds, means that the man who held the one-hundred pound share is called upon to pay fifty pounds towards indemnifying the depositors and lenders." "So that if the man pays the fifty he loses a hundred and fifty?" "Exactly. Now, if the second call is double the first, he will, when he has paid that----" "He will have lost two hundred and fifty pounds on his original hundred pound speculation." "Quite so. You see that. Let us say nine out of ten can pay the fifty pounds, but not more than six out of ten can pay the hundred. Now, my correspondent in Dublin gives me to understand that nothing like six out of ten will be able to meet the second call, and that, in fact, the solvent shareholders after the second call will be only rich men; so that there will be no need for proceeding further gradually, and, in all likelihood, the third call will be for a very large sum indeed per share, two hundred and fifty, five hundred, or a thousand pounds perhaps." "Mr. O'Donnell, you will not consider me impertinent if I ask you, in strict confidence, whether you think you will be able to pay this second call?" "Yes, I think I shall be able to pay the second call, but as far as I can see it will drain me to the utmost. My credit is now, of course, gone, and I am obliged to pay cash, so that after paying the hundred pound call I shall have barely sufficient capital to keep the business going. The business consists, of course, of the good-will, the plant, the stock, and the debts. All this put together would not go nearly meeting a third call of any such magnitude as I have spoken of." "And the result of that would be to you?" "That I should be a bankrupt and a pauper." "Well," said Lavirotte, going over and taking the old man by the hand, "meet the second at all hazards." He drew himself up then to his full height, raised his right hand to heaven, saying: "And I swear to you, Mr. O'Donnell, that I will answer for the third." The merchant rose from his chair and took his hand. "There is no use in attempting to thank a man for a service such as you promise. I will not try to say anything; I could not if I would." "Be seated, sir, I beg you, be seated. Think no more of the matter. Rely on me. Leave the rest to me. And now that we have settled the matter" (both men had sat down) "I wish you to answer me a question which affects a friend of mine, and is connected with Vernon's bank. My friend is a minor. Her affairs were in the hands of trustees. Her trustees--or, I believe, trustee, more accurately--invested the money in Vernon's bank, shares I presume. Now, my friend has heard nothing from the bank about these calls. How is that?" "She has nothing to do with the matter. She has lost all her money." "Yes; but what about the calls?" "The trustee has to pay those." "Out of his own pocket?" "Yes, out of his own pocket." "Supposing him to be an honest man, and that he did everything for the best?" "Supposing him to be an honest man, and that he did everything for the best." "What an infamous injustice! What an infamous injustice to a well-meaning, honest

man!" "An infamous injustice you may say, supposing the man to be honest. He gets your friend's money on trust to invest. Here is a highly respectable banking firm which will pay him, according to the market value of its shares, six or seven per cent. He is anxious his ward should have the most interest he can safely get for her money. He invests, and is ruined." Lavirotte started to his feet, threw his arms above his head wildly, and, walking up and down the room, excitedly cried: "By heavens, Mr. O'Donnell, he shall not be ruined, I will see that he shall not be ruined. He did me a bad turn once, or rather he refused to do me a good one when he could; but I shall protect him against this execrable injustice, this infamous law." Mr. O'Donnell did not feel himself justified in asking any questions, and there was no further conversation of any interest that night. Next morning Lavirotte set off for London, arrived in due time, called upon Dora first, and related to her all the interesting particulars of the marriage. She had but a reflected interest in the bride and bridegroom, and, therefore, the subject was soon exhausted. Before this he had, of course, told her of the large fortune into which he hoped to come soon. They had, upon one or two occasions, talked over the loss of her money; but he had always tossed the matter to the winds as of no consequence when confronted with the mighty results he was expecting. Now he had a matter of another kind to speak about. He asked her pointedly, elaborately, how upon the whole Kempston had behaved towards her. She said that no one could have been more kind and considerate, and that the only occasion upon which she had any reason to complain of him, was when he refused to let Lavirotte have the money or her to marry him. Then Lavirotte informed her that not only was her money swallowed up in the Vernon whirlpool, but that Kempston, her trustee, would inevitably be ruined owing to his connection with her and it. The girl was horrified. Then Lavirotte told her that he had sworn this man should not be ruined, and that he meant to keep his oath. She clung to him and kissed him, and praised him with all the dearest words of her heart, for his noble, his sublime generosity, and after some time he left her to see Crawford. He found the old man more busy, more energetic, more enthusiastic, more hopeful than ever. Lavirotte told him that since he had seen him last additional reason had arisen for haste. He did not go into detail. He merely said that business called him hence for a few hours; but that on his return he would throw into the work twice the energy he had previously displayed. "Then," said the old man, "you are digging at once to find a treasure and a grave." "But in what a glorious cause!" cried Lavirotte, in an excited voice. "The cause of honour, of justice, of reparation. When I have secured my dear friends from the disaster which now threatens them, and when I have paid back the prudent parsimony of this attorney a thousandfold, why should I not die! I shall never do a better thing in all my life, and when a man has done his best he ought to go, lest, peradventure, he live to do his worst, and die in doing it." "And Dora?" The look of exaltation faded from the face of Lavirotte. "And Dora, my darling Dora! My own sweet, trusting girl!" he cried, tenderly. "I do not understand myself; I am two beings; I have two natures. To myself I would be merciless to gain this final glory of assuaging the wrong I have done my friends, and in act forgiving the injury this man Kempston has done to me. But Dora! Dora! Then something else comes in, my other self, my weaker self, my better self, perhaps. Any weakness is better than the tyranny of glory, than the lust of applause." He was silent for a while. The old man had listened to him without a word. "Now, I must go and see that attorney, and show him that I am not the interested adventurer he took me for, and that if a little time ago I was willing to borrow a few paltry pounds, which in a year or two should in any case be my own, I am now willing to throw down thousands for him who never did me personally a service, simply because he was kind and good to the woman whom I love." Lavirotte left the tower.

CHAPTER XXX.

After the marriage and the going back of Lavirotte to London, all things went on regularly in their old course. Before the return of the bride and bridegroom from their Continental tour, Mr. O'Donnell paid the second call. He had done so with extreme difficulty. It had taken every penny he could lay his hand upon; and, indeed, the way in which he was obliged to draw in money from those who owed it to him threatened to be of serious injury to his business. Still he fought on bravely. The heart of the old man was stirred within him. His dogged nature was aroused to activity such as it had never known, even in his younger days. James O'Donnell was at bay, and he would show the world what James O'Donnell could do when his case seemed desperate. Day and night he worked. His energy appeared inextinguishable. His resources seemed to increase with the demands upon them. His vision was clear, his judgment infallible, his instincts true, his premonitions verified. Rathclare stood still and watched this miracle of new-born strength in the old man. People knew well enough that he had called in his last farthing, and that now, outside the four walls of his business place, he had not a hundred pounds in the world, beyond the book debts, which to claim hastily would be finally to destroy the business. When his son came back from abroad, he was more amazed than anyone else. The slow, plodding manner of late years had completely disappeared from his father, and instead he encountered the indomitable energy, the insatiable thirst for activity, and a judgment clearer and sounder than he had ever found in any

