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CHAPTER LXXIV.

My Work, my Philosophical Work-the ambitious hope of my intellectual life—how eagerly I returned to it again! Far away from my household grief, far away from my haggard perplexities—neither a Lilian nor a Margrave there!

As I went over what I had before written, each link in its chain of reasoning seemed so serried, that to alter one were to derange all; and the whole reasoning was so opposed to the possibility of the wonders I myself had experienced, so hostile to the subtle hypotheses of a Faber, or the childlike belief of an Amy, that I must have destroyed the entire work if I had admitted such contradictions to its design!

But the work was I myself!—I, in my solid, sober, healthful mind, before the brain had been perplexed by a phantom. Were phantoms to be allowed as testimonies against science? No; in returning to my Book, I returned to my former Me!

How strange is that contradiction between our being as man and our being as Author! Take any writer enamoured of a system: a thousand things may happen to him every day which might shake his faith in that system; and while he moves about as mere man, his faith is shaken. But when he settles himself back into the phase of his being as author, the mere act of taking pen in hand and smoothing the paper before him restores his speculations to their ancient mechanical train. The system, the beloved system, reasserts its tyrannic sway, and he either ignores, or moulds into fresh proofs of his theory as author, all which, an hour before, had given his theory the lie in his living perceptions as man.

I adhered to my system,—I continued my work. Here, in the barbarous desert, was a link between me and the Cities of Europe. All else might break down under me. The love I had dreamed of was blotted out from the world, and might never be restored; my heart might be lonely, my life be an exile's. My reason might, at last, give way before the spectres which awed my senses, or the sorrow which stormed my heart. But here at least was a monument of my rational thoughtful Me,—of my individualized identity in multiform creation. And my mind, in the noon of its force, would shed its light on the earth when my form was resolved to its elements. Alas! in this very yearning for the Hereafter, though but the Hereafter of a Name, could I see only the craving of Mind, and hear not the whisper of Soul!

The avocation of a colonist, usually so active, had little interest for me. This vast territorial lordship, in which, could I have endeared its possession by the hopes that animate a Founder, I should have felt all the zest and the pride of ownership, was but the run of a common to the passing emigrant, who would leave no son to inherit the tardy products of his labour. I was not goaded to industry by the stimulus of need. I could only be ruined if I risked all my capital in the attempt to improve. I lived, therefore, amongst my fertile pastures, as careless of culture as the English occupant of the Highland moor, which he rents for the range of its solitudes.

I knew, indeed, that if ever I became avaricious, I might swell my modest affluence into absolute wealth. I had revisited the spot in which I had discovered the nugget of gold, and had found the precious metal in rich abundance just under the first coverings of the alluvial soil. I concealed my discovery from all. I knew that, did I proclaim it, the charm of my bush-life would be gone. My fields would be infested by all the wild adventurers who gather to gold as the vultures of prey round a carcass; my servants would desert me, my very flocks would be shepherdless!

Months again rolled on months. I had just approached the close of my beloved Work, when it was again suspended, and by an anguish keener than all which I had previously known.

Lilian became alarmingly ill. Her state of health, long gradually declining, had hitherto admitted checkered intervals of improvement, and exhibited no symptoms of actual danger. But now she was seized with a kind of chronic fever, attended with absolute privation of sleep, an aversion to even the lightest nourishment, and an acute nervous susceptibility to all the outward impressions of which she had long seemed so unconscious; morbidly alive to the faintest sound, shrinking from the light as from a torture. Her previous impatience at my entrance into her room became aggravated into vehement emotions, convulsive paroxysms of distress; so that Faber banished me from her chamber, and, with a heart bleeding at every fibre, I submitted to the cruel sentence.

Faber had taken up his abode in my house and brought Amy with him; one or the other never left Lilian, night or day. The great physician spoke doubtfully of the case, but not despairingly.

"Remember," he said, "that in spite of the want of sleep, the abstinence from food, the form has not wasted as it would do were this fever inevitably mortal. It is upon that phenomenon I build a hope that I have not been mistaken in the opinion I hazarded from the first. We are now in the midst of the critical struggle between life and reason; if she preserve the one, my conviction is that she will regain the other. That seeming antipathy to yourself is a good omen. You are inseparably associated with her intellectual world; in proportion as she revives to it, must become vivid and powerful the reminiscences of the shock that annulled, for a time, that world to her. So I welcome, rather than fear, the over-susceptibility of the awakening senses to external sights and sounds. A few days will decide if I am right. In this climate the progress of acute maladies is swift, but the recovery from them is yet more startlingly rapid. Wait, endure, be prepared to submit to the will of Heaven; but do not despond of its mercy."

I rushed away from the consoler,—away into the thick of the forests, the heart of the solitude. All around me, there, was joyous with life; the locust sang amidst the herbage; the cranes gambolled on the banks of the creek; the squirrel-like opossums frolicked on the feathery boughs. "And what," said I to myself,—"what if that which seems so fabulous in the distant being whose existence has bewitched my own, be substantially true? What if to some potent medicament Margrave owes his glorious vitality, his radiant youth? Oh, that I had not so disdainfully turned away from his hinted solicitations—to what?—to nothing guiltier than lawful experiment. Had I been less devoted a bigot to this vain schoolcraft, which we call the Medical Art, and which, alone in this age of science, has made no perceptible progress since the days of its earliest teachers—had I said, in the true humility of genuine knowledge, 'these alchemists were men of genius and thought; we owe to them nearly all the grand hints of our chemical science,—is it likely that they would have been wholly drivellers and idiots in the one faith they clung to the most?'—had I said that, I might now have no fear of losing my Lilian. Why, after all, should there not be in Nature one primary essence, one master substance; in which is stored the specific nutriment of life?"

Thus incoherently muttering to the woods what my pride of reason would not have suffered me gravely to say to my fellow-men, I fatigued my tormented spirits into a gloomy calm, and mechanically retraced my steps at the decline of day. I seated myself at the door of my solitary log-hut, lean ing my cheek upon my hand, and musing. Wearily I looked up, roused by a discord of clattering hoofs and lumbering wheels on the hollow-sounding grass-track. A crazy groaning vehicle, drawn by four horses, emerged from the copse of gum-trees,—fast, fast along the road, which no such pompous vehicle had traversed since that which had borne me—luxurious satrap for an early colonist—to my lodge in the wilderness. What emigrant rich enough to squander in the hire of such an equipage more than its cost in England, could thus be entering on my waste domain? An ominous thrill shot through me.

The driver—perhaps some broken-down son of luxury in the Old World, fit for nothing in the New World but to ply, for hire, the task that might have led to his ruin when plied in sport—stopped at the door of my hut, and called out, "Friend, is not this the great Fenwick Section, and is not yonder long pile of building the Master's house?"

Before I could answer I heard a faint voice, within the vehicle, speaking to the driver; the last nodded, descended from his seat, opened the carriage-door, and offered his arm to a man, who, waving aside the proffered aid, descended slowly and feebly; paused a moment as if for breath, and then, leaning on his staff, walked from the road, across the sward rank with luxuriant herbage, through the little gate in the new-set fragrant wattle-fence, wearily, languidly, halting often, till he stood facing me, leaning both wan and emaciated hands upon his staff, and his meagre form shrinking deep within the folds of a cloak lined thick with costly sables. His face was sharp, his complexion of a livid yellow, his eyes shone out from their hollow orbits, unnaturally enlarged and fatally bright. Thus, in ghastly contrast to his former splendour of youth and opulence of life, Margrave stood before me.

"I come to you," said Margrave, in accents hoarse and broken, "from the shores of the East. Give me shelter and rest. I have that to say which will more than repay you."

Whatever, till that moment, my hate and my fear of this unexpected visitant, hate would have been inhumanity, fear a meanness, conceived for a creature so awfully stricken down.

Silently, involuntarily, I led him into the house. There he rested a few minutes, with closed eyes and painful gasps for breath. Meanwhile, the driver brought from the carriage a travelling-bag and a small wooden chest or coffer, strongly banded with iron clamps. Margrave, looking up as the man drew near, exclaimed fiercely, "Who told you to touch that chest? How dare you? Take it from that man, Fenwick! Place it here,—here by my side!"

I took the chest from the driver, whose rising anger at being so imperiously rated in the land of democratic equality was appeased by the gold which Margrave lavishly flung to him.

"Take care of the poor gentleman, squire," he whispered to me, in the spontaneous impulse of gratitude, "I fear he will not trouble you long. He must be monstrous rich. Arrived in a vessel hired all to himself, and a train of outlandish attendants, whom he has left behind in the town yonder. May I bait my horses in your stables? They have come a long way."

I pointed to the neighbouring stables, and the man nodded his thanks, remounted his box, and drove off.

I returned to Margrave. A faint smile came to his lips as I placed the chest beside him.

"Ay, ay," he muttered. "Safe! safe! I shall soon be well again,—very soon! And now I can sleep in peace!"

I led him into an inner room, in which there was a bed. He threw himself on it with a loud sigh of relief. Soon, half raising himself on his elbow, he exclaimed, "The chest—bring it hither! I need it always beside me! There, there! Now for a few hours of sleep; and then, if I can take food, or some such restoring cordial as your skill may suggest, I shall be strong enough to talk. We will talk! we will talk!"

His eyes closed heavily as his voice fell into a drowsy mutter: a moment more and he was asleep.

I watched beside him, in mingled wonder and compassion. Looking into that face, so altered yet still so young, I could not sternly question what had been the evil of that mystic life, which seemed now oozing away through the last sands in the hour-glass. I placed my hand softly on his pulse: it scarcely beat. I put my ear to his breast, and involuntarily sighed, as I distinguished in its fluttering heave that dull, dumb sound, in which the heart seems knelling itself to the greedy grave!

Was this, indeed, the potent magician whom I had so feared!—this the guide to the Rosicrucian's secret of life's renewal, in whom, but an hour or two ago, my fancies gulled my credulous trust!

But suddenly, even while thus chiding my wild superstitions, a fear, that to most would seem scarcely less superstitious, shot across me. Could Lilian be affected by the near neighbourhood of one to whose magnetic influence she had once been so strangely subjected? I left Margrave still sleeping, closed and locked the door of the hut, went back to my dwelling, and met Amy at the threshold. Her smile was so cheering that I felt at once relieved.

"Hush!" said the child, putting her finger to her lips, "she is so quiet!
I was coming in search of you, with a message from her."

"From Lilian to me—what! to me!"

"Hush! About an hour ago, she beckoned me to draw near to her, and then said, very softly: 'Tell Allen that light is coming back to me, and it all settles on him—on him. Tell him that I pray to be spared to walk by his side on earth, hand-in-hand to that heaven which is no dream, Amy. Tell him that,—no dream!'"

While the child spoke my tears gushed, and the strong hands in which I veiled my face quivered like the leaf of the aspen. And when I could command my voice, I said plaintively,—

"May I not, then, see her?—only for a moment, and answer her message though but by a look?"

"No, no!"

"No! Where is Faber?"

"Gone into the forest, in search of some herbs, but he gave me this note for you."

I wiped the blinding tears from my eyes, and read these lines:—

"I have, though with hesitation, permitted Amy to tell you the cheering words, by which our beloved patient confirms my belief that reason is coming back to her,—slowly, labouringly, but if she survive, for permanent restoration. On no account attempt to precipitate or disturb the work of nature. As dangerous as a sudden glare of light to eyes long blind and newly regaining vision in the friendly and soothing dark would be the agitation that your presence at this crisis would cause. Confide in me."

