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Title: Archibald Malmaison

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Release date: January 1, 2005 [EBook #7344]
Most recently updated: October 7, 2012

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Curtis Weyant, Eric Eldred, Charles Franks and
the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

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ARCHIBALD MALMAISON

BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE

AUTHOR OF "GARTH," "SEBASTIAN STROME," "DUST," ETC.

INTRODUCTORY.

When I was a child, I used to hope my fairy-stories were true. Since reaching years of discretion, I have preferred acknowledged fiction. This inconsistency, however, is probably rather apparent than real. Experience has taught me that the greater the fairy-story the less the truth; and contrariwise, that the greater the truth the less the fairy-story. In other words, the artistic graces of romance are irreconcilable with the crude straightforwardness of fact. The idealism of childhood, believing that all that is most beautiful must on that very account be most true, clamors accordingly for truth. The knowledge of maturity, which has discovered that nothing that is true (in the sense of being existent) can be beautiful, deprecates truth beyond everything. What happens, we find, is never what ought to happen; nor does it happen in the right way or season. In palliation of this hardship, the sublime irony of fate grants us our imagination, wherewith we create little pet worlds of poetry and romance, in which everything is arranged in neat harmonies and surprises, to gratify the scope of our little vision. The actual world, the real universe, may, indeed, be picturesque and perfect beyond the grandest of our imaginative miniatures; but since the former can be revealed to us only in comparatively infinitesimal portions, the miniatures still have the best of it.

To preface a story with the information that it is true, is not, therefore, the way to recommend it. Your hearer's life, and those of his friends, are enough true stories for him; what he wants of you is merciful fiction. Destiny, to his apprehension, is always either vapid, or clumsy, or brutal; and he feels certain that, do your worst, you can never rival the brutality, the clumsiness, or the vapidness of destiny. If you are silly, he can at least laugh at you; if you are clumsy or brutal, he has his remedy; and meanwhile there is always the chance that you may turn out to be graceful and entertaining. But to bully him with facts is like asking him to live his life over again; and the civilized human being has yet to be found who would not rather die than do that.

No; we are all spontaneously sure that no story-teller, though he were a Timon of Athens double distilled, can ever be so unsympathetic and unnatural as destiny, who tells the only story that never winds up. We cannot understand destiny; we never know to what lengths she may go: but the story-teller we know inside and out; he is only a possible oneself, and we defy him to do us any serious harm. I trust I am rendering my meaning clear, and that no one will suppose that in making this onslaught upon truth, I have anything else in view than truth as applied to what are called stories. With truth scientific, moral, religious, I am at present in nowise concerned. Only, I have no respect for the weakness that will outrage a promising bit of narrative for the sake of keeping to the facts. Imbecile! the facts are given you, like the block of marble or the elements of a landscape, as material for the construction of a work of art. Which would you rather be, a photographer or Michael Angelo? "*Non vero ma ben trovato*" should be your motto; and if you refuse to kill your heroine on the Saturday night because, forsooth, she really did, despite all dramatic propriety, survive till Monday morning--why, please yourself; but do not bring your inanities to me!

I have now to reconcile this profession of faith with the incongruous fact that the following story is a true one. True it is, in whole and in part; furthermore, the events took place in the present century, and within a hundred miles of London. But let me observe, in the first place, that, although a true tale, it is nevertheless strange and interesting to an unusual degree; and, secondly, that this interest and strangeness mainly depend, not upon the succession of incidents, but upon the subjective condition--character it cannot be termed--of Archibald Malmaison himself. This being the case, it follows

that the greater part of the objections above insisted upon fall to the ground. What goes on inside a man must needs be accepted as it is revealed to us: to invent psychological attributes does not lie within the province of a romancer. His skill and power are confined to so selecting and arranging the incidents as to provide his psychological data with the freest possible development. In the present case I might easily have devised a stage and a series of events for Malmaison, which would have brought his mysterious affection into somewhat more prominent and picturesque relief. But that affection is itself so absorbing a problem, that the fashion of its statement becomes of comparatively small import; and I may add that the setting furnished by nature happens on this occasion to answer all practical purposes tolerably well. Moreover, I am not altogether a free agent in the matter. The friend by whose permission I tell the tale is of opinion that no liberties ought to be taken with its form, any more than with what he is pleased to call its "physiological characteristics." The main significance of the narrative being, according to him, of a scientific or pathological kind, it would be hostile to scientific interests to depart from historical accuracy in its presentation. From the professional dictum of a man like Dr. Forbes Rollinson there can, of course, be no appeal, and if I am to write the account at all, it is but fair that in so doing I should respect the wishes of him who is the lawful proprietor of it. I have thought it but fair to myself, however, to begin by offering this explanation. I feel more or less hampered by the conditions enjoined upon me, and, besides, I do not agree with Dr. Rollinson's theory of the phenomena. In the present state of our knowledge, no theory on such subjects can pretend to be more than hypothetically correct; and my prejudices are opposed to what is known as the materialistic explanation of the universe. With, all respect for the validity of science within its proper sphere, I do not conceive that its judgments are entitled to paramount consideration when they attempt to settle the problems of psychology. There are mysteries which no process of inductive reasoning can reach.--The reader, however, will not be decoyed blindfold into accepting as final either the Doctor's view or mine; but, after possessing himself of the facts, will be left free to draw what conclusions he may please.

As regards the matter of names, dates, and localities, Dr. Rollinson holds that they had better be given at full length; and here I am not disposed to differ from him. The system of blanks and initial letters was always distasteful to me; and to use fictitious names in a true story seems like taking away with one hand what you give with another. Besides, every one of the actors in the drama is now dead: Dr. Rollinson [1] himself being the only living person who is cognizant, directly, of all the circumstances, from beginning to end. In his capacity of physician, he was the intimate and trusted friend of the ill-fated Malmaison household during upward of twenty years, and he inherited this confidential position from his father. He has kindly placed at my disposal a number of his professional note-books and journals, and in various places I have incorporated with the narrative some of the information which they contain. At other times I have inserted minor details of conversation and incident, and have endeavored to throw over the whole as "fictitious" an air as was consistent with the conscientious observance of my compact with the Doctor. And now, without further preface, I will proceed to business.

I.

Archibald Malmaison was the second son of Sir Clarence Butt Malmaison, of Malmaison, Sussex. He had the odd distinction of being born on the 29th of February, 1800. His elder brother, Edward, born 1798, died before him, as will be hereinafter shown. There were no other brothers, but four girls appeared after Archibald, two of whom died in childhood of scarlet fever, while the other two grew up to be married. They have nothing to do with the story, and will not be mentioned again.

The Malmaisons, as their name denotes, were of French descent--Huguenots. Like many other emigrants, they yielded, in the course of a generation or two, to a barbarous mispronunciation of their patronymic, which came to be spoken of as if spelt "Malmsey."

How it happened that the chateau of the Empress Josephine was christened by the same name, I know not; at all events, the Sussex Malmaisons have prior claim to the title. The estate, which embraced between seven and eight hundred acres, lay in that portion of the county which borders upon the junction line of Kent and Surrey. Colonel Battledown, the Peninsular soldier, owned the adjoining estate in Kent; while the Surrey corner was occupied, at the epoch of this story, by the Honorable Richard Pennroyal--he whose father, Lord Epsom, is said to have won ninety thousand pounds from Fox in a single night's play. The three families had been on a friendly footing with each other ever since the early part of the reign of George III.

Sir Clarence had been an ally of the father of the Honorable Richard in Parliament (they were both Whigs), and Colonel Battledown, though a Tory, was such capital company as not only to compensate for his political derelictions, but even to render them a matter for mutual congratulation--they so enlivened the conversation! In truth, I suppose the three gentlemen must have had many a boisterous discussion over their nightly three or four bottles apiece of claret, and after their hard day across country.

The Honorable Richard, by the by, was by far the youngest of the three; at the time of Archibald's birth he was not much over twenty; but he had a cool, strong brain, and quite as much gravity as his seniors, over whom, in fact, he seems to have exercised a species of ascendancy. Possibly he inherited something of his noble father's ability--that of playing quietly for big stakes when all the odds were in his favor. At all events, in the year 1801 he married Miss Jane Malmaison, the baronet's sister, who was fifteen years older than he, but who brought him fifty thousand pounds--a not unimportant consideration to him at that time.

Mrs. Pennroyal has one claim upon our notice, and only one; seven years after her marriage, at the age of forty-two, she completely lost her memory, and became rather idiotic, and a few years later contrived to fall into an ornamental fish-pond, and drowned there before her attendants missed her. She was buried with much stateliness; but it is to be feared that few persons missed her even then. She left no children.

Was poor old Jane the first member of the Malmaison line who had shown any special weakness or peculiarity in the upper story? There was a hoary tradition to the effect that the son or grandson of the first emigrant had made some compact or other with the Evil One, the terms of which were that he (the grandson) was to prolong his terrestrial existence for one hundred and forty years by the ingenious device of living only every alternate seven years, the intervening periods to be passed in a sort of hibernation. In return for this accommodation he was, of course, to make H.S.M. the usual acknowledgment!

The final upshot of this bargain--as is usually the way in these cases--is not known. Did the worthy gentleman work his way into his third half century? And had he, by that time, acquired astuteness sufficient to cheat the other party to the contract of his due? History is silent; the only thing asserted with any appearance of confidence is that Sir Eustace de Malmaison possessed the power of vanishing at will from the eyes of men. Nay, he would seem to have bequeathed this useful accomplishment to certain of his descendants; for there is among the family documents a curious narrative, signed and witnessed, describing how a member of the family, in the time (I think) of the Second Pretender, did, being hard pressed by the minions of the German Prince, and pursued by them into the extreme eastern chamber of his house of Malmaison, suddenly and without warning render himself invisible, insomuch that nothing of him remained save his dagger, and the plume which he bore in his cap. This eastern chamber had, at the time, but one outlet, and that was into a room already guarded by the soldiery.

The chronicle goes on to say that the disappearance was not final: the mysterious fugitive reappeared on the third day, in the same spot where he had vanished, but apparently rather the worse for wear. He was at first taken for a spirit, and all fled before him; but he, going hastily forward to the dining hall, and finding a great sirloin of beef set out upon the board, forthwith fell to, and, in a wondrous short time, devoured the whole thereof, drinking also a gallon and a half of the wine of Burgundy. This exploit restored the belief of the household in the material consistency of their master, and thereupon was much thanksgiving, feasting, and rejoicing. But the secret of the disappearance never was revealed.

I give these musty old details for what they are worth; they may perhaps be construed as an indication that the race of Malmaison had some peculiarities of its own.

As for Archibald, he was rather neglected than otherwise. He was a dull and stolid baby, neither crying nor crowing much: he would sit all day over a single toy, not playing with it, but holding it idly in his hands or between his knees. He could neither crawl, walk, nor talk till long after the usual time for such accomplishments. It seemed as if he had made up his mind to live according to his birthdays--that is, four times as slow as other people. The only things he did do well were eating and sleeping: he never appeared to be thoroughly awake, nor was his appetite ever entirely satisfied. As might be supposed, therefore, his body grew apace; and at seven years old (or one and three quarters, as the facetious Baronet would have it) he weighed twelve good pounds more than his brother Edward, who was two years his senior, though, to be sure, not a specially robust child.

For the rest, poor Archibald seemed to be affectionate, in a dim, inarticulate way, though his sympathies were confined within somewhat narrow limits. He loved a certain brindled cat that he had more than anything else: next to her, his little baby sister; and oddly enough, he conceived a sort of dog-like admiration for the Honorable Richard Pennroyal--a compliment which that personage did nothing to deserve, and which he probably did not desire. He had also a distinct feeling for localities; he was never quite at his ease except in the nursery-room where he slept; and, on the other hand, he never failed to exhibit symptoms of distrust and aversion when he was carried into the East chamber--that in which his great-grandfather had effected his mysterious self-effacement. But the only thing that was certain to make him cry was to be brought into the company of little Kate Battledown, the colonel's only child, a year or two younger than Archibald, and universally admitted to be the prettiest and most graceful baby in the neighborhood. But Archibald, up to his seventh year, would do anything to get away from her--short of walking.

In a word, he exhibited such symptoms of a deficient and perverted understanding as would have gained him--had he been of humbler birth--the descriptive title of "natural." Being a son of Sir Clarence Butt Malmaison, he was considered to be peculiar only. The old wives of the village maintained that he was the sort that could see elves, and that, if one but knew how, he might be induced to reveal valuable secrets, and to confer magic favors. But, looking the other way, he was to be dreaded as a possible (though involuntary) agent of evil; especially perilous was it, these venerable dames would affirm, to become the object of his affection or caresses--a dogma which received appalling confirmation in the fate of the brindled cat, who, after having been caught by the leg in a trap intended for a less respectable robber of hen-roosts, was finished by a bull-terrier, who took advantage of her embarrassed circumstances to pay off upon her a grudge of long standing. This tragedy occurred in January of the year 1807, and produced a noticeable effect upon Master Archibald Malmaison. He neither wept nor tore his hair, but took the far more serious course of losing his appetite.

The most remarkable part of the story is yet to come. No one had told him that the cat was dead, and the cat, having adventurous propensities, had often been away from home for days at a time without leave or warning. Nevertheless, Archibald was immediately aware of her fate, and even seemed (judging from some expressions that escaped him) to have divined the manner of it. He then gave intimation of an earnest desire to view the remains; but in this he could not be gratified, for they had already been secretly interred in an obscure corner of the back garden. Will it be believed that the "peculiar" child hereupon got upon his fat legs, and, without either haste or hesitation, deliberately ambled out of the nursery, along the corridor, down the stairs, across the hall, through the door, and so round to the back garden and to the very identical spot where poor Tabby had been deposited!

The fact is sufficiently well attested; I am not aware that it has ever been accounted for. The boy had never in his life walked so far before, although his limbs were perfectly developed and able for much longer pilgrimages. He did not resist being led away; but, as has been said, he neglected his bread and milk, and every few days returned to the back garden, and stood beside the grave in the cold, looking fixedly at it, but making no active demonstration whatever. This went on for about six weeks, and attracted a good deal of curiosity in the neighborhood. At length, in the latter part of February, Archibald had a sort of fit, apparently of an epileptic nature. On recovering from it, he called for a glass of milk, and drank it with avidity; he then fell asleep, and did not awake again for thirty-six hours.

By this time he was a personage of more importance at Malmaison than he had ever yet been in his small life. The wise folk who stood around his crib hazarded various predictions as to the issue of his unnatural slumber. Some said he would lose what little wit he had; others, that he would become an acknowledged wizard; others again, that he would never wake up at all. In short, like other prophets, they foretold everything except that which was actually to happen; and they would have foretold that too, if they had thought of it in time.

II.

Archibald awoke at length, and sat up in bed. He opened his mouth, apparently for the purpose of saying something, but his tongue refused to articulate any recognizable words. An irregular, disjointed sound made itself heard, like the vague outcry of an infant; and then, as if angry at his own failure, he set up a loud and indignant wail, muffled from time to time by the cramming of his fingers into his mouth.

Whatever else was the matter with the child, it was evident that he was hungry--as, indeed, he well might be. Some bread and milk was brought to him, that being his favorite food; but to the general astonishment and dismay, he did not seem to know what it was, although he continued to exhibit every symptom of a ravenous and constantly augmenting appetite. They tried him with every imaginable viand, but in vain; they even put morsels into his mouth, but he had lost the power of mastication, and could not retain them. The more they labored, the greater became his exasperation, until at last there was such a hubbub and confusion on the score of Master Archibald as that hitherto rather insignificant little personage should have felt proud to occasion.

Among the anxious and bewildered people who thronged the nursery at this juncture was a young woman who acted as wet-nurse to the latest born of the Malmaisons, a baby-girl three months old.

She was a healthy and full-bodied peasant, and as she pressed forward to have her look at the now frantic Archibald, she held the nursing infant--the only serene and complacent member of the assemblage--to her open breast. Archibald caught sight of her, and immediately reached toward her, arms, mouth and all, accompanying the action by an outcry so eager, impatient, and gluttonous that it was capable of only one interpretation. An incredible interpretation, certainly, but that made no difference; there was nothing else to be done. Honest Maggie, giggling and rubicund, put aside her complacent nursling (who thereupon became anything but complacent) and took to her kind bosom this strapping and unreasonable young gentleman, who had already got many of his second teeth. That did not prevent him from making an unconscionably good supper, and thenceforth the only person likely to be disturbed by his new departure in gormandizing was Maggie herself. Everything being thus happily arranged, the household dispersed about its business, the Baronet declaring, with a great laugh, that he had always said Archie was but a babe in arms, and this proved it!

Dr. Rollinson, however (the elder doctor, that is--father of the present [2] distinguished bearer of the name), had witnessed this scene with something more than ordinary wonder or amusement; it had puzzled, but also interested him extremely. He was less of a conservative than many of his profession; he kept his mind open, and was not disinclined to examine into odd theories, and even, perhaps, to originate a few such himself upon occasion. The question that now confronted him and challenged his ingenuity was, What was the matter with Archibald? Why had the boy suddenly gone back to the primitive source of nourishment, not from mere childish whim, but from actual ignorance--as it seemed--that nourishment was obtainable in any other way? An obvious reply would be that the boy had become wholly, idiotic; but the more Dr. Rollinson revolved this rough and ready explanation, the less satisfactory did he find it. He wisely decided to study the symptoms and weigh the evidence before committing himself one way or the other.

The first result of his observations was to confirm his impression that Archibald was not idiotic. There was a certain sort of vacancy in the child's expression, but it was the vacancy of ignorance rather than of foolishness. And ignorant to a surprising degree he was. He had at no time been regarded as a boy of large attainments; but what he knew before his strange seizure was, to what he knew after it, as Bacon to a ploughman. Had he been newly born into the world, he could not have shown less acquaintance with it, so far as intellectual comprehension went; his father, mother, sister--all were alike strangers to him; he gazed at them with intent but unrecognizing eyes; he never looked up when his name was spoken, nor did he betray any sign of understanding the talk that went on around him. His own thoughts and wants were expressed by inarticulate sounds and by gestures; but the mystery of speech evidently interested him, and he studied the movements of the lips of those who spoke to him with a keen, grave scrutiny to them highly amusing--except in the case of his poor old Aunt Jane, who turned quite pale under his inquisition, and declared that he must be bewitched, for although he seemed to know nothing, yet he had the knowingest look of any child she ever saw. Herein Aunt Jane gave utterance to a fact that was beginning to be generally acknowledged. Whatever Archibald had lost, it was beyond dispute that he had somehow come into possession of a fund of native intelligence (the term "mother wit" seems inappropriate under the circumstances) to which he had heretofore been a stranger. He might have forgotten his own name, and the mother that bore him; but he had learned how to learn, and was for the first time in his life wide awake. This was very much like saying that he was a new boy in the old skin; and this, again, was little better than a euphemism for changeling. Was he a changeling after all? The sage old woman whom we have already quoted asserted confidently that he was, and that, however much he pretended to ignorance, he really knew vastly more than any plain human child did or ought to know. And as a warrant for this opinion they brought forward evidence that Master Archibald, having been left alone one day in the nursery, had been overheard humming to himself the words of a certain song--a thing, it was argued, which he could not have done had he known no words at all; and therefore he was a changeling.