other man. The newly-married couple took a small house in Glengowra. Every day Eugene went in to business, and every day returned to Glengowra in time for dinner. While Eugene was away his father had written to him, saying he had paid the second call, and that, with the help of Lavirotte, he would be able to pay the third, which would, he assumed, be the last. In Dublin the opinion was that the third call would certainly be the last. The determination was to wind the whole thing up with the greatest possible despatch, and hide its infamy away for ever. It was possible for accountants, who had charge of the affair, to go over the share book, and place opposite every name, which had hitherto proved solvent, a very close approximation of the resources at the disposal of each; and it gradually oozed out that there would be no use in having a call of anything less than five hundred pounds, for if they had two hundred and fifty now, and another two hundred and fifty later on, they would simply have the same names recurring, since the men who could meet the two hundred and fifty could meet the five. In Rathclare, at last, people began to believe that someone must have promised to sustain O'Donnell at the final moment, for all agreed that unless the old man had lost his reason, there could be now no doubt he was certain to tide over the affair. He had made arrangements one, two, three years in advance. He was in treaty for purchasing adjoining buildings with a view to incorporating them in his vast store. He had ordered new lighters to be laid down for him in the dockyard. Up to this he had always refused the mayoralty of the town, although he had for many years been a member of the corporation. Now he allowed himself to be put forward as a candidate for next year. No bankrupt could be mayor. From first to last he had never once sought any communication with the Vernons. Now he seemed to think his old friend not so great a criminal as at one time he appeared. Although he could not entirely forgive him, he spoke less harshly of him than of old, and was heard even to say once: "Poor devil, how do we know how he was dragged into it?" Meanwhile, Lionel Crawford and Dominique Lavirotte wrought with the energy of desperate men in the basement of St. Prisca's Tower. By day they dug and delved, Lavirotte, being younger, carrying the fruit of their labour to the top of the tower. The slow and cautious mode of procedure adopted by the old man was too tedious for the fiery-hearted Frenchman. "I'll risk the lofts," cried Lavirotte, "if I were to perish beneath them. You may stick to your old plan if you like, but it is too slow for me. It would kill me. It would drive me mad, when I think of my friends over there, when I think of the approaching ruin which we may avert." Mr. Kempston was a bachelor, easy-going and somewhat indolent, when the first news reached him that Vernon and Son had closed their doors. Hour after hour, and day after day, brought him nothing but a tedious aggravation of the worst reports, and gradually it dawned upon him that now, when he was no longer young, he was a ruined man. Harrington, the father of Dora, and he had been friends in youth. Hence his trusteeship to the will. Hence his guardianship of Dora. He had always been a man of excellent business capacity; but outside his business he was inclined to be lazy, self-indulgent, extravagant. When younger, he was greatly devoted to what is called fun. Now he liked rich living, good company, good clubs, and, if the truth might be told, a great deal more rather high whist than was good for his pocket. He paid the first "call" of the Vernon bank with a groan. "When I have paid the second," he said, "I shall still have my profession--that is," he said bitterly, "if they don't make a bankrupt of me." Then Lavirotte came with his amazing promise of indemnity, and his still more amazing forgiveness. The elderly attorney groaned, smiled, shook his head, swore, thanked Lavirotte profusely, said he'd take the help if it came, grasped Lavirotte by the hand, swore again, gave Lavirotte an excellent luncheon at his club, shook hands and said good-bye to Lavirotte, and then swore mutely the whole way from his club back to his office. When the time for paying the second instalment arrived, he paid it without a murmur, and then swore no more. He had nothing to swear by. Day by day Lionel Crawford and Dominique Lavirotte tore at the earth and clay and stones at the base of St. Prisca's Tower. Day by day they grew nearer and nearer to the goal. Crawford had told Lavirotte what that goal would be like. He knew every stone of that tower from his old readings. They were to keep now to the centre, as near as possible, driving the pick down as far as ever they could. "If it meets anything hard," said the old man, "strike again with the pick a few inches all round, and if it meets anything hard all round, that's it--that's the conical roof of the vault. In that vault the chests have now lain buried more than two hundred years." At last, the accountants who had charge of the affairs of Vernon and Son issued the last call. It was for five hundred pounds per share. Eugene wrote to Lavirotte, and asked him, for God's sake, to be quick. Lavirotte scarcely ate or slept. For days now he did not go near Dora, even. He was wasted, haggard, thin. He had long ago given up living at his rooms off the Strand. He and Lionel Crawford spent all their time now in the tower. Once in two or three days he went to his lodgings to see if there were letters. The morning he went and found Eugene's there he felt faint, and he had no sooner sat down in a chair than the fact that he had at last worn out all his energies came upon him. If death threatened him there he could not have arisen. For two nights he had not slept, and he had eaten little for the two days. The lofts had already shown unmistakable signs of impatience at the weight they bore. Any moment they might come crushing down upon the two workers, burying Crawford and himself and the stupendous treasure for ever, since outside that tower no living being knew what they sought. The sight of Eugene's letter, and the sense that not only were his labours not completed, but that they must be redoubled, overcame him. He called for wine. They brought him some. He drank a little, and felt stronger. He thought if he drank a little more he might be able to get back to the tower before his drowsiness overcame him. He drank a little more wine, and, before he found himself sufficiently invigorated to move, he fell asleep in the chair. He did not awake for some hours. Then he felt refreshed and stronger. "It was a shame for me," he said, "to fall asleep, but the sleep has done me good. Now to work once more." He drove to within a hundred yards of St. Prisca's Tower, and there alighted. He walked up to the massive oak door, opened it with his key, and entered the tower. The darkness was Cimmerian. He could see absolutely nothing. "Crawford must be aloft." He looked down. His eye detected something unusual below. In the middle of the

impenetrable gloom there was what seemed to him a phosphorescent glow, covering about two square feet of the bottom of the pit. The lantern by which they worked was not to be seen. What could this glow of light be? The lantern, when below, looked like a distinct yellow patch surrounded by circles of light, decreasing in brightness as they receded from the lantern. But the light below was perfectly equal. It was not more intense at the centre than at the edges, and, contrary to the case of the lantern, there was no dark patch in the centre. Lavirotte descended the ladder in uneasy amazement, and approached the glowing space. It was not until within a few feet of it he discovered what it was. A hole! At the bottom, twelve feet below, an uneven floor. Through the hole dangled a rope. On the floor below, the lantern by which Crawford and he worked. Close to the lamp, the prostrate form of a man. Lavirotte seized the rope and descended. This was the vault in which they had hidden the treasure, unmistakably. He stooped and raised the lantern, casting the light slowly all round him, so that when he had finished his inspection nothing that was in that vault could be unknown to him. Then he knelt down beside the prostrate form of the man, and turned the face upward. Lionel Crawford! There was no other way of getting out of that vault but by climbing up that rope. He tried to climb that rope and failed. His strength was gone. He sat down on the floor of the vault, and covered his face with his hands. With the exception of himself, the lantern, and the corpse of Lionel Crawford, the vault was empty!

Part II.

CHAPTER I.

For a while Lavirotte sat on the floor of that vault, immovable. He was confounded, stunned. He found himself confronted by three terrible facts. There was no treasure here. Here was the dead body of Lionel Crawford. Here was he himself entombed. When he closed the door of the tower, he locked it on the inside, and put the key in his pocket. How was anyone to find out he was here? Lionel Crawford had told him that during all the months and months he had lived in that place no one, to his knowledge, had ever rapped at the door. Was it likely anyone would rap now? And, if anyone did, what use would the rapping be? From the top of the vault to the threshold of the door was at least twenty feet; and he was twelve feet below the top of the vault. And all day long, around and about the base of St. Prisca's Tower the heavy traffic of one of the great waterside streets groaned and screeched and murmured, continually pierced by the shouts and oaths of men, until such a dull, dead, loud tumult reared itself against the walls of the tower that no single human voice could by any possibility be, in the daytime, heard without from where he now sat. By night things would not improve. If he happened to be on a level with the door leading from the tower into the lane, he could, no doubt, hear the footfall of the infrequent policeman. But here, thirty feet down, and with the concave shield of the vault between him and the doorway, and the massive door between him and the lane, it would be insanity to expect he could hear so slight a sound. There, it is true, dangled the rope through the hole. He could read the last chapter in the life of Lionel Crawford by the aid of that rope. Would someone else, years, ay perhaps a century hence, be able to read the last chapter of his life by the aid of what would then remain of that rope? He saw how it had been with the dead old man. During his (Lavirotte's) absence, Crawford's pickaxe had struck upon the roof of the vault. Crawford then felt that the labours of his life were at an end. While he (Lavirotte) was sleeping, the old man must have worked like a giant. They had found the floor above the vault a few days ago. Now, here was hard against the steel pick the very stone that kept the treasure from the old man's eyes. He could see Crawford stoop in the dim light of the lantern, lean over his pick, grovel under his shovel, panting, praying, sweating, until a large space of the stonework of the roof had been cleared. Then he could see the ardent, eager, tremulous haste of the old man as, bit by bit, he picked out the mortar from between the stones, until at last he had freed one stone, and succeeded in getting it out of the bed in which it had lain for centuries. To enlarge the orifice was a matter of no great labour or time. He simply put his arm through the hole, and swung a sledgehammer against the roof-stones until he had loosed them. Then he removed them one by one, making the opening big enough to allow him to descend. When all was ready for going down he went up to