I remained brooding over these lines and over Lilian's message long and silently, while Amy's soothing whispers stole into my ear, soft as the murmurs of a rill heard in the gloom of forests. Rousing myself at length, my thoughts returned to Margrave. Doubtless he would soon awake. I bade Amy bring me such slight nutriment as I thought best suited to his enfeebled state, telling her it was for a sick traveller, resting himself in my hut. When Amy returned, I took from her the little basket with which she was charged, and having, meanwhile, made a careful selection from the contents of my medicine-chest, went back to the hut. I had not long resumed my place beside Margrave's pillow before he awoke.

"What o'clock is it?" he asked, with an anxious voice.

"About seven."

"Not later? That is well; my time is precious."

"Compose yourself, and eat."

I placed the food before him, and he partook of it, though sparingly, and as if with effort. He then dozed for a short time, again woke up, and impatiently demanded the cordial, which I had prepared in the mean while. Its effect was greater and more immediate than I could have anticipated, proving, perhaps, how much of youth there was still left in his system, however undermined and ravaged by disease. Colour came back to his cheek, his voice grew perceptibly stronger. And as I lighted the lamp on the table near us—for it was growing dark—he gathered himself up, and spoke thus,—

"You remember that I once pressed on you certain experiments. My object then was to discover the materials from which is extracted the specific that enables the organs of life to expel disease and regain vigour. In that hope I sought your intimacy,—an intimacy you gave, but withdrew."

"Dare you complain? Who and what was the being from whose intimacy I shrank appalled?"

"Ask what questions you please," cried Margrave, impatiently, "later—if I have strength left to answer them; but do not interrupt me, while I husband my force to say what alone is important to me and to you. Disappointed in the hopes I had placed in you, I resolved to repair to Paris,—that great furnace of all bold ideas. I questioned learned formalists; I listened to audacious empirics. The first, with all their boasted knowledge, were too timid to concede my premises; the second, with all their speculative daring, too knavish to let me trust to their conclusions. I found but one man, a Sicilian, who comprehended the secrets that are called occult, and had the courage to meet Nature and all her agencies face to face. He believed, and sincerely, that he was approaching the grand result, at the very moment when he perished from want of the common precautions which a tyro in chemistry would have taken. At his death the gaudy city became hateful; all its pretended pleasures only served to exhaust life the faster. The true joys of youth are those of the wild bird and wild brute, in the healthful enjoyment of Nature. In cities, youth is but old age with a varnish. I fled to the East; I passed through the tents of the Arabs; I was guided—no matter by whom or by what—to the house of a Dervish, who had had for his teacher the most erudite master of secrets occult, whom I knew years ago at Aleppo—-Why that exclamation?"

"Proceed. What I have to say will come—later."

"From this Dervish I half forced and half purchased the secret I sought to obtain. I now know from what peculiar substance the so-called elixir of life is extracted; I know also the steps of the process through which that task is accomplished. You smile incredulously. What is your doubt? State it while I rest for a moment. My breath labours; give me more of the cordial."

"Need I tell you my doubt? You have, you say, at your command the elixir of life of which Cagliostro did not leave his disciples the recipe; and you stretch out your hand for a vulgar cordial which any village chemist could give you!"

"I can explain this apparent contradiction. The process by which the elixir is extracted from the material which hoards its essence is one that requires a hardihood of courage which few possess. This Dervish, who had passed through that process once, was deaf to all prayer, and unmoved by all bribes, to attempt it again. He was poor; for the secret by which metals may be transmuted is not, as the old alchemists seem to imply, identical with that by which the elixir of life is extracted. He had only been enabled to discover, in the niggard strata of the lands within range of his travel, a few scanty morsels of the glorious substance. From these he had extracted scarcely enough of the elixir to fill a third of that little glass which I have just drained. He guarded every drop for himself. Who that holds healthful life as the one boon above all price to the living, would waste upon others what prolongs and recruits his own being? Therefore, though he sold me his secret, he would not sell me his treasure."

"Any quack may sell you the information how to make not only an elixir, but a sun and a moon, and then scare you from the experiment by tales of the danger of trying it! How do you know that this essence which the Dervish possessed was the elixir of life, since, it seems, you have not tried on yourself what effect its precious drops could produce? Poor wretch, who once seemed to me so awfully potent! do you come to the Antipodes in search of a drug that only exists in the fables by which a child is amused?"

"The elixir of life is no fable," cried Margrave, with a kindling of eye, a power of voice, a dilatation of form, that startled me in one just before so feeble. "That elixir was bright in my veins when we last met. From that golden draught of the life-spring of joy I took all that can gladden creation. What sage would not have exchanged his wearisome knowledge for my lusty revels with Nature? What monarch would not have bartered his crown, with its brain-ache of care, for the radiance that circled my brows, flashing out from the light that was in me? Oh again, oh again! to enjoy the freedom of air with the bird, and the glow of the sun with the lizard; to sport through the blooms of the earth, Nature's playmate and darling; to face, in the forest and desert, the pard and the lion,—Nature's bravest and fiercest,—her firstborn, the heir of her realm, with the rest of her children for slaves!"

As these words burst from his lips, there was a wild grandeur in the aspect of this enigmatical being which I had never beheld in the former time of his affluent, dazzling youth. And, indeed, in his language, and in the thoughts it clothed, there was an earnestness, a concentration, a directness, a purpose, which had seemed wanting to his desultory talk in the earlier days I expected that reaction of languor and exhaustion would follow his vehement outbreak of passion, but, after a short pause, he went on with steady accents. His will was sustaining his strength. He was determined to force his convictions on me, and the vitality, once so rich, rallied all its lingering forces to the aid of its intense desire.

"I tell you, then," he resumed, with deliberate calmness, "that, years ago, I tested in my own person that essence which is the sovereign medicament. In me, as you saw me at L——, you beheld the proof of its virtues. Feeble and ill as I am now, my state was incalculably more hopeless when formerly restored by the elixir. He from whom I then took the sublime restorative died without revealing the secret of its composition. What I obtained was only just sufficient to recruit the lamp of my life, then dying down—and no drop was left for renewing the light which wastes its own rays in the air that it gilds. Though the Dervish would not sell me his treasure, he permitted me to see it. The appearance and odour of this essence are strangely peculiar,—unmistakable by one who has once beheld and partaken of it. In short, I recognized in the hands of the Dervish the bright life-renewer, as I had borne it away from the corpse of the Sage of Aleppo."

"Hold! Are you then, in truth, the murderer of Haroun, and is your true name Louis Grayle?"

"I am no murderer, and Louis Grayle did not leave me his name. I again adjure you to postpone, for this night at least, the questions you wish to address to me.

"Seeing that this obstinate pauper possessed that for which the pale owners of millions, at the first touch of palsy or gout, would consent to be paupers, of course I coveted the possession of the essence even more than the knowledge of the substance from which it is extracted. I had no coward fear of the

experiment, which this timid driveller had not the nerve to renew. But still the experiment might fail. I must traverse land and sea to find the fit place for it, while, in the rags of the Dervish, the unfailing result of the experiment was at hand. The Dervish suspected my design, he dreaded my power. He fled on the very night in which I had meant to seize what he refused to sell me. After all, I should have done him no great wrong; for I should have left him wealth enough to transport himself to any soil in which the material for the elixir may be most abundant; and the desire of life would have given his shrinking nerves the courage to replenish its ravished store. I had Arabs in my pay, who obeyed me as hounds their master. I chased the fugitive. I came on his track, reached a house in a miserable village, in which, I was told, he had entered but an hour before. The day was declining, the light in the room imperfect. I saw in a corner what seemed to me the form of the Dervish,—stooped to seize it, and my hand closed on an asp. The artful Dervish had so piled his rags that they took the shape of the form they had clothed, and he had left, as a substitute for the giver of life, the venomous reptile of death.

"The strength of my system enabled me to survive the effect of the poison; but during the torpor that numbed me, my Arabs, alarmed, gave no chase to my quarry. At last, though enfeebled and languid, I was again on my horse. Again the pursuit, again the track! I learned—but this time by a knowledge surer than man's—that the Dervish had taken his refuge in a hamlet that had sprung up over the site of a city once famed through Assyria. The same voice that in formed me of his whereabouts warned me not to pursue. I rejected the warning. In my eager impatience I sprang on to the chase; in my fearless resolve I felt sure of the prey. I arrived at the hamlet wearied out, for my forces were no longer the same since the bite of the asp. The Dervish eluded me still; he had left the floor, on which I sank exhausted, but a few minutes before my horse stopped at the door. The carpet, on which he had rested, still lay on the ground. I dismissed the youngest and keenest of my troop in search of the fugitive. Sure that this time he would not escape, my eyes closed in sleep.

"How long I slept I know not,—a long dream of solitude, fever, and anguish. Was it the curse of the Dervish's car pet? Was it a taint in the walls of the house, or of the air, which broods sickly and rank over places where cities lie buried? I know not; but the Pest of the East had seized me in slumber. When my senses recovered I found myself alone, plundered of my arms, despoiled of such gold as I had carried about me. All had deserted and left me, as the living leave the dead whom the Plague has claimed for its own. As soon as I could stand I crawled from the threshold. The moment my voice was heard, my face seen, the whole squalid populace rose as on a wild beast,—a mad dog. I was driven from the place with imprecations and stones, as a miscreant whom the Plague had overtaken while plotting the death of a holy man. Bruised and bleeding, but still defying, I turned in wrath on that dastardly rabble; they slunk away from my path. I knew the land for miles around. I had been in that land years, long years ago. I came at last to the road which the caravans take on their way to Damascus. There I was found, speechless and seemingly lifeless, by some European travellers. Conveyed to Damascus, I languished for weeks between life and death. But for the virtue of that essence, which lingered yet in my veins, I could not have survived—even thus feeble and shattered. I need not say that I now abandoned all thought of discovering the Dervish. I had at least his secret, if I had failed of the paltry supply he had drawn from its uses. Such appliances as he had told me were needful are procured in the East with more ease than in Europe. To sum up, I am here, instructed in all the knowledge, and supplied with all the aids, which warrant me in saying, 'Do you care for new life in its richest enjoyments, if not for yourself, for one whom you love and would reprieve from the grave? Then, share with me in a task that a single night will accomplish, and ravish a prize by which the life that you value the most will be saved from the dust and the worm, to live on, ever young, ever blooming, when each infant, new-born while I speak, shall have passed to the grave. Nay, where is the limit to life, while the earth hides the substance by which life is renewed?"

I give as faithfully as I can recall them the words in which Margrave addressed me. But who can guess by cold words transcribed, even were they artfully ranged by a master of language, the effect words produce when warm from the breath of the speaker? Ask one of an audience which some orator held enthralled, why his words do not quicken a beat in the reader's pulse, and the answer of one who had listened will be, "The words took their charm from the voice and the eye, the aspect, the manner, the man!" So it was with the incomprehensible being before me. Though his youth was faded, though his beauty was dimmed, though my fancies clothed him with memories of abhorrent dread, though my reason opposed his audacious beliefs and assumptions, still he charmed and spell-bound me; still he was the mystical fascinator; still, if the legends of magic had truth for their basis, he was the born magician,—as genius, in what calling soever, is born with the gift to enchant and subdue us.

Constraining myself to answer calmly, I said, "You have told me your story; you have defined the object of the experiment in which you ask me to aid. You do right to bid me postpone my replies or my questions. Seek to recruit by sleep the strength you have so sorely tasked. To-morrow—"

"To-morrow, ere night, you will decide whether the man whom out of all earth I have selected to aid me shall be the foe to condemn me to perish! I tell you plainly I need your aid, and your prompt aid.

Three days from this, and all aid will be too late!"