Dr. Rollinson happened to hear this argument, and thought it worth while to inquire further into the matter. Such testimony as he could collect went to confirm the truth of the story. Not only so, but the song itself, if the witnesses were to be believed, so far from being an ordinary childish ditty, was some matter of pretty maids and foaming wine-cups that Tom Moore might have written, and that gentlemen sometimes trolled out, an hour or two after dinner. Now

this looked very black for Archibald. Further investigation, however, put a somewhat different face upon the affair. It transpired that the song had been often sung in Archibald's hearing, and before his fit, by the Honorable Richard, for whom, as has been said, the boy had taken a queer fancy.

And, perhaps because affection is a good teacher, the boy had acquired the power of repeating some of the verses to himself, of course without understanding a syllable of them, and very likely without himself being conscious of what he was doing, he hummed them over, in short, exactly as a preoccupied parrot might do; and always at a certain time, namely, after he had been put to bed, and was staring up at the darkening ceiling previous to falling asleep. This, by itself, was nothing very remarkable; the puzzle was, how could he do it now? Out of all the wreck of his small memory, why was this song, the meaning of which he had never understood, the sole survivor? Was it that his affection for Mr. Pennroyal had kept it alive? So might a sentimentalist have concluded; but the Doctor was a man of sense. Was it that the boy was shamming? Impossible on all accounts. But then, what was it?

The Doctor had by this time worked himself up to believe that the solution of this problem would help largely toward the clearing up of the whole mystery. So he took notes, and continued to observe and to consider.

He found, in the first place, that the song-singing took place under exactly the same circumstances as before the fit, and at no other time or place.

Hereupon, he devised experiments to discover whether Archibald was conscious that he was singing, or whether it was an act performed mechanically, while the mind was otherwise engaged. After the child was in bed, he quietly arranged a lamp so as to cast a circular space of light upon the ceiling above the bed, the rest of the room being left in shadow. Not a word of any song was heard that night; and the test was tried twice more during the week, with a like result. At another time he got the Honorable Richard to come into a room adjoining the nursery, and sing the song so that Archibald might hear it. Archibald heard it, but gave no sign of being affected thereby. He was then brought into Mr. Richard's presence; it was the first time they had met since the change. Now, if ever, was an opportunity for the imperishable quality of the affections to be vindicated. But no such vindication occurred. On the contrary, after having stared his uncle almost out of countenance for some minutes, he turned from him with a marked expression of disapproval, and could never afterward be induced voluntarily to go near him. The affection had become an antipathy.

"No, madam; set your mind at rest," said the bluff Doctor to Lady Malmaison over a cup of tea that evening. "The child's no changeling; but he's changed, and changed for the better, too, by Gad! He can tell a bad egg from a good one now," continued the Doctor, with a significant chuckle, the significance of which, however, Lady Malmaison perhaps failed to perceive. But the fact was, the Honorable Richard Pennroyal had never been an especial favorite with Dr. Rollinson.

The next day was a new excitement. Archibald had walked, and that, too, as well as the best-grown boy of seven that you would want to see.

"Ay, and where did he walk to?" demanded the Doctor.

It was explained that it was at the time for nursing him, and he was sitting in his little chair at one end of the nursery, when Maggie had entered at the other. As soon as he clapped eyes on her, he had set up his usual impatient outcries; but Maggie, instead of going directly to him, had stopped to exchange a few words with the head-nurse, unfastening the front of her dress the while, however, so that Master Archibald's impatience was carried to the point of intolerance by the glimpse thus afforded of the good things in store for him. And then, before you had time to think, he had got up from his chair, and trotted across the floor, bellowing all the time, and had tugged at Maggie's dress.

"Bellowing all the time, eh?" said the Doctor.

"And walking all the same like he was ten year old, sir: and it did give us all a turn; and if you please, sir, what do you say to *that*?"

"What do I say to that?--why, that it's just what I should have expected--that's what I say!" replied Dr. Rollinson, who had apparently begun to divine some clew to the grand mystery. But he vouchsafed no explanations as yet.

Archibald did not repeat the walking miracle, although, within the space of a few weeks only, he passed through the regular gradations of crawling, tottering, and toddling, to normal pedestrianism of the most active kind. His progress in other accomplishments was almost parallel with this. From inarticulate gabble he trained his tongue to definite speech; his vocabulary expanded with astonishing rapidity, and, contrary to his previous habit, he made incessant use of it. He was now as remarkable for loquacity as formerly for the opposite characteristic; and his keenness of observation and retentive memory were a theme of general admiration. In a word, he used his five senses to ten times better effect than had ever been expected of him in the old days; and no one who had not seen him for a year from the time of his fit would have recognized him as the same child. He was not only making up for lost time--he was incomparably outstripping his earlier self; he seemed to have emerged from a mental and physical cocoon--to have cast aside an incrustation of deterring clumsiness, and to be hastening onward with the airy case and accuracy of perfect self-possession. At the end of a year he was to all intents and purposes ten years old; and what was most remarkable about this swift advance lay in the fact that a year had seen the whole of it. Though he had been eight years in the world, the first seven had furnished none of the mental or moral material for the last: it stood alone and disconnectedly. Of those seven years it is certain that he retained not the smallest recollection; they were to him as if they had never been. The only thing they did provide him with was a well-fed and sound body; in other respects Archibald was positively new. He had to make the acquaintance of his family and friends over again; but it was done with modifications. In other cases besides that of his uncle, it was observed that he felt antipathies where formerly he loved, and *vice versa*.

A minor instance, but interesting as must be all evidence in a case so strange as this, is that of the brindled cat that was buried in the garden. Archibald was brought to the grave, which he had so pathetically haunted before his metamorphosis, not many weeks after the metamorphosis occurred; and every means was used to revive in him some recollection of the bereavement; they even went so far as to uncover poor pussy's remains.... Archibald was first

unconscious and indifferent, then curious, finally disgusted. His feelings were not otherwise touched. All associations connected with this whilom pet of his, grief for whose loss was supposed to have been the impelling cause of the fit itself, were as utterly expunged from his mind as if they had never existed there. Moreover, aversion from all cats was from this time forth so marked in him as almost to amount to horror; while dogs, whose presence had been wont to fill him with dismay, were now his favorite companions. It was the same in other things; the boy formed independent opinions and prejudices in all the relations of life--independent, that is, of his past. His temper, too, was changed; no longer timid, appealing and docile, it was now determined, enterprising, and bold. It was manifest even thus early that here was a character fitted to make its way in the world.

"No, I protest, Doctor, I can never believe it's the same child," said Lady Malmaison, with a sigh. "That noisy, self-willed boy is never my quiet, affectionate little Archie. And yesterday he beat his brother Edward, that is two years older than he. Heigho! Pray, dear Doctor, what is your opinion?"

"My opinion, Lady Malmaison, is that women will never be content," answered the bluff old physician. "I can remember the time when you thought your quiet little Archie was a nincompoop--and quite right too. And now because a monstrous piece of good luck has made a Crichton of him, you begin to regret the nincompoop! It ain't logical;" and the Doctor took snuff.

"But who ever heard of a child changing his whole nature all in a moment?" persisted Lady Malmaison.

"Why, isn't all in a moment better than inch by inch? The thing is no such mighty matter as some folks try to make it out. The boy went to sleep as soon as he was born, and has but just waked up--that's my notion about it. So now, instead of starting, the way most of us do, at the point of helplessness, he begins life with a body full of seven years' pith, and faculties sharp set as a new watch. Till now he has but dreamed; now he's going to exist, with so much the more extra impetus. He don't recollect what he's been dreaming--why should he?"

"But he did recollect some things, Doctor; that song.... And then, his walking across the room."

"Purely physical--purely automatic," replied the Doctor, tapping his snuff-box, and pleased with Lady Malmaison's awe at the strange word. "If he had stopped to think what he was doing he couldn't have done it. The body, I tell you, grows under all circumstances--as much when you're asleep as when you're awake; and the body has a memory of its own, distinct from the mental memory. Have you never hummed a song when you were doing your embroidery, and thinking about--about Lady Snaffle's elopement with the captain?"

"Oh, Doctor!"

"Yes; and if I'd come in at the moment and asked you what you were singing, could you have told me? Of course you couldn't! You could have told me all about the elopement. Well, then, that's clear now, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Lady Malmaison, meaning, it must be supposed, "as clear as mud." Dr. Rollinson chuckled to himself, and they continued their game of piquet.

III.

Possibly the reader, though, understanding the force of the Doctor's illustration better than good stupid Lady Malmaison could do, is still of opinion that that eminent practitioner's exposition of the real nucleus of the mystery might have been more explicit. It is all very well to say that the boy was asleep for seven years and then woke up; but what does such a statement mean? Are such prolonged slumbers an ordinary occurrence? And if so, might not the slumberer, after a longer or shorter interval of wakefulness, fall asleep again? It is to be feared that the old physician was not quite so well satisfied in his secret mind as he pretended to be, and that his learned dissertation upon automatic action was little better than a device to avoid being pressed upon the real point at issue. But it is always a delicate matter to fathom the depth of a medical man's sagaciousness.

Mention has already been made of little Kate Battledown, the effect of whose society on Archibald had been so strangely ungenial. A year or two after his "awakening" the little maiden was again thrown in his way, and this time with very different results. There is extant among the family papers a letter containing a very pretty account of the relations which were soon established between these small personages. They seem to have taken to one another at once, and exercised over each other a mutual fascination. Archibald, keen and domineering with his brother and sisters, and, so far as his power went, with everybody else--was as sweet as milk to his childish enchantress; and no doubt his manners, if not his general character, greatly benefited by her companionship. There is a picture of the two children painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence and now hanging in the present Dr. Rollinson's parlor (where, doubtless, thousands of his patients have beheld it, ignorant of its history), which is perhaps as beautiful an example of English youth and maidenhood at eleven and nine years of age as could be found in the three kingdoms. The boy, black-eyed and black-haired, seems to step forward daringly, with his glance fixed defiantly upon the spectator; but his left hand, extended behind him, clasps that of little Kate with a protecting gesture; and her great brown eyes rest on his face, with a look half of apprehension, half of admiring confidence. There is a second portrait of her, taken ten years later; but of Archibald no other authentic likeness exists. Report affirms, however, that in 1823 and thereabout he was esteemed one of the handsomest young fellows of his day.

The devotion of the two to each other grew with their growth. She, even at that early age, must have given occasional foretastes of the wayward, impulsive, and yet calculating character that was developed in her later life; but there can be little doubt that she felt a genuine attachment to Archibald; and he laid himself at her feet with a chivalric single-heartedness more characteristic of the fifteenth century than of the early nineteenth. Indeed, his jealous guardianship

of her excited not a little amusement among his seniors; and it is related that in his twelfth year he actually commissioned Colonel Battledown to carry a formal "message" on his behalf to the Honorable Richard Pennroyal; the latter's offence consisting in his having taken Miss Battledown on his knee and kissed her. The matter was, however, happily arranged on the Hon. gentleman's expressing his regret for his indiscretion, and the Colonel and Sir Clarence becoming answerable for his good behavior in future. But the children's preference for each other now began to suggest other thoughts than those of mere passing entertainment to the paternal minds. There seemed to be no good reason why they should not ultimately make a match of it. It was true that Kate might well expect to find a more brilliant mate than the second son of a baronet; but, personal feeling and the friendship of the families aside, she might do much worse than with Archibald. The second son of Sir Clarence stood a fair chance of hereafter making a favorable entry into politics; and as for fortune, his aunt on the mother's side, a Miss Tremont, of Cornwall, an old maid without nearer relatives than her nephew, was in a fair way to bequeath him seventy thousand pounds. And furthermore (this was an aspect of the case which Colonel Battledown probably kept to himself), it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that Archibald might finally inherit Malmaison in spite of the accident of his birth. Edward Malmaison had always been a delicate child, and years were not making him stronger. He was very studious, and disinclined to those active exercises in which his brother was already beginning to excel: his eyes were weak and his cheeks pale; and in short, unless his constitution should presently undergo a favorable change, the chances were fairly against his surviving Archibald, to say the least of it. "Archie thrashed him at fisticuffs," said the old man of war to himself, "and why shouldn't he get the better of him in other ways as well? Of course we wish no harm to happen to poor Edward, who is a good little snipe enough; but one must conduct one's campaign to an eye to what may happen, as well as to what is."

So this matrimonial arrangement, without being definitely resolved upon (except possibly in the hearts of the two young persons principally concerned), was allowed to remain in a state of favorable suspense. Kate and Archibald saw one another as much as was good for them--although, by way of keeping up the chivalric conditions, they used to pretend that all manner of portentous obstacles intervened between them and the consummation of their desires; and exhausted their ingenuity in the devising of secret meetings, of elopements across the garden wall, and of heart-rending separations, when imaginary heartless parents tore them ruthlessly from one another's arms. In a letter written by Sir Clarence to Dr. Rollinson, under date December 27th, 1811, the jolly Baronet says: "Our Xmas festivities were for a time interrupted by another Romantic Event. Catherine, onely daughter of Colonel Battledown eloped with Mr. Archibald Malmaison of Malmaison. The Fugitives escaped by the pantry dore, and before they could be overtaken, had been maid man and wife by the under Gardner in the tool house in the corner of the yard. An application will be made to Parlement to dissolve the marriage untill the parties are out of the Nursrie." By this it may appear that Sir Clarence had even more humor than orthography.

It was a few weeks after this event that poor old Aunt Jane left the world by way of the ornamental fish-pond. The pond in question lay on the boundary-line between the Malmaison estate and that of the Pennroyals; and the ornamentation consisted of two flights of steps leading down to the water, and of half a dozen willows whose twisted trunks bent over the surface. Although of no great area, this pond was startlingly deep, and the bottom, when you got to it, was of the softest and most unfathomable mud. Had not Aunt Jane been seen just as she was sinking for the third time, therefore, the chances are that she would never have been seen till doomsday; there was room, and to spare, for all the Malmaison line in the slimy depths of that pool. After the catastrophe, Mr. Pennroyal caused a handsome iron railing to be erected round the scene of it. This act caused it to be said that he might have done it before. Did he expect his future wives to go the road of the first one? And was it not criminal negligence in him to have suffered her to escape from her attendants? How could such a thing have happened? Did Mr. Pennroyal consider that people might say that the death of his wife was no loss to him, but the contrary? because that fifty thousand pounds of hers, of which, during her lifetime, he could touch only the interest, became, at her decease, his absolute property, to do with as he liked. Under such circumstances, a gentleman careful of his reputation should have guarded her as the apple of his eye. It was certainly very odd that a poor frail crazy creature should have been able to elude all pursuit, and then have gone straight to the pool--in midwinter, too--and deliberately jumped in. And there she might have lain, and no one the wiser, had not young Archibald Malmaison happened to see her, and given the alarm. If he had been a few minutes earlier, who can tell but he might have seen something--that nobody suspected!

All this random talk proved nothing more than that the Honorable Mr. Pennroyal was not a favorite with his neighbors; and that was a fact of which no proof was needed. Some men, who are good fellows enough at bottom and even capable of inspiring genuine attachment in particular cases, never become generally popular. When Mr. Pennroyal was accused of stinginess, it was not considered that he had a great many liabilities to meet, and perhaps some big debts to pay off. When it was said that he was unsocial and cynical, it was forgotten that these very remarks were enough to make him so. And when he was blamed for neglecting his wife, and profiting by her demise--well, now, how is a gentleman to pay attentions to an idiot, or to be inconsolable when Providence gives him fifty thousand down in exchange for her? Besides, he gave her an imposing funeral, and put himself and all his household into strict mourning. As for the iron railing, it might be looked upon as a sort of monument to the departed, in which practical usefulness and a becoming sentiment were ingeniously combined.

The incident had its effect upon Archibald--in rather a curious fashion. He was, as has been intimated, the one to give the alarm. He had been passing that way, it seemed, and had caught sight of a struggling something in the water; and his shouts had speedily drawn the gamekeeper and a couple of villagers to the spot. The boy had watched the recapture of the lifeless body in solemn silence, a red flush of color in either cheek. He had been rather fond of Aunt Jane after her insanity became confirmed, and he was the only human being whom the poor woman had seemed to recognize, and in whose company she felt some dull gleams of pleasure. He now shed no tears, seeming more angry than grieved, and continued to maintain a marked taciturnity for several days; and, concerning the catastrophe itself, he could never be induced to speak at all. The power of keeping his own counsel had always characterized him: in the present instance he was as gloomily reserved as though he had buried a secret of state in his breast. Toward the widower his manner became, from hostile, almost insolent. It was a curious spectacle to see the lad, scarcely out of the nursery, either ignoring his tall relative, as if the latter were a caitiff unworthy the notice of a gentleman, or else staring him haughtily in the face, and staring him down, too! for it was remarked that the Honorable Richard exhibited an admirable forbearance, not to say meekness, toward his rude little kinsman. And yet, before this time, he had occasionally given

the boy harsh words and looks.... It must have been that his bereavement had softened his heart.

However, time went on, and by degrees the poignancy of the widower's grief was blunted, and Aunt Jane's name was seldom mentioned by any one; after all she had not done herself, or anybody connected with her, much credit. And other changes occurred: the stout old Colonel found it incumbent upon him to join Sir Arthur Wellesley in the Peninsula; and Kate began to take the lead in household affairs (her mother was a good deal of an invalid), and stayed more at home than she used to do, and consequently did not see so much of Archibald; she gave him to understand that it was more genteel for him to come and call on her, as Mr. Pennroyal and other gentlemen did. The young lady was already coming into her heritage of beauty, and possessed more than her share of maidenly dignity, considering that she was barely thirteen. And when, at that mention of Pennroyal, Archibald said:

"Indeed, Kate, you must not class me with him, or with any man. Remember that we were married two Christmases ago--" she answered:

"You foolish boy! that was not a real marriage: a real marriage is done in a church, by a parson, and I wear a white veil."

"But ours was an elopement," objected Archibald, disturbed.

"An elopement without a carriage-and-four and a blacksmith? What an idea!"

"Do you mean to say you are not my wife, Kate?" demanded the boy, turning pale.

"Neither yours nor anybody's, Mr. Archibald."

"Kate!" he broke out passionately, the blood leaping to his face, "take care you never let yourself be any body else's wife than mine! And I don't see what difference a blacksmith or a veil makes. And if you do, they shall die! I know how to use a sword, and a pistol too!"

"O Archie, how wicked you are! and how cruel to me, when you know that I can never love any man but you, though cruel fate may separate us for a season!" The young lady was quoting from "Evelina," as Archibald well knew, but they had got so much in the habit of applying the phraseology of that work to the requirements of their own private romance, that it came without their thinking of it.

"But say that you will be my own at last!" cries Archibald, carrying on the scene in all seriousness.

"Nay, my lord, 'tis ungenerous thus to press me--Oh, no, you must not do so, Archie; the book says that Lord Orville only kisses her hand--"

"I am not Lord Orville, and I will kiss you where I like; and I don't care for the book when I feel as I do now! I only care for you."

"Bravo, young gentleman! that's the way to talk to 'em!" cried Dr. Rollinson, who had overheard the whole of this conversation, and who now appeared with his broad figure, his gouty legs, and his gruff chuckle. "Books are very well for make-believe, but when it comes to downright earnest, use a tongue of your own--eh?" and he clapped the boy kindly on the shoulder. "Yes, yes, she'll marry you fast enough when she sees you making eyes at some other pretty girl! Don't tell me! there's plenty of 'em, go where you will, and when you start on the grand tour, as you'll be doing one of these days, you'll see for yourself!" Such were the cynical blasphemies which this man was not ashamed to instil into the ear of his young friend; and then he led him away somewhere, still chuckling, and left Miss Battledown to digest her slight the best way she could. The Doctor fancied he knew a thing or two about the sex. If so, he was very knowing!