one of the lofts and fetched a rope, tied one end of this rope to the foot of the ladder that dipped into the pit, or to several of the larger stones, or to the handles of one of the baskets filled with earth--to something which would more than counterpoise his weight. Then, taking the lantern with him, and the hopes of years and the certainty of success, he had lowered himself into that blind void, in the full belief that within a minute from the time he began the descent he would be in possession of one of the largest treasures ever discovered by man on earth. He had slid down that rope. He had in all likelihood done as he (Lavirotte) had done--swung the lantern hither and thither, round and round, until he had found out that the vault was empty, the treasure had been carried away, or had never been deposited there at all. Then the shock had, no doubt, been too much for the overwrought nature, and the broken spirit of Lionel Crawford had fled. There was no reason to suppose that any vapours of the place had killed him, for while he died the light in the lantern lived. Man has taken the wolf and made a servant of him. Man has taken the fox and made a servant of him. He has called the two when fused, the dog. Man has taken the heat of the sun and the blaze of the volcano, and has called the two when fused, fire. They are both his especial slaves. They are both his especial prerogatives. The dog is his creature. Fire is his creature. Neither exists without him. Either will die where he cannot live. The light of the lantern had outlived Crawford, which showed that he had not died of any exhaled or infiltrated poisonous gas. Shock or exhaustion had killed the old man. What was to kill him, Lavirotte? Hunger? He shuddered and looked around. How horrible the thought of dying of hunger; there, within thirty feet of one of the great ways that, from early to late, was crammed and choked with all kinds of simple or rich or rare or exquisite food, endlessly moving westward for the sustentation of the great city. To die of hunger there, when the freight of one huge van now lumbering by would preserve a whole regiment from starving for a week, would give him enough food for years. To die of hunger there within five hundred yards of five thousand people, not the humblest of whom would refuse to share with him his crust, if that humblest of the upper earth but knew how dire his extremity. To die of hunger there, with money in his pocket, when, within a stone's throw of the door of that tower, there were ten places whose only business was to supply food, not to those who were absolutely hungry in the sense of their approaching death through hunger, but to those who were hungry in the ordinary trivial routine of the day. It seemed horrible. He took down his hands from before his eyes, and looked with horror around him. To be alone without any chance of delivery and in danger of death is bad, seemingly almost the worst condition in which a man could find himself; but to be alone, beyond succour, threatened by death, and in the presence of the already dead, is ten thousand times more appalling. In the former case we know to a certainty, we are assured beyond doubt that we shall die, but the realisation of death is unfixed and' shadowy. We have, ever since we can remember, known we should die. We have seen death, touched death, kissed the dear dead, seen the dead put finally away in the cold envicinage of earth. But few have sat looking at the dead, waiting for death. Here to Lavirotte death was approaching. There to Lavirotte was an exemplar of the dead. As that was, he should be. The whole blue vault of heaven should vanish. The whole sweet plains and dales and hills of earth should be to him no more. No more to him than to *that* lying there now before him. Hope and love and joy and friendship, and the sweet commune with the great body of sympathetic man, where experience had first developed, expectancy had first arisen, and vague and splendid imaginings had had their hint and form, should all, all evanesce. Here, upon what was to have been the completion of their joint great work, was to be no reward, but their joint death. Of old he had smiled at Crawford's enthusiastic belief in this buried treasure. Then he had come to share Crawford's beliefs and hopes. Now he had come to share Crawford's despair and grave. Out of that vault there was no chance he should ever go alive. The friends whom he had striven to serve would believe him to have been a foolish braggart or a vicious liar. The girl whom he was to wed would know no more of his fate than though a whirlwind had plucked him up and cast him, unseen by man, into the middle of the sea. There would be no record of him when all was over, until, perhaps, a century hence reference would be made somewhere to his bones. It was hotter here than above-ground, much hotter. To die of hunger was, he had always heard, one of the most painful of deaths. Yet here was he caged in by all adversity, destined to end his life for want of such things as no man above-ground need die for lack of, since, when all man's individual enterprise was marred or put away, the State stepped forth and said he shall not die for need of mere bread. It was much hotter here than in the cool broad streets, fenced with places where one could get wholesome food, and get that wholesome food--cheap. The sky was above those streets. He had seen the sky as he drove along the Strand and Fleet Street to-day. The sky was blue, and to wave one's arms upwards towards it was to feel refreshed and cool. Cool--cool--cool. It was getting hotter. As he had come along the Strand that evening he had thought he would stop the cab at one of those many, many shops that hedged the way, and get a drink of something deliciously cool and bitter to take away the thirst which that wine had put upon him. But then he was so eager to reach the tower, he had forborne. Now he was sorry. He had had only two glasses of that wine, and two such small glasses were very little good to quench thirst when one was thirsty. How much better it would have been for him to have taken a whole pint of milk, or cold, clear, sparkling water. If he had had either of these---- The place was getting hotter and hotter. He looked at the candle in the lantern. It was burning low. In an hour he should be in the dark. What a pity he had not bought a lemon for a penny. How strange seemed the difference between a penny here and a penny in the Strand or Fleet Street a little while ago. He had gold and silver in his pocket, and although he thought to himself as he drove along, "Why should I give a penny for a lemon, when I know as soon as I get to the tower I shall be able to have as much water as I desire for nothing?" now he was in the tower, and he knew that on one of the lofts above was water more than any man could drink in many days, and yet he would have given all the silver he had in his pocket for one pint. The heat seemed to increase. He stood up. His limbs were scarcely strong enough to support him. His strength had left him wholly. He looked up at

the opening over his head. He clutched the rope. He pushed his arms up as far as they would reach, then raised his feet from the ground. The hands would not support the body. The rope slipped through them. He fell awkwardly upon the hard floor of the vault. A subtle dust rose from the floor. It filled his eyes, his nose, his mouth. He rose into a kneeling posture. He pressed his eyelids down with his fingers. He blew the dust from his nose. He thrust out his dry parched tongue, and sought to clear it of the dust with the back of his hand. But his hand, too, was dusty, dry. Oh, if he might have but one wineglassful of the water in the loft above! Just one wineglassful to clear his mouth of the hideous dryness, and the still more hideous dust of two hundred years. Just so much water as would suffice to lave the parched portions of his mouth, and carry away the foul savour. He had heard that to die of hunger was painful. He had heard that to die of thirst was madness. Was he to die of thirst?

CHAPTER II.

Thirst! It was an awful death, one of the worst that could befall man. He had read of it, heard of it both aboard ship and on the solid land. He had read how in China they kept malefactors seven or eight days without food or drink, until at last, having become already mad, they died. But in China or the broad plains of the Pacific, to die of thirst was intelligible, tolerable. In China, a man must have done something more or less criminal, according to the notions of the people there; and at sea, one, when first launched without water, might live for a while upon the hope of a sail. But here was he now, absolutely innocent from a criminal point of view, doomed, beyond the hope of any sail, to final extinction by one of the cruellest of deaths. The candle in the lantern would not burn much longer. It would hold out for an hour or so, let him say. He had read that men can live seven or eight days without sleep, seven or eight days without food, seven or eight days without water. If in a warm climate a man had water alone, he might live for thirty days without food. But, supposing he had neither water nor food, there was little or no chance of his surviving the ninth day. What to him, in his present position, was the value of nine days, nine weeks, nine months; nine years? It was more than probable that since the Great Fire, more than two hundred years ago, no one had ever stood in the vault where he sat now. What likelihood was there that for two hundred years to come his peace would be disturbed by anybody, once his death-struggle was over? As he sat there he could see the clothes of the dead man tremble, owing to the vibration of the air caused by the enormous traffic going on overhead. But all the strong life above-ground was now as remote from him, as little allied to help he might expect, as the faintest cloud darkening in the east. Yes, darkening in the east, for now he knew by the sounds around him--the sounds whose volume thinned while its pitch increased--that evening was coming on, and that soon upon the evening would come the night. When it was dead of night, and there was no longer any chance of feeling the touch of man through the vibration of the din, what should he do? Nothing. Whatever might come or go he could do nothing. He was powerless to climb that rope. The excitement which had sustained him at fever pitch for many days was now gone finally. He could no longer hope, not only to save his friends from financial ruin and realise a handsome fortune, but he could no longer hope to do more than drag on the most miserable of existences hour by hour, under conditions the meanest pauper would refuse to accept. Here was he doomed to death, as surely as the condemned man in the condemned cell is doomed to death. In a certain number of days, in a certain number of hours, he must die, as inevitably as the sun must rise and set upon the broad, fair world above him. He had hoped greatly, and laboured greatly, and lost all--all--all. He put his hand in his pocket and felt his knife. Would it not be best to die while he had the companionship of the light, the companionship of the spectacle of the dead? To all intents and purposes he was as dead as though he had been blown from the muzzle of a gun. Morally, there could be no harm in his anticipating by a few hours, a few days of dreary pain, the fate which was inevitably before him. Morally, he did not shrink from the knife. But in him was strong the brute instinct, the love of life for life's sake, for the infinite potentialities of hope that lie hidden in the last ragged remnant of existence. It would, perhaps, be better after all to wait until the lantern burnt out, and he was alone with silence and the dead. Then he should possibly go mad, and it was incredible that the insane could suffer so acutely as he was suffering now. Supposing, then, some fine delirium seized him, and he fancied himself to be Pluto, and that this realm of darkness was his natural element, his habitual haunt; that hunger and thirst were the inevitable accessories of his gloomy rule, and that the dignity of his position was heightened by the fare which Charon had just ferried across the Styx, and now lay there before him! Here the lantern went out. Fool! Fool! Madman! What had he been thinking about? Two things, only two, had been left to him--life and light. Now the latter had been taken away from him for ever. For ever! What an awful phrase! Here was he, who had no more than touched manhood, thrust downward by a malignant chance into a vile dark dungeon to die. Here was he, who ought to be in the full plenitude of his youthful strength, unable to master the brief space hanging there in the darkness above him, between the invisible floor and the imperceptible roof. If in the heat and hurry of that morning, he had been asked to clamber up a rope three times the length of that now