I had already gained the door of the room, when he called to me to come back.

"You do not live in this but, but with your family yonder. Do not tell them that I am here; let no one but yourself see me as I now am. Lock the door of the but when you quit it. I should not close my eyes if I were not secure from intruders."

"There is but one in my house, or in these parts, whom I would except from the interdict you impose. You are aware of your own imminent danger; the life, which you believe the discovery of a Dervish will indefinitely prolong, seems to my eye of physician to hang on a thread. I have already formed my own conjecture as to the nature of the disease that enfeebles you. But I would fain compare that conjecture with the weightier opinion of one whose experience and skill are superior to mine. Permit me, then, when I return to you to-morrow, to bring with me the great physician to whom I refer. His name will not, perhaps, be unknown to you: I speak of Julius Faber."

"A physician of the schools! I can guess well enough how learnedly he would prate, and how little he could do. But I will not object to his visit, if it satisfies you that, since I should die under the hands of the doctors, I may be permitted to indulge my own whim in placing my hopes in a Dervish. Yet stay. You have, doubtless, spoken of me to this Julius Faber, your fellow-physician and friend? Promise me, if you bring him here, that you will not name me,—that you will not repeat to him the tale I have told you, or the hope which has led me to these shores. What I have told you, no matter whether, at this moment, you consider me the dupe of a chimera, is still under the seal of the confidence which a patient reposes in the physician he himself selects for his confidant. I select you, and not Julius Faber!"

"Be it as you will," said I, after a moment's reflection. "The moment you make yourself my patient, I am bound to consider what is best for you. And you may more respect, and profit by, an opinion based upon your purely physical condition than by one in which you might suppose the advice was directed rather to the disease of the mind than to that of the body."

"How amazed and indignant your brother-physician will be if he ever see me a second time! How learnedly he will prove that, according to all correct principles of science and nature, I ought to be dead!"

He uttered this jest with a faint weary echo of his old merry, melodious laugh, then turned his face to the wall; and so I left him to repose.

CHAPTER LXXV.

I found Mrs. Ashleigh waiting for me in our usual sitting-room. She was in tears. She had begun to despond of Lilian's recovery, and she infected me with her own alarm. However, I disguised my participation in her fears, soothed and sustained her as I best could, and persuaded her to retire to rest. I saw Faber for a few minutes before I sought my own chamber. He assured me that there was no perceptible change for the worse in Lilian's physical state since he had last seen me, and that her mind, even within the last few hours, had become decidedly more clear. He thought that, within the next twenty-four hours, the reason would make a strong and successful effort for complete recovery; but he declined to hazard more than a hope that the effort would not exhaust the enfeebled powers of the frame. He himself was so in need of a few hours of rest that I ceased to harass him with questions which he could not answer, and fears which he could not appease. Before leaving him for the night, I told him briefly that there was a traveller in my but smitten by a disease which seemed to me so grave that I would ask his opinion of the case, if he could accompany me to the but the next morning.

My own thoughts that night were not such as would suffer me to sleep.

Before Margrave's melancholy state much of my former fear and abhorrence faded away. This being, so exceptional that fancy might well invest him with preternatural attributes, was now reduced by human suffering to human sympathy and comprehension; yet his utter want of conscience was still as apparent as in his day of joyous animal spirits. With what hideous candour he had related his perfidy and ingratitude to the man to whom, in his belief, he owed an inestimable obligation, and with what insensibility to the signal retribution which in most natures would have awakened remorse!

And by what dark hints and confessions did he seem to confirm the incredible memoir of Sir Philip

Derval! He owned that he had borne from the corpse of Haroun the medicament to which he ascribed his recovery from a state yet more hopeless than that under which he now laboured! He had alluded, rapidly, obscurely, to some knowledge at his command "surer than man's." And now, even now the mere wreck of his former existence—by what strange charm did he still control and confuse my reason? And how was it that I felt myself murmuring, again and again, "But what, after all, if his hope be no chimera, and if Nature do hide a secret by which I could save the life of my beloved Lilian?"

And again and again, as that thought would force itself on me, I rose and crept to Lilian's threshold, listening to catch the faintest sound of her breathing. All still, all dark! In that sufferer recognized science detects no mortal disease, yet dares not bid me rely on its amplest resources of skill to turn aside from her slumber the stealthy advance of death; while in yon log-hut one whose malady recognized science could not doubt to be mortal has composed himself to sleep, confident of life! Recognized science?—recognized ignorance! The science of to-day is the ignorance of to-morrow! Every year some bold guess lights up a truth to which, but the year before, the schoolmen of science were as blinded as moles.

"What, then," my lips kept repeating,—"what if Nature do hide a secret by which the life of my life can be saved? What do we know of the secrets of Nature? What said Newton himself of his knowledge? 'I am like a child picking up pebbles and shells on the sand, while the great ocean of Truth lies all undiscovered around me!' And did Newton himself, in the ripest growth of his matchless intellect, hold the creed of the alchemists in scorn? Had he not given to one object of their research, in the transmutation of metals, his days and his nights? Is there proof that he ever convinced himself that the research was the dream, which we, who are not Newtons, call it?[1] And that other great sage, inferior only to Newton—the calculating doubt-weigher, Descartes—had he not believed in the yet nobler hope of the alchemists,—believed in some occult nostrum or process by which human life could attain to the age of the Patriarchs?"[2]

In thoughts like these the night wore away, the moonbeams that streamed through my window lighting up the spacious solitudes beyond,—mead and creek, forest-land, mountaintop,—and the silence without broken by the wild cry of the night hawk and the sibilant melancholy dirge of the shining chrysococyx,[3]—bird that never sings but at night, and obstinately haunts the roofs of the sick and dying, ominous of woe and death.

But up sprang the sun, and, chasing these gloomy sounds, out burst the wonderful chorus of Australian groves, the great kingfisher opening the jocund melodious babble with the glee of his social laugh.

And now I heard Faber's step in Lilian's room,—heard through the door her soft voice, though I could not distinguish the words. It was not long before I saw the kind physician standing at the threshold of my chamber. He pressed his finger to his lip, and made me a sign to follow him. I obeyed, with noiseless tread and stifled breathing. He awaited me in the garden under the flowering acacias, passed his arm in mine, and drew me into the open pasture-land.

"Compose yourself," he then said; "I bring you tidings both of gladness and of fear. Your Lilian's mind is restored: even the memories which had been swept away by the fever that followed her return to her home in L—— are returning, though as yet indistinct. She yearns to see you, to bless you for all your noble devotion, your generous, greathearted love; but I forbid such interview now. If, in a few hours, she become either decidedly stronger or decidedly more enfeebled, you shall be summoned to her side. Even if you are condemned to a loss for which the sole consolation must be placed in the life hereafter, you shall have, at least, the last mortal commune of soul with soul. Courage! courage! You are man! Bear as man what you have so often bid other men submit to endure."

I had flung myself on the ground,—writhing worm that had no home but on earth! Man, indeed! Man! All, at that moment, I took from manhood was its acute sensibility to love and to anguish!

But after all such paroxysms of mortal pain, there comes a strange lull. Thought itself halts, like the still hush of water between two descending torrents. I rose in a calm, which Faber might well mistake for fortitude.

"Well," I said quietly, "fulfil your promise. If Lilian is to pass away from me, I shall see her, at least, again; no wall, you tell me, between our minds; mind to mind once more,—once more!"

"Allen," said Faber, mournfully and softly, "why do you shun to repeat my words—soul to soul?"

"Ay, ay,—I understand. Those words mean that you have resigned all hope that Lilian's life will linger here, when her mind comes back in full consciousness; I know well that last lightning flash and the darkness which swallows it up!"

"You exaggerate my fears. I have not resigned the hope that Lilian will survive the struggle through which she is passing, but it will be cruel to deceive you—my hope is weaker than it was."

"Ay, ay. Again, I understand! Your science is in fault,—it desponds. Its last trust is in the wonderful resources of Nature, the vitality stored in the young!"

"You have said,—those resources of Nature are wondrous. The vitality of youth is a fountain springing up from the deeps out of sight, when, a moment before, we had measured the drops oozing out from the sands, and thought that the well was exhausted."

"Come with me,—come. I told you of another sufferer yonder. I want your opinion of his case. But can you be spared a few minutes from Lilian's side?"

"Yes; I left her asleep. What is the case that perplexes your eye of physician, which is usually keener than mine, despite all the length of my practice?"

"The sufferer is young, his organization rare in its vigour. He has gone through and survived assaults upon life that are commonly fatal. His system has been poisoned by the fangs of a venomous asp, and shattered by the blast of the plague. These alone, I believe, would not suffice to destroy him. But he is one who has a strong dread of death; and while the heart was thus languid and feeble, it has been gnawed by emotions of hope or of fear. I suspect that he is dying, not from the bite of the reptile, not from the taint of the pestilence, but from the hope and the fear that have overtasked the heart's functions. Judge for yourself."

We were now at the door of the hut. I unlocked it: we entered. Margrave had quitted his bed, and was pacing the room slowly. His step was less feeble, his countenance less haggard than on the previous evening.

He submitted himself to Faber's questioning with a quiet indifference, and evidently cared nothing for any opinion which the great physician might found on his replies.

When Faber had learned all he could, he said, with a grave smile: "I see that my advice will have little weight with you; such as it is, at least reflect on it. The conclusions to which your host arrived in his view of your case, and which he confided to me, are, in my humble judgment, correct. I have no doubt that the great organ of the heart is involved in the cause of your sufferings; but the heart is a noble and much-enduring organ. I have known men in whom it has been more severely and unequivocally affected with disease than it is in you, live on for many years, and ultimately die of some other disorder. But then life was held, as yours must be held, upon one condition,—repose. I enjoin you to abstain from all violent action, to shun all excitements that cause moral disturbance. You are young: would you live on, you must live as the old. More than this,—it is my duty to warn you that your tenure on earth is very precarious; you may attain to many years; you may be suddenly called hence tomorrow. The best mode to regard this uncertainty with the calm in which is your only chance of long life, is so to arrange all your worldly affairs, and so to discipline all your human anxieties, as to feel always prepared for the summons that may come without warning. For the rest, quit this climate as soon as you can,—it is the climate in which the blood courses too quickly for one who should shun all excitement. Seek the most equable atmosphere, choose the most tranquil pursuits; and Fenwick himself, in his magnificent pride of stature and strength, may be nearer the grave than you are."

"Your opinion coincides with that I have just heard?" asked Margrave, turning to me.

"In much—yes."

"It is more favourable than I should have supposed. I am far from disdaining the advice so kindly offered. Permit me, in turn, two or three questions, Dr. Faber. Do you prescribe to me no drugs from your pharmacopoeia?"

"Drugs may palliate many sufferings incidental to organic disease, but drugs cannot reach organic disease itself."

"Do you believe that, even where disease is plainly organic, Nature herself has no alternative and reparative powers, by which the organ assailed may recover itself?"

"A few exceptional instances of such forces in Nature are upon record; but we must go by general laws, and not by exceptions."

"Have you never known instances—do you not at this moment know one—in which a patient whose malady baffles the doctor's skill, imagines or dreams of a remedy? Call it a whim if you please, learned sir; do you not listen to the whim, and, in despair of your own prescriptions, comply with those of the

patient?"

Faber changed countenance, and even started. Margrave watched him and laughed.

"You grant that there are such cases, in which the patient gives the law to the physician. Now, apply your experience to my case. Suppose some strange fancy had seized upon my imagination—that is the doctor's cant word for all phenomena which we call exceptional—some strange fancy that I had thought of a cure for this disease for which you have no drugs; and suppose this fancy of mine to be so strong, so vivid, that to deny me its gratification would produce the very emotion from which you warn me as fatal,—storm the heart, that you would soothe to repose, by the passions of rage and despair,—would you, as my trusted physician, concede or deny me my whim?"