IV.

Malmaison House was partly destroyed by fire a number of years ago, [3] and two years later the portion still standing was taken down to make way for the proposed branch of the London and South-Coast Railway. The branch is still unbuilt, but only some heaps of grass-grown rubbish remain to mark the site of the venerable edifice. But at the period of which I am now writing it was an imposing pile of gray-stone, standing on a slight elevation, with a sloping lawn in front, and many large trees surrounding it. The centre and the right wing were of Elizabethan date; the left wing was constructed by Sir Christopher Wren, or by some architect of his school, and, though outwardly corresponding with the rest of the building, was interiorly both more commodious and less massive. The walls of the old part were in some places over four feet in thickness, and even the partitions between the rooms were two feet of solid masonry. Many of the rooms were hung with tapestry; and in taking down the house several traces were discovered of secret passages hollowed out within the walls themselves, and communicating by means of sliding panels from room to room. The plan of the building comprised two floors and an attic; but the attic was not coextensive with the lower areas; and there was often a difference of level between the apartments on the latter floors of from one to four steps. An irregular corridor on the first floor, badly lighted, and in some places perfectly dark, extended from the centre into the right wing, affording entrance to the rooms front and back.

At the end of the right wing was situated the east chamber, of which mention has already been made. Originally, the only access to it was by way of a larger chamber adjoining, which, again, could only be entered through the dark corridor. This was the condition of things at the time of the famous magic disappearance of Sir Charles Malmaison, in 1745. But, at the beginning of the present century, a door was cut through the outside wall, whence a covered flight of stone steps led down into an enclosed courtyard. The room was thus rendered independent, so to speak, of the rest of

the house. The occupant might lock the door communicating with the adjoining chamber, and go and come by the other as he pleased. As for the courtyard, part of it had formerly been used as a stable, with stalls for three horses; these were now transferred to the other end of the mansion, though the stable, of course, remained; and it was necessary to go through the stable in order to get to the covered flight of steps.

It may be remembered that Archibald, in what we may term his soporific period, had manifested a strong, although entirely irrational, repugnance to this east chamber. Perhaps he had been conscious of presences there which were imperceptible to normal and healthy senses! Be that as it may, he got bravely over his folly afterward, and in his twelfth year (his third, Sir Clarence would have called it) he permanently took up his quarters there, and would admit no "women" except as a special favor. In those days, when people were still, more or less, prone to superstition, it was not every boy who would have enjoyed the sensation of spending his nights in so isolated a situation; for the right wing was almost entirely unoccupied on this floor. But Archibald appears to have been singularly free from fear, whether of the natural or of the supernatural. He collected together all his boyish *penates*--his gun, his sword, his fishing-rods, and his riding-whips, and arranged them about the walls. He swept down the cobwebs from windows and ceiling; turned out of doors a lot of miscellaneous lumber that had insensibly collected there during the last half century; lugged in a few comfortable broad-bottomed chairs and stanch old tables; set up a bookshelf containing Walton's "Complete Angler," "Dialogues of Devils," "Arabian Nights," Miss Burney's "Evelina," and other equally fashionable and ingenious works; kindled a great fire on the broad hearth; and, upon the whole, rendered the aspect of things more comfortable than would have been anticipated. The room itself was long, narrow, and comparatively low; the latticed windows were sunk several feet into the massive walls; lengths of brownish-green and yellow tapestry, none the fresher for its two centuries and more of existence, still protested against the modern heresy of wallpaper; and in a panel-frame over the fireplace was seen the portrait, by Sir Godfrey Kneller, of the Jacobite baronet. It was a half-length, in officer's uniform; one hand holding the hilt of a sword against the breast, while the forefinger of the other hand pointed diagonally downward, as much as to say, "I vanished in that direction!" The fireplace, it should be noted, was built on the side of the room opposite to the windows; that is to say, in one of the partition walls. And what was on the other side of this partition? Not the large chamber opening into the corridor--that lay at right angles to the east chamber, along the southern front of the wing. Not the corridor either, though it ran for some distance parallel to the east chamber, and had a door on the east side. But this door led into a great dark closet, as big as an ordinary room, and used as a receptacle for rubbish. Was it the dark closet, then, that adjoined the east chamber on the other side of the partition? No, once more. Had a window been opened through the closet wall, it would have looked--not into Archibald's room, but--into a narrow blind court or well, entirely enclosed between four stone walls, and of no apparent use, save as a somewhat clumsy architectural expedient. There was no present way of getting into this well, or even of looking into it, unless one had been at the pains to mount on the roof of the house and peer down. As a matter of fact, its existence was only made known by the reports of an occasional workman engaged in renewing the tiles, or mending a decayed chimney. An accurate survey of the building would, of course, have revealed it at once; but nothing of the kind had been thought of within the memory of man. Such a survey would also have revealed what no one in the least suspected, but which was, nevertheless, a fact of startling significance--namely, that the blind court was, at least, fifteen feet shorter, and twenty-five feet narrower, *than it ought to have been!*

Archibald was as far from suspecting it as anybody; indeed, he most likely never troubled his head about builders' plans in his life. But he thought a great deal of his great-grandfather's portrait; and since it was so placed as to be in view of the most comfortable chair before the fire, he spent many hours of every week gazing at it. What was Sir Charles pointing at with that left forefinger? And what meant that peculiarly intent and slightly frowning glance which the painted eyes forever bent upon his own? Archibald probably had a few of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances along with the other valuable books on his shelves, and he may have cherished a notion that a treasure, or an important secret of some sort, was concealed in the vicinity. Following down the direction of the pointing finger, he found that it intersected the floor at a spot about five feet to the right of the side of the fireplace. The floor of the chamber was of solid oak planking, blackened by age; and it appeared to be no less solid at this point than at any other. Nevertheless, he thought it would be good fun, and at all events would do no harm, to cut a hole there, and see what was underneath. Accordingly, he quietly procured a saw and a hammer and chisel, and one day, when the family were away from home, he locked himself into his room, and went to work. The job was not an easy one, the tough oak wood being almost enough to turn the edge of his chisel, and there being no purchase at all for the saw. After quarter of an hour's chipping and hammering, with very little result, he paused to rest. The board at which he had been working, and which met the wall at right angles, was very short, not more than eighteen inches long, indeed, being inserted merely to fill up the gap caused by a deficiency in length of the plank of which it was the continuation. Between the two adjoining ends was a crack of some width, and into that crack did Archibald idly stick his chisel. It seemed to him that the crack widened, so that he was able to press the blade of the chisel down to its thickest part. He now worked it eagerly backward and forward, and, to his delight, the crack rapidly widened still further; in fact, the short board was sliding back underneath the wainscot. A small oblong cavity was thus revealed, into which the young discoverer glowered with beating heart and vast anticipations.

What he found could scarcely be said to do those anticipations justice; it was neither a casket of precious stones, nor a document establishing the family right of ownership of the whole county of Sussex. It was nothing more than a tarnished rod of silver, about nine inches in length, and twisted into an irregular sort of corkscrew shape. One end terminated in a broad flat button; the other in a blunted point. There was nothing else in the hole--nothing to show what the rod was meant for, or why it was so ingeniously hidden there. And yet, reflected Archibald, could it have been so hidden, and its place of concealment so mysteriously indicated, without any ulterior purpose whatever? It was incredible! Why, the whole portrait was evidently painted with no other object than that of indicating the rod's whereabouts. Either, then, there was or had been something else in the cavity in addition to the rod, or the rod was intended to be used in some way still unexplained. So much was beyond question.

Thus cogitated Archibald--that is to say, thus he might have cogitated, for there is no direct evidence of what passed through his mind. And, in the first place, he made an exhaustive examination of the cavity, and convinced himself not only that there was nothing else except dust to be got out of it, but also that it opened into no other cavity which might prove more fruitful. His next step was to study the silver rod, in the hope that scrutiny or inspiration might suggest to

him what it was good for. His pains were rewarded by finding on the flat head the nearly obliterated figures 3 and 5, inscribed one above the other, in the manner of a vulgar fraction, thus, $\frac{3}{5}$; and by the conviction that the spiral conformation of the rod was not the result of accident, as he had at first supposed, but had been communicated to it intentionally, for some purpose unknown. These conclusions naturally stimulated his curiosity more than ever, but nothing came of it. The boy was a clever boy, but he was not a detective trained in this species of research, and the problem was beyond his ingenuity. He made every application of the figures 3 and 5 that imagination could suggest; he took them in feet, in inches, in yards; he added them together, and he subtracted one from the other: all in vain. The only thing he did not do was to take any one else into his confidence; he said not a word about the affair even to Kate; being resolved that if there were a mystery, it should be revealed, at least in the first instance, to no one else besides himself. At length, after several days spent in fruitless experiments and loss of temper, he returned the rod to its hiding-place, with the determination to give himself a rest for awhile, and see what time and accident would do for him. This plan, though undoubtedly prudent, seemed likely to effect no more than the others; and over a year passed away without the rod's being again disturbed. By degrees his thoughts ceased to dwell so persistently upon the unsolved puzzle, and other interests took possession of his mind. The tragedy of his aunt's death, his love for Kate, his studies, his prospects--a hundred things gave him occupation, until the silver rod was half forgotten.

In the latter part of 1813, however, he accidentally made a rather remarkable discovery.

V.

He had for the first time been out hunting with his father and the neighboring country gentlemen in the autumn of this year, and it appears that on two occasions he had the brush awarded to him. At his request the heads of the two foxes were mounted for him, and he proposed to put them up on either side his fireplace.

The wall, above and for a few inches to the right and left of the mantelpiece, was bare of tapestry; the first-named place being occupied by the portrait, while the sides were four feet up the oaken wainscot which surrounded the whole room behind the tapestry, and from thence to the ceiling, plaster. The mantelpiece and fireplace were of a dark slaty stone, and of brick, respectively.

Archibald fixed upon what he considered the most effective positions for his heads--just above the level of the wainscot, and near enough to the mantelpiece not to be interfered with by the tapestry. He nailed up one of them on the left-hand side, the nails penetrating with just sufficient resistance in the firm plaster; and then, measuring carefully to the corresponding point on the right-hand side, he proceeded to affix the other head there. But the nail, on this occasion, could not be made to go in; and on his attempting to force it with a heavier stroke of the hammer, it bent beneath the blow, and the hammer came sharply into contact with the white surface of the wall, producing a clinking sound as from an impact on metal.

A brief investigation now revealed the fact that a circular disk of iron, about three inches in diameter, and painted white to match the plaster, was here let into the wall. What could be the object of it? With a fresh nail the boy began to scratch off the paint from the surface of the disk, in order to determine whether it were actually iron, or some other metal; in so doing a small movable lid, like the screen of a keyhole, was pushed aside, disclosing a little round aperture underneath. Archibald pushed the nail into it, thereby informing himself that the hole went straight into the wall, for a distance greater than the length of the nail; but how much greater, and what was at the end of it, he could only conjecture.

We must imagine him now standing upon a chair, with the nail in his hand, casting about in his mind for some means of probing this mysterious and unexpected hole to the bottom. At this juncture he happens to glance upward, and meets the intent regard of his pictured ancestor, who seems to have been silently watching him all this time, and only to be prevented by unavoidable circumstances from speaking out and telling him what to do next. And there is that constant forefinger pointing--at what? At the cavity in the floor, of course; but not of that alone; for if you observe, this same new-found hole in the wall is a third point in the straight line between the end of the forefinger and the hiding-place of the silver rod; furthermore, the hole is, as nearly as can be estimated without actual measurement, three feet distant from the forefinger, and five feet from the rod; the problem of three above and five below has solved itself in the twinkling of an eye, and it only remains to act accordingly!

Archibald sprang to the floor in no small excitement; but the first thing he did was to see that both his doors were securely fastened. Then he advanced upon the mystery with heightened color and beating heart, his imagination revelling in the wildest forecasts of what might be in store; and anon turning him cold with sickening apprehension lest it should prove to be nothing after all! But no--something there must be, some buried secret, now to live once more for him, and for him only: the secret, whereof dim legends had come down through the obscurity of two hundred years; the secret, too, of old Sir Charles in the frame yonder, the man of magic repute. What could it be? Some talisman--some volume of the Black Art perhaps--which would enable him to vanish at will into thin air, and to travel with the speed of a wish from place to place--to become a veritable enchanter, endowed with all supernatural powers. With hands slightly tremulous from eagerness he pushed back the bit of plank and drew forth the silver rod; then mounted on the chair and applied it to the hole, which it fitted accurately. Before pushing it home he paused a moment.

In all the stories he had read, the possessors of magic secrets had acquired the same, only in exchange for something supposed to be equally valuable, namely, their own souls. It was not to be expected that Archibald would be able to modify the terms of the bargain in his own case: was he, then, prepared to pay the price? Every human being, probably, is called upon to give a more or less direct answer to this question at some epoch of their lives: and were it not for curiosity and scepticism, and an unwillingness to profit by the experience of others, very likely that answer might be more often favorable to virtue than it actually is. Archibald did not hesitate long. Whether he decided to disbelieve in

any danger; whether he resolved to brave it whatever it might be; or whether, having got thus far, he had not sufficient control over his inclinations to resist going further--at all events he drew in his breath, set his boyish lips, and drove the silver rod into the aperture with right good will.

It turned slowly as it entered, the curve of its spiral evidently following the corresponding windings of the hole. Inward it twisted like a snake, until only some two inches still projected. As the searcher after forbidden mysteries continued to press, something seemed to give way within; and at the same instant an odd, shuffling sound caused him to glance sharply over his left shoulder.

What was the matter with the mantelpiece? The whole of the right jamb seemed to have started forward nearly a foot, while the left jamb had retired by a corresponding distance into the wall; the hearth, with the fire burning upon it, remained meanwhile undisturbed. At first Archibald imagined that the mantelpiece was going to fall, perhaps bringing down the whole partition with it; but when he had got over the first shock of surprise sufficiently to make an examination, he found that the entire structure of massive gray-stone was swung upon a concealed pivot, round which it turned independently of the brickwork of the fireplace. The silver rod had released the spring by which the mechanism was held in check, and an unsuspected doorway was thus revealed, opening into the very substance of the apparently solid wall. On getting down from his chair he had no difficulty in pulling forward the jamb far enough to satisfy himself that there was a cavity of unknown extent behind. And from out of this cavity breathed a strange dry air, like the sigh of a mummy. As for the darkness in there, it was almost substantial as of the central chamber in the great pyramid.

Archibald may well have had some misgivings, for he was only a boy, and this happened more than sixty years ago, when ghosts and goblins had not come to be considered such indefensible humbugs as they are now. Nevertheless, he was of a singularly intrepid temperament, and besides he had passed the turning point in this adventure a few minutes ago. Nothing, therefore, would have turned him back now. Come what might of it, he would see this business to an end.

It was, however, impossible to see anything without a light; it would be necessary to fetch one of the rush candles from the table in the corridor. It was a matter of half a minute for the boy to go and return; then he edged himself through the opening, and was standing in a kind of vaulted tunnel, directly behind the fireplace, the warmth of which he could feel when he laid his hand on the bricks on that side. The tunnel, which extended along the interior of the wall toward the left, was about six feet in height by two and a half in width. Archibald could walk in it quite easily.

But, in the first place, he scrutinized the mechanism of the revolving mantelpiece. It was an extremely ingenious and yet simple device, and so accurately fitted in all its parts that, after so many years, they still worked together almost as smoothly as when new. After Archibald had poured a little of his gun-oil into the joints of the hinges, and along the grooves, he found that heavy stone structure would open and close as noiselessly and easily as his own jaws. It could be opened from the inside by using the silver rod in a hole corresponding to that on the outside; and, having practised this opening and shutting until he was satisfied that he was thoroughly master of the process, he put the rod in his pocket, pulled the jamb gently together behind him, and, candle in hand, set forth along the tunnel.

After walking ten paces, he came face-up against a wall lying at right angles to the direction in which he had been moving. Peering cautiously round the corner, he saw, at the end of a shallow embrasure, a ponderous door of dark wood, braced with iron, standing partly open, with a key in the keyhole, as if some one had just come out, and, in his haste, had forgotten to shut and lock the door behind him. Archibald now slowly opened it to its full extent; it creaked as it moved, and the draught of air made his candle flicker, and caused strange shadows to dance for a moment in the unexplored void beyond. In another breath Archibald had crossed the threshold and arrived at the goal of his pilgrimage.

At first he could see very little; but there could be no doubt that he was in a room which seemed to be of large extent, and for the existence of which he could by no means account. The reader, who has been better informed, will already have assigned it its true place in that unexplained region mentioned some pages back, between the blind court and the east chamber. Groping his way cautiously about, Archibald presently discerned a burnished sconce affixed to the wall, in which having placed his candle, the light was reflected over the room, so that the objects it contained stood dimly forth. It was a room of fair extent and considerable height, and was, apparently, furnished in a style of quaint and sombre magnificence, such as no other apartment in Malmaison could show. The arched ceiling was supported by vast oaken beams; the floor was inlaid with polished marbles. The walls, instead of being hung with tapestry, were painted in distemper with life-size figure subjects, representing, as far as the boy could make out, some weird incantation scene. At one end of the room stood a heavy cabinet, the shelves of which were piled with gold and silver plate, richly chased, and evidently of great value. Here, in fact, seemed to have been deposited many of the precious heirlooms of the family, which had disappeared during the Jacobite rebellions, and were supposed to have been lost. The cabinet was made of ebony inlaid with ivory, as was also a broad round table in the centre of the room. In a niche opposite the cabinet gleamed a complete suit of sixteenth century armor; and so dry was the atmosphere of the apartment, that scarce a spot of rust appeared upon the polished surface, which, however, like every other object in the room, was overlaid with fine dust. A bed, with embroidered coverlet and heavy silken curtains, stood in a deep recess to the left of the cabinet. Upon the table lay a number of papers and parchments, some tied up in bundles, others lying about in disorder. One was spread open, with a pen thrown down upon it, and an antique ink-horn standing near; and upon a stand beside the bed was a gold-enamelled snuff-box, with its lid up, and containing, doubtless, the dusty remnant of some George II. rappee.

At all these things Archibald gazed in thoughtful silence. This room had been left, at a moment's warning, generations ago; since then this strange dry air had been breathed by no human nostrils, these various objects had remained untouched and motionless; nothing but time had dwelt in the chamber; and yet what a change, subtle but mighty, had been wrought! Mere stillness--mere absence of life--was an appalling thing, the boy thought. And why had this secret been suffered to pass into oblivion? And why had fate selected him to discover it? And now, what use would he make of it? "At all events," said the boy to himself, "it has become my secret, and shall remain mine; and no fear but the occasion will come when I shall know what use to make of it." He felt that meanwhile it would give him power, security, wealth also if he should ever have occasion for it; and with a curious sentiment of pride he saw himself thus mystically

designated as the true heir of Malmaison--the only one of his age and generation who had been permitted to stand on an equality with those historic and legendary ancestors, to whom the secret of this chamber had given the name and fame of wizards. Henceforth Archibald was as much a wizard as they.

Or, might there after all be a power in necromancy that he yet dreamed not of? Was it possible that even now those old enchanters held their meetings here, and would question his right to force his way among them?