hanging above his head, he could have done so with perfect ease. But since he had left the tower that morning the shears of fate had been busy with his hair, and it was now almost as difficult for him to stand unsupported as it would then have been for him to put his back against the wall and shake down the solid foundations of the tower. And yet, what a paltry thing it was to die because he lacked the brute force to urge, himself upwards twelve feet along that rope. It seemed incredible that one so exquisitely formed, so superbly endowed with intelligence and the mastery of all forces that exert themselves on earth, should here lie prone, helpless, before a difficulty which half the brute creation would have regarded as no difficulty at all. It was all over with him. When it was all over with him how would it be with others who had depended upon him? He had promised Mr. O'Donnell a vast sum of money to meet the demands of the bank. Now he could not even lay his body before that troubled man in assurance that he had done his best. He had promised to protect Kempston from ruin. Now he was powerless even to go and explain to Kempston the reason of his failure. To go! All the bitterness of his present situation was wrought up in that one phrase--To go! He could now go nowhere until he went forth for ever. Then the thought of Dora came upon him. Dora, the sweetest, the simplest, the truest, the most confiding sweetheart man ever had. He did not pity her for losing him. He pitied her for losing the lover rather than the man. He knew that all her soul was centred in him, that she waited eagerly for his coming, and grieved when he left; that she lived in one only hope--namely, that some day, and soon, she should leave the solitude of her present ways and come and be with him for ever, to soothe him with her gentle ministerings and cheer him with her anxious hopes. He thought of how she would leave her hand trustingly in his, lean her head trustingly on his bosom, take all he said to her as revealed truth, and, in token of gratitude for his love, hold up her sweet lips for his kisses. He thought of how he in the fickle wavering of his nature had been carried away from her beauty, which was the beauty, the dark beauty of his own folk purified and chastened by a less ardent sun, to the rich, ripe, northern beauty of sunnier hue, although remoter from the sun. He thought how for a while he had swerved from Dora to Nellie, and now he could not understand it, for the glamour was withdrawn, and he saw the unapparelled hearts of both. In Nellie, he saw nothing now but the beauty, the unapproachable beauty which could never be more to him than the irresponsive beauty of a marble statue. In Dora, he now saw beauty that was thoroughly informed with love, and that radiated towards him with all the responsive faculties of inexhaustive sympathy. Her slightest word or gesture, was measured for his regard. Her least syllable was designed to move his lightest mood to pleasant consonance. Her smiles were those which came upon her face merely to show him that all the smiles and joyousness of her nature came forth but to greet and welcome him, and show him that all the smiles and joyousness of her nature were his wholly. What a contrast was here! The sunlight of success, the sunlight of love, the sunlight of heaven, shut out by one foul, crass adventure! The sunlight of life, of young life, of life before it had drunk under the meridian sun, extinguished for ever! "Dominique Lavirotte," he thought, "pray to the merciful God that you may go mad--speedily."

CHAPTER III.

Of late Lavirotte's visits to Dora had been so infrequent and irregular that she did not know when to expect him, or when to be surprised that he did not come. Three or four days often passed now without her seeing him. She knew he was busy, exceedingly busy, at St. Prisca's Tower, but busy with what she could not tell. For the past few weeks he had always seemed to her exhausted and taciturn. There was no falling off in his tenderness towards her. He seemed to love her more passionately than ever. But his visits were short, and he said little. It was three days before Lavirotte got O'Donnell's last letter that he visited Dora. On going back from her to the tower he had thrown himself more blindly, more enthusiastically into the work of excavation than ever. In this final effort he had exhausted all his physical resources, with the result that when O'Donnell's letter came his strength was completely wasted, and he was as helpless as a little child. When he had seen Dora last he said he would come again soon--as soon as the important business upon which he was engaged would allow him. But he named no hour, no day. Three days passed and she did not see him or hear from him. That was not unusual. A fourth, a fifth, a sixth, a seventh day might go by without arousing anything stronger than longing and disappointment in her heart. Since she had come back from Ireland she had never passed the threshold of that solitary tower in Porter Street. He had never asked her to come, nor had her grandfather. Dominique had told her that matter of the first moment rested upon his uninterrupted attendance at the tower. He had taken her no further into his confidence. It would, he had said, be time enough to tell her all when all was known, and the hopes which moved him had been realised. Beyond Dora there was nobody else in London who had any distinct knowledge of where Lavirotte and the old man lived. It is true, of course, that they had to get food, but this Crawford always procured and brought into the tower, so that the likelihood was not a soul who supplied them with the necessaries of life had any distinct memory as to where they lived. And even if the people knew where they lived, there was no reason in the world why

they should be uneasy because a certain old man who had for some time back bought milk, or bread, or meat of them ceased to come any more. It might be he had left the place. It might be he had taken his custom somewhere else. It might be he was dead in the ordinary and familiar ways of death, which require no extraordinary comment and exact no extraordinary cares. Among the four millions of people who live within the mighty circle called London, it was unlikely one would take the trouble to inquire what had become of Crawford and Lavirotte. Dora naturally would; but her grandfather had visited her in Charterhouse Square only two or three times since they had come back from Ireland. She had no reason to expect a visit from him for one week, two weeks, three weeks. Nor had she any reason to feel uneasy if Dominique did not come to Charterhouse Square for several days. Meanwhile, what was to become of him, Lavirotte? While the candle yet burned he had made out that there was only one door into this vault, and that in the direction of what had formerly been the body of the church. Crawford had told him that the ordinary entrance to that vault had been from the crypt of the church, but that with the destruction of the church the crypt had been destroyed, and now a solid bank of masonry and earth, thirty or forty feet thick, forming the lane at the back, lay between the vault and the cellars of the stores beyond. So long as the candle had lasted he did not seem to have severed his last connection with the earth above; but with the absolute darkness following the failure of the light, all the realities of the tomb, without the merciful absence of suffering, had come upon him. He was buried, and yet free to move. He could walk about, and yet the great tower standing over him was little better than a large headstone on his grave. He had committed no crime, and yet was condemned to die--to die the slowest and most painful of all deaths--by want of water. He had read about the Black Hole of Calcutta. This place was about the size of that terrible dungeon. But how much better it would have been to die there a hundred years ago, surrounded by fellow-men--to die there quickly, in the distance of time between evening and day, instead of dragging out here, hour by hour, minute by minute, the terrible solitude of doom foreclosed. It had been a very hot summer, and now the autumn was at hand. The leaves had taken their earliest shade of yellow, and when the wind blew strongly the sicklier leaves fell. For months in London a fierce sun and a dry air had parched all they touched. Nails in woodwork exposed to the sun had worked loose in their holds. It was the beginning of September, and people, thinking of a calamity which occurred more than two hundred years ago, said it was a mercy London was no longer built of wood; since if it was, and the fire should then break out with a strong wind behind it--as at the time of the Great Fire--what was now called the Great Fire would cease to be so named, and be referred to as the Little Fire compared with the gigantic proportions which a burning wooden London of to-day would afford. Crawford and Lavirotte had, owing to the dryness of the season, been able to get rid of the excavated earth by exposing it to the heat on the roof of the tower, and then casting it, handful by handful, through the embrasures. Although no food ever was sent by tradespeople in the vicinity to the tower, it was generally known by the men who worked there that two men visited the tower. But why they lived there, or what their occupation was, no one knew. They had been seen to come in and go out. That was all. When Lavirotte made up his mind that their means of making away with what they dug was out of proportion with his desire of getting downward, he had resolved to trust the lofts to a greater weight than had hitherto been put upon them; and finding loft number one but slightly cumbered with the larger stones Crawford could not dispose of, he had determined to make it the chief depository of the excavated earth. Over and over again Crawford had told him the lofts were old, the beams rotten. He had ignored the warning, saying if they were to win at all they must win quickly, and that he would risk everything but delay. As the weight of earth upon the first loft increased, it gradually sank in the middle. Lavirotte, cautioned by this, tried to find out the absolute condition of the beams, and to his great joy discovered, after carefully probing them, while slung under them in a loop of line, that they were comparatively sound. But the hotter the weather became, and the greater the burden upon the floor above grew, the more the joists bent downward. He did not care. He was certain the joists would not break. They showed no sign of chipping or splitting, and, in perfect fearlessness, he went on piling up the clay, taking, of course, the ordinary precaution to keep the weight as close as possible to the wall. Gradually, however, owing to the inclination towards the centre, the clay slid slightly inward, and, as it dried in the hot air of August, the inner surface of the clay fell inward. Before leaving the tower, the morning he got O'Donnell's letter, Lavirotte looked anxiously at the floor of the first loft. It was now concave above, convex below. But although he looked long and anxiously, he could see no sign of any of the joists giving way. "They will bend like yew," he said. "They will never break." He had omitted one calculation, that when they had bent to a certain degree, they would be withdrawn to a certain extent from their holdfasts in the wall, and when they were withdrawn from their holdfasts beyond a certain extent, they would slip out. On the morning of the day after Lavirotte was entombed in the vault beneath St. Prisca's Tower, the joists of loft number one had been so far withdrawn from their supports in the wall that the loft was in equilibrio, and ten pounds more pressure on the floor would drag the whole loft down with all its burden into the hole beneath.

CHAPTER IV.