"Can you ask? I should grant it at once, if I had no reason to know that the thing that you fancied was harmful."

"Good man and wise doctor! I have no other question to ask. I thank you."

Faber looked hard on the young, wan face, over which played a smile of triumph and irony; then turned away with an expression of doubt and trouble on his own noble countenance. I followed him silently into the open air.

"Who and what is this visitor of yours?" he asked abruptly.

"Who and what? I cannot tell you."

Faber remained some moments musing, and muttering slowly to himself, "Tut! but a chance coincidence,—a haphazard allusion to a fact which he could not have known!"

"Faber," said I, abruptly, "can it be that Lilian is the patient in whose self-suggested remedies you confide more than in the various learning at command of your practised skill?"

"I cannot deny it," replied Faber, reluctantly. "In the intervals of that suspense from waking sense, which in her is not sleep, nor yet altogether catalepsy, she has, for the last few days, stated accurately the precise moment in which the trance—if I may so call it—would pass away, and prescribed for herself the remedies that should be then administered. In every instance, the remedies so self-prescribed, though certainly not those which would have occurred to my mind, have proved efficacious. Her rapid progress to reason I ascribe to the treatment she herself ordained in her trance, without remembrance of her own suggestions when she awoke. I had meant to defer communicating these phenomena in the idiosyncrasy of her case until our minds could more calmly inquire into the process by which ideas—not apparently derived, as your metaphysical school would derive all ideas, from preconceived experiences—will thus sometimes act like an instinct on the human sufferer for self-preservation, as the bird is directed to the herb or the berry which heals or assuages its ailments. We know how the mesmerists would account for this phenomenon of hygienic introvision and clairvoyance. But here, there is no mesmerizer, unless the patient can be supposed to mesmerize herself. Long, however, before mesmerism was heard of, medical history attests examples in which patients who baffled the skill of the ablest physicians have fixed their fancies on some remedy that physicians would call inoperative for good or for harm, and have recovered by the remedies thus singularly self-suggested. And Hippocrates himself, if I construe his meaning rightly, recognizes the powers for self-cure which the condition of trance will sometimes bestow on the sufferer, 'where' (says the father of our art) 'the sight being closed to the external, the soul more truthfully perceives the affections of the body.' In short—I own it—in this instance, the skill of the physician has been a compliant obedience to the instinct called forth in the patient; and the hopes I have hitherto permitted myself to give you were founded on my experience that her own hopes, conceived in trance, bad never been fallacious or exaggerated. The simples that I gathered for her yesterday she had described; they are not in our herbal. But as they are sometimes used by the natives, I had the curiosity to analyze their chemical properties shortly after I came to the colony, and they seemed to me as innocent as lime-blossoms. They are rare in this part of Australia, but she told me where I should find them,—a remote spot, which she has certainly never visited. Last night, when you saw me disturbed, dejected, it was because, for the first time, the docility with which she had hitherto, in her waking state, obeyed her own injunctions in the state of trance, forsook her. She could not be induced to taste the decoction I had made from the herbs; and if you found me this morning with weaker hopes than before, this is the real cause,—namely, that when I visited her at sunrise, she was not in sleep but in trance, and in that trance she told me that she had nothing more to suggest or reveal; that on the complete restoration of her senses, which was at hand, the abnormal faculties vouchsafed to trance would be withdrawn. 'As for my life,' she said quietly, as if unconscious of our temporary joy or woe in the term of its tenure here,—'as for my life, your aid is now idle; my own vision obscure; on my life a dark and cold shadow is resting. I cannot foresee if it will pass away. When I strive to look around, I see but my Allen—'"

"And so," said I, mastering my emotions, "in bidding me hope, you did not rely on your own resources of science, but on the whisper of Nature in the brain of your patient?"

"It is so."

We both remained silent some moments, and then, as he disappeared within my house, I murmured, —

"And when she strives to look beyond the shadow, she sees only me! Is there some prophet-hint of Nature there also, directing me not to scorn the secret which a wanderer, so suddenly dropped on my solitude, assures me that Nature will sometimes reveal to her seeker? And oh! that dark wanderer—has Nature a marvel more weird than himself?"

[1] "Besides the three great subjects of Newton's labours—the fluxional calculus, physical astronomy, and optics—a very large portion of his time, while resident in his college, was devoted to researches of which scarcely a trace remains. Alchemy, which had fascinated so many eager and ambitious minds, seems to have tempted Newton with an overwhelming force. What theories he formed, what experiments he tried, in that laboratory where, it is said, the fire was scarcely extinguished for weeks together, will never be known. It is certain that no success attended his labours; and Newton was not a man—like Kepler—to detail to the world all the hopes and disappointments, all the crude and mystical fancies, which mixed themselves up with his career of philosophy… Many years later we find Newton in correspondence with Locke, with reference to a mysterious red earth by which Boyle, who was then recently dead, had asserted that he could effect the grand desideratum of multiplying gold. By this time, however, Newton's faith had become somewhat shaken by the unsatisfactory communications which he had himself received from Boyle on the subject of the golden recipe, though he did not abandon the idea of giving the experiment a further trial as soon as the weather should become suitable for furnace experiments."—Quarterly Review, No. 220, pp. 125, 126.

[2] Southey, in his "Doctor," vol. vi. p. 2, reports the conversation of Sir Kenelm Digby with Descartes, in which the great geometrician said, "That as for rendering man immortal, it was what he could not venture to promise, but that he was very sure he could prolong his life to the standard of the patriarchs." And Southey adds, "that St. Evremond, to whom Digby repeated this, says that this opinion of Descartes was well known both to his friends in Holland and in France." By the stress Southey lays on this hearsay evidence, it is clear that he was not acquainted with the works and biography of Descartes, or be would have gone to the fountain-head for authority on Descartes's opinions, namely, Descartes himself. It is to be wished that Southey had done so, for no one more than he would have appreciated the exquisitely candid and lovable nature of the illustrious Frenchman, and the sincerity with which he cherished in his heart whatever doctrine he conceived in his understanding. Descartes, whose knowledge of anatomy was considerable, had that passion for the art of medicine which is almost inseparable from the pursuit of natural philosophy. At the age of twenty-four he had sought (in Germany) to obtain initiation into the brotherhood of the Rosicrucians, but unluckily could not discover any member of the society to introduce him. "He desired," says Cousin, "to assure the health of man, diminish his ills, extend his existence. He was terrified by the rapid and almost momentary passage of man upon earth. He believed it was not, perhaps, impossible to prolong its duration." There is a hidden recess of grandeur in this idea, and the means proposed by Descartes for the execution of his project were not less grand. In his "Discourse on Method," Descartes says, "If it is possible to find some means to render generally men more wise and more able than they have been till now, it is, I believe, in medicine that those means must be sought… I am sure that there is no one, even in the medical profession, who will not avow that all which one knows of the medical art is almost nothing in comparison to that which remains to learn, and that one could be exempted from an infinity of maladies, both of body and mind, and even, perhaps, from the decrepitude of old age, if one had sufficient lore of their causes and of all the remedies which nature provides for them. Therefore, having design to employ all my life in the research of a science so necessary, and having discovered a path which appears to me such that one ought infallibly, in following, to find it, if one is not hindered prematurely by the brevity of life or by the defects of experience, I consider that there is no better remedy against those two hindrances than to communicate faithfully to the public the little I have found," etc. ("Discours de la Methode," vol. i. OEuvres de Descartes, Cousin's Edition.) And again, in his "Correspondence" (vol. ix. p. 341), he says: "The conservation of health has been always the principal object of my studies, and I have no doubt that there is a means of acquiring much knowledge touching medicine which, up to this time, is ignored." He then refers to his meditated Treatise on Animals as only an entrance upon that knowledge. But whatever secrets Descartes may have thought to discover, they are not made known to the public according to his promise. And in a letter to M. Chanut, written in 1646 (four years before he died), he says ingenuously: "I will tell you in confidence that the notion, such as it is, which I have endeavoured to acquire in physical philosophy, had greatly assisted me to establish certain foundations for moral philosophy; and that I am more easily satisfied upon this point than I am on many others touching medicine, to which I have, nevertheless, devoted much more time.

So that"—(adds the grand thinker, with a pathetic nobleness)—"so that, instead of finding the means to preserve life, I have found another good, more easy and more sure, which is—not to fear death."

[3] Chrysococyx lucidus,—namely, the bird popularly called the shining or bronzed cuckoo. "Its note is an exceedingly melancholy whistle, heard at night, when it is very annoying to any sick or nervous person who may be inclined to sleep. I have known many instances where the bird has been perched on a tree in the vicinity of the room of an invalid, uttering its mournful notes, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that it could be dislodged from its position."—Dr. Bennett: Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australasia.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

I strayed through the forest till noon, in debate with myself, and strove to shape my wild doubts into purpose, before I could nerve and compose myself again to face Margrave alone.

I re-entered the but. To my surprise, Margrave was not in the room in which I had left him, nor in that which adjoined it. I ascended the stairs to the kind of loft in which I had been accustomed to pursue my studies, but in which I had not set foot since my alarm for Lilian had suspended my labours. There I saw Margrave quietly seated before the manuscript of my Ambitious Work, which lay open on the rude table, just as I had left it, in the midst of its concluding summary.

"I have taken the license of former days, you see," said Margrave, smiling, "and have hit by chance on a passage I can understand without effort. But why such a waste of argument to prove a fact so simple? In man, as in brute, life once lost is lost forever; and that is why life is so precious to man."

I took the book from his hand, and flung it aside in wrath. His approval revolted me more with my own theories than all the argumentative rebukes of Faber.

"And now," I said, sternly, "the time has come for the explanation you promised. Before I can aid you in any experiment that may serve to prolong your life, I must know how far that life has been a baleful and destroying influence?"

"I have some faint recollection of having saved your life from an imminent danger, and if gratitude were the attribute of man, as it is of the dog, I should claim your aid to serve mine as a right. Ask me what you will. You must have seen enough of me to know that I do not affect either the virtues or vices of others. I regard both with so supreme an indifference, that I believe I am vicious or virtuous unawares. I know not if I can explain what seems to have perplexed you, but if I cannot explain I have no intention to lie. Speak—I listen! We have time enough now before us."

So saying, he reclined back in the chair, stretching out his limbs wearily. All round this spoilt darling of Material Nature were the aids and appliances of Intellectual Science,—books and telescopes and crucibles, with the light of day coming through a small circular aperture in the boarded casement, as I had constructed the opening for my experimental observation of the prismal rays.

While I write, his image is as visible before my remembrance as if before the actual eye,—beautiful even in its decay, awful even in its weakness, mysterious as is Nature herself amidst all the mechanism by which our fancied knowledge attempts to measure her laws and analyze her light.

But at that moment no such subtle reflections delayed my inquisitive eager mind from its immediate purpose,—who and what was this creature boasting of a secret through which I might rescue from death the life of her who was my all upon the earth?

I gathered rapidly and succinctly together all that I knew and all that I guessed of Margrave's existence and arts. I commenced from my vision in that mimic Golgotha of creatures inferior to man, close by the scene of man's most trivial and meaningless pastime. I went on,—Derval's murder; the missing contents of the casket; the apparition seen by the maniac assassin guiding him to the horrid deed; the luminous haunting shadow; the positive charge in the murdered man's memoir connecting Margrave with Louis Grayle, and accusing him of the murder of Haroun; the night in the moonlit pavilion at Derval Court; the baneful influence on Lilian; the struggle between me and himself in the house by the seashore,—the strange All that is told in this Strange Story.