As this thought passed through the boy's mind, he was moving slowly forward, his eyes glancing now here, now there, when all at once the roots of his hair were stirred with an emotion which, if not fear, was certainly far removed from tranquillity. From the darkest corner of the room he had seen a human figure silently and stealthily creeping toward him. Now, as he fixed his eyes upon it, it stopped, and seemed to return his stare. His senses did not deceive him; there it stood, distinctly outlined, though its features were indistinguishable by reason of the shadow that fell upon them. But what living thing--living with mortal life at least--could exist in a room that had been closed for sixty years?

Now certainly this Archibald, who had not yet completed his fourteenth year, possessed a valiant soul. That all his flesh yearned for instant flight does not admit of a doubt; and had he fled, this record would never have been written. Fly, however, he would not, but would step forward rather, and be resolved what manner of goblin confronted him. Forward, therefore, he stepped; and behold, the goblin was but the reflection of himself in a tall mirror, which the obscurity and his own agitation had prevented him from discerning. The revulsion of feeling thus occasioned was so strong that for a moment all strength forsook the boy's knees; he stumbled and fell, and his forehead struck the corner of the ebony cabinet. He was on his feet again in a moment, but his forehead was bleeding, and he felt strangely giddy. The candle, too, was getting near its end; it was time to bring this first visit to a close. He took the candle from the sconce, passed out through the door, traversed the tunnel, and thrust the silver key into the keyhole. The stone door yielded before him; he dropped what was left of the candle, and slipped through the opening into broad daylight. The first object his dazzled eyes rested upon was the figure of Miss Kate Battledown. In returning from his visit to the corridor he must have forgotten to lock the room door after him. She was standing with her back toward him, looking out of the window, and was apparently making signs to some one outside.

Noiselessly Archibald pushed the mantelpiece back into place; thanks to the oiling he had given the hinges, no sound betrayed the movement. The next moment Kate turned round, and seeing him, started and cried "Oh!"

"Good-morning, Mistress Kate," said Archibald.

"Archibald!"

"Well?"

"You were not here a moment ago!"

"Well?"

"Then how did you get here?"

Archibald made a gesture toward the door leading to the covered stairway.

"No--no!" said Kate; "it is locked, and the key is on this side." She had been coming toward him, but now stopped and regarded him with terror in her looks.

"What is the matter, Kate?"

"You are all over blood, Archibald! What has happened? Are you ... oh, what are you?" She was ready to believe him a ghost.

"What am I?" repeated the boy, sluggishly. That odd giddiness was increasing, and he scarcely knew whether he were asleep or awake. Who was he, indeed? What had happened? Who was that young woman in front of him? What....

"Archibald! Archie! Speak to me! Why do you look so strangely?"

"Me not know oo!" said Archie, and began to cry.

Mistress Kate turned pale, and began to back toward the door.

"Me want my Kittie!" blubbered Archie.

Kate stopped. "You want me?"

"Me want my 'ittle Kittie--my 'ittle b'indled Kittie! Dey put my Kittie in de hole in de darden! Me want her to p'ay wiz!" And with this, and with the tears streaming down his cheeks, poor Archie toddled forward with the uncertain step and outstretched arms of a little child. But Kate had already gained the door, and was running screaming across the next room, and so down the long corridor.

Poor Archie toddled after, his baby heart filled with mourning for the brindled cat that had been buried in the back garden seven years before. Seven years?--or was it only yesterday?

Miss Kate Battledown's screams, as she ran down the corridor, must speedily have summoned the household; and then the dreadful news was told, not losing anything of its horror, we may be sure, in the recital; and then appeared poor Archie in confirmation. The greatest confusion and bewilderment prevailed. No one comprehended anything. It was not known what had happened. What was this story about Archie's having suddenly appeared, where before there had been only empty air--just as his great grandfather, Sir Charles, had done before him? Kate, to whom we may pardon a little incorrectness or exaggeration under the circumstances, solemnly asseverated that she had been looking straight at the centre of the room, and that nobody was there; and that all at once "Archie grew together out of nothing!" Such is the version of her words given by Lady Malmaison in a letter to her sister, Miss Tremount, of Cornwall, soon after the occurrence. Miss Tremount, it may be remembered, had intimated years ago her intention of making Archibald her heir; and Lady Malmaison's letter is an amusing and rather ingenious attempt to convey the information about poor Archie, in such a way as not to frighten off this inheritance. Doctor Rollinson, she wrote, had seen dear Archie, and had said that what had happened was only what might have been expected; and that the dear child's health would certainly not suffer, but, on the contrary, be strengthened, and his life prolonged. For that there could be no doubt that poor Archie had been laboring under an almost unnatural excitement, or tension of the nerves, during the last few years, which had caused Lady Malmaison the greatest anxiety; and she was truly thankful, for her part, that things had come out no worse than they had. She could feel secure, now, that her darling Archie would live to be a quiet, good, sensible English gentleman, fitted to discharge efficiently, and conscientiously, an English gentleman's duties, whether it were to manage an estate, or--or in fact whatever it might be. And then came the little story about the mysterious apparition of Archie out of vacancy, which Lady Malmaison treated humorously; though in her own heart she was very much scared at it, and was moreover privately convinced that Archie was, and would remain, very little better than an idiot all his life long. Now, it is well known that English country gentlemen are never idiotic.

What was the elder Dr. Rollinson's real opinion about Archie's relapse? The only direct evidence worth having on this point--his own--is unfortunately not forthcoming, and we are obliged to depend on such inaccurate or interested hearsay as has just been quoted above. It seems likely that he came to the conclusion that stupidity was the boy's normal condition and that his seven years of brilliance had been something essentially abnormal and temporary, and important only from a pathological point of view. Indeed, there was nothing in the transmuted Archibald's condition that was susceptible of being treated as a disease. He was as healthy as the average of boys of fourteen (if he were a boy of fourteen, and not a child of seven). He knew nothing, and had retained nothing, of his other life; he had to be taught his letters--and a terrible job that was, by all accounts; he occasionally expressed a desire to see his nurse Maggie--who, the charitable reader will rejoice to hear, had been honestly married since we last heard of her. He was greatly puzzled to find himself so much taller than when he last knew himself; and it was a long time before he could be induced to recognize his own reflection in the looking-glass. Needless to say that everything connected with the secret chamber and the silver rod was completely erased from his mind; and though he had been found with the rod in his hand, he could not tell what it was or where he got it.

In this connection, however, I will mention something which, if it be true, throws a new and strange light upon his psychological condition. There is reason to believe that he visited the secret chamber in a somnambulistic state. The evidence on which this supposition is founded appears, at this distance of time, rather imperfect; but it is certain that a few weeks after the boy's entrance upon his unintelligent state, the silver rod was lost sight of; and it is almost certain that during the time of its disappearance it was lying in its hidden receptacle under the floor beside the mantelpiece. But in that case, who but Archibald could have put it there? and when could he have put it there save in his sleep? It is known that he was a somnambulist during his unenlightened period, though never in his alternate state; and if he, as a somnambulist, remembered the hiding-place of the rod, it follows that he must also have remembered the rod's use, and visited the secret chamber. Thus it would seem that only in the boy's waking hours was he oblivious and stupid; in his dreams he truly lived and was awake! Here, then, is a complication of absorbing interest, which I will leave for physicians and metaphysicians to fight out between themselves. For my part, I can only look on in respectful bewilderment.

But we must leave Archibald for the present, and occupy our minds with the proceedings of the other personages of this drama. An era of disaster was in store for most of them. It is curious to note how the proverb that misfortunes never come single was illustrated in the case of these people. Fate seems to have launched its thunderbolts at them all at once, as if making up for lost time; or like a playwright, who clears his stage of all secondary and superfluous characters, and leaves a free field wherein the two or three principal people may meet and work out their destiny unimpeded.

Colonel Battledown fought under Wellington against Soult at Orthez; and in a charge of the French cavalry the gallant officer and genial gentleman was cut in the head by a sabre-stroke and ridden down; and when picked up after the battle he was dead. He was buried on the spot; the practice of sending the corpses of heroes and others careering over the face of the earth, in search of a spot of loam worthy to receive them, was not at that time so fashionable as it has since become. But the news of his death came home, and put his friends in mourning, and made Mistress Kate the heiress of a great property at the age of fourteen. But she was older than her years, and was generally considered to be "just the sort of person to be an heiress," whatever that may be. I suppose she was exceedingly handsome, with a proper sense of her importance, and a capacity of keeping an eye upon what she considered her interests. At the same time many actions of hers indicate that she was occasionally liable to ungovernable impulses, and that her temper was fitful and wayward. Such a woman would make a capital heroine for a modern novel; she would stand a lot of analyzing.

The tender relations which had subsisted between her and Archibald were perforce broken off. What can you do with a lover who suddenly ceases to have the most distant recollection of you, who does not believe you when you tell him your name, and whose only associations with that name date seven years back and are disagreeable? Nobody can blame Kate for giving Archibald up; she would have been more than human if she could have intrusted her heart to the keeping of a half-witted wizard, whose mysterious likeness to, or connection with, a charming young gentleman rendered him only the more undesirable. Poor Kate! If she gave her heart to Archibald, and then Archibald became somebody else, what shall we say became of her heart? Must it not have been irretrievably lost, and shall we be surprised if we hereafter detect in her a tendency to heartlessness?

The next one to drop was Sir Clarence Butt Malmaison. The jolly baronet was never the same man after the relapse of his second son, whom he had grown to love more than his first-born, and to whose future he had looked forward with much ambitious anticipation. He used to sit for hours at a time sadly watching the child's sluggish gambols about the nursery floor; ever and anon trying to arouse in his darkened mind some sparks of the former brightness, and, when the effort failed, sighing heavily, sometimes with tears trickling down his ruddy old cheeks. If Archibald had never passed through that period of deceptive promise, it is probable that he would have received a fair amount of affection as he was, and he would at all events not have committed the unpardonable offence of inspiring hopes which were not destined to be fulfilled. Sir Clarence felt like the man in the fairy tale who received from the fairy a purse of gold, but on opening the purse to handle the money, found nothing in his grasp but a bunch of yellow autumn leaves. The heroic end of his friend the Colonel served to augment the baronet's depression of spirits; nor was his gloom lightened by the reflection that Kate's inheritance of the estate would now in no way advantage Archibald. So, what with one thing and another, it must be confessed that Sir Clarence ended by taking too much wine after dinner. And the more wine he drank, the less inclination did he feel to keep up his hardy outdoor habits of riding and shooting; and, consequently, the more moody and plethoric he became. At length he nearly quarrelled with Dr. Rollinson because the latter told him plainly that the bottle would be his coffin; and a few days later he did quarrel, and very violently too, with the Honorable Richard Pennroyal. This gentleman, it seems, had ridden over to Malmaison and stayed to dinner; and at dessert the conversation got round to the present melancholy condition of local affairs.

"Everything's going to the dogs!" cried poor Sir Clarence, with an oath; "and no gentleman, by ---, ought to condescend to exist!"

"Come, Malmaison," said Pennroyal, smiling and cracking filberts, "you're going too far. Things are not so bad. And there are compensations!"

"Compensations? What compensations? What the devil do you mean?"

"Ha, ha! Well, for instance, about the poor Colonel. Of course, we're all dooced sorry to lose the Colonel; fine old chap, and a good hand at piquet. But after all he had to go some time; and then what happens? The fair Miss Battledown becomes the richest heiress in the three counties."

"Ay, and what's the compensation in that? What good does her being an heiress do me? Can my boy marry her? Answer me that!"

"Well, I should fancy not; but somebody else can."

"Somebody else? Who, I'd like to know?" bawled Sir Clarence. "Let me see the scoundrel who'll dare to marry Kate Battledown--let me see him!"

"I hear you quite plainly, Malmaison; and I wouldn't exert myself so much if I were you--you know what the doctor said. As for Miss Battledown, surely she has a right to marry whom she pleases, hasn't she?"

"No, she has not!" returned the baronet, getting angrier than ever. "She belongs to my Archibald; and if any scoundrel--"

"Really, you are intolerable, Sir Clarence," interrupted Pennroyal, still smiling, but not a pleasant smile. "A man whose temper is faulty at the best of times should be more careful to avoid whatever tends to make it worse;" and as Pennroyal said this he glanced significantly at the decanter--of which, to do him justice, he was very sparing himself.

"Pennroyal!" said the old baronet, drawing himself up with a good deal of dignity, "your father and I were friends before you were born, and you're my brother-in-law; but if you were not sitting at my table, I'd teach you better manners than to lecture your elders. I said I should like to see the scoundrel who would dare to marry Kate Battledown--and--and what is that to you?"

"Well, it's just this," returned Pennroyal, quietly; "I'm going to marry her myself!"

Sir Clarence started up from his chair with a tremendous oath--and sat down again. He was putting a terrible restraint upon himself. Not for his life would he outrage the guest who was beneath his roof. His face became dark red, and the veins on his forehead and in his neck stood out and throbbed visibly. His eyes were fixed staringly upon the impassable visage of the Honorable Richard, and he drew his breath with difficulty. There was a pause of some duration, broken only by this stertorous breathing, and by the deliberate cracking of the guest's filberts. At last, with a tragic effort of courtesy that was almost grotesque, the poor gentleman pushed the decanter toward his brother-in-law and deadly enemy, accompanying the act by a rattling sound in the throat, probably intended as an invitation to help himself. But the struggle was too severe. The next moment the baronet's eyes rolled wildly, a gasping noise broke from him, and he fell forward with his head on the table.

Mr. Pennroyal promptly arose and rang the bell. "Send for the doctor at once," he said to the servant who appeared. "Sir Clarence has overdrunk himself, or overeaten himself, I fancy. And help me to put him on the sofa and loosen his neckcloth. There--very distressing. Apply the usual remedies, while I step up--stairs and speak to Lady Malmaison."

The usual remedies availed little, and when Dr. Rollinson arrived, four hours afterward, it was already evident that even he could be of no use. Sir Clarence never fully regained consciousness, and two days later he ceased to breathe. There was an inquest, resulting in a verdict of death by apoplexy, and followed by a handsome funeral. The widow of the deceased, who was a lady of easily-stirred emotions and limited intellect, wept at short intervals during several weeks thereafter, and assured the Honorable Richard that she had no one in the world to depend on besides him. Archibald, who had moved about the house during this season of mourning with handsome vacant face and aimless steps, betrayed little grief at the family loss or comprehension of it; but whenever Pennroyal was in the way, he followed him round with a dog-like fondness in strange contrast with the vivid antipathy which he had manifested toward him in his other

phase of being. As for Archibald's brother, now a pale and slender but dignified youth of nineteen, he assumed the title of Sir Edward, and the headship of the house, with a grave propriety of bearing that surprised those who had only looked upon him as a moping scholar. Undemonstratively, but surely, he gave evidence that he understood the responsibilities of his position, and that he knew how to make himself respected. He did not encourage his mother in her unrestrained dependence upon Pennroyal; and between the latter and him there appears to have arisen a coolness more or less marked. Certainly, Pennroyal was far from loving the ceremonious and punctilious young baronet, who would neither drink nor play cards. Toward Archibald, on the other hand, he exhibited a cynical and contemptuous sort of good-humor; often amusing himself by asking the poor dull-witted youth all sorts of questions about events which had occurred in his enlightened period, and concerning which, of course, Archibald was unfathomably ignorant. The Honorable Richard Pennroyal was not the first man who has failed to see whence his greatest danger was to be expected.

VII.

That piece of news with which Mr. Pennroyal had killed Sir Clarence was no more than the truth. He was the betrothed husband of the beautiful heiress, Miss Battledown; and the three counties, on the whole, approved the match. It would consolidate two great contiguous estates, and add one considerable fortune to another. There was a rather wide discrepancy in ages, Pennroyal being about forty, while Miss Battledown was only in her nineteenth year; but that mattered little so that they agreed in other respects. Miss Battledown was generally believed to have very proper ideas as to her duties and responsibilities as an heiress. Since poor Archibald Malmaison lost his wits, she had received more than one offer which a young lady who was weak-minded enough to regard only personal attractions might have been tempted to accept; but she had needed no elder person to counsel her to refuse them. In fact, she had at one time allowed it to be inferred that she deprecated the idea of being married to any one; and this demonstrated a commendable maidenly reserve; but it was neither to be expected nor desired that she should adhere to such a resolution in the face of good reasons for changing it. And Mr. Pennroyal was an excellent reason. He had passed through the unsteady period of his life; he had lived down the vaguely discreditable reports which had once been circulated at his expense; he had shown himself a thrifty landlord; and the very fact of his being a widower invested him with a certain respectability not always appertaining to unmarried gentlemen of his age. Finally, he belonged to a noble and distinguished family, and though there was no likelihood of his acceding to the title, who was better qualified than he to illustrate the substantial virtues of an English country gentleman?

We are without detailed records of the early progress of this charming love affair. The inference is that it proceeded upon orthodox and unexceptional lines. Mr. Pennroyal would make known to the widow of the late Colonel the aspirations of his heart, and would receive from her permission to address himself to the lady of his choice. After the lapse of a few weeks or months (as the case might be) of mutually complimentary interviews and correspondence, the swain would entreat the maid to name the day which was to make him the happiest of men. She would delay and hesitate for a becoming while; but at length, with a blush and a smile, would indicate a date too distant for the lover's impatience, yet as near as a respect for the *convenances* of wealthy virginity could permit. And now, all preliminaries being settled, the preparations would go forward with liberality and despatch.

It had been at first arranged that the wedding should be solemnized at the house of the bride; but, for some reason or other, this plan was subsequently changed, and Malmaison was fixed upon as the scene of the ceremony. The great dining-hall, which had more than once been put to similar uses in years gone by, was made ready for the occasion. It was a vast and stately apartment, sixty feet in length by forty in breadth, and its lofty ceiling was richly carved in oak; while around the walls were arranged suits of historic armor, and swords, pikes, and banners, the relics of ancestral valor. It was on the ground-floor of the most ancient part of the house, immediately below that suite of rooms of which the east chamber was one. It had not been used as a dining-hall since the old times when retainers fed at the same table with their lords; but family celebrations had been held there; and at the coming of age of the late Sir Clarence, in 1775, it had been the scene of a grand banquet to the neighboring nobility and gentry. The floor at the eastern end of the room was raised some eight inches above the level of the rest; and it was here that the bride and bridegroom were to stand. A very reverend dean was secured to pronounce the service; and there were to be eight bridesmaids and a best man; the latter being none other than poor beclouded Archibald himself.

This choice created a good deal of surprise and comment. The fact appears to have been that the post of "best man" had, in the first instance, been offered to young Sir Edward Malmaison, who, however, declined it. His reason for so doing was, in the first place, disapproval of the match; he holding the opinion that the widower of his aunt might as well have refrained from a second nuptials, and that, at all events, he should have selected any one rather than her who was to have been the wife of Archibald. His second objection was a personal dislike to the Honorable Richard, and an indisposition to encourage his intimacy with the family. But Sir Edward could not so far oppose his mother's wishes as to forbid the marriage being celebrated at Malmaison; and being obliged to concede so much, he wisely deemed it most consistent with his dignity to adopt a manner as outwardly gracious as was compatible with self-respect.