There was no hope. What hope could there be for him, Lavirotte, buried thirty feet below a roaring thoroughfare of London, with no possible means of communication with the upper world, a feebleness so great that it did not allow him to do more than stand, and twelve clear feet in the perpendicular between him and deliverance? Under such circumstances how could anyone hope? What could anyone do? Nothing. Lie down and die. There was space enough to die, and air enough to make dying tedious. That was the worst of it. It was bad enough to die at any time; but to die when young, of no fault of one's own, and when dying happened to be tedious, was almost beyond endurance. And yet what could one do but endure? Nothing. No action was possible. He could not without violence accelerate his death. By no power at his disposal could he retard it. It was dismal to die here, alone, unknown. It was chilling to think that the whole great, bustling world abroad would go on while, from mere hunger, or, still worse, thirst, he was panting out the last faint breaths of life in this hideous darkness here. There was no help for it. Second by second, man lives through his life, is conscious of living; and when the proper time comes, hour by hour he is conscious that, owing to some failure in his internal economy, he is dying. But here was he, Lavirotte, in the full consciousness of the possession of youth and of health, save in so far as health had been exhausted by trying labours and wasting fasts, about to die because there was no pitcher of water from which he might slake his thirst, no crust which could allay the pangs of hunger. Suppose he had been upon the upper, gracious earth, without any of the money now in his pocket. Suppose he had nothing but his youth and youthful elasticity of spirits, even feeble as he now was, he might pick up a living somewhere. He had education and good manners. He might not be able to earn two hundred pounds a year, but he could make a shilling, eighteenpence a day somehow, and on eighteenpence a day a man could live. On eighteenpence a day no man could have splendours or luxuries, but he might have water free from the fountain he had just passed in front of that church in Fleet Street, and water was a great deal. Water was half life, more than half life--water was all life when one was thirsty, as he was now. Then, for eighteenpence a day he might have food, not luxurious or exquisite food; but in his wanderings through London he had seen places where suppers were set forth at threepence--large bowls of boiled eels swimming in appetising gravy, with, to each bowl, a huge junk of milky white bread. He had, when his pocket was comparatively full of money, often seen the wearied artisan or factory "hand" eating with relish eel-soup and bread. He had stood looking in at the windows, and, being full-fed himself, congratulated himself upon the comfort, the luxury, these poor people enjoyed in their savoury evening repast. He had watched them go in tired and dreary, worn out with the mean commonplaces of hard work and insufficient wages. He had watched them sit down in a listless, careless way, as though they cared not whether the next hour brought them death or not. Then, gradually, as the savour of the place penetrated them, and as the eager but delayed appetite became satisfied, he had seen a kind of attenuated conviviality arise between these poor folk, until, at the end, when they had finished their meal, they came forth congratulating themselves upon the cheapness, wholesomeness, and satisfying power of the food they had enjoyed. Now, supposing in a shop he had a basin of this eel-soup, not merely soup, but soup with luscious, succulent flesh of the rich fish swimming about in that delicious liquor, and in his hand a piece of bread larger than one fist, but not quite so large as two, what should he do? First of all he would take the spoon--nay, not the spoon, the bowl itself, and quench his thirst and recruit his failing energies with a long draught out of that humble, yellow bowl. He would drink nearly all the liquid up, for he was parched and dry. Abroad would be the sound of traffic and of human voices, stronger than the sound of traffic now beating against his ears. Then, when he had slaked his thirst he would eat some of the bread--no, the bread was too dry. It would make him thirsty again. He would eat some of the fish, and sop the soft white bread in what remained of the soothing liquor. And when he had finished, he, too, would come forth with a contented mind, and supposing any trace of thirst remained, and he had no money to spend in fantastic ways of allaying thirst, he would go to some public drinking-fountain where there was an unlimited supply of water, and out of the clean white metal cups drink and drink and drink until this horrible dryness of mouth and throat had been finally removed, and he felt cheered and invigorated, and fit to face any difficulty or odds that might be against him. Threepence, and he might enjoy what then seemed to him an unparalleled luxury! But supposing he were free and penniless, there was nothing to prevent him walking to the first drinking-fountain that offered and quenching his thirst, drowning his thirst in its free waters. He could have one, two, three, any number of cups of water, and, while drinking, he could touch his fellow-man, see the blue sky above him, and feel upon his cheek the wind made by passing men and vehicles. Now was he here, young and full of notions of life, with no malady of ordinary growth upon him, merely the victim of an extraordinary accident, destined to die in darkness of thirst, of hunger, of despair. There was no hope for him. Dora knew he spent most of his day in that tower. She did not know why. She would never think of seeking him there. And if she did seek him, if she came and knocked, she would get no reply. She would have no reason to assume more than that he did not hear, being there, or was absent from the place. If she called at his lodgings she would be told all they knew of him, and all they knew of him would not help her forward towards his present condition. He had no means of measuring time. His watch had ceased to beat, he could not tell how long ago. He held it up against his ear. It was silent. This silence seemed to him typical of the final silence which already surrounded Lionel Crawford, and which was now gathering around himself. Through this silence now came a sound, It was the sound of something falling. Something very small falling sharply, as it were, against the dull murmur of the traffic around him. He paused and listened. Then he sprang to his feet, aroused by a tremendous crash which deafened his ears, shook him as though a great gale blew, and filled his eyes, his mouth, his nostrils with some thick air or dust, he knew not which, that for a moment threatened to

suffocate him. The loft above had fallen.

CHAPTER V.

Before this tremendous noise and confusion had arisen, Lavirotte had no means of ascertaining how time went. He was conscious of certain pauses and beats in the great noise of traffic above his head. The pauses and beats, he assumed, of traffic in the artery of time. But he knew nothing certain. He had kept no record whatever. He was conscious that there had been periods of activity and quiescence, just as he was conscious there had been periods of activity and quiescence in his youth, when he was a child. But, as in the remote past, he had lost all knowledge or record of the numbers of the period. His reason told him he could not have been a fortnight entombed. His memory told him nothing. Abroad in the busy street and lanes close to St. Prisca's Tower, the fall of the lowest loft made a prodigious commotion. First of all, there was the roar of noise accompanying the fall of the floor, and of the tons upon tons of stones and clay lying on the loft. Then out through the narrow windows of the tower sprang shafts of dust, forced furiously outward by the enormous pressure upon the air within. For a moment the tumultuous traffic of Porter Street was stopped, and men who would scarcely have minded the downfall of the warehouse out of which they were loading their vans or carts, stood in silent amazement at the inexplicable, tremendous subsidence which had occurred in the tower. Those men who were familiar with the place were all the more amazed, because they believed there had been no possibility of the old tower uttering such a terrible note as that which had proceeded from it. They believed that the lofts of the tower were merely decayed wood. It was well known that the bells had been long ago removed, and as there had been in that tower, so far as the frequenters of Porter Street knew, nothing which could with profit be stolen, the interest in that tower to them had been less than in the Monument. To people of this class the Monument was something like the rainbow or the Milky Way. It had no effect on life, no influence upon wages, and, consequently, was altogether unworthy of consideration. Rain and hail and snow influenced wages in so far as they impeded work, but not the Monument, not St. Prisca's Tower, not the rainbow, not the Milky Way, controlled work, and therefore each, while it might be a matter for dreamy speculation under the influence of tobacco, was absolutely indifferent to the workmen frequenting Porter Street. Few, except workmen, or those intimately connected with workmen, frequented Porter Street. You might walk there a whole day long with the assurance you would never meet a brougham or a hansom, a beau or a lady. It was as much out of the line of the fashionable world as Kamtchatka. In Nova Zembla, in Patagonia, in Japan, in Florida, you may meet an English nobleman, an English lady, but in the history of Porter Street it is not recorded that any member of the elegant world wandered there for a hundred years. The first effect of the tremendous crash, caused by the falling of the loft, was to paralyse activity for a short time. The next thing was to create discussion as to the possible source and cause of the crash. The third was to induce speculation as to the fate of anyone who might have been in the tower at the time of the catastrophe. Then slowly, very slowly, those around the place began to realise the fact that someone--a man--more than one man--two men it was thought, of late--one man of old--two men of late--an old man some time ago--a young man latterly, had taken up their residence in that tower. This might account for something of the extraordinary in what had taken place. It might have been that owing to something or other done by these men, this enormous explosion--for so it seemed at first--had occurred. They may have had some object in blowing down the tower, or in some other violent onslaught against its integrity. If this were so, in all likelihood they were both now far beyond the range of any danger which could reach them from the tower. After a while, when speculation had become somewhat methodical and less vague, people began to remember that there was nothing particularly dangerous-looking about either of the men who had taken up their residence in the tower, and that in all probability neither of them had been actuated by any criminal designs. There for a while public opinion stood still, and men began to wonder what was the fate of their fellow-men, whose lives had for some time back been associated in their minds with the existence of the tower. Slowly, gradually, the people who were familiar with Porter Street came to think that possibly the two men, whose appearance had been connected in their minds with that place for some time, had been imperilled or destroyed in the fall of the lofts. For to the outside public it had seemed that nothing less than the fall of the lofts could have produced so great a noise as they had heard. They had not taken into account that the beams of dust which shot across the street and lanes had reached no higher than the first loft, and they had not taken care to conclude that since no dust exuded through the higher windows, the likelihood was that the higher lofts were untouched. But after the first sense of arrest and confusion which came upon those within the scope of the sound, there arose the humane idea of rendering succour to the living, if the place contained anyone alive, or tendering services to the dead, supposing both had perished. Then it was anxiously asked, was anything known as to whether either or both men were in the tower. It was well known that the old man now seldom came forth, that the young man brought in the provisions necessary for the two, and that even he was seldom for any long

time absent from St. Prisca's. Moment by moment people began to recollect that the old man had not been seen out of the tower for many days, and that the young man had been seen to leave the tower and return. In such a crowded thoroughfare it was almost impossible that the door of the tower could be opened without exciting observation. It was also nearly impossible that any close observation could have been made. It is quite common for a busy man who lives close to a church clock that strikes the hours and the quarters, to hear and yet not heed the striking of the clock; so that you may ask him, after the striking, what has occurred with regard to the hour, and he may have been perfectly unconscious at the time the clock struck that he was observing the sound, and yet when asked he may be able to tell perfectly the time. So it was with these busy folk in Porter Street. They had never regarded those two men with any interest whatever beyond the interest one feels for a friendly but unknown dog, or for a man who is not likely ever in the course of life to have more than a passing interest for the observer. Nevertheless, these busy folk who worked hour by hour, day by day, and the sum of whose life was made up in the sum of their work, and the mere material comforts and pleasures which the result of their work brought them, had insensibly drunk in the fact that two men had entered that tower, that neither of these men had come forth, and that now the likelihood was the lives of either or both of these men had been swallowed up in the catastrophe which had occurred. With men of the class who worked in Porter Street, thought is a very rarely exercised faculty. They have to carry huge weights, heave winches, stow goods, pack and manage vast bales, in the conduct of which the eye for space and the muscle for motion is all that is called into play. Everything else is designed by the foreman, and each man has no more to do with every separate piece of goods than dispose of it as his strength will allow in the position the foreman indicates. Hence men of this class are exceedingly slow to invent, and exceedingly quick to act. When the loft fell, all the men within hearing of the crash immediately ceased to work, and stood stupidly looking on as though they expected some miraculous manifestation. They did not remain inactive because of any disinclination to help, if help were needed, but they had not realised the fact that it was possible their great strength might be of avail to anyone suffering. All at once a woman cried: "My God, the men are buried!" and before the words were well out of her mouth, the crowd seemed to grasp the central idea that underneath the encumbrance of these lofts had been buried two men, who were formed in every way like themselves, and who, although not of their class, were nevertheless entitled to all that could be done for them.