But warming as I spoke, and in a kind of fierce joy to be enabled thus to free my own heart of the

doubts that had burdened it, now that I was fairly face to face with the being by whom my reason had been so perplexed and my life so tortured. I was restrained by none of the fears lest my own fancy deceived me, with which in his absence I had striven to reduce to natural causes the portents of terror and wonder. I stated plainly, directly, the beliefs, the impressions which I had never dared even to myself to own without seeking to explain them away. And coming at last to a close, I said: "Such are the evidences that seem to me to justify abhorrence of the life that you ask me to aid in prolonging. Your own tale of last night but confirms them. And why to me—to me—do you come with wild entreaties to lengthen the life that has blighted my own? How did you even learn the home in which I sought unavailing refuge? How—as your hint to Faber clearly revealed—were you aware that, in yon house, where the sorrow is veiled, where the groan is suppressed, where the foot-tread falls ghostlike, there struggles now between life and death my heart's twin, my world's sunshine? Ah! through my terror for her, is it a demon that tells you how to bribe my abhorrence into submission, and supple my reason into use to your ends?"

Margrave had listened to me throughout with a fixed attention, at times with a bewildered stare, at times with exclamations of surprise, but not of denial. And when I had done, he remained for some moments silent, seemingly stupefied, passing his hand repeatedly over his brow, in the gesture so familiar to him in former days.

At length he said quietly, without evincing any sign either of resentment or humiliation,—

"In much that you tell me I recognize myself; in much I am as lost in amazement as you in wild doubt or fierce wrath. Of the effect that you say Philip Derval produced on me I have no recollection. Of himself I have only this,—that he was my foe, that he came to England intent on schemes to shorten my life or destroy its enjoyments. All my faculties tend to self-preservation; there, they converge as rays in a focus; in that focus they illume and—they burn. I willed to destroy my intended destroyer. Did my will enforce itself on the agent to which it was guided? Likely enough. Be it so. Would you blame me for slaying the tiger or serpent—not by the naked hand, but by weapons that arm it? But what could tiger and serpent do more against me than the man who would rob me of life? He had his arts for assault, I had mine for self-defence. He was to me as the tiger that creeps through the jungle, or the serpent uncoiling his folds for the spring. Death to those whose life is destruction to mine, be they serpent or tiger or man! Derval perished. Yes! the spot in which the maniac had buried the casket was revealed to me—no matter how; the contents of the casket passed into my hands. I coveted that possession because I believed that Derval had learned from Haroun of Aleppo the secret by which the elixir of life is prepared, and I supposed that some stores of the essence would be found in his casket. I was deceived —not a drop! What I there found I knew not how to use or apply, nor did I care to learn. What I sought was not there. You see a luminous shadow of myself; it haunts, it accosts, it compels you. Of this I know nothing. Was it the emanation of my intense will really producing this spectre of myself, or was it the thing of your own imagination,—an imagination which my will impressed and subjugated? I know not. At the hours when my shadow, real or supposed, was with you, my senses would have been locked in sleep. It is true, however, that I intensely desire to learn from races always near to man, but concealed from his every-day vision, the secret that I believed Philip Derval had carried with him to the tomb; and from some cause or another I cannot now of myself alone, as I could years ago, subject those races to my command,—I must, in that, act through or with the mind of another. It is true that I sought to impress upon your waking thoughts the images of the circle, the powers of the wand, which, in your trance or sleep-walking, made you the involuntary agent of my will. I knew by a dream—for by dreams, more or less vivid, are the results of my waking will sometimes divulged to myself—that the spell had been broken, the discovery I sought not effected. All my hopes were then transferred from yourself, the dull votary of science, to the girl whom I charmed to my thraldom through her love for you and through her dreams of a realm which the science of schools never enters. In her, imagination was all pure and all potent; and tell me, O practical reasoner, if reason has ever advanced one step into knowledge except through that imaginative faculty which is strongest in the wisdom of ignorance, and weakest in the ignorance of the wise. Ponder this, and those marvels that perplex you will cease to be marvellous. I pass on to the riddle that puzzles you most. By Philip Derval's account I am, in truth, Louis Grayle restored to youth by the elixir, and while yet infirm, decrepit, murdered Haroun,—a man of a frame as athletic as yours! By accepting this notion you seem to yourself alone to unravel the mysteries you ascribe to my life and my powers. O wise philosopher! O profound logician! you accept that notion, yet hold my belief in the Dervish's tale a chimera! I am Grayle made young by the elixir, and yet the elixir itself is a fable!"

He paused and laughed, but the laugh was no longer even an echo of its former merriment or playfulness,—a sinister and terrible laugh, mocking, threatening, malignant.

Again he swept his hand over his brow, and resumed,—

"Is it not easier to so accomplished a sage as you to believe that the idlers of Paris have guessed the

true solution of that problem, my place on this earth? May I not be the love-son of Louis Grayle? And when Haroun refused the elixir to him, or he found that his frame was too far exhausted for even the elixir to repair organic lesions of structure in the worn frame of old age, may he not have indulged the common illusion of fathers, and soothed his death-pangs with the thought that he should live again in his son? Haroun is found dead on his carpet—rumour said strangled. What proof of the truth of that rumour? Might he not have passed away in a fit? Will it lessen your perplexity if I state recollections? They are vague,—they often perplex myself; but so far from a wish to deceive you, my desire is to relate them so truthfully that you may aid me to reduce them into more definite form."

His face now became very troubled, the tone of his voice very irresolute,—the face and the voice of a man who is either blundering his way through an intricate falsehood, or through obscure reminiscences.

"This Louis Grayle! this Louis Grayle! I remember him well, as one remembers a nightmare. Whenever I look back, before the illness of which I will presently speak, the image of Louis Grayle returns to me. I see myself with him in African wilds, commanding the fierce Abyssinians. I see myself with him in the fair Persian valley,-lofty, snow-covered mountains encircling the garden of roses. I see myself with him in the hush of the golden noon, reclined by the spray of cool fountains,—now listening to cymbals and lutes, now arguing with graybeards on secrets bequeathed by the Chaldees,—with him, with him in moonlit nights, stealing into the sepulchres of mythical kings. I see myself with him in the aisles of dark caverns, surrounded by awful shapes, which have no likeness amongst the creatures of earth. Louis Grayle! Louis Grayle! all my earlier memories go back to Louis Grayle! All my arts and powers, all that I have learned of the languages spoken in Europe, of the sciences taught in her schools, I owe to Louis Grayle. But am I one and the same with him? No—I am but a pale reflection of his giant intellect. I have not even a reflection of his childlike agonies of sorrow. Louis Grayle! He stands apart from me, as a rock from the tree that grows out from its chasms. Yes, the gossip was right; I must be his son."

He leaned his face on both hands, rocking himself to and fro. At length, with a sigh, he resumed,—

"I remember, too, a long and oppressive illness, attended with racking pains, a dismal journey in a wearisome litter, the light hand of the woman Ayesha, so sad and so stately, smoothing my pillow or fanning my brows. I remember the evening on which my nurse drew the folds of the litter aside, and said, 'See Aleppo! and the star of thy birth shining over its walls!'

"I remember a face inexpressibly solemn and mournful. I remember the chill that the calm of its ominous eye sent through my veins,—the face of Haroun, the Sage of Aleppo. I remember the vessel of crystal he bore in his hand, and the blessed relief from my pains that a drop from the essence which flashed through the crystal bestowed! And then—and then—I remember no more till the night on which Ayesha came to my couch and said, 'Rise.'

"And I rose, leaning on her, supported by her. We went through dim narrow streets, faintly lit by wan stars, disturbing the prowl of the dogs, that slunk from the look of that woman. We came to a solitary house, small and low, and my nurse said, 'Wait.'

"She opened the door and went in; I seated myself on the threshold. And after a time she came out from the house, and led me, still leaning on her, into her chamber.

"A man lay, as in sleep, on the carpet, and beside him stood another man, whom I recognized as Ayesha's special attendant,—an Indian. 'Haroun is dead,' said Ayesha. 'Search for that which will give thee new life. Thou hast seen, and wilt know it, not I.'

"And I put my hand on the breast of Haroun—for the dead man was he—and drew from it the vessel of crystal.

"Having done so, the frown of his marble brow appalled me. I staggered back, and swooned away.

"I came to my senses, recovering and rejoicing, miles afar from the city, the dawn red on its distant wall. Ayesha had tended me; the elixir had already restored me.

"My first thought, when full consciousness came back to me, rested on Louis Grayle, for he also had been at Aleppo; I was but one of his numerous train. He, too, was enfeebled and suffering; he had sought the known skill of Haroun for himself as for me; and this woman loved and had tended him as she had loved and tended me. And my nurse told me that he was dead, and forbade me henceforth to breathe his name.

"We travelled on,—she and I, and the Indian her servant,—my strength still renewed by the wondrous elixir. No longer supported by her, what gazelle ever roved through its pasture with a bound more

elastic than mine?

"We came to a town, and my nurse placed before me a mirror. I did not recognize myself. In this town we rested, obscure, till the letter there reached me by which I learned that I was the offspring of love, and enriched by the care of a father recently dead. Is it not clear that Louis Grayle was this father?"

"If so, was the woman Ayesha your mother?"

"The letter said that 'my mother had died in my infancy.' Nevertheless, the care with which Ayesha had tended me induced a suspicion that made me ask her the very question you put. She wept when I asked her, and said, 'No, only my nurse. And now I needed a nurse no more.' The day after I received the letter which announced an inheritance that allowed me to vie with the nobles of Europe, this woman left me, and went back to her tribe."

"Have you never seen her since?"

Margrave hesitated a moment, and then answered, though with seeming reluctance, "Yes, at Damascus. Not many days after I was borne to that city by the strangers who found me half-dead on their road, I woke one morning to find her by my side. And she said, 'In joy and in health you did not need me. I am needed now."'

"Did you then deprive yourself of one so devoted? You have not made this long voyage—from Egypt to Australia—alone,—you, to whom wealth gave no excuse for privation?"

"The woman came with me; and some chosen attendants. I engaged to ourselves the vessel we sailed in."

"Where have you left your companions?"

"By this hour," answered Margrave, "they are in reach of my summons; and when you and I have achieved the discovery—in the results of which we shall share—I will exact no more from your aid. I trust all that rests for my cure to my nurse and her swarthy attendants. You will aid me now, as a matter of course; the physician whose counsel you needed to guide your own skill enjoins you to obey my whim—if whim you still call it; you will obey it, for on that whim rests your own sole hope of happiness,—you, who can love—I love nothing but life. Has my frank narrative solved all the doubts that stood between you and me, in the great meeting-grounds of an interest in common?"

"Solved all the doubts! Your wild story but makes some the darker, leaving others untouched: the occult powers of which you boast, and some of which I have witnessed,—your very insight into my own household sorrows, into the interests I have, with yourself, in the truth of a faith so repugnant to reason —"

"Pardon me," interrupted Margrave, with that slight curve of the lip which is half smile and half sneer, "if, in my account of myself, I omitted what I cannot explain, and you cannot conceive: let me first ask how many of the commonest actions of the commonest men are purely involuntary and wholly inexplicable. When, for instance, you open your lips and utter a sentence, you have not the faintest idea beforehand what word will follow another. When you move a muscle can you tell me the thought that prompts to the movement? And, wholly unable thus to account for your own simple sympathies between impulse and act, do you believe that there exists a man upon earth who can read all the riddles in the heart and brain of another? Is it not true that not one drop of water, one atom of matter, ever really touches another? Between each and each there is always a space, however infinitesimally small. How, then, could the world go on, if every man asked another to make his whole history and being as lucid as daylight before he would buy and sell with him? All interchange and alliance rest but on this,—an interest in common. You and I have established that interest: all else, all you ask more, is superfluous. Could I answer each doubt you would raise, still, whether the answer should please or revolt you, your reason would come back to the same starting-point, —namely, In one definite proposal have we two an interest in common?"