Accordingly, when Pennroyal--whether maliciously, or from honest good-will toward one who manifested an almost child-like attachment to himself--chose Sir Edward's brother in his default, Sir Edward offered no open opposition. If he remonstrated privately with Archibald, his arguments were void of effect, and would have been, besides, counteracted by Lady Malmaison's influence. It is needless to say that Archibald was immensely proud of the compliment (as he considered it), and took care to celebrate his distinction at all times and places, opportune or otherwise--seeming, indeed, to think and talk of little else. It is not probable that he fully comprehended the significance of the matter, as he was certainly far from perceiving its ironic aspect; nevertheless, his dull brain received more stimulus from the prospect than from any other thing that had befallen him, thereby furnishing sardonic humorists with the criticism, that if the Honorable Richard Pennroyal would keep on burying his wives, and choosing Archibald as best man for the new-comer, the youth might in time become approximately intellectual.

The wedding-day was fixed for the 5th of March, 1821--a date which was long remembered in the neighborhood. Fortunately we have ample accounts of everything that occurred--the testimony of many eye-witnesses, which, through varying in some unimportant details (as is inevitable), agree nevertheless upon all essential points. I shall give the gist of the narrative as concisely as a proper attention to its more important phases will allow.

Miss Kate Battledown, with her mother, came to Malmaison on the evening of the 4th, and spent the night, the ceremony being appointed at eleven the next forenoon. The young lady spent an hour or so, before going to bed, in conversation with Archibald, who, in his pleasurable excitement over the forthcoming event, was much more lively and conversable than usual. As they walked side by side up and down the great hall, at one end of which some workmen were still engaged in arranging the decorations for the morrow, they must have made a handsome picture. Kate was at this time a lithe and graceful figure, slightly above the medium height, and possessing a great deal of "style;" in fact, young as she was, she had been for some time regarded as a model of fashion and deportment by all the aspiring young women within a radius of twenty miles. She was dressed on this evening in a gown of some thin, white material, the frilled hem of which failed by at least six inches to reach the floor, thereby displaying a pair of arched feet and slender ankles, clothed in open-work silk stockings. The skirt of this gown began immediately beneath the arms, and every contour of the wearer's form could be traced through its close-fitting and diaphanous folds. Miss Battledown's arms were bare, save for the black silk netted mittens that she wore; her dark curling hair was gathered pyramidally on the top of her head, and fastened with a black ribbon; a black velvet band encircled her white throat, and there was a row of black bows down the front of her dress. Her forehead was narrow and compact, her large brown eyes were perhaps a trifle closer together than they should have been, her nose was delicate, her lips blunt-cornered and rather full than thin; the whole expression of her face spirited and commanding. As for Archibald, he was a handsome vacancy, so to speak; a fine physical man wasted for lack of a spiritual man to carry him about and use him. His regular, finely moulded face, with its healthy pallor and its black eyes and hair, always had a dim, pathetic look of having forgotten something. His figure, symmetrical and full of strength, moved itself awkwardly and unmeaningly, as though ignorant of its own capabilities, and rather encumbered than otherwise by their redundancy. His smile, which drew his features into their handsomest attitude, was nevertheless rather silly, and seemed to last on after he himself had forgotten what he was smiling for. His hands--strong, well-formed hands of the slender and long-fingered type--hung helplessly at the end of his arms; or, if he attempted to use them, each finger appeared to have a different idea of what was to be done, and one and all fumbled drowsily and shiftlessly at their task. The young man wore the high-collared coat, short waistcoat, and clinging pantaloons of the period; and his black hair hung down on his shoulders in natural luxuriance of curls. Poor Archibald accepted meekly whatever was given him to put on; but he would not let his hair be cut, or even anointed with the incomparable oil of Macassar.

"And so you are glad, Archie?" said Mistress Kate, continuing their talk.

"Oh, glad! yes, glad!" replied Archie, nodding his head slowly and solemnly.

"You don't regret me, then, at all?"

"Oh, regret, no!" said Archie, shaking his head with the same sapience and gravity.

"Why do you always repeat what a person says, without seeming to know what it is? There used to be a time, sir, when regret would have been far too mild a word for you. Have you forgotten all that? Have you forgotten Lord Orville and Evelina?"

"Forgotten, yes; all forgotten!"

"Come, now, I wish you to remember. You understand that I am to be married to Richard Pennroyal tomorrow--to Richard Pennroyal!"

"Uncle Richard, dear Uncle Richard. I love Uncle Richard!"

"Do you love no one beside him? don't you love me?"

"Don't love you, oh, no!"

"Archie, have you forgotten how we were married in the back garden, and how you used to say I was your little wife; and you wanted to fight a duel with Richard because he had taken me on his knee and kissed me?"

"See how pretty!" exclaimed Archie, whose attention had been fixed during this speech upon two of the workmen who were unrolling between them a piece of crimson cloth appertaining to the hangings.

"What a creature!" muttered Kate to herself. To have her romantic souvenirs ignored even by this simpleton vexed her a little. Perhaps, too, she had another reason for regretting her companion's witlessness. She could remember when she had cared for him--or for something called him--more than she cared now for the man she would wed to-morrow. Why was he not the same now as then? His face, his hands, his figure--these were the same, or rather they were handsomer and more manlike than formerly. Why could not the soul, or whatever may be that mysterious invisible motive-power in a man--why could it not have stuck to its fortress during these seven years past? Here were five feet eleven of well-sculptured living clay, that had been growing and improving for more than one and twenty years; and for an inhabitant, nothing but a soft foolish child, destitute of memory, intelligence, and passion. Such reflections may have passed through the mind of the young heiress; and then she may have thought, glancing at him, "If my Archibald were here, to-morrow might see another spectacle than that put down in the programme." She might have thought this; she did not and of course would not on any account have uttered such a sentiment aloud. But it would be unjust to her taste and sensibility to suppose that, apart from worldly and politic considerations, she should have really preferred a sharp-featured, thin-haired, close-fisted gentleman of forty to a conceivable hero of half that age, dowered with every grace and beauty, not to mention Miss Tremount's seventy thousand pounds. Is she to be blamed if she sighed with a passing regret at that hero's mysterious disappearance? Yes, he had disappeared, more mysteriously and more irrevocably than

old Sir Charles seventy years ago. Where in the heavens or the earth or under the earth, indeed, was he? Did he still exist anywhere? Might she dream of ever meeting him again--that hero?...! Bah! what nonsense!

"Pretty!" repeated Archie, who, in the subsidence of his other faculties, had retained an appreciation of color.

"Poor boy--poor thing!" said Kate; "you lost a great deal when you lost your wits; between being a groomsman and a bridegroom there is a very wide difference. And you don't even care--perhaps that's your greatest loss of all--ha, ha! Come, Archie, it's time for little fellows like you to be asleep."

"Kate--" began Archie; and paused.

"What?"

"Do you love anybody?"

She met his look of dull yet earnest inquiry with a contemptuous smile at first, but afterward her smile died away and she answered soberly:

"I did once."

"I did once, too!" rejoined Archie, with a sort of sluggish eagerness.

"You did--when?" demanded she, with the beginning of a heart-beat.

"I think I did--once--when I was asleep."

She laughed shortly and turned away. "Yes, sleep is the best thing for you, Archie; you had better sleep all the time now; it will be too late to wake up to-morrow. Good-night, Archie."

VIII.

Old Miss Tremount had come up from Cornwall for the occasion, accompanied by her poodle, her female toady, and her father confessor. The good lady had altered her will some years before, on hearing of her favorite nephew's changed condition, and it was feared she would leave her money to the Church of Rome, of which she was a member. But on receiving the announcement of her intended visit, Lady Malmaison had begun to entertain hopes that Sir Edward might succeed in so favorably impressing his aunt as to induce her to divert at least some portion of her thousands in his direction. But it is not likely that Miss Tremount had come to Malmaison with any such views; in fact, her reason for coming had little or no connection with the late baronet's family. It was not generally known that, between forty and fifty years previously, there had been tender passages between Colonel Battledown and this snuffy old maid, whose soul was now divided between her cards and her psalter. So it was, however; they were even betrothed to one another, though the betrothal was kept a secret, the Colonel then being a comparatively penniless young lieutenant, and as such by no means a desirable son-in-law from the parental point of view. An elopement was contemplated so soon as the young lady should be of age; and it would be difficult to explain the occasion of the trumpety quarrel between the lovers, which ended in the lady taunting the gentleman with caring only about her money, and resulted in the rupture of the engagement. Doubtless it might have been renewed; but at this juncture the lieutenant was ordered away on active service to the American Colonies, where he remained for some years. Later, he was stationed in India; and the next time he met his old love, in London, he was twenty years older than when she had last seen him, and a major, and with ribbons on his breast, and a wife on his arm. Miss Tremount never betrayed any grief or disappointment, except in so far as she remained single all her life, and latterly waxed religious and became a convert to the Jesuits. But when the Colonel was dead, and she heard that his daughter was about to be married, she resolved to make a journey to Malmaison; and who can tell whether in the bottom of her heart, hidden even from her father confessor, she may not have cherished a secret purpose of making Mistress Kate her heir? It is certain at all events that she brought her will with her in her trunk.

This romance, I say, was known to but few, and as Miss Battledown did not happen to be among the number, she was less cordial in her behavior to the old lady than she might otherwise have been. Kate was not constitutionally a lover of old women, and not herself old enough to be aware that no truly charitable person should ever be inattentive to seventy thousand pounds, no matter to how unprepossessing a human being the money might be attached. Her manner, therefore, was tolerant and patronizing rather than flattering; and honest Lady Malmaison, though she liked Kate very much, and would have been delighted to see her inherit seventy thousand pounds from the Shah of Persia or the President of the United States, was not quite so unnatural an idiot as to recommend to the young lady a more conciliating behavior. As for Miss Tremount, she preserved her composure and kept her counsel perfectly, and never referred to her will even in her most unguarded moments. She was courteous and complimentary to Sir Edward, indulgent to Archibald, kind and sisterly to Lady Malmaison, and quietly observant of everything and everybody. On the wedding morning she criticised and admired the bride's toilet with a taste and appreciation that caused the proud young beauty's eyes to sparkle; and just before the party entered the hall, she pressed Kate's hand affectionately, and said, in her gentlest tones, that she hoped she would be happy. "I have always looked upon your mother as one of the happiest of women, my dear," she added. "May your fortune equal hers!" This good-natured benediction caused Lady Malmaison a good deal of anxiety; Sir Edward smiled aside at what he fancied was a subtle stroke of irony; and Kate herself became thoughtful, and regretted that it was rather late in the day to begin to show Miss Tremount what a charming elderly lady she thought her.

The great hall looked its stateliest that morning. The March sunshine came slanting through the tall windows, and lay in

bright patches upon the broad floor, or gleamed upon the ancient swords and breastplates, or glowed in the festal hangings. Quite a large number of titled and fashionable persons were collected at the upper end of the room, whispering and rustling, and dressed in what we should now consider very wonderful costumes, though they were all the mode then. A few minutes before eleven the very reverend dean, and an assistant divine, together with the bridegroom and Archibald, entered and took their places in great pomp and dignity beneath the canopy which had been constructed for the occasion, and which, was covered with fresh flowers, whose fragrance breathed over the gay assemblage like a sacred incense. At eleven o'clock there was a general hush of expectation; and presently the door at the bottom of the hall was thrown open, and the bridal procession came in. Very pretty they looked as they paced, up the long stretch of carpeting which had been laid down for them to walk upon, and which had been scattered over with a profusion of flowers. The bride, with her veil and her orange-blossoms, was supported on the arm of Sir Henry Rollinson (the good Doctor had been knighted the year before by an appreciative sovereign), who was to give her away. She looked calm, pale, and exceedingly handsome. The widow of Colonel Battledown was escorted by Lord Epsom, the Honorable Richard's elder brother, and wore a very splendid pink turban, and red eyes. But all these details, and many more, may be read in the *Morning Post* of March 7th, 1821, to which I refer the curious.

The service commenced. As Sir Henry Rollinson was in the act of giving the bride away, he happened to glance at Archibald, and observed that the latter wore a very strange expression on his face; and a moment afterward the young man dropped into a chair that happened to be near him, pressing his head between his hands, and breathing heavily. No one else noticed this incident; and Sir Henry, who supposed the youth was going to faint, was of course unable at the time to afford any assistance. The service went on. Richard Pennroyal and Catherine Battledown were pronounced man and wife; and man was warned not to put asunder those whom God had joined together. The ring shone on the new-made wife's finger. The very reverend dean gave the pair his blessing. All this time Archibald remained with his head between his hands, the physician watching him not without apprehensions, and inwardly cursing the folly of those who were responsible for the poor half-witted creature's appearance in such a scene.

The register was now brought forth, in which the happy couple and their friends were to inscribe their names. The principal personages signed first. It came to Archibald's turn. It had previously been ascertained that he knew how to string together the requisite letters upon paper. There he sat, with his head in his hands. Sir Henry touched him on the shoulder.

"Now, then, lad--Archie! wake up! Come! you're wanted!" He spoke sharply and imperatively, in the hope of rousing the young fellow out of his stupor, and at least getting him decently out of the room.

Archibald raised his face, which was deadly pale and covered with sweat, and looked at the persons around him with a kind of amazed defiance. He started to his feet, oversetting his chair as he did so, which rolled down the steps of the dais and fell with a crash on the stone floor below.

"I came in by the staircase door!" he said in an excited voice, which startled every one who heard it, so different was it from his usual tones. "If you thought it locked, you were wrong. How else could I have come?... When did you bring me here? This is the great hall! What have you been doing? How came *you* here?"

There was a dead silence. Every one felt that some ugly thing was about to happen. Several women began to laugh hysterically. It seems to have been supposed, at first, that Archibald had exchanged his inoffensive idiocy for a condition of raving madness. The old physician was probably the only one present who had a glimmering of what might be the truth. The Honorable Richard Pennroyal had none. He pushed between the venerable knight and his "best man," and relying upon his oft-proved and established influence over the latter, he took him firmly by the arm, and looked in his face.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Archie," said he, in a low distinct voice, in which was a subdued ring of menace. "It's all right. You're my best man, you know. You are to sign your name as one of the witnesses of the marriage--that's all."

"I have witnessed no marriage," replied Archibald, returning with surprise Richard's look. "Who are you?" he continued, after a moment. Then he exclaimed, "You are Richard Pennroyal--I didn't know you at first, you look so old!"

"Oh, the fellow's quite mad!" muttered Richard, turning away with a shrug of the shoulders. "I should have known better than to run the risk of having such a lunatic here. We must have him moved out of the room at once."

Young Sir Edward overheard this latter sentence. "Pardon me for reminding you that my brother is at home in Malmaison," he said gravely.

"Oh, as you please, of course," returned Richard, frowning.

Meanwhile Archibald had caught sight of Kate, and recognized her at once; and breaking away from his mother and Sir Henry Rollinson, who were endeavoring to quiet him, he came up to her and planted himself in front of her, just as Richard was approaching to take her off. Archibald took both her hands in his.

"Kate, I have never seen you look so beautiful," he said. "But why have you got this white veil on?--and orange blossoms! It's like a wedding. What were they saying about a wedding? ... is it to be our wedding?"

"The wedding has already taken place, my dear Archie," interposed the bridegroom, offering his arm to the bride, and smiling with no very good grace. "This lady is now Mrs. Pennroyal. Stand aside, like a good boy--"

Archibald grasped Richard by the padded sleeve of his coat, and with an angry movement of his powerful arm threw him backward into the embrace of his new mother-in-law, who happened to be coming up from behind.

"You are under my father's roof, or I would tell you that you are a liar," said the young man, grimly. Then turning to the bride, who had said not a word since this scene began, but had kept her eyes constantly fixed upon the chief actor in it,

"He shall not insult you again, my dear. But all this is very strange. What does it mean?"

"It means.... It is too late!" replied the girl, in a low, bitter voice. What could she have meant by that?

Richard, white with fury, came up again. There was a general murmur and movement in the surrounding assemblage, who expected to see some deed of violence committed.

"Mrs. Pennroyal," said he between his teeth, "I am obliged to request you peremptorily to take my arm and--and leave this house where guests are insulted and outraged!"

Archibald turned, his face darkening. But Kate held up her hand entreatingly; and Archibald caught the gleam of the plain gold ring on her finger. At that sight he stopped abruptly, and his arms fell to his sides.

"Is it true?" He asked in a tone of bewilderment.

Here Sir Edward interposed again, with his cool courtesy: "Mr. Pennroyal, and my friends, I trust you will find it possible to overlook the behavior of my brother. You may see that he is not himself. When he has had time to recover himself, he will ask pardon of each and all of you. Mr. Pennroyal, I entreat you and your wife to forget what has passed, and to reconsider the heavy imputation which has been cast upon my house. Let the shadow pass away which has threatened for a moment this--most auspicious occasion!"

If the last words were ironical, the irony was too grave and ceremonious to be obtrusive, Pennroyal was fain to return Sir Edward's bow with the best grace he could muster. The rest of the company accepted the apology, as at least a formal way out of the difficulty. An effort was made to resume indifferent conversation, and to act as if nothing had happened. Sir Edward, with admirable self-possession and smiling courtesy, marshalled the guests out of the hall, to a neighboring room in which the wedding breakfast had been set out. Archibald remained behind, and the Doctor and old Miss Tremount remained with him. He stood still, with his arms at his sides, his glance fixed upon the floor. The Doctor and Miss Tremount exchanged a look, and then the latter went up to him, and took one of his hands between hers.

"Do you know me, my dear?" she said.

Archibald looked at her, and shook his head.

"I am your aunt, Ruth Tremount. My dear, I am so sorry for you."

"Can you tell me what is the matter with me? Am I mad?"

"On the contrary," put in the Doctor, "you are yourself for the second time in your life. You've overslept yourself, my lad, that's all!"

Archibald cast his eyes round the hall, as if searching for some one. "Where is my father?" he asked at length.

There was an awkward pause. Finally Miss Tremount said, "My dear, your sleep has lasted seven years. Much may happen in such a length of time."

"But my father--where is he? I want to see him; I will see him!" and he made some steps toward the door.

"My poor lad, you cannot see him now--he ... he--"

"Where is he?" cried Archibald, stamping his foot.

"He has been for five years in his grave."

Archibald stared at the Doctor a moment, and then burst out laughing.

IX.

But Archibald had come into possession of his intelligent soul once more; or he was awake again; or the pressure of the skull upon the cerebrum had yet another time been relieved; at all events there was now a brilliant youth in the flesh-and-blood envelope which, an hour before, had contained only a half-witted boy. When the first crash of the restoration was over, the new man began to accommodate himself with wonderful rapidity and keenness to the strange environment. He knew of nothing that had happened since that afternoon when he spoke with Kate in the east chamber, while the blood oozed from the cut on his forehead; but he accepted the facts with more than a youth's resolution and stoicism. The world had been turning round while he had been absent--somewhere! Well, then, by the force of his will and his splendid faculties he would get on even terms with it again--and more. Injury had been done him; irreparable injury, perhaps, but which still might be avenged. He was not discouraged; his spirit seemed to come upon life with all the freshness of a seven years' rest, and it reckoned nothing impossible.

Of course his fresh metamorphosis created plenty of comment among the neighbors; Archibald Malmaison was the most talked-of man in that part of the country for several weeks, the impossibility of arriving at any satisfactory conclusion regarding his condition or conditions prolonging the wonder so far beyond the proverbial nine days. One party were vehemently of the opinion that he was mad; another party opposed this view with equal energy and just as much foundation. Both sides put forward plenty of arguments, and when they were refuted, appealed to Sir Henry Rollinson, who confirmed them both with equally sagacious shakes of the head.