CHAPTER VI.

How were the entombed men to be delivered? Various ways suggested themselves in the heat of the moment. It was plain to all that the first thing to be done was to force the door. This was no trivial matter. How it was to be forced was the consideration. There were those among the crowd who had seen the door open, and noticed the huge bolt of the lock which shot into an iron holdfast let into the solid stonework of the tower. They knew that the old man had never omitted to lock the door on the inside when he came in, and that the young man had been no less careful. There was a general belief that something secret, and, upon the whole, uncommendable, was going on in that tower, and the desire to rescue the two imprisoned men was largely augmented by curiosity. The laneway from which the door opened was seldom crowded. There was usually a brisk traffic up and down it; but in that part of the City the narrow laneways that feed the great thoroughfares are seldom blocked, although the main thoroughfares themselves may be impassable. A man in the crowd cried out: "Someone get a pole or a beam, and we'll soon have them out." Then several men rushed off in various directions. By this time the traffic in the laneways and in Porter Street itself was interrupted. The workmen ran out of the stores and wharfs, the waggoners and carters deserted their horses, and even the bargemen from the river had come up on hearing that some terrible accident had befallen St. Prisca's Tower. In a few minutes three men were seen advancing, carrying a heavy beam of wood. Other men ran to help them. A dozen willing arms had now seized the beam, and a hundred men were anxious to lend their aid if opportunity offered. A way was cleared for the men with the beam. The people separated on both sides. The men turned out of Porter Street and ran up into the lane. The men engaged in carrying the baulk were too intent upon getting it to its destination as quick as possible to observe one fatal defect. One onlooker shouted out: "Too long. Too long." Then the men carrying it swept up, way was made for them, and they tried to bring the beam into position for use as a battering-ram against the door. Then the onlooker's words were confirmed by experience, and it was seen that it would be utterly impossible to use the baulk effectually as a ram, for, owing to the narrowness of the lane, it was impossible to get it at right angles to the door, and striking the door with it at an acute angle would not be likely to produce the desired effect. However, it was better to try this which was at hand, than to do nothing at all. In the meantime some better means might be devised of bursting open the door. Once, twice, thrice, half-a-dozen times the men thrust the beam obliquely against the massive woodwork. It merely glanced off the thick stubborn oak, and more than two-thirds of its power was expended upon the

solid and immovable stonework of the doorway. Other pieces of timber were brought, but all proved too long to be of any effective use. The shortest, it is true, could be brought into a horizontal position against the door, but it allowed of no play, and therefore was incapable of receiving the necessary impetus. Then the crowd began to clamour for sledges. A great, brown-bearded man, tall, lank, and rounded in the shoulders, broke away from the crowd crying: "I'll soon get it open; I'll soon break it in." This man was celebrated in Porter Street for his enormous strength. No sooner had he undertaken to burst in the door than all other efforts were suspended, in the full faith that he would make good his words. In a few moments he returned, bearing in each hand a square half-hundredweight. He hastened up to the door and said: "Someone must hold me." But how are they to hold him? "I want," he said, "to put my back against the door, lift these up this way" (he raised the half-hundreds above his head as though they were no heavier than boxing-gloves), "then I'll bring them down against the door; but if it bursts open I don't want to fall in, for there's a pit inside." The difficulty now was how to hold him, and at the same time give him free play with the weights, and avoid any possibility of the weights in the downward swoop touching anyone who might aid him. Some time was lost in trying to arrange so that he might be held, prevented from falling inward, and, at the same time, not impeded. At last he cried: "Let me alone; I can manage it myself. Stand back. Don't be afraid of me." Then they cleared a semicircle round him. He put his back to the door, raised his arms aloft, directly over his head, bowed himself backward, so that his head and heels alone touched the door, and his back was bowed forward as a bent bow is against the string. Then, setting his teeth and putting all the energy of his body into the muscles of his arms and shoulders, he swung the two weights downward with prodigious force, loosed them from his hold when they came level with his legs, sprang forward, and turned swiftly round with a look of expectant success. The crowd cheered. The two half-hundredweights had crushed through the lower portion of the door as though it were so much cardboard. The lock remained unshaken. The blows had been delivered too low down, and, while the wood had given way, the iron had remained firm. Then, while the people were standing admiring the result of his great strength, a man cried out: "Here's a crowbar, Bill. You can finish it with that." Bill caught the crowbar in his hand, whirled it over his head as though it were but a walking-cane, leaped back from the door as far as the narrowness of the lane would allow him; then, holding the crowbar lightly in his hand, as a soldier holds his gun at the charge, he dashed forward and flung the crowbar with its blunt edge against the place where the lock held fast. The lock had been loosened on the door by the previous assault, and now, with a tearing screech, the bolts drew out of the tough wood, and the door swung back on its hinges. When Bill had succeeded, and seen that he had succeeded, he turned round, surveyed the crowd steadily for a few moments, and then said: "That's my share of it. You do the rest." Then, as one who had no further concern with the matter, he strode off, the people making way for him as he went. Two or three men approached the door and looked in. Below was a wild jumble of planks and beams and stones and earth, all mixed up, higgledy-piggledy, in the wildest confusion. It was impossible to make out anything clearly at first, owing to the dense dust that floated in the air. The men who had thrust in their heads withdrew them after a short time, partly suffocated and partly blinded by the fumes that arose out of the pit beneath. "Ask is there anyone there," suggested one of the crowd. A head was thrust in through the open doorway, and a stentorian voice cried out: "Anyone there!" To this a feeble voice replied from what seemed to be the bowels of the earth: "Yes. Help. Water, for God's sake." "All right," shouted the man above. "We'll get you out safe enough. Keep up your heart. Are the two of you below?" "Yes," answered the feeble voice; "but he is dead. Quick, for God's sake, or I shall die. This dust is killing me." "Keep up," shouted the man, "and we'll do the best. We'll get you out in a jiffy. There's a hundred of us here. How much of the place has fallen?" "I don't know," answered the voice below, growing fainter. "I think only the first floor. I can talk no more. I am dying." And then came some sounds, inarticulate and faint, the meaning of which the man above could not gather. A ladder was got and thrust down into the pit, and in a short time a score of willing hands were at work. The joists had drawn gradually out of the wall, and the eastern end being first freed, that side fell downward, shooting most of the stones and earth up into the pit at the eastern side. The floor doubled up in two from the north and south, almost like the leaves of a book, and in the fold of this a large quantity of clay and stones had remained. This folded part fell almost directly on the hole made by Lionel Crawford in the roof of the vault. The weight of the stones and the impetus they had gained in their fall was sufficient to cause them to smash through the doubled-up flooring, and some of them fell through the hole, carrying with them a portion of the roof of the vault. By this falling mass Lavirotte had been struck and hurt, and under some of the flooring, earth, and stones he now lay partly covered, prostrate upon the ground of the vault. Owing to the fact that most of the heavy stones and the great bulk of the earth had been shot to the eastern side of the tower, comparatively little entered the vault, and so Lavirotte escaped instant death. The men working at his release found out after a short time, partly by his moaning and partly by looking through the hole in the fallen floor, that Lavirotte was in the vault, and not immediately under the fallen floor. In less than an hour he was rescued. He was all begrimed with dirt and clay, insensible, battered, bleeding, almost pulseless. He was immediately placed in a cab and taken to an hospital. On his way he recovered consciousness and begged for water, which was given him. Upon examination it was discovered that his injuries were not of much moment, and that exhaustion had more to do with his prostrate condition than the hurts he had received. For a long time he lay quiet, expressing no wish. At length he asked what had become of the body of his companion, and was told that it had been removed from the tower. He was asked if he had any friends with whom he desired to communicate, and he said no. Now that Lionel Crawford was dead, there was no one in London whom he could call a friend. He did not wish that Dora should hear anything of the result of that awful day, when her grandfather lost his life, and he all hope of the vast fortune upon which he had been building for some time.