And again Margrave laughed, not in mirth, but in mockery. The laugh and the words that preceded it were not the laugh and the words of the young. Could it be possible that Louis Grayle had indeed revived to false youth in the person of Margrave, such might have been his laugh and such his words. The whole mind of Margrave seemed to have undergone change since I last saw him; more rich in idea, more crafty even in candour, more powerful, more concentred. As we see in our ordinary experience, that some infirmity, threatening dissolution, brings forth more vividly the reminiscences of early years, when impressions were vigorously stamped, so I might have thought that as Margrave neared the tomb, the memories he had retained from his former existence, in a being more amply endowed, more formidably potent, struggled back to the brain; and the mind that had lived in Louis Grayle moved the lips of the dying Margrave.

"For the powers and the arts that it equally puzzles your reason to assign or deny to me," resumed my terrible guest, "I will say briefly but this: they come from faculties stored within myself, and doubtless conduce to my self-preservation,—faculties more or less, perhaps (so Van Helmont asserts), given to all men, though dormant in most; vivid and active in me because in me self-preservation has been and yet is the strong master-passion, or instinct; and because I have been taught how to use and direct such faculties by disciplined teachers,—some by Louis Grayle, the enchanter; some by my nurse, the singer of charmed songs. But in much that I will to have done, I know no more than yourself how the agency acts. Enough for me to will what I wish, and sink calmly into slumber, sure that the will would work somehow its way. But when I have willed to know what, when known, should shape my own courses, I could see, without aid from your pitiful telescopes, all objects howsoever far. What wonder in that? Have you no learned puzzle-brained metaphysicians who tell you that space is but an idea, all this palpable universe an idea in the mind, and no more? Why am I an enigma as dark as the Sibyls, and your metaphysicians as plain as a hornbook?" Again the sardonic laugh. "Enough: let what I have said obscure or enlighten your guesses, we come back to the same link of union, which binds man to man, bids States arise from the desert, and foeman embrace as brothers. I need you and you need me; without your aid my life is doomed; without my secret the breath will have gone from the lips of your Lilian before the sun of to-morrow is red on the hill-tops."

"Fiend or juggler," I cried in rage, "you shall not so enslave and enthrall me by this mystic farrago and jargon. Make your fantastic experiment on yourself if you will: trust to your arts and your powers. My Lilian's life shall not hang on your fiat. I trust it—to—"

"To what—to man's skill? Hear what the sage of the college shall tell you, before I ask you again for your aid. Do you trust to God's saving mercy? Ah, of course you believe in a God? Who, except a philosopher, can reason a Maker away? But that the Maker will alter His courses to hear you; that, whether or not you trust in Him, or in your doctor, it will change by a hairbreadth the thing that must be—do you believe this, Allen Fenwick?"

And there sat this reader of hearts! a boy in his aspect, mocking me and the graybeards of schools.

I could listen no more; I turned to the door and fled down the stairs, and heard, as I fled, a low chant: feeble and faint, it was still the old barbaric chant, by which the serpent is drawn from its hole by the charmer.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

To those of my readers who may seek with Julius Faber to explore, through intelligible causes, solutions of the marvels I narrate, Margrave's confession may serve to explain away much that my own superstitious beliefs had obscured. To them Margrave is evidently the son of Louis Grayle. The elixir of life is reduced to some simple restorative, owing much of its effect to the faith of a credulous patient: youth is so soon restored to its joy in the sun, with or without an elixir. To them Margrave's arts of enchantment are reduced to those idiosyncrasies of temperament on which the disciples of Mesmer build up their theories,—exaggerated, in much, by my own superstitions; aided, in part, by such natural, purely physical magic as, explored by the ancient priest-crafts, is despised by the modern philosophies, and only remains occult because Science delights no more in the slides of the lantern which fascinated her childhood with simulated phantoms. To them Margrave is, perhaps, an enthusiast, but, because an enthusiast, not less an impostor. "L'Homme se pique," says Charron. Man cogs the dice for himself ere he rattles the box for his dupes. Was there ever successful impostor who did not commence by a fraud on his own understanding? Cradled in Orient Fableland, what though Margrave believes in its legends; in a wand, an elixir; in sorcerers or Afrites? That belief in itself makes him keen to detect, and skilful to profit by, the latent but kindred credulities of others. In all illustrations of Duper and Duped through the records of superstition—from the guile of a Cromwell, a Mahomet, down to the cheats of a gypsy—professional visionaries are amongst the astutest observers. The knowledge that Margrave had gained of my abode, of my affliction, or of the innermost thoughts in my mind, it surely demanded no preternatural aids to acquire. An Old Bailey attorney could have got at the one, and any quick student of human hearts have readily mastered the other. In fine, Margrave, thus rationally criticised, is no other prodigy (save in degree and concurrence of attributes simple, though not very common) than may be found in each alley that harbours a fortune-teller who has just faith enough in the stars or the cards to bubble himself while he swindles his victims; earnest, indeed, in the self-conviction that he is really a seer, but reading the looks of his listeners, divining the thoughts that induce them to listen, and acquiring by practice a startling ability to judge what the listeners will deem

it most seer-like to read in the cards or divine from the stars.

I leave this interpretation unassailed. It is that which is the most probable; it is clearly that which, in a case not my own, I should have accepted; and yet I revolved and dismissed it. The moment we deal with things beyond our comprehension, and in which our own senses are appealed to and baffled, we revolt from the Probable, as it seems to the senses of those who have not experienced what we have. And the same principle of Wonder that led our philosophy up from inert ignorance into restless knowledge, now winding back into shadow land, reverses its rule by the way, and, at last, leaves us lost in the maze, our knowledge inert, and our ignorance restless.

And putting aside all other reasons for hesitating to believe that Margrave was the son of Louis Grayle,—reasons which his own narrative might suggest,—was it not strange that Sir Philip Derval, who had instituted inquiries so minute, and reported them in his memoir with so faithful a care, should not have discovered that a youth, attended by the same woman who had attended Grayle, had disappeared from the town on the same night as Grayle himself disappeared? But Derval had related truthfully, according to Margrave's account, the flight of Ayesha and her Indian servant, yet not alluded to the flight, not even to the existence of the boy, who must have been of no mean importance in the suite of Louis Grayle, if he were, indeed, the son whom Grayle had made his constant companion, and constituted his principal heir. Not many minutes did I give myself up to the cloud of reflections through which no sunbeam of light forced its way. One thought overmastered all; Margrave had threatened death to my Lilian, and warned me of what I should learn from the lips of Faber, "the sage of the college." I stood, shuddering, at the door of my home; I did not dare to enter.

"Allen," said a voice, in which my ear detected the unwonted tremulous faltering, "be firm,—be calm. I keep my promise. The hour is come in which you may again see the Lilian of old, mind to mind, soul to soul."

Faber's hand took mine, and led me into the house.

"You do, then, fear that this interview will be too much for her strength?" said I, whisperingly.

"I cannot say; but she demands the interview, and I dare not refuse it."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

I left Faber on the stairs, and paused at the door of Lilian's room. The door opened suddenly, noiselessly, and her mother came out with one hand before her face, and the other locked in Amy's, who was leading her as a child leads the blind. Mrs. Ashleigh looked up, as I touched her, with a vacant, dreary stare. She was not weeping, as was her womanly wont in every pettier grief, but Amy was. No word was exchanged between us. I entered, and closed the door; my eyes turned mechanically to the corner in which was placed the small virgin bed, with its curtains white as a shroud. Lilian was not there. I looked around, and saw her half reclined on a couch near the window. She was dressed, and with care. Was not that her bridal robe?

"Allen! Allen!" she murmured. "Again, again my Allen—again, again your Lilian!" And, striving in vain to rise, she stretched out her arms in the yearning of reunited love. And as I knelt beside her, those arms closed round me for the first time in the frank, chaste, holy tenderness of a wife's embrace.

"Ah!" she said, in her low voice (her voice, like Cordelia's, was ever low), "all has come back to me,—all that I owe to your protecting, noble, trustful, guardian love!"

"Hush! hush! the gratitude rests with me; it is so sweet to love, to trust, to guard! my own, my beautiful—still my beautiful! Suffering has not dimmed the light of those dear eyes to me! Put your lips to my ear. Whisper but these words: 'I love you, and for your sake I wish to live.'"

"For your sake, I pray—with my whole weak human heart—I pray to live! Listen. Some day hereafter, if I am spared, under the purple blossoms of yonder waving trees I shall tell you all, as I see it now; all that darkened or shone on me in my long dream, and before the dream closed around me, like a night in which cloud and star chase each other! Some day hereafter, some quiet, sunlit, happy, happy day! But now, all I would say is this: Before that dreadful morning—" Here she paused, shuddered, and passionately burst forth, "Allen, Allen! you did not believe that slanderous letter! God bless you! God

bless you! Great-hearted, high-souled—God bless you, my darling! my husband! And He will! Pray to Him humbly as I do, and He will bless you." She stooped and kissed away my tears; then she resumed, feebly, meekly, sorrowfully,—

"Before that morning I was not worthy of such a heart, such a love as yours. No, no; hear me. Not that a thought of love for another ever crossed me! Never, while conscious and reasoning, was I untrue to you, even in fancy. But I was a child,—wayward as the child who pines for what earth cannot give, and covets the moon for a toy. Heaven had been so kind to my lot on earth, and yet with my lot on earth I was secretly discontented. When I felt that you loved me, and my heart told me that I loved again, I said to myself, 'Now the void that my soul finds on earth will be filled.' I longed for your coming, and yet when you went I murmured, 'But is this the ideal of which I have dreamed?' I asked for an impossible sympathy. Sympathy with what? Nay, smile on me, dearest!—sympathy with what? I could not have said. Ah, Allen, then, then, I was not worthy of you! Infant that I was, I asked you to understand me: now I know that I am a woman, and my task is to study you. Do I make myself clear? Do you forgive me? I was not untrue to you; I was untrue to my own duties in life. I believed, in my vain conceit, that a mortal's dim vision of heaven raised me above the earth; I did not perceive the truth that earth is a part of the same universe as heaven! Now, perhaps, in the awful affliction that darkened my reason, my soul has been made more clear. As if to chastise but to teach me, my soul has been permitted to indulge its own presumptuous desire; it has wandered forth from the trammels of mortal duties and destinies; it comes back, alarmed by the dangers of its own rash and presumptuous escape from the tasks which it should desire upon earth to perform. Allen, Allen, I am less unworthy of you now! Perhaps in my darkness one rapid glimpse of the true world of spirit has been vouchsafed to me. If so, how unlike to the visions my childhood indulged as divine! Now, while I know still more deeply that there is a world for the angels, I know, also, that the mortal must pass through probation in the world of mortals. Oh, may I pass through it with you, grieving in your griefs, rejoicing in your joy!"