But this good gentleman was now getting near the end of his days, and, in fact, ceased living in the world before the close of the year. He did not depart without leaving a successor, however, and one who bade fair to do credit to his ancestry. This was Mr. E. Forbes Rollinson, his son, who had concluded a course of study at Vienna and Paris, and who returned to his native land with the highest diplomas that continental schools could give him. He was at this time a young man of about five and twenty, with a great square head and a short, compact figure. The wild jungle of beard and the terribly penetrating eye-glass which distinguished him in later times had not then made their appearance. Well, the new Dr. Rollinson had known something of Archibald as a boy, and was of course much interested (apart from his friendly feelings) in so remarkable a case. His theory upon the matter, in so far as he had formed one, did not on all points coincide with his father's; he belonged to a somewhat more recent school--more critical and less dogmatic. Still, it would be hazardous to assert that young Dr. Rollinson knew exactly what was the matter with Archibald--especially as he has seen reason to modify his first impressions more than once during the last fifty years. It is enough to remark here that he thought the affection was of a rhythmic or regularly recurrent character, a notion which its previous history went far to justify; and he consequently looked with interest to see whether the lapse of another seven years would bring about another change. To have discovered the orbit, so to speak, of a malady, is not, indeed, to have explained it; but it is always something. It would be more interesting to know what Archibald thought of himself; and were I, in this instance, a novelist dealing with a creation of my own, I might not shrink from an attempt to analyze his mental state. As it is, I can do no more than point to the curious field of conjecture which it here afforded: the young man left no confessions or self-analytic diaries; still less did he discuss his peculiarities with other people. With excellent good sense and no small courage, he accepted things as they were; he felt his individuality in no way diminished by the circumstance that it was intermittent or exchangeable; and perhaps it seemed no more strange to him than the nightly falling asleep of all mankind does to them. The one mystery is quite as strange as the other, only the sleep of seven hours is common to all, while that of seven years is probably unprecedented.

One grotesque question suggests itself--or may do so shortly--and that is whether Archibald would be responsible in one phase of his being for a crime committed in another--for a crime, or any other act involving the welfare or condition of other people. The analogy with sleep does not here seem altogether satisfactory; for in ordinary sleep, or even somnambulism, we are not in active relations with our fellow-beings, and consequently our lawgivers have not devised a code to control our doings while in that state. A jury, in delivering its verdict, would be embarrassed by the reflection that although only one half of the culprit before them was guilty, they could not give that half its just punishment without at the same time unjustly punishing the half that was guiltless. A consistent individuality, therefore, though often a burden and a weariness, is still not without its advantages.

Meanwhile an important change had taken place in the relations between the family of Malmaison and the Honorable Richard Pennroyal. The latter conceived himself to have been affronted by the former on the occasion of his marriage, and refused a reconciliation--which, to tell the truth, neither Sir Edward nor his younger brother were too anxious to force upon him. Lady Malmaison was still for peace, but her opinion had ceased to have much weight in the family counsels. At length matters came to a head somewhat in the following manner.

Sir Edward Malmaison and Pennroyal happened to meet at the table of a common friend, and after the ladies had withdrawn, Pennroyal, who had taken more wine than was usual with him, began to talk at Sir Edward in an unnecessarily audible and offensive tone. Sir Edward kept his temper, and made no reply, not having as yet been personally addressed. Pennroyal after a while came round to where he was sitting, and the two gentlemen presently fell into conversation. Pennroyal finally declared that he had been insulted by a man who retained his present title and estates solely by his (Pennroyal's) permission and kindness. Sir Edward was constrained to ask him what he meant. Pennroyal thereupon began to utter disparaging reflections upon the late Sir Clarence, who, he intimated, was not legally entitled to his name. This brought on a dead silence, and all eyes were turned upon Sir Edward, whose pale countenance became yet paler as he said, with his imperturbable courteousness of phrase:

"I must entreat Mr. Pennroyal not to indulge in innuendos, but to state explicitly whether he intends anything dishonorable to my father."

"To a man of the world a word is enough," responded the Honorable Richard, insolently. "I am not here to tutor schoolboys in the comprehension of the English tongue."

"I cannot allow you to evade my question," rejoined Sir Edward, with a gleam in his eye, though without an alteration in his voice. "You must explain what you have seen fit to insinuate before these gentlemen, one way or the other."

Pennroyal laughed. "When you have lived a few years longer, young gentleman," said he, "you will learn to be cautious how you ask for too explicit information regarding the morals of your grandparents."

At this brutal remark there was a general expression of indignation among the hearers; but Pennroyal, in no way abashed, added, "Let him disprove it if he can. Since he provokes me to it, I affirm it--his father had no right to the title. Let him prove the contrary if he can. I didn't force on the discussion, but I will tell young Sir Edward Malmaison, as he calls himself, that he holds property to which he has no claim, and that it depends upon my good-will and pleasure how long he holds it."

The host--he was Francis Hastings Kent, Esq. and M. P., the same who afterward became famous in the Corn-law controversy--here interposed, and "spoke the sense of the meeting." "Egad, Pennroyal," cried he, "you are drunk, and you have insulted a gentleman at my table. I'll trouble you to make him an apology. I have no doubt that Sir Edward Malmaison's titles are just as good as yours or mine, and, begad, they sha'n't be called in question here at all events. I say you shall make Sir Edward an apology!"

There was only one man in the room who evinced any disagreement with this speech, and that one was Major Bolingbroke, a retired officer of good family but of not altogether unexceptionable personal repute; he was believed to have fought more duels than are usually considered desirable; and he had for some months past been a constant inmate at the house of Mr. Pennroyal.

"It's no affair of mine, of course," said this gallant warrior, "if Sir Edward chooses to put up with such language from a man, on the ground that he was drunk when he used it. Only, if there's going to be an apology, I should advise Sir Edward to exact a very full one, and lose no time about it."

Sir Edward, however, rose carelessly, and said with a smile that he could not think of contributing any further to the unfortunate interruption of the social harmony; and adding that he had no doubt Mr. Pennroyal would, as soon as he had had time to recollect himself, make every explanation that the case demanded, he bowed and left the room.

It was afterward suspected that Pennroyal's intoxication had been assumed for the purpose of insulting the heir of Malmaison with the more impunity; and that the Major was present expressly to aid and abet him. What, then, was the object, and what the grounds, of the charge which Pennroyal made? With respect to the latter, nothing was known until later; but the immediate result was this. Sir Edward went home, and appeared more cheerful and in better spirits than usual. He spent the next forenoon in his chamber, apparently engaged in looking over some papers. In the afternoon he mentioned to his mother and Archibald that he should be obliged to run up to London for a few days on business, and that he must start that evening. He had made no allusion to the affair at Francis Kent's house, and neither Archibald nor Lady Malmaison knew anything about it. That evening, accordingly, he bade them good-by, and departed seemingly with a light heart, bidding his brother act as his accredited plenipotentiary while he was away, and promising his mother to bring her the latest fashion in turbans when he returned.

He was absent five days. The Honorable Richard Pennroyal, who had happened to be likewise called away on business at the same time, returned to his house some twenty-four hours before Sir Edward was brought in a carriage to Malmaison, with a bullet-hole just beneath the collar-bone. The fact is, the two gentlemen had travelled to Belgium instead of to London, and had there shot at each other in the presence of Major Bolingbroke (who gave the word) and of a friend of Sir Edward's whose name has not come down to us. Pennroyal had escaped untouched; Sir Edward, under the care of Dr. Rollinson the younger, lay for several weeks in a critical condition; but, when the bullet had been extracted, he rallied, and was able before long to rise from his bed and walk about the house. But though his strength had improved, he appeared to be harassed in mind; he carried on a considerable correspondence with the family lawyers in London, and was continually searching for something--what, no one could tell. Whatever it was he did not find it, and his anxiety did not diminish.

Archibald had of course asked him about the particulars of the duel, and what led to it; but his brother had sought to make light of the affair, saying merely that Pennroyal had been very rude, and had failed to make a suitable apology; and that the insult having been public, he was forced to resent it. In answer to Archibald's question as to the subject of his present correspondence with the lawyers, he replied that it related to some old family traditions, and possessed only an antiquarian interest. Archibald accepted these answers in silence, but with entire incredulity. The brothers were fond of each other, but the strange conditions of the younger's life had prevented their attaining really intimate and confidential relations. Archibald was too proud either to demand further particulars from Sir Edward, or to make inquiries elsewhere. Moreover, there was perhaps less need of information on his side than on that of his brother, had the latter but known it. Archibald had secrets of his own.

Pennroyal, meanwhile, kept quiet, waiting for the affair to blow over. Whether he had intended to kill Sir Edward, or whether he was glad that the duel had not resulted fatally, I cannot tell. Of course, neither he nor his wife were seen again at Malmaison. The neighbors were for some time disposed to give him the cold shoulder; but when his antagonist recovered, and the matter had lost its first freshness, there appeared to be little more against him than that he had committed an indiscretion while under the influence of liquor, and had afterward atoned for it in accordance with a code of honor which had not, at that epoch, fallen entirely into disuse. And, after all, what business was it of theirs? Pennroyal, however objectionable in himself, owned a large property and belonged to a good family. In short, society received the honorable prodigal in its bosom once more, and Mrs. Pennroyal reigned the undisputed toast for a while longer.

But at the end of six or seven months a new order of events began. Sir Edward, either from anxiety, or from some imprudent exposure, fell ill again, and his wound opened afresh and became inflamed. His constitution had never been good for much, and the chances were all against its being able to survive this trial. Dr. Rollinson did all that could be done; but one morning Sir Edward asked to see his brother, and when the two were left alone together, he said:

"Well, Archie, how shall you like to be Sir Archibald?"

For a minute they looked at one another in silence.

"Do you think so?" then said the younger, frowning a little.

"I am certain of it."

"Ned, we are brothers," said Archibald.

The young men grasped hands, and Archibald half sat on the edge of the bed, looking down at the invalid, whose face was now bony in its emaciation, and his eyes sunken and bright.

"Archie, I have something to tell you."

"I feared so."

"It is not anything that you could expect. That quarrel between Richard and me was about our father. Richard said he was--that is--"

"Don't fear. Say it!"

"That his mother was not Lady Malmaison."

"He lied!"

"So I told him. But that's not the end of it, unfortunately. He defied me to prove the contrary. Ever since I first got up after the duel, I have been looking for the papers relating to Sir Clarence's birth. They're not to be found. There is no record that our grandmother had any son at all. On the other hand, there is indirect evidence that our grandfather had an affair with some woman.... The amount of it is, I have not been able to establish Sir Clarence's legitimacy. And the worst is still to tell."

"I know the rest; I know it all! Why didn't you say all this to me at first, brother? You have been harassing yourself with the idea that because you couldn't vindicate father, Malmaison might be claimed by Richard, under that old agreement of Sir Charles's time."

"How did you know--"

"I know everything. I know where the papers are that you have been looking for. Set your mind at rest, Ned. Sir Clarence was the legitimate heir. There was also a son by the other woman, but he died in infancy. Ned, why weren't you open with me? Richard has no more hold on our estates than my groom has. Blame him! I only hope he'll think otherwise! We'll ruin him first and kill him afterward."

"If I had only known...." said the sick man, after a pause. "But you are certain? You have the proof? Where did you find the papers?"

"I have them. Get well, and you shall know all about it. I have a good many curious things to tell you, and to show you, too."

"Well, God be thanked! whatever becomes of me. It is late, Archie, but I'm beginning to get acquainted with you at last. It is my fault that I did not know you before. You are better fitted to bear the title than I."

"No. If I thought so, I would not deny it; but if I inherit Malmaison, our family will--perish off the earth! I can foresee some things, Ned. The hope of the house lies in you; I shall bring only calamity. You must get well."

Again the brothers grasped hands, looked in one another's eyes for a moment or two, and then Archibald went out; the day passed, and the evening fell. At midnight he was Sir Archibald of Malmaison.

X.

It was not long before the new baronet--the last of his line--began to make his influence felt. His temper was resolute, secret, and domineering; he bore himself haughtily among the neighboring squires, never seeking to please a friend or to conciliate an enemy. Few people liked him; many stood in awe of him. He seemed to be out of sympathy with his race; his strange, ambiguous history invested him with an atmosphere of doubt and mystery; his nature was not like other men's; it was even whispered that he had powers transcending those of ordinary humanity. It is probable that his remarkable personal beauty, which in moments of anger or energy gleamed out with an almost satanic intensity, may have lent substance to this impression; men shrunk from meeting the stern inquisition of his black eyes; and for women his glance possessed a sort of fascination, unconnected with his beauty. But there were other indications more direct than these. A century, or even half a century, previous to this time Sir Archibald might have found it difficult to avoid the imputation of witchcraft. After all, was not he the descendant of his forefathers? and what had some of them been? "Were there not people in the neighboring village of Grinstead who were willing to take affidavit that the handsome young baronet had the power to make himself invisible when he pleased? Nay, had not Mrs. Pennroyal herself, while she was yet a young maid, borne testimony to the fact--that he had suddenly stood before her, in broad daylight, in a room which had the instant before been empty? That room had always had a queer reputation; it was there, or thereabouts, that most of these strange goings-on took place. A servant, who had once wandered in there to announce to Sir Archibald that one of his lawyers had arrived, and was waiting to see him, had found the room vacant, though he had seen his master enter it only ten minutes before. Thinking that he must have gone out by the other entrance, through the stable, he was about to follow, when he noticed that this door was bolted on the inside. In some bewilderment, he was on the point of retiring, when he was startled by a burst of laughter which continued for near a minute, and which, though it echoed almost in his ears, and came apparently from the very air round about him, yet sounded faint and unsubstantial as if a vast distance nevertheless intervened. Whether near or far, it was unmistakably the laughter of Sir Archibald, but wilder and more scornful than had ever been heard from his lips. The honest footman was now thoroughly frightened, and made the best of his way out of the chamber; but before he could cross the next room and reach the passage-way beyond, the living and peremptory tones of Sir Archibald himself overtook him, and brought him back with failing knees and pallid cheeks to where the black-haired baronet was standing in the doorway. There he stood in flesh and blood, but cloaked, booted, and spurred, as if just returned from a journey.

"What were you doing in this room?" demanded the baronet.

The man faltered out his errand.

"Hear this, once for all, and remember it," said the baronet, nor sternly nor roughly, but with a concentration of purpose in his mellow voice that seemed to stamp the words into the hearer's soul. "No one may enter this chamber except I open the door. Else harm may happen which I could not prevent. That is all. Now send Mr. Mawgage to me."

That was all, but it was quite enough; in fact, the difficulty thereafter was to induce any one to venture into the room on any terms. It was believed to be haunted, and that Sir Archibald was either himself the ghost, or was in some way responsible for there being one.

I have mentioned this story, to which the reader already possesses the clew, only by way of showing that Sir Archibald was making use, at that time, of the secret which he had discovered, and was taking the surest means of keeping it to himself. He had occupations in the inner chamber at which he did not wish to be disturbed. What those occupations were he confided to no living soul--indeed, there was no one who could have served him as a confidant. His life was a lonely one, if ever a lonely life there were. Whom had he to love, or to love him? Even his mother, now enfeebled both in body and mind, felt fear of him rather than fondness for him. She spent much of her time playing cards with her female companion, and in worrying over the health of her pet spaniels. But did Sir Archibald love no one?--at all events he hated somebody, and that heartily. He held Richard Pennroyal responsible for all the ills that had fallen upon Malmaison and upon himself; and he was evidently not the man to suffer a grudge to go unrequited.

Pennroyal, on the other hand, was not disposed to wait quietly to be attacked; he came out to meet the enemy half way. In the spring of the year 1824--about nine months after Sir Edward's death--it was known in every mansion and public house for twenty miles round that a great lawsuit would by-and-by be commenced between Malmaison and Pennroyal, the question to be decided being nothing less than the ownership of the Malmaison estates, which Richard Pennroyal claimed, in the alleged failure of any legitimate heir of Sir John Malmaison, deceased--the father of Sir Clarence--but, as Pennroyal alleged, by a left-handed marriage. I have not gone into the details of this case, and should not detain the reader over it if I had; he may, if it pleases him, read it at full length elsewhere. It is enough to observe that Pennroyal brought forward evidence to show that he, and his father before him, had always had cognizance of the will or other document which entitled him to the property in dispute in the event provided for; and had only been withheld from putting in their claim thereto by the repeated and solemn assurances of Sir Clarence that no such irregularity as was suspected regarding his birth had in fact occurred. Latterly, however, from fresh information accidentally received, it appeared that Sir Clarence had either been guilty of a wilful and criminal misstatement, or that he had been deceived. In confirmation whereof, the Honorable Richard produced documents of undoubted genuineness, showing that an illegitimate son had been born to Sir John; and now called upon the defendant to prove that this son had died in childhood, or that he had not grown up to be Sir Clarence; and furthermore, having disposed of this difficulty, to show the certificate of birth of a legitimate heir to Sir John Malmaison, and to identify that heir with Sir Clarence.

Now, there were certainly some awkward circumstances in respect of this illegitimacy question. Sir Clarence had known that he had had a brother born out of wedlock; and it is possible he also knew that the documents relating to his own birth were not where he could put his hands upon them. He may even have been aware that, were his title to be challenged, there would be serious technical difficulties in the way of vindicating it. At the same time, Sir Clarence was entirely and justly convinced that his title was good. The history of the illegitimate son was familiar to him, and to the rest of the family, in all its details. It was not, of course, an ordinary topic of conversation, but it was an acknowledged piece of family history. Sir John had been wild in his youth, and had made a good many loose connections before acceding to the baronetcy--his father, Sir Charles, the same who ate the venison pasty, having lived to see his heir a man of thirty. One of these connections had been with the daughter of a tenant; during its progress a marriage had been arranged between John Malmaison and a neighboring heiress. About the time that the marriage took place, the tenant's daughter had a child; Clarence himself was born about a year later. The child had lived five or six years only; after its death its mother had gone up to London, and had not since been heard of. This was all simple enough; the only trouble being that no one could tell what had become of the certificate of Clarence's birth, or of the other's decease. Consequently there was an opening for an evil-disposed person to assert what the Honorable Richard was now asserting.

Where had the Honorable Richard got his information?--of the absence, that is to say, of these papers. It was never spoken of outside the family. It is only proper to observe that his brother, Lord Epsom, would have nothing to do with the affair, but explicitly and emphatically washed his hands of it. But this did not deter Richard; he had got his materials, he had decided upon his plan of action, and he was bound to go through with it. He entertained no doubts of his success, and he probably anticipated from it not only solid worldly advantage, but the gratification of an undisguised enmity. It would give him peculiar pleasure to augment his prosperity at the expense of Sir Archibald Malmaison.

Considering that the outlook was so bad for him, the young baronet faced it with commendable fortitude. People who met him regarded him with curiosity, expecting him to appear disturbed, if not desperate. But he wore an aspect of satisfied composure, tempered only by his habitual haughtiness. He had interviews with his lawyers, seemed neither flurried nor helpless, and altogether behaved as if his victory over his opponent was placed beyond the possibility of a doubt. And yet, what could be his defence? Was he going to rely upon the title having remained so long unquestioned? Did he build his hopes upon a possible break in the chain of Pennroyal's evidence? The on-lookers could only conjecture. And now the time when conjectures would be exchanged for certainty was at hand.