They told him that he would be able to leave the hospital in a few days. A few days would be quite time enough to tell her all the bad news. Indeed, the longer she was kept in ignorance of it the better. To the inquiries of those around him, he had refused to give any reply beyond the facts that St. Prisca's Tower was his property; that he and the dead man, Lionel Crawford, had for some time back lived in the tower; and that, for reasons which he declined to state, they had both been engaged in excavating. John Cassidy usually left his office at about four o'clock in the evening. As he was walking in the direction of his home on the afternoon Lavirotte was rescued from the tower, his eye was arrested by a line in the bills of *The Evening Record*--"Mysterious affair in Porter Street." As a rule, John Cassidy did not buy newspapers. They did not interest him. His theory was that one could learn enough of public affairs from the conversation of others. But a mysterious affair always did interest him, and in this case he bought *The Evening Record*, and read in it a brief paragraph of what occurred in the tower, giving the names of the two men concerned. Mystery on mystery! Here was this man Lavirotte mixed up in two inexplicable affairs in a space of a few months. On the previous occasion Lavirotte had been found insensible, near a wounded man. Now he was found insensible, near a dead man. In the paragraph there was no suggestion that any suspected foul play; and yet to him, Cassidy, it seemed impossible that Lavirotte was not in some way accountable for the death of the man found with him that day. Cassidy was burning with anxiety to tell someone of Lavirotte's former predicament. It would give him such an air of importance if he could add material facts to those already known in connection with this matter. There was no use in his going back to the office, for all his fellow-clerks had left. It was impossible for him to go home to his room burdened with this news. He therefore resolved to turn into the Cleopatra Restaurant in the Strand, in the hope he might there find someone to whom he might communicate the startling addition to the news in the evening paper. It so fell out that he succeeded beyond his wishes. He found a group of men standing at the bar, and among these one named Grafton, an artist whom he had known for some time, and through whom he hoped to find himself on the track of the Lavirotte mystery, as he knew Grafton was acquainted with Lavirotte. "I say, Grafton," said he, "that's a deuce of a mysterious thing that happened to-day in Porter Street. You know, of course, this is the Lavirotte you told me you knew. He's back in London again, after being mixed up in a most extraordinary affair in my part of the world." Then he related, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the group of men standing round, all he knew concerning the affair at Glengowra. When he had finished, one of the bystanders, whom he did not know, said: "You would have no objection to my making use of what you say?" "In the press?" said Cassidy, colouring with delight and importance. "Yes," said the other. "I am connected with *The Evening Record*, and if you authorise me to do so, I should be greatly pleased to add just a line to our account of the affair. All I would ask or say: 'We understand that M. Lavirotte, who was found insensible, was some little time ago mixed up with another mysterious affair in Glengowra, in the south of Ireland.'" Cassidy gave a willing consent, and the addition suggested appeared in the special edition of *The Evening Record*. It was in the special edition of *The Evening Record* that Dora Harrington saw her grandfather was dead, that Lavirotte was injured, and that he had been mixed up in a mysterious affair in Glengowra.

CHAPTER VII.

The shock nearly overwhelmed Dora. The double blow was too much for her, and when the landlady came into the room a short time afterwards she found the girl insensible on the floor. When she returned to consciousness she could not believe she had read the paper aright. She took it up again and went carefully over the passage with aching eyes. The solid ground seemed to be melting away under her feet, and all the material things around her were visionary, unreal, far away. The landlady at length made her talk, and with talk came tears, and with tears relief. She pointed out the paragraph to the woman, and told her she must go at once to the hospital and see about the whole affair. It was too horrible, she said, to think that her grandfather should be killed and her lover nearly killed in this enterprise, whatever it was, they were engaged upon. The woman was of a kindly and compassionate nature, and offered to accompany the girl. This offer Dora gladly accepted, and the two set out. They ascertained at the hospital that Lavirotte was going on favourably, but that they could not see him until next day. They went and saw the body of the old man at the mortuary, and, finding out that nothing could be done, returned to Charterhouse Square, greatly depressed and saddened; for the kindly woman shared the girl's grief, and felt for her desolate condition. Next day, when Dora called at the hospital she was admitted. She found Lavirotte haggard, and worn, and wild-looking, but far less seriously injured than the newspaper report had led her to expect. It was not a place for a demonstrative meeting, and she had been cautioned not to excite the injured man. After the first words of the meeting she asked him all the particulars of what had occurred at the tower. He told her as briefly as he could. Then for the first time she learned that her grandfather and her lover had been seeking for a treasure in that lonely place in Porter Street. He told her how the old man had been firmly persuaded a vast hoard had been hidden beneath the tower before the Great Fire, and had

remained there ever since. While he, Lavirotte, was away at his lodgings, looking for letters, the old man had found the top of the vault, had pierced the vault, and descended into it. Then, no doubt, the shock of finding the work of years useless had been too great for him, and he had succumbed. He related how he, being then in a very weak condition from wearing anxiety and the want of food and rest, had returned to the tower, descended into the vault, and found himself unable to reascend. Then later on came the crash, his own insensibility, and finally the rescue the afternoon before. In grief and pity she listened to him, and when he had finished she could think of nothing to say but that she hoped he would soon get strong again, and that she would do anything she could for him, and come to see him as often as they would let her. Then he went on to explain how this terrible disappointment at not finding the treasure would not only leave him almost penniless, but would prevent him doing the service he had intended for O'Donnell and Kempston. He told her he had not replied to the letter he found from Eugene at his lodgings, because he hoped that in a day or two he might be able to communicate the glorious news that the period of their affluence was at hand. Now all this was changed. The whole aspect of his career was altered, and the first thing she would have to do for him was to telegraph to Eugene, saying that all hope of succour was now at an end. It would be a cruel, a terrible, perhaps literally a fatal blow to the elder O'Donnell, but that could not now be helped. He dictated to her the telegram, and she wrote it down. He also dictated a note she was to write to Mr. Kempston. Then he said: "They tell me I shall not be long here; but how it is to be with me when I get about again I cannot say. Misfortune seems to have marked me out as one upon whom she was to try all her arts." She said tenderly, advancing her hand to his: "Don't say that, Dominique." "Forgive me, Dora, darling. I was not thinking of you. I was speaking of only the business aspect of things. We shall be as poor as ever now." "But we were never rich, and yet we were--fond of each other, and very happy." "Ay, darling, very fond of each other, and very happy, and will be always," he added, pressing the hand he had in his. "I was thinking only of you in the matter. When I had this dream of wealth upon me, I used to picture to myself what we should do when we became rich; how you should have all that art and luxury could produce." "I have never wished for wealth or luxury, Dominique," she whispered. "I know I shall be as happy as I ever hoped to be, more happy than I ever deserved, with you. Let us think no more of that treasure. It has brought no good to us up to this. Why should we allow it to cause us sorrow now?" "Ay, ay," he said. "We must make the best of it now. Bad will be the best of it, but it might have been worse. You know I have a little money, and with it I shall be able to continue at the singing until I am good enough for the boards. Then I shall be able to earn enough for us both, Dora." "Very little will be enough," she whispered, again pressing his hand. He returned the pressure, and said: "Thank you, darling. They will not let you stay much longer now. I am sorry I am not able to be up; but I suppose they will do everything necessary about your grandfather. I want you to go to my landlord. He has some money of mine. Tell him to arrange all about the funeral. You tell me there is no man in the house where you lodge, and the few men I know in London, I know scarcely sufficiently well to ask a favour of them. Stop," he said; "there is Grafton. I might ask him. He was very friendly to me when I was in London before. I remember where he lived. Go to him and tell him all, and give him the money. That will be better." He gave her Grafton's address, and after a little while she took her leave. She sought the artist and found him at home. He had two rooms in Charlotte Street--one a bedroom; the other served as studio and sitting-room. When Dora called, he was not alone. Having renewed his acquaintance with Cassidy, he had invited the dandy to his place. Cassidy and he were now having coffee. Grafton hurried Cassidy into the bedroom, which was separated from the sitting-room by folding doors. Dora was shown up, and explained the circumstances of the case. Grafton said he would be delighted to do anything he could for Lavirotte and Miss Harrington. Unfortunately there was a difficulty in the way. It was utterly impossible for him to leave his studio that afternoon or night, as he was at work on a block which would take him till five o'clock in the morning to finish, and he had just that moment received a telegram from the illustrated paper on which he worked, ordering him north to the scene of a great colliery accident the first thing in the morning. He was deeply grieved. He would try if he could possibly do anything. Stop! A friend of his was in the house. He would go and ask him if he could manage to do what was required. He went out by the door leading to the landing, and from that landing through another door into the bedroom where Cassidy was. Cassidy flushed with surprise and pleasure when he saw a chance of his getting mixed up with the Lavirotte affair. He told Grafton he would ask them to give him a holiday to-morrow, and between this afternoon and to-morrow there would be plenty of time to arrange everything about Lionel Crawford, as, no doubt, the inquest was held that day. Then Grafton brought Cassidy in and introduced him to Dora, and said that he would act in every way as though he were Grafton himself. Dora expressed her great gratitude. "You know," Cassidy said, "I shall go and see Mr. Lavirotte as soon as possible, and I have no doubt he will be glad to see me, for I come from the neighbourhood in which he lived, and know Glengowra thoroughly." Here the overwhelming desire to rise in importance in the eyes of Dora, pleasantly or otherwise, mastered him, and he said: "Perhaps you have seen the special edition of *The Evening Record?*" She said yes; that she had there first seen an account of the terrible affair. "It was I," said he, bowing and smiling, "who gave the information respecting the mysterious occurrence at Glengowra, of which you, doubtless, know." By this time he was, of course, aware he was talking to the girl to whom Lavirotte had made love when formerly in London. "I do not know anything about it," she whispered faintly. "I am exceedingly obliged to both of you." She said good-bye and went. When she was gone, Cassidy said: "Strange she doesn't know anything about the Glengowra affair. I don't think it right she should be kept in ignorance of it. However, Grafton, you haven't a minute to lose now. I'll be off down east and see what's to be done. I assure you nothing could give me greater pleasure than to act for you in this affair."