Here language failed her. Again the dear arms embraced me, and the dear face, eloquent with love, hid itself on my human breast.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

That interview is over! Again I am banished from Lilian's room; the agitation, the joy of that meeting has overstrained her enfeebled nerves. Convulsive tremblings of the whole frame, accompanied with vehement sobs, succeeded our brief interchange of sweet and bitter thoughts. Faber, in tearing me from her side, imperiously and sternly warned me that the sole chance yet left of preserving her life was in the merciful suspense of the emotions that my presence excited. He and Amy resumed their place in her chamber. Even her mother shared my sentence of banishment. So Mrs. Ashleigh and I sat facing each other in the room below; over me a leaden stupor had fallen, and I heard, as a voice from afar or in a dream, the mother's murmured wailings,

"She will die! she will die! Her eyes have the same heavenly look as my Gilbert's on the day on which his closed forever. Her very words are his last words,—'Forgive me all my faults to you.' She will die! she will die!"

Hours thus passed away. At length Faber entered the room; he spoke first to Mrs. Ashleigh,—meaningless soothings, familiar to the lips of all who pass from the chamber of the dying to the presence of mourners, and know that it is a falsehood to say "hope," and a mockery as yet, to say, "endure."

But he led her away to her own room, docile as a wearied child led to sleep, stayed with her some time, and then returned to me, pressing me to his breast father-like.

"No hope! no hope!" said I, recoiling from his embrace. "You are silent.
Speak! speak! Let me know the worst."

"I have a hope, yet I scarcely dare to bid you share it; for it grows rather out of my heart as man than my experience as physician. I cannot think that her soul would be now so reconciled to earth, so fondly, so earnestly, cling to this mortal life, if it were about to be summoned away. You know how commonly even the sufferers who have dreaded death the most become calmly resigned to its coming, when death visibly reveals itself out from the shadows in which its shape has been guessed and not seen. As it is a bad sign for life when the patient has lost all will to live on, so there is hope while the patient, yet

young and with no perceptible breach in the great centres of life (however violently their forts may be stormed), has still intense faith in recovery, perhaps drawn (who can say?) from the whispers conveyed from above to the soul.

"I cannot bring myself to think that all the uses for which a reason, always so lovely even in its errors, has been restored, are yet fulfilled. It seems to me as if your union, as yet so imperfect, has still for its end that holy life on earth by which two mortal beings strengthen each other for a sphere of existence to which this is the spiritual ladder. Through yourself I have hope yet for her. Gifted with powers that rank you high in the manifold orders of man,—thoughtful, laborious, and brave; with a heart that makes intellect vibrate to every fine touch of humanity; in error itself, conscientious; in delusion, still eager for truth; in anger, forgiving; in wrong, seeking how to repair; and, best of all, strong in a love which the mean would have shrunk to defend from the fangs of the slanderer,—a love, raising passion itself out of the realm of the senses, made sublime by the sorrows that tried its devotion,—with all these noble proofs in yourself of a being not meant to end here, your life has stopped short in its uses, your mind itself has been drifted, a bark without rudder or pilot, over seas without shore, under skies without stars. And wherefore? Because the mind you so haughtily vaunted has refused its companion and teacher in Soul.

"And therefore, through you, I hope that she will be spared yet to live on; she, in whom soul has been led dimly astray, by unheeding the checks and the definite goals which the mind is ordained to prescribe to its wanderings while here; the mind taking thoughts from the actual and visible world, and the soul but vague glimpses and hints from the instinct of its ultimate heritage. Each of you two seems to me as yet incomplete, and your destinies yet uncompleted. Through the bonds of the heart, through the trials of time, ye have both to consummate your marriage. I do not—believe me—I do not say this in the fanciful wisdom of allegory and type, save that, wherever deeply examined, allegory and type run through all the most commonplace phases of outward and material life. I hope, then, that she may yet be spared to you; hope it, not from my skill as physician, but my inward belief as a Christian. To perfect your own being and end, 'Ye will need one another!'"

I started—the very words that Lilian had heard in her vision!

"But," resumed Faber, "how can I presume to trace the numberless links of effect up to the First Cause, far off—oh; far off—out of the scope of my reason. I leave that to philosophers, who would laugh my meek hope to scorn. Possibly, probably, where I, whose calling has been but to save flesh from the worm, deem that the life of your Lilian is needed yet, to develop and train your own convictions of soul, Heaven in its wisdom may see that her death would instruct you far more than her life. I have said, Be prepared for either,—wisdom through joy, or wisdom through grief. Enough that, looking only through the mechanism by which this moral world is impelled and improved, you know that cruelty is impossible to wisdom. Even a man, or man's law, is never wise but when merciful. But mercy has general conditions; and that which is mercy to the myriads may seem hard to the one, and that which seems hard to the one in the pang of a moment may be mercy when viewed by the eye that looks on through eternity."

And from all this discourse—of which I now, at calm distance of time, recall every word—my human, loving heart bore away for the moment but this sentence, "Ye will need one another;" so that I cried out, "Life, life, life! Is there no hope for her life? Have you no hope as physician? I am a physician, too; I will see her. I will judge. I will not be banished from my post."

"Judge, then, as physician, and let the responsibility rest with you. At this moment, all convulsion, all struggle, has ceased; the frame is at rest. Look on her, and perhaps only the physician's eye could distinguish her state from death. It is not sleep, it is not trance, it is not the dooming coma from which there is no awaking. Shall I call it by the name received in our schools? Is it the catalepsy in which life is suspended, but consciousness acute? She is motionless, rigid; it is but with a strain of my own sense that I know that the breath still breathes, and the heart still beats. But I am convinced that though she can neither speak, nor stir, nor give sign, she is fully, sensitively conscious of all that passes around her. She is like those who have seen the very coffin carried into their chamber, and been unable to cry out, 'Do not bury me alive!' Judge then for yourself, with this intense consciousness and this impotence to evince it, what might be the effect of your presence,—first an agony of despair, and then the complete extinction of life!"

"I have known but one such case,—a mother whose heart was wrapped up in a suffering infant. She had lain for two days and two nights, still, as if in her shroud. All save myself said, 'Life is gone.' I said, 'Life still is there.' They brought in the infant, to try what effect its presence would produce; then her lips moved, and the hands crossed upon her bosom trembled."

"And the result?" exclaimed Faber, eagerly. "If the result of your experience sanction your presence, come; the sight of the babe rekindled life?"

"No; extinguished its last spark! I will not enter Lilian's room. I will go away,—away from the house itself. That acute consciousness! I know it well! She may even hear me move in the room below, hear me speak at this moment. Go back to her, go back! But if hers be the state which I have known in another, which may be yet more familiar to persons of far ampler experience than mine, there is no immediate danger of death. The state will last through to-day, through to-night, perhaps for days to come. Is it so?"

"I believe that for at least twelve hours there will be no change in her state. I believe also that if she recover from it, calm and refreshed, as from a sleep, the danger of death will have passed away."

"And for twelve hours my presence would be hurtful?"

"Rather say fatal, if my diagnosis be right."

I wrung my friend's hand, and we parted.

Oh, to lose her now!—now that her love and her reason had both returned, each more vivid than before! Futile, indeed, might be Margrave's boasted secret; but at least in that secret was hope. In recognized science I saw only despair.

And at that thought all dread of this mysterious visitor vanished,—all anxiety to question more of his attributes or his history. His life itself became to me dear and precious. What if it should fail me in the steps of the process, whatever that was, by which the life of my Lilian might be saved!

The shades of evening were now closing in. I remembered that I had left Margrave without even food for many hours. I stole round to the back of the house, filled a basket with elements more generous than those of the former day; extracted fresh drugs from my stores, and, thus laden, hurried back to the hut. I found Margrave in the room below, seated on his mysterious coffer, leaning his face on his hand. When I entered, he looked up, and said,—

"You have neglected me. My strength is waning. Give me more of the cordial, for we have work before us to-night, and I need support."

He took for granted my assent to his wild experiment; and he was right.

I administered the cordial. I placed food before him, and this time he did not eat with repugnance. I poured out wine, and he drank it sparingly, but with ready compliance, saying, "In perfect health, I looked upon wine as poison; now it is like a foretaste of the glorious elixir."

After he had thus recruited himself, he seemed to acquire an energy that startlingly contrasted his languor the day before; the effort of breathing was scarcely perceptible; the colour came back to his cheeks; his bended frame rose elastic and erect.

"If I understood you rightly," said I, "the experiment you ask me to aid can be accomplished in a single night?"

"In a single night,—this night."

"Command me. Why not begin at once? What apparatus or chemical agencies do you need?"

"Ah!" said Margrave, "formerly, how I was misled! Formerly, how my conjectures blundered! I thought, when I asked you to give a month to the experiment I wish to make, that I should need the subtlest skill of the chemist. I then believed, with Van Helmont, that the principle of life is a gas, and that the secret was but in the mode by which the gas might be rightly administered. But now all that I need is contained in this coffer, save one very simple material,—fuel sufficient for a steady fire for six hours. I see even that is at hand, piled up in your outhouse. And now for the substance itself,—to that you must guide me."

"Explain."

"Near this very spot is there not gold—in mines yet undiscovered?—and gold of the purest metal?"

"There is. What then? Do you, with the alchemists, blend in one discovery gold and life?"

"No. But it is only where the chemistry of earth or of man produces gold, that the substance from which the great pabulum of life is extracted by ferment can be found. Possibly, in the attempts at that transmutation of metals, which I think your own great chemist, Sir Humphry Davy, allowed might be possible, but held not to be worth the cost of the process,—possibly, in those attempts, some scanty grains of this substance were found by the alchemists, in the crucible, with grains of the metal as

niggardly yielded by pitiful mimicry of Nature's stupendous laboratory; and from such grains enough of the essence might, perhaps, have been drawn forth, to add a few years of existence to some feeble graybeard,—granting, what rests on no proofs, that some of the alchemists reached an age rarely given to man. But it is not in the miserly crucible, it is in the matrix of Nature herself, that we must seek in prolific abundance Nature's grand principle,—life. As the loadstone is rife with the magnetic virtue, as amber contains the electric, so in this substance, to which we yet want a name, is found the bright life-giving fluid. In the old goldmines of Asia and Europe the substance exists, but can rarely be met with. The soil for its nutriment may there be well-nigh exhausted. It is here, where Nature herself is all vital with youth, that the nutriment of youth must be sought. Near this spot is gold; guide me to it."

"You cannot come with me. The place which I know as auriferous is some miles distant, the way rugged. You can not walk to it. It is true I have horses, but—"

"Do you think I have come this distance and not foreseen and forestalled all that I want for my object? Trouble your self not with conjectures how I can arrive at the place. I have provided the means to arrive at and leave it. My litter and its bearers are in reach of my call. Give me your arm to the rising ground, fifty yards from your door."

I obeyed mechanically, stifling all surprise. I had made my resolve, and admitted no thought that could shake it. When we reached the summit of the grassy hillock, which sloped from the road that led to the seaport, Margrave, after pausing to recover breath, lifted up his voice, in a key, not loud, but shrill and slow and prolonged, half cry and half chant, like the nighthawk's. Through the air—so limpid and still, bringing near far objects, far sounds—the voice pierced its way, artfully pausing, till wave after wave of the atmosphere bore and transmitted it on.

In a few minutes the call seemed re-echoed, so exactly, so cheerily, that for the moment I thought that the note was the mimicry of the shy mocking Lyre-Bird, which mimics so merrily all that it hears in its coverts, from the whir of the locust to the howl of the wild dog.