It was the autumn of the year 1825. One cool, clear, gray afternoon Sir Archibald had his horse saddled, and mounting him, rode out upon his estate. In the course of an hour or so he found himself approaching the pond, which, as has been already stated, lay on the border-line between Malmaison and the lands of Richard Pennroyal. As he drew near the spot, he saw at a distance the figure of a woman, also on horseback. It was Kate--Mrs. Pennroyal. She was riding slowly in a direction nearly opposite to his own, so that if they kept on they would meet on the borders of the pond.

Sir Archibald had not met this lady for many months; and when he recognized her, his first impulse was perhaps to draw rein. Then he looked to see whether that were her impulse likewise. But she held on her course; and he, smiling in a defiant way, shook his bridle, and in a few moments they were but half a dozen yards apart. There they paused, as it seemed, by mutual consent.

How lovely she looked! Sir Archibald saw it, and ground his teeth with a kind of silent rage. She should have been his.

"Good-day, Mrs. Richard Pennroyal!"

"Good-day, Archibald!"

His name, coming with such gentleness and sweet familiarity from her lips, made his blood tingle. He had expected coldness and formality.

"I had not looked forward to the honor of meeting you here," he said.

"But we have met here before, I think." And so they had, in days upon which Archibald now looked back as does an exile upon home. His horse moved forward a few steps, and his rider only stopped him when he was within arm's length.

"That seems long ago; and yet, when I look at you, I could almost believe it was but yesterday."

"You have changed more than I," replied the lady, letting her eyes rest upon him with a certain intentness. This was true enough, physically speaking; the handsome boy was now a superb young man; but Archibald chose to interpret her words figuratively, and he answered bitterly:

"You may have changed little; but that little in you has caused whatever change you find in me."

"It is true, then, that you are angry with me? I had hoped otherwise," said Mrs. Pennroyal, with a sad dignity that sat well upon her.

"Angry with you!" broke out Archibald, his face flushing. "Has it been a desire to keep my--my friendship that has caused you to--"

Mrs. Pennroyal interrupted him, drawing herself up proudly. "Pardon me, sir, I had no intention of forcing your good-will. If you will be my enemy, please yourself, and perhaps I may learn to become yours." And she turned her horse as she spoke. But Archibald, thus seemingly put in the wrong, and unwilling now to terminate the interview so abruptly, pressed his heel against his horse's side, and was again beside her.

"You misunderstand me," said he. "What could I think? You will not deny that your--that Richard Pennroyal has shown himself no friend of mine."

"I shall deny nothing that you see fit to charge against me, sir," rejoined the lady, still hurt and indignant, and the more irresistible.

Archibald reflected that she was not, perhaps, justly responsible for the malevolence of another person, even though that person were her husband; and from this thought to thinking that she might, perhaps, be inclined to sympathize against her husband and with himself, was an easy transition. This perilous fancy made his pulses throb and his eyes gleam. He caught her horse's bridle.

"Do not go yet! Let us talk a little, since we are met."

"What has Sir Archibald Malmaison to say to me?"

"You called me 'Archibald' just now."

"You called me 'Mrs. Richard Pennroyal!'"

"Well--and so you are!" said he, between his teeth.

"Do you think of me by that name?" she asked, turning her brown eyes on him for a moment, and then looking away.

"Kate!"

She put out her beautiful hand, and he took it and carried it to his lips. Thoughts fierce and sweet flew through his mind. But Mrs. Pennroyal, having gained her immediate end (which, to do her justice, was probably nothing worse than the gratification of a coquettish whim), knew how to take care of herself. She drew her hand away.

"There--well--you have been very unkind, Archibald. Have we not been friends--have we not been together from the first? How could you believe that I could wish you any harm?"

"Ah, Kate, but you married him!"

"Well, sir, I as good as asked you to marry me first, and you would not do it."

"You asked me!"

"Yes; you have forgotten. It has all been so strange, you see. I hardly know, even now, whether you are the Archibald I used to know."

"But I know, very well," returned he, grimly. "And you are the wife of my enemy, the man who is trying to ruin me. Kate," he broke off suddenly, "how did Richard know that those papers were missing in our family? I told you once--do you remember that day? And no one knew it except you."

Mrs. Pennroyal would perhaps have preferred not to be asked this question. But since it was asked, she was bound to make the best answer she could.

"It was for that I wanted to see you to-day," she said, after a pause. "I have been to blame, Archibald; but it was ignorantly. It was long ago--before all these troubles began to occur: while we were yet on good terms. Ah me! would

we were so again!"

"You told him, then?"

"I did not know that I was betraying a secret. From what Richard said, I thought that he knew it, or at least suspected it; and I merely added my confirmation. Afterward, when I found how things were going, I begged him not to use that knowledge. But it was too late. I could not be at rest until I had told you, and asked you to forgive me."

Archibald would not have believed this speech, if his head only had been concerned in the matter. Unfortunately, such was not the case. He believed it because he ardently wished to do so; and he forgave her the more easily, because that implied having her hand in his again for a few moments.

"If I could only see you and Richard at peace again, I should be happy," resumed Mrs. Pennroyal, with a sigh.

"Is it for him you fear, or for me?" inquired Archibald, smiling.

"The danger is yours," she answered, diplomatically.

He shook his head, still smiling: "Dismiss your anxiety, Kate. There is no danger for me or mine. Let Richard look to himself!"

Mrs. Pennroyal was startled. She had looked upon the Malmaison case as virtually hopeless. This hint of the contrary gave her a strong sensation, not altogether unpleasurable. Richard was her husband, but he was not nearly so young as Archibald, and as to looks!--there there was no comparison. Archibald was simply the finest man in England. Perhaps Mrs. Pennroyal had never been passionately fond of her husband; and, on the other hand, she had certainly liked Archibald very much. In the present quarrel she had felt that the propriety of being on the winning side was not diminished by the fact that it happened to be her husband's; but if it should turn out that her husband's was not the winning side after all--then there was matter for consideration. Of course, strictly speaking, her husband's misfortunes must be her own; but in this instance the nominal misfortune would be his failure to ruin Archibald, and Mrs. Pennroyal thought she could sustain that. No, the sensation was certainly not unpleasurable. But was it certain that Archibald was not mistaken?

"I am very glad, for both our sakes," said she, at last. "I could never have endured to take your name and estates away from you. Then that notion that the papers were lost was a mistake?"

"I can tell you nothing more," replied Archibald, looking at her.

"Ah, you have not forgiven me--you do not trust me!"

He checked his horse and hers, and turned full upon her: "Kate, you are the wife of my enemy, I must remember that! If I found you playing a double part between him and me, I should hate you more than I hate him; and then ... I should be capable of any crime. Well, I will not put it in your power. You will know all soon enough. Meantime, I trust you in this--to keep silence on what I have said to-day. Let him believe that he will succeed until he knows that he has failed. Will you promise that?"

Mrs. Pennroyal saw no harm in making this promise, but she did not see why she should not make as great a favor as she could of granting it.

"A wife should have no secrets from her husband, Archibald."

"Have you never had a secret from him, Kate?"

"You have no right to ask that!"

Archibald laughed. "Are you as happy with him as the day is long?"

She looked up for a moment, and their eyes met. "The days seem very long sometimes," she said, almost beneath her breath.

"This day?" he demanded, bending toward her.

"Autumn days are short, you know," she said, smiling a little, with averted face.

"Do you often ride out in autumn?"

"What else can I do, when my husband is away from home? I must go now--it is late."

"And your promise?"

For the third time that afternoon she gave him her hand. Her color was higher than usual, and her breathing somewhat uneven. She had not passed unscathed through this interview. Archibald's was the stronger spirit, and she felt his power--felt it, and liked to feel it! And he, as he held her warm and delicate hand in his own, was conscious of a strange tumult in his heart. Was fate, which he had hitherto found so adverse, going to change at last, and yield him everything at once--revenge and love in the same breath? A revenge consummated through love were sweet indeed.

They parted at length, and rode away in opposite directions. This was their first meeting, but it was not their last by many.

XI.

Meanwhile the lawyers were keeping at work with commendable diligence, and Mr. Pennroyal was counting his chickens as hatched, and was as far as possible from suspecting the underplot which was going on around him. On the contrary, it seemed to him that he was becoming at last the assured favorite of fortune. For this gentleman's life had not been, in all respects, so prosperous as it appeared. To begin with, he had had a deplorable weakness for dicing and card-playing, which had frequently brought him in large sums, but which had ended by costing twenty times as much as they had won for him. He gave up these forms of diversion, therefore, and resolved to amass a fortune in a more regular manner. He studied the stock-market profoundly, until he felt himself sufficiently master of the situation, and when he entered the lists as a financier. He bought and sold, and did his very best to buy cheap and to sell dear. He made several lucky hits; but in the long run he found that the balance was setting steadily against him. All his ready money was gone, and mortgages began to settle down like birds of ill-omen upon his house and lands. It was at this period that he married Kate Battledown; and with the money that she brought him he began to retrieve his losses, and again the horizon brightened. Alas! the improvement was only temporary. Ill-luck set in once more, and more inveterately than ever. Kate's good money went after his bad money, and neither returned. A good deal of it is said to have found its way into the pockets of Major Bolingbroke, his second in the duel. The ill-omened birds settled down once more, until they covered the roof and disfigured all the landscape.

To add to his troubles, he did not find that comfort and consolation in his matrimonial relations which he would fain have had. It is true that he married his wife first of all for her money; but he was far from insensible to her other attractions, and, so far from wearying of them, they took a stronger and stronger hold upon him, until this cold, sarcastic, and unsocial man grew to be nothing less than uxorious. But his wife recompensed his devotion but shabbily; her position had not fulfilled her anticipations, she was angry at the loss of her money, and upon the whole she repented having taken an irrevocable step too hastily. She felt herself to be the intellectual equal of her husband, and she was not long in improving the advantage she possessed of not caring anything about him. In a word, she bullied the unfortunate gentleman unmercifully, and he kissed the rod with infatuation.

This state of things was in force up to the time of Mrs. Pennroyal's meeting with Archibald, as above described. After that there was a marked and most enchanting alteration in Mrs. Pennroyal's demeanor toward her husband. She became all at once affectionate and sympathetic. She flattered him, she deferred to him, she consulted him, and drew him on with delicate encouragements to consult her, to confide in her all the private details of his affairs, which he had never done before, and to intrust to her safekeeping every inmost fear and aspiration of his mind. At every point she met him with soothing agreement and ingenuous suggestion; and in particular did she echo and foster his enmity against Sir Archibald Malmaison, and urged him forward in his suit, bidding him spare no expense, since success was assured, and affirming her readiness to mortgage her very jewels, if need were, to pay the eminent legal gentlemen who were to conduct the case.

This behavior of hers afforded her husband especial gratification, for he had always been a little jealous of Sir Archibald, and indeed one of the impelling motives to the present action had been a desire to pay his grudge in this respect. But the discovery that Mrs. Pennroyal hated the young baronet quite as much as he did, filled his soul with balm; so that it only needed the successful termination of the lawsuit to render his bliss complete and overflowing.

Well, the great case came on; and all the nobility and gentry of the three counties, and others besides, were there to see and hear. There were bets that the trial would not be over in seven days, and odds were taken against its lasting seven weeks. Society forgot its ennui and settled itself complacently to listen to a piquant story of scandal, intrigue, imposition, and robbery in high life.

The reader knows the sequel. Never was there such a disappointment. The learned brethren of the law opened their mouths only to shut them again.

For after the famous Mr. Adolphus, counsel for the plaintiff, had eloquently and ingeniously stated his case and given a picturesque and appetizing outline of the evidence that he was going to call, and the facts that he was going to prove; after this preliminary flourish was over, behold, up got Mr. Sergeant Runnington, who appeared on behalf of the defendant, and let fall some remarks which, though given in a sufficiently matter-of-fact and every-day tone, fell like a thunder-clap upon the ears of all present, save two persons; and produced upon the Honorable Richard Pennroyal an effect as if a hand-grenade had been let off within his head, and his spine drawn neatly out through the back of his neck.

I cannot give the learned Sergeant's speech here, but the upshot of it was that the plaintiff had no case; inasmuch as he relied, to make good his claim, on the absence of any direct evidence establishing the identity of the late Sir Clarence Butt Malmaison, and the decease of that illegitimate personage whom the plaintiffs sought to confound with him.

What could have induced the plaintiff to imagine that such direct evidence was not forthcoming, Sergeant Runnington confessed himself at a loss to understand. He had cherished hopes, for the sake of common decency, for the sake of the respect due to the Bench, for the sake of human nature, that his learned brother on the other side would have been able to hold forth a challenge which it would be, in some degree, worth his while to answer; he regretted sincerely to say that those hopes had not been by any means fulfilled.

Had he been previously made aware of the course of attack which the plaintiff had had the audacity to adopt, he could have saved him and other persons much trouble, and the Court some hours of its valuable time, by the utterance of a single word, or, indeed, without the necessity for any words at all. Really, this affair, about which so much noise had been made, was so ridiculously simple and empty that he almost felt inclined to apologize to the Court and to the gentlemen of the jury for showing them how empty and simple it was. But, indeed, he feared that the apology, if there was to be one, was not due from his side.

It was not for him to decide upon the motives which had prompted the plaintiff to bring this action. He should be sorry to charge any one with malice, with unconscionable greed, with treacherous and impudent rapacity. It belonged to the plaintiff to explain why he had carried this case into court, and what were his grounds for supposing that it could be made to issue to his credit and advantage.

For his own part, he should content himself with producing the documents which the learned counsel on the other side had professed himself so anxious to get a sight of, and to humbly request that the plaintiff be nonsuited with costs.

Thus ended the great trial. People could hardly, at first, believe their own ears and eyes; but when the documents were acknowledged to be perfectly genuine and correct, when the learned Mr. Adolphus relinquished the case, not without disgust, and when the Court, after some very severe remarks upon the conduct of the plaintiff, had concluded a short address by adopting the learned Sergeant Runnington's suggestion as to the costs--when all was settled, in short, in the utterly absurd space of two hours and three quarters, then at last did society awake to a perception of the fact that it had been most egregiously and outrageously swindled, and that the Honorable Richard Pennroyal was the swindler.

Nobody was at the pains to conceal these sentiments from the honorable gentleman, and he left the court with as little sympathy as ever disappointed suitor had.

Poor man! he suffered enough, in more ways than one, on that disastrous day, yet one shame and agony, the sharpest of all, was spared him--he did not see the look and the smile that were exchanged between his wife and Sir Archibald Malmaison, when the decision of the Court was made known.

XII.

We are now drawing near the last scene of this strange and sinister history. The action confines itself almost entirely to the three chief figures.

If Pennroyal had been twenty years younger when this catastrophe fell upon him, it might merely have had the effect of enraging him; but he was near fifty years of age, and old for his years, and it seems to have overwhelmed and cowed him. The cat still in his house, like a rat in his hole, saying nothing, and noticing nothing, but drinking a great deal of brandy. The fiery stuff did not excite him; it merely had the effect of keeping him from sinking into unconsciousness of his misery. He knew that he was a ruined man, and that it was too late to retrieve his ruin. Means and energy were alike lacking, and could never be supplied. He sat in his chair, and brooded over all his life, and realized the utterness of his failure; and nothing could rouse him--not even the intelligence that his enemy, Sir Archibald, having by the death of his aunt, Miss Tremount, come into an inheritance of upward of seventy thousand pounds, was buying up the mortgages, and would probably foreclose on him when he got him thoroughly in his power. Archibald had beaten him, and he would fight no more. Let him enjoy his triumph, and push it to the utmost. There was one point, at all events, on which Richard had the better of him, and this thought brought with it the sole spark of comfort that these evil days afforded him. He had his wife--the woman to win whom Sir Archibald would have given all his lands and fortune, and his soul into the bargain. Yes, Kate was his, and his only; and it was the resolve to keep her his, and thus spite his enemy as long as possible, that withheld Richard from seeking relief in suicide at this juncture. So Providence leads men from agony to worse agony, with intent, doubtless, to torture out of them the evil which they will not voluntarily relinquish.

One winter evening, Richard sitting brooding and sipping brandy as usual, with a lamp burning on the table beside him, and the embers of the fire flickering on the broad hearth at his feet, there came a light, measured step and the rustle of a dress, and he knew that his wife was in the room. He raised his haggard visage and looked at her. What a goddess of beauty she seemed! How young, graceful, lovely! How pure and clear were the tints of her face, how lustrous dark her eyes, how soft her ample hair! How peerless she was! and all she was--all this treasure of fragrant womanhood--was his, and not another's. Ay, and his willingly; she really loved him, he thought; she had shown it of late; she cared for him, old, ruined, and degraded though he was. It was a strange thing; it was a pleasant thing. Perhaps, he thought, if he had had such a creature to love him in earlier days, he might not have been where he was now. But then, in earlier days, he was not a ruined and wasted man.

"Kate!"

"Yes, Richard."

"Oh, never speak so formally! Am I not Dick, thy own dear old Dick--eh?"

"I did not mean to be formal."

"Come and sit here beside me--no, here, on the arm of my chair. It was good of you to come in here. I was getting lonesome. I wanted my Kate to tell me she loved me--eh?"

"I only came in to say good-night. It is late."

"Late?--pooh! It's not nine o'clock. Stay and be sociable a bit. There, I won't touch another drop if you'll stay."

"I'm tired; I have a headache. You don't want me."

"Not want you! Ay, but I do though! Without you, Kate, I should have been a dead man weeks ago. Not want you!"

"Nonsense! what do you mean? You have drunk too much already, I fear."

"I mean that, but for you, I'd have blown my brains out the day of the trial--after I'd blown out his, the scoundrel! But since I have you, I know a way to worry him better than by blowing his brains out. To know that you are mine is hell to him. And in that hell I'll keep him, as long as my body and soul will hang together!"

"What should he care whether I am yours or not?"

"Because he loves you--that's why he cares! Ay, you needn't start. He loves you, and it's hell to him to feel that another man has you. How many thousand pounds do you think he'd give to kiss this little hand as I kiss it now? I wish he could see me do it!"

"Nonsense, you are crazy.... And so you only care for me to spite him?"

"No, not that. God knows--if there is a God--I love you, Kate, with all there is left of me--except what hates him! That's my life--love for you and hate for him. And I believe I hate him less than I love you, though that's saying a great deal!"

"Oh, I think you love that brandy better than you do me."

"You do? If you say so, I'll never touch it again!"

"Oh, I don't care. I don't want you to give up anything that makes you comfortable."

"Ay, you do love me, don't you, Kate?"

"Come, Richard, our courting days are over. And I must go. Good-by!"

"No, don't go! I feel, somehow, as if I couldn't spare you to-night."

"Shall I pour you out another glass?"

"Yes--no! I'll drink no more to-night. Kate...."

"Well?"

"I'm getting old. In the natural course of things I should die long before you. I sha'n't die yet a while--but some time, you know. Will you promise something?"

"I'll promise nothing to-night. I dare say you'll outlive me."

"Promise, come what will, you'll never marry him; eh, Kate?"

"Really, Richard, I--I never heard anything so foolish! I can't stay to hear any more such talk. You are not your right self. There--let me go!"