CHAPTER VIII.

When Eugene O'Donnell got the telegram he fell into despair. He durst not go to his father or his mother. Up to this his father had been in the very best spirits, fully anticipating deliverance at the hands of Lavirotte. Now what was to become of them? Ruin of the most complete kind stared them in the face. They would not have the least chance of saving anything from the wreck of their fortune, for James O'Donnell was a man of scrupulous honesty, and would not lend himself to the least kind of fraud. When everything was sold up they would not be able to pay more than a small portion of the last call, and Eugene knew his father too well to think he would conceal a single penny, or accept a favour at the hands of the bank. Eugene did not know what to do. The telegram came to him when he was alone. He read it three times, put it in his pocket, and went out to try if a walk in the air would help him. Insensibly his steps turned towards the station, where, a little later on in the afternoon, he would, in the ordinary course, find himself on the way to Glengowra. When he got to the railway station he looked at his watch, and saw that there was just time for him to run out to Glengowra and get back again before his ordinary time for leaving the office. He determined to run out and tell it first of all to Nellie, upon whom he had learned to depend. She was greatly surprised to see him so early, ran to him with a smile, and, throwing her arms round him, said: "I cannot tell you why, but I was half expecting to see you earlier than usual. You have brought good news, I dare say, from Lavirotte?" He shook his head, and said: "No; poor Lavirotte has met with an accident." "Met with an accident!" cried Nellie, in surprise. "Is it serious, and will he be able to do what he promised for your father?" "Well, you see," said her husband, "this accident is likely to knock him up for some time, I suppose, and every hour is precious to us." The husband and wife were now in the little drawing-room overlooking the sea. He had sat down on a chair, dispiritedly. She stood opposite him, with eager, inquiring eyes. "So that you are afraid," said she, "that, after all, his promise may come to nothing." "Yes," said Eugene, "I am afraid it may come to nothing." She sank on a chair beside him, and cried: "Good heavens, Eugene, what is to become of us all?" "I don't know, Nellie," he said gloomily, "I have not dared to tell the governor yet. I must tell him to-night, you know. He must at once decide upon what we shall do." "Do you believe Lavirotte met with an accident?" "Certainly I believe. What object could he have in telling a lie?" "To screen his failure, if not worse." "What could be *worse* at present than his failure?" "Supposing he had deliberately deceived all through." "What earthly object could Lavirotte have in deceiving us?" "Well, he would tell neither you nor your father where he expected this money from. I don't like Lavirotte. I don't trust him. I wish we never had anything to do with him. I think it was an unfortunate day you first met him." "Look here, now, Nellie. I believe Lavirotte was perfectly sincere in this matter, as I believe he was sincere in his love of you, or in his desire to destroy me when under the influence of what must have been insanity. Anyway, this is not the time to discuss his merits. We must think of what we ourselves have to do in this matter. How am I to break it to my father? After all he has gone through, I fear it will kill him or drive him mad. He has the fullest faith in Lavirotte's turning up with the money in time. As I told you before, he has made arrangements for the future in the full faith that the help will be forthcoming." "I don't know how you are to do it, Eugene. As you say, there is very little time, if he must know this evening. Would you like me to go in and see your mother, or do you think I should only be in the way?" "I don't know, I'm sure. But I think, after all, it will be best if I open the subject to him." So it was decided that Eugene should go back to Rathclare, and make known to his father the bad news contained in the telegram. His visit to Glengowra had no effect. It left a strong impression on Nellie's mind, that in addition to Lavirotte being, under great excitement, a dangerous lunatic, he was capable at ordinary times of deliberately and cruelly lying, if the statements he made were not the result of delusion. When Eugene found his father, the latter was in the best of spirits. "Well, my son," he cried cheerily, "any news from London? Has our friend, our good friend, got the money? Time is running very short now, and since we are going to pay the call, we may as well do the thing decently and be up to time." "Do you think, sir, there is no chance of getting a later date for payment?" The father shook his head. "No, there is no chance," he said. "Those who can pay must pay up at once. I am not myself uneasy about Lavirotte, but I wish we had some news. It will be comfortable to hear the mill going when this awful banking affair is pleasantly settled; but I own the sound of the mill does not seem good for my ears just now. This, of course, will be all right in a few days. Why do you ask if there is any chance of getting time, boy?" "Because, sir, it has occurred to me that possibly we may want it." "But Lavirotte knows the circumstances of the case; and with such vast expectations as he has, there can be no difficulty whatever in getting in the form of an advance any sum of money we may require." "That depends on the security he has to offer. Do you know, sir, what is the nature of the security he has to offer?" "No, he would not tell me. He said he was under an obligation, and could communicate the matter to no one." "Well, sir, may it not be that the property which he expects to come into will not realise quite as much as he anticipated? Suppose it fell a little short of what you want, what should you do?" "Borrow money on this place, of course," said the merchant, waving his hand over his head. "But in case, I mean, that what Lavirotte could give you and what you could borrow on this place would not together make

sufficient, what would you do?" "Upon my word, Eugene, you are in a very uncomfortable humour to-day. What earthly use is there in calculating upon chances or solving difficulties that will never arise? But I may answer you. I should of course sell the place. I should sell every stick of the place, every wheel, every ounce of stuff in it, my house, horses, plate, furniture, in fact everything that I have." By this time the face of the old man had lost its gay aspect. He had turned pale. His eyes were no longer sprightly, but fixed with a strange glitter, not turned directly towards his son--in fact, avoiding his son's gaze. It was as though he suspected--he more than suspected, he assumed--Eugene had some bad news to give him, and that he would wait there patiently for the bad news to come without aiding his son's story by the display of curiosity. "But, sir, I have some reason to fear Lavirotte will not be able to do all he said. I am disposed to think, on good grounds, that he will not have all the money we want in time." The son now avoided the father's face. They were sitting at opposite sides of the large office table. The son's eyes were turned towards the window looking into the quadrangle. The father's eyes were fixed vacantly upon the door of the strong-room behind his son, and to his right. "In that case," said the elder man, "I should mortgage." "I am very much disinclined to go on," said the young man, frowning heavily, "but I have no alternative. Lavirotte will not be able to give you all you want, and I do not think you will be able to pay all." "Then I shall sell. I shall sell every stick I have in the world." The old man's eyes became more fixed than ever; they never wandered from that door. His face became more pallid. With both hands he grasped the elbows of his chair. He sat well in the chair, leaning slightly forward, as though he expected someone who would try and pull him out of it. His son looked hastily at him for a moment, then turned his eyes away as hastily, and said slowly: "You must know, sir--you must by this time have guessed that I have had bad news from London, from Lavirotte. You must try and bear up, sir, for all our sakes. It will be a bitter blow after the hope we have lived in for months." James O'Donnell seemed to abandon the position he had taken up with regard to Eugene's news. It would be folly any longer to affect ignorance that something terrible was coming, or to court delay. "What is the news from Lavirotte?" he asked. "Lavirotte is himself injured by some accident, and he has no longer any hope of realising the money he expected." "No longer any hope," repeated the old man. "No longer any hope, sir. We are not to rely on him for the least aid. What do you purpose doing, sir?" "I must think over the matter for a while, Eugene." He looked calmly at his watch. "You have only just time to catch the train, and I would rather be alone at present." "If you would let me stay, sir, I would much rather remain with you. I can drive home later." "No, Eugene; you may go now. I would rather be alone." The old man seemed quite calm and collected; in fact, so calm and collected, that Eugene resolved not to go to Glengowra by the train, but to run up to his father's house and to tell his mother what had occurred. When James O'Donnell found himself alone, he got up slowly out of his chair, crossed the floor, opened the door of the strong-room, whispering to himself: "No longer any hope." He went into the gloomy chamber, and going to the safe, opened it and took something from it. When he returned to the office, he held the revolver in his hand and whispered to himself: "No longer any hope." He looked at his watch. It was just closing time. Having placed the revolver on the table, he sat down in his chair, whispering in the same quiet voice, "I will wait till they are all gone," and repeated for the third time: "No longer any hope." At seven o'clock Eugene returned to the private office, for which he had a key. To his astonishment he found his father's chair vacant and the strong-room door open. He went into the strong-room and examined it. The door of the safe was open. The drawer was pulled out. Eugene turned sick. He leant against the wall and moaned out: "Oh! what has the poor old man done!" Then he pushed in the drawer, the door of the safe, the door of the strong-room, and having locked the door of the private office, hastened downstairs. He could find no trace of his father. He set half-a-dozen men to search the town quietly. Up to next morning he failed to find any clue to James O'Donnell.

END OF VOL. II.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAST CALL: A ROMANCE (VOL. 2 OF 3) ***

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