"What king," said the mystical charmer, and as he spoke he carelessly rested his hand on my shoulder, so that I trembled to feel that this dread son of Nature, Godless and soulless, who had been—and, my heart whispered, who still could be—my bane and mind-darkener, leaned upon me for support, as the spoilt younger-born on his brother,—"what king," said this cynical mocker, with his beautiful boyish face,—"what king in your civilized Europe has the sway of a chief of the East? What link is so strong between mortal and mortal, as that between lord and slave? I transport yon poor fools from the land of their birth; they preserve here their old habits,—obedience and awe. They would wait till they starved in the solitude,—wait to hearken and answer my call. And I, who thus rule them, or charm them —I use and despise them. They know that, and yet serve me! Between you and me, my philosopher, there is but one thing worth living for,—life for oneself."

Is it age, is it youth, that thus shocks all my sense, in my solemn completeness of man? Perhaps, in great capitals, young men of pleasure will answer, "It is youth; and we think what he says!" Young friends, I do not believe you.

CHAPTER LXXX.

Along the grass-track I saw now, under the moon, just risen, a strange procession, never seen before in Australian pastures. It moved on, noiselessly but quickly. We descended the hillock, and met it on the way,—a sable litter, borne by four men, in unfamiliar Eastern garments; two other servitors, more bravely dressed, with yataghans and silver-hilted pistols in their belts, preceded this sombre equipage. Perhaps Margrave divined the disdainful thought that passed through my mind, vaguely and half-unconsciously; for he said, with a hollow, bitter laugh that had replaced the lively peal of his once melodious mirth,—

"A little leisure and a little gold, and your raw colonist, too, will have the tastes of a pacha."

I made no answer. I had ceased to care who and what was my tempter. To me his whole being was resolved into one problem: Had he a secret by which death could be turned from Lilian?

But now, as the litter halted, from the long dark shadow which it cast upon the turf the figure of a woman emerged and stood before us. The outlines of her shape were lost in the loose folds of a black mantle, and the features of her face were hidden by a black veil, except only the dark, bright, solemn

eyes. Her stature was lofty, her bearing majestic, whether in movement or repose.

Margrave accosted her in some language unknown to me. She replied in what seemed to me the same tongue. The tones of her voice were sweet, but inexpressibly mournful. The words that they uttered appeared intended to warn, or deprecate, or dissuade; but they called to Margrave's brow a lowering frown, and drew from his lips a burst of unmistakable anger. The woman rejoined, in the same melancholy music of voice. And Margrave then, leaning his arm upon her shoulder, as he had leaned it on mine, drew her away from the group into a neighbouring copse of the flowering eucalypti,—mystic trees, never changing the hues of their pale-green leaves, ever shifting the tints of their ash-gray, shedding bark. For some moments I gazed on the two human forms, dimly seen by the glinting moonlight through the gaps in the foliage. Then turning away my eyes, I saw, standing close at my side, a man whom I had not noticed before. His footstep, as it stole to me, had fallen on the sward without sound. His dress, though Oriental, differed from that of his companions, both in shape and colour; fitting close to the breast, leaving the arms bare to the elbow, and of a uniform ghastly white, as are the cerements of the grave. His visage was even darker than those of the Syrians or Arabs behind him, and his features were those of a bird of prey,—the beak of the eagle, but the eye of the vulture. His cheeks were hollow; the arms, crossed on his breast, were long and fleshless. Yet in that skeleton form there was a something which conveyed the idea of a serpent's suppleness and strength; and as the hungry, watchful eyes met my own startled gaze, I recoiled impulsively with that inward warning of danger which is conveyed to man, as to inferior animals, in the very aspect of the creatures that sting or devour. At my movement the man inclined his head in the submissive Eastern salutation, and spoke in his foreign tongue, softly, humbly, fawningly, to judge by his tone and his gesture.

I moved yet farther away from him with loathing, and now the human thought flashed upon me: was I, in truth, exposed to no danger in trusting myself to the mercy of the weird and remorseless master of those hirelings from the East,—seven men in number, two at least of them formidably armed, and docile as bloodhounds to the hunter, who has only to show them their prey? But fear of man like myself is not my weakness; where fear found its way to my heart, it was through the doubts or the fancies in which man like myself disappeared in the attributes, dark and unknown, which we give to a fiend or a spectre. And, perhaps, if I could have paused to analyze my own sensations, the very presence of this escort-creatures of flesh and blood-lessened the dread of my incomprehensible tempter. Rather, a hundred times, front and defy those seven Eastern slaves—I, haughty son of the Anglo-Saxon who conquers all races because he fears no odds—than have seen again on the walls of my threshold the luminous, bodiless Shadow! Besides: Lilian! Lilian! for one chance of saving her life, however wild and chimerical that chance might be, I would have shrunk not a foot from the march of an army.

Thus reassured and thus resolved, I advanced, with a smile of disdain, to meet Margrave and his veiled companion, as they now came from the moonlit copse.

"Well," I said to him, with an irony that unconsciously mimicked his own, "have you taken advice with your nurse? I assume that the dark form by your side is that of Ayesha."

The woman looked at me from her sable veil, with her steadfast solemn eyes, and said, in English, though with a foreign accent: "The nurse born in Asia is but wise through her love; the pale son of Europe is wise through his art. The nurse says, 'Forbear!' Do you say, 'Adventure'?"

"Peace!" exclaimed Margrave, stamping his foot on the ground. "I take no counsel from either; it is for me to resolve, for you to obey, and for him to aid. Night is come, and we waste it; move on."

The woman made no reply, nor did I. He took my arm and walked back to the hut. The barbaric escort followed. When we reached the door of the building, Margrave said a few words to the woman and to the litter-bearers. They entered the but with us. Margrave pointed out to the woman his coffer, to the men the fuel stowed in the outhouse. Both were borne away and placed within the litter. Meanwhile, I took from the table, on which it was carelessly thrown, the light hatchet that I habitually carried with me in my rambles.

"Do you think that you need that idle weapon?" said Margrave. "Do you fear the good faith of my swarthy attendants?"

"Nay, take the hatchet yourself; its use is to sever the gold from the quartz in which we may find it embedded, or to clear, as this shovel, which will also be needed, from the slight soil above it, the ore that the mine in the mountain flings forth, as the sea casts its waifs on the sands."

"Give me your hand, fellow-labourer!" said Margrave, joyfully. "Ah, there is no faltering terror in this pulse! I was not mistaken in the Man. What rests, but the Place and the Hour? I shall live! I shall live!"

CHAPTER LXXXI.

Margrave now entered the litter, and the Veiled Woman drew the black curtains round him. I walked on, as the guide, some yards in advance. The air was still, heavy, and parched with the breath of the Australasian sirocco.

We passed through the meadow-lands, studded with slumbering flocks; we followed the branch of the creek, which was linked to its source in the mountains by many a trickling waterfall; we threaded the gloom of stunted, misshapen trees, gnarled with the stringy bark which makes one of the signs of the strata that nourish gold; and at length the moon, now in all her pomp of light, mid-heaven amongst her subject stars, gleamed through the fissures of the cave, on whose floor lay the relics of antediluvian races, and rested in one flood of silvery splendour upon the hollows of the extinct volcano, with tufts of dank herbage, and wide spaces of paler sward, covering the gold below,—Gold, the dumb symbol of organized Matter's great mystery, storing in itself, according as Mind, the informer of Matter, can distinguish its uses, evil and good, bane and blessing.

Hitherto the Veiled Woman had remained in the rear, with the white-robed, skeleton-like image that had crept to my side unawares with its noiseless step. Thus in each winding turn of the difficult path at which the convoy following behind me came into sight, I had seen, first, the two gayly-dressed, armed men, next the black bier-like litter, and last the Black-veiled Woman and the White-robed Skeleton.

But now, as I halted on the tableland, backed by the mountain and fronting the valley, the woman left her companion, passed by the litter and the armed men, and paused by my side, at the mouth of the moonlit cavern.

There for a moment she stood, silent, the procession below mounting upward laboriously and slow; then she turned to me, and her veil was withdrawn.

The face on which I gazed was wondrously beautiful, and severely awful. There was neither youth nor age, but beauty, mature and majestic as that of a marble Demeter.

"Do you believe in that which you seek?" she asked, in her foreign, melodious, melancholy accents.

"I have no belief," was my answer. "True science has none. True science questions all things, takes nothing upon credit. It knows but three states of the mind,—Denial, Conviction, and that vast interval between the two, which is not belief, but suspense of judgment."

The woman let fall her veil, moved from me, and seated herself on a crag above that cleft between mountain and creek, to which, when I had first discovered the gold that the land nourished, the rain from the clouds had given the rushing life of the cataract; but which now, in the drought and the hush of the skies, was but a dead pile of stones.

The litter now ascended the height: its bearers halted; a lean hand tore the curtains aside, and Margrave descended, leaning, this time, not on the Black-veiled Woman, but on the White-robed Skeleton.

There, as he stood, the moon shone full on his wasted form; on his face, resolute, cheerful, and proud, despite its hollowed outlines and sicklied hues. He raised his head, spoke in the language unknown to me, and the armed men and the litter-bearers grouped round him, bending low, their eyes fixed on the ground. The Veiled Woman rose slowly and came to his side, motioning away, with a mute sign, the ghastly form on which he leaned, and passing round him silently, instead, her own sustaining arm. Margrave spoke again a few sentences, of which I could not even guess the meaning. When he had concluded, the armed men and the litter-bearers came nearer to his feet, knelt down, and kissed his hand. They then rose, and took from the bier-like vehicle the coffer and the fuel. This done, they lifted again the litter, and again, preceded by the armed men, the procession descended down the sloping hillside, down into the valley below.

Margrave now whispered, for some moments, into the ear of the hideous creature who had made way for the Veiled Woman. The grim skeleton bowed his head submissively, and strode noiselessly away through the long grasses,—the slender stems, trampled under his stealthy feet, relifting themselves, as after a passing wind. And thus he, too, sank out of sight down into the valley below. On the tableland of the hill remained only we three,—Margrave, myself, and the Veiled Woman.

She had reseated herself apart, on the gray crag above the dried torrent. He stood at the entrance of the cavern, round the sides of which clustered parasital plants, with flowers of all colours, some amongst them opening their petals and exhaling their fragrance only in the hours of night; so that, as

his form filled up the jaws of the dull arch, obscuring the moonbeam that strove to pierce the shadows that slept within, it stood now—wan and blighted—as I had seen it first, radiant and joyous, literally "framed in blooms."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

"So," said Margrave, turning to me, "under the soil that spreads around us lies the gold which to you and to me is at this moment of no value, except as a guide to its twin-born,—the regenerator of life!"

"You have not yet described to me the nature of the substance which we are to explore, nor of the process by which the virtues you impute to it are to be extracted."

"Let us first find the gold, and instead of describing the life-amber, so let me call it, I will point it out to your own eyes. As to the process, your share in it is so simple, that you will ask me why I seek aid from a chemist. The life-amber, when found, has but to be subjected to heat and fermentation for six hours; it will be placed, in a small caldron which that coffer contains, over the fire which that fuel will feed. To give effect to the process, certain alkalies and other ingredients are required; but these are prepared, and mine is the task to commingle them. From your science as chemist I need and ask nought. In you I have sought only the aid of a man."

"If that be so, why, indeed, seek me at all? Why not confide in those swarthy attendants, who doubtless are slaves to your orders?"

"Confide in slaves! when the first task enjoined to them would be to discover, and refrain from purloining gold! Seven such unscrupulous knaves, or even one such, and I, thus defenceless and feeble! Such is not the work that wise masters confide to fierce slaves. But that is the least of the reasons which exclude them from my choice, and fix my choice of assistant on you. Do you forget what I told you of the danger which the Dervish declared no bribe I could offer could tempt him a second time to brave?"

"I remember now; those words had passed away from my mind."

"And because they had passed away from your mind, I chose you for my comrade. I need a man by whom danger is scorned