"Go?--go where? Gad, I've a mind to say you sha'n't go! Well, yes, I didn't mean it; forgive me, Kate! Only you're my wife, you know, and I'm your husband; and I love you; and somehow I feel afraid to let you out of my sight--as if I might not see you again. Well, then.... But one thing you shall do--you shall give me a kiss before you go! Else you sha'n't go at all!"

Thus compelled, Mrs. Pennroyal kissed her husband, or let herself be kissed by him; and then she escaped from the room, with a shudder and a sinking of the heart.

Richard Pennroyal sat there alone; the embers of the fire were now gray and lifeless. He stirred them with his foot, and they fell into ashes. He felt cold. How still the house was; how lonely! And he had no pleasant thoughts to keep him company now that his wife had left him; but many thoughts, many memories that were far from pleasant, were lying in wait for him in the dark corners of his mind, ready to leap out upon him if he gave them a chance. Among them, why did the foolish face of crazy old Jane, his wife of many years ago, persist in obtruding itself? Why did it wear that look of stupid, unreasonable reproach? yes, unreasonable; for how was he to blame? He had but let things take their course; no more than that.... well, scarcely more! And yet that face, that silly old face, that dull, lifeless, drowned old face, kept meeting his in the dark corners, turn where he would. If he closed his eyes, it was still visible through the eyelids, and seemed nearer than ever.

So he opened his eyes; and there hovered the face, in the gloom beyond the lamp. What an expression! Was it signalling him to come away? Was it mocking him for fearing to come? Fearing? He was not afraid. He was a Pennroyal; he had noble blood in his veins; though he was now a bit old and shaky, and had, perhaps, been taking a little too much brandy of late. But--afraid! not he. Why, he would follow the thing, if it came to that; follow it to....

He rose slowly from his chair, still keeping his eyes steadily fixed upon it, and moved toward it, with his hands outstretched. He did not get any nearer to it; it was retreating before him, like a will-o'-the-wisp. He kept on, crossing the length of the room; it seemed to pass through the substance of the door, and yet he saw it beyond. He opened the door softly; yes, there it was in the hall. A pistol was lying on the little table beside the door, which Richard knew to be loaded. Mechanically, and without looking at it, he took it up as he passed. Then down the hall on tiptoe, the shadowy, unmeaning face marshalling him the way, and leering at him if he hesitated. Ay, he would follow it to the end, now. Fortunately, the house-door stood open; there would be no noise in getting out. Out they glided, pursuer and pursued, into the cold stillness of the night. There was a moon, but it was dim and low down. The shadows seemed more real than the light. There was no snow to betray footprints. But whither would this chase lead? It seemed to be heading toward the northwest--toward Malmaison; ay, and toward the pool that lay on the borders of the estate. Richard shuddered when he thought of that pool, and of the grisly significance of his being led thither by this witless, idiotic old phantom of his dead wife's face. Stay, the face seemed to have got itself a body within the last few moments: it was a

gray figure that now flitted on before him; gray and indistinct in the dim moonlight, with noiseless, waving drapery. It was going the very path that old Jane had gone that day, many years ago--her last day on earth; and yet, was she not here again to-night? And she was leading him to the pool; and what then?

Swiftly she flitted onward, some seventy paces in advance apparently, now lost in shadow, now reappearing in the light. She never turned nor beckoned, but kept straight on, and Richard had much ado to keep pace with her. At length he caught the gleam of the dark pool some little distance beyond. He set his teeth, and came on. The gray phantom had paused at last. But was that Jane after all? Not Jane's was that tall and graceful figure. This must be some other woman's ghost. Was it a ghost? And if so, was that another--that man who issued from behind a clump of bushes, and came toward her? The two figures met; the man took the woman in his arms, and kissed her many times on the lips and eyes. Kisses! ay, those were kisses indeed! Now they seemed to be conversing together; his arms were round her waist. The moonlight revealed his features; it was the enemy--it was Archibald Malmaison! And the woman was not the dead wife, but the living one.

"We are perfectly safe, my darling," Archibald was saying. "The room was all prepared for you, and there is no possibility of discovery. There will be a great outcry and confusion for a week or so, and they will search for you, dead and alive; and I along with the rest, the better to disarm suspicion. It will be settled, at last, that you must have escaped to some foreign country; or, maybe, Richard himself will fall under suspicion of having made away with you, as he did with his first wife. Sooner or later, at any rate, they will give up the search; and, whether or not, we shall always be free to each other. You could not persuade any one at Malmaison to so much as put his nose into the east chamber, and as to the other, you and I are the only living creatures who even dream of its existence. Darling, you will not mind being a prisoner for a little while, since love will be a prisoner with you?"

The woman clung to him tremulously. "I did not know it would be so hard to leave him," she murmured. "I hate him, and yet it was hard. He is so wretched; and he is all alone. What will he do now? He kept saying that he loved me and asking me to love him, and to call him Dick; and ... he made me kiss him. Oh, Archie, I feel that kiss beneath all yours. I shall always feel it!"

"No, this shall make you forget it--"

"Hush! I hear something!"

"You are nervous--"

"Ah! look! It is he. Now God have mercy!"

Sir Archibald looked; and there, indeed, stood the tall figure of the Honorable Richard Pennroyal, without his hat, and with an expression on his face that was a living curse to behold. And yet that face smiled and bowed with a hideous politeness.

"Good-evening, Sir Archibald. Will you permit me to inquire whether you are armed?"

Sir Archibald put his hand within his vest, and drew out a pistol.

"Ah, that comes in very conveniently. Now, let us see. Mrs. Pennroyal, since you are my wife, perhaps you will be good enough to give us the word?--No, she insists upon fainting. Well, then, we must manage the best way we can. But let me entreat you to take your aim carefully, my dear Sir Archibald, for if you miss it will involve unpleasant consequences for Mrs. Pennroyal as well as for yourself. Now, I will toss up this pebble, and when it strikes the surface of the water we will fire. Is it agreed? Here goes, then."

He had the pebble in his hand, and was in act to toss it, when the baronet, breaking silence for the first time, said:

"Mr. Pennroyal, I am willing that this should go no further."

"Scoundrel and coward!" snarled the other, his deadly fury breaking in a moment through the thin mockery of courtesy; "come up then, and be shot like the cur you are!"

There could be no more words. Sir Archibald raised his pistol; his antagonist threw the pebble high in the air, and as it smote the smooth surface of the pool in its descent, both pulled trigger. Richard Pennroyal's weapon missed fire; Sir Archibald's bullet passed through his enemy's heart; he swayed backward and forward for a moment, and then fell on his face, hurling his pistol as he fell at the prostrate figure of his wife, who lay huddled on the ground; but it flew wide, and struck Sir Archibald on the temple. Before the ripples caused by the pebble's fall had died away, Pennroyal had ceased to live.

Mrs. Pennroyal was still apparently insensible, but as Sir Archibald approached her she partly raised herself up, and looked first at him and then at the dead body.

"It was not worth while," she said.

"It's done," he murmured. "Are you hurt?"

"What shall we do?"

"We must get back to Malmaison."

"We cannot leave him here."

Sir Archibald bent over the body of his enemy, and turned the face upward. It wore a calm and happy expression.

"I will sink him in the pool," he said. "His will not be the first dead body that has lain there."

He stooped accordingly, and getting his hands beneath the arms of the corpse, dragged it to one of the flights of steps that led down to the water. Kate sat watching him with her hands clasped in her lap. She heard a splashing sound and a ripple. Sir Archibald came back, picked up the pistol, and flung it also into the pool.

"The water will freeze to-night," he said, "and the fishes will do the rest. Now, come!"

In a secret chamber at Malmaison lamps were burning softly in a dozen sconces of burnished silver round the walls. Their light fell on luxurious furniture, fit for the boudoir of a lovely and noble lady. The broad-backed ebony chairs were upholstered in delicate blue damask; clips and salvers of chased gold stood on the inlaid cabinet; the floor was covered with richly-tinted Persian rugs and soft-dressed furs; a warm fire glowed on the hearth, and upon the table was set out a supper such as might have awakened an appetite in a Roman epicure. A tall mirror, at the farther end of the room, reflected back the lights and the color and the sparkle, while in a niche at one side stood rigidly upright an antique suit of armor, its gauntlets seeming to rest meditatively upon the hilt of its sword, while from between the closed bars of the helmet one might fancy that the dark spirit of its former inmate was gazing grimly forth upon all this splendor and luxury, and passing a ghastly jest thereon. But it was as fair and comfortable a scene as perhaps this world can show, and well calculated to make the sternest ascetic in love with life.

Through the massive oaken door, clamped with polished steel bands, entered now two pallid and haggard persons--a man and a woman. The light striking on their eyes made them blink and look aside. The man led the woman to the fire, and seated her upon a low chair; and taking a blue satin coverlid from the bed in the recess, he folded it tenderly round her shoulders. She scarcely seemed to notice where she was, or what was being done; she sat with her eyes and face fixed, shivering now and then, and with her mind apparently preoccupied with some ugly recollection. The man then went to the table and poured out a glass of wine, and held it to the woman's lips, and after a little resistance she drank some of it.

"You are as safe here," said he, "as if you were in an island of the South Sea. I will see that you want for nothing while you have to remain here."

"What is the use?" she asked, with a kind of apathetic peevishness.

"Before long we shall be able to go away," he continued. "My darling, don't be disheartened. All our happiness is to come."

"I can never forget it," she said, with a shiver. "What is the use? I can never get away from him now. Do you think the water is frozen yet?"

"You must not think of that at all. When you are warm, and have drunk some wine, you will not feel this nervousness. Nothing has been done that is worth regretting, or that could have been helped. Kate, I love you more than ever."

"What is the use?" she repeated, in a dull tone. "It was not worth while."

There was a pause.

"I must leave you for a few minutes," he said gently. "It is necessary that I should show myself to Lady Malmaison and to the servants. No one knows that I have left the house. By the time I come back you will have got warm, and we will sup together. Don't be downhearted, my darling."

He bent forward to kiss her. With a sudden gesture of aversion she pushed him back. "There is blood upon your forehead!" she said, in a sharp whisper.

"Only a scratch--I had forgotten it," he answered, trying to smile. "Well, then, in half an hour, at the utmost, we will meet again."

She made no rejoinder; and, after standing a moment looking down at her, he turned and went out. He closed the oaken door behind him, and locked it, then felt his way along the stone passage, and let himself out by the concealed entrance. He put the silver rod in its receptacle beneath the floor, and walked toward the room adjoining. On the threshold of that room he paused a moment, leaning against the door-post. A sensation of sluggish weariness had come over him; his head felt full and heavy. He roused himself presently, and went on trying to remember whither he was going. By the time he had reached the top of the great staircase, the idea that he was in search of seemed to have come to him. He descended the stairs and went directly to Lady Malmaison's room. It was then about eleven o'clock. The good lady was playing cards with her companion, her spaniel sleeping on her knees. She looked up in astonishment, for Sir Archibald seldom honored her with a visit.

"Mamma," said he, going up to her chair, and standing there awkwardly, "where is Kate?"

"My son! what has happened?"

"Was she married to-day?" pursued the baronet, in an aggrieved tone.

Lady Malmaison and the companion exchanged a terrified glance.

"I think it is very unkind, then," declared the young man, reproachfully; "for Richard promised me I should be groomsman--and now they have gone and got married while I was asleep. It was unkind of Kate, and I don't love her; but I don't believe it was Richard's fault, because he is good, and I love him."

* * * * *

"Ring the bell, Simpson," said Lady Malmaison, in a broken voice, "and tell them to send for Dr. Rollinson."

XIII.

During all the months of consternation, speculation, and vague hue-and-cry that followed the mysterious disappearance of the Honorable Mr. and Mrs. Pennroyal, it never for one moment occurred to any one to suggest any connection between that unexplained circumstance and the equally curious but unpertinent fact that poor Sir Archibald had "gone daft" once more.

How should it? It was known that Sir Archibald had been in his room all that day and evening up to the time when he came into his mother's chamber without his wits. It was true that there had been no love lost of late between the houses of Malmaison and Pennroyal, but that was neither here nor there.

The notion that the vanished persons had met with foul play was never seriously entertained, it being generally agreed that Mr. Pennroyal had ample reasons for not wishing to remain in a place where his credit and his welcome were alike worn out. In all likelihood, therefore, the pair had slunk away to foreign parts, and were living under an assumed name somewhere on the Continent, or in America.

It was not surprising that they had gone together, for it was known that they were on very good terms with each other, especially during the last year. An idle story of a groom, who affirmed that he had been present at an interview between Mrs. Pennroyal and Sir Archibald, on horseback, a few weeks before the trial, when, according to this narrator, they had appeared to be rather friendly than otherwise, was not thought to be in any way to the point.

So the months passed away, and the years followed the months; the house and the lands of the Pennroyals were sold, and their very name began to be forgotten. The daft baronet and his aged mother went on living at Malmaison in a quiet and uneventful manner, seeing very few people, and doing nothing except allow their large property to grow larger. Yet, in spite of their retiring inoffensiveness, a shadow seemed to brood over the ancient house.

The old story of Sir Archibald's past exploits in the magical line, and of his ancestors before him, were still revived occasionally round evening firesides; and it was submitted whether his present condition were not a judgment upon him for having tampered with forbidden mysteries.

In the opinion of these fireside juries, there was a curse upon Malmaison, especially upon that part of it which contained the east chamber. That room was haunted, and had never been haunted so badly as during the few days immediately following Sir Archibald's loss of memory.

It may have been a demon's carousal over the sad plight of the poor, foolish young baronet. At all events shrieks had been heard, faint and muffled, but unmistakable, proceeding from that region, when everybody knew that no living soul was there or could be there; but all the servants at Malmaison could swear to the sounds. Ay, the place was accursed.

Late on the night of the 22d of January, 1833, Sir Archibald found himself mounting the staircase of Malmaison, with but an indistinct idea of how he came to be doing so. He could not recollect whether he had seen his mother and the servants or not. No wonder if his thoughts had been a little absent, with such a dark and burdensome secret as that which lay upon his soul. But, of course, he must have seen them. He had left Kate with the intention of doing so, within this very hour; and how should he be coming up-stairs, unless from the execution of that purpose? His mind was busy with many projects. It would probably be thought that Mr. and Mrs. Pennroyal had left the country to escape creditors. If only the pond froze, and the cold weather held on for a week or two, there would be no trace that could lead to a suspicion of anything else. For himself, he would find no difficulty in proving an alibi, if it came to that. And after all, he had but acted upon compulsion, and in self-defence, and upon equal terms. He was guilty of no crime, except--well, call it a crime; he was willing to bear the brunt of that. So they would be able to get away soon, and in Italy, Spain, somewhere, anywhere, they could live and be happy many years. Perhaps after a time they could venture to marry and return openly to England. There were numberless and indefinite possibilities in their favor. Life was all they wanted, and life they had. They were both young; the gloom of this unlucky tragedy would soon be dispelled. Kate had been nervous and distraught when he left her, and no wonder, poor love! but wine, and food, and warmth would soon bring the color back to her cheeks and the light to her eyes. Lovely Kate! sweet, wayward, tender, haughty, but his own at last--his own in spite of earth and heaven! Yes, he and she would have their will and take their pleasure in spite of God and man; and if God would kill them, then, at any rate, they would die together, and in each other's arms.

With these and many like thoughts flying through his mind, Sir Archibald Malmaison reached the east chamber struck a light, and lit the candle that stood on the table beside the door. He looked at his watch--half-past eleven; he was within his time then; he had been absent less than half an hour. What was Kate doing, he wondered? He stopped a moment, picturing her to himself in some luxurious attitude; but his impatience would not suffer him to delay. He quickly got the silver rod from its receptacle, opened the concealed door, and went in, carrying the lighted candle in his hand. In a moment he was at the inner oaken door; it resisted his attempt to open it. Then he recollected that he had locked it for additional security. The key was in the lock; he turned it, and entered.

An involuntary cry of surprise escaped him. Instead of the soft blaze of light that he had expected, the room was full of a heavy darkness, that seemed to rush out to meet him, and almost overwhelmed the feeble glimmer of his wretched candle. And why was it so deadly cold? Where had gone that cheerful fire which was burning so ardently on the hearth half an hour ago? Could Kate have put out the lights and gone off? Impossible, since the doors were fastened. Ah, there she was!

She was kneeling with her face bowed forward on her arms, which rested on the seat of one of the low chairs. Her

attitude was that of passionate prayer. Her thick brown hair was unfastened, and fell over her shoulders.

She made no movement. It was strange! Was she praying? Could she be asleep?

He took a step or two, and then stopped. Still no movement.

"Kate!" he said in a hushed voice; and as she did not answer, he spoke more loudly: "Kate, I have come back; and I've a mind to scold you for letting the fire go out, and startling me with this darkness. What are you doing on your knees? Come, my darling, we want no prayers to-night. Kate ... will you give me a kiss now?"

"Perhaps she may have fainted. Poor darling, she must have fainted!"

He went close up to her, and laid his hand on her shoulder: he seemed to grasp nothing but the empty stuff of the dress. With a terrified, convulsive motion, he pulled her round, so that the head was disturbed from its position on the arms, and the ghastly mystery was revealed to his starting eyeballs. The spectacle was not one to be described. He uttered a weak, wavering scream, and stood there, unable to turn away his gaze.

I must confess that I do not care to pursue this narrative any farther: though it is just at this point, according to my venerable friend Dr. Rollinson, that the real scientific interest begins. He was constantly with Sir Archibald during the eight or nine months that he remained in life after this episode; and made some highly important and edifying notes on his "case," besides writing down the unhappy baronet's confessions, as given from time to time. After his death, the Doctor made an autopsy of the brain, and discovered--I care not what! It was not the mystery of the man's soul, I am convinced.

I have adhered strictly to the facts throughout. Of course some of the conversations have been imagined, but always on an adequate foundation of truth or logical inference. All the dates and "coincidences" are genuine. But, indeed, I prefer fiction, and am resolved never in future to make an excursion into the crude and improbable regions of reality.

THE END.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dr. Forbes Rollinson's death occurred while these pages were in preparation. This is not the place to add my tribute of affection and appreciation to the many memoirs of him which have appeared in the public prints. My first acquaintance with him dates but little more than three years prior to his death; but the impression he produced upon me of cordiality, culture, and ability will remain with me while I live. He was a grand old gentleman of a school that is now bygone; a scholar of vast attainments, and a Christian in heart and life, if not in profession. Although he had far exceeded the ordinary span of life--he was born, I believe, in the last century--he showed few signs of physical, and none of mental infirmity; and his sudden and painless decease was quite unexpected.

I subjoin extracts from a letter written to me on the subject of the present narrative:

"WELLESLEY HOUSE, QUEEN'S GATE, W.

"MY DEAR H.: I must say I fail to perceive the force of your objections. What is fiction, at best, but an imitation of truth--and a pretty poor imitation, too, as a general thing?... You ought to be glad to be saved the trouble of inventing.... In the matter of love-making and adventure I have nothing to say, but scientific truths are not lightly to be tampered with. 'Round off the corners' by all means, if you think fit, but do not suffer your artistic proclivities to lead you into a misrepresentation of the essential facts.... The people are all dead, and the estate is broken up, so you need have no hesitation regarding names. Literary value aside, the thing would be worth nothing if the means of verifying it were withheld....

"Ever faithfully yours,

"June 3d, 1878. E. FORBES ROLLINSON."

2. Now also the late: *vide supra*.

3. 3. In July, 1867.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ARCHIBALD MALMAISON ***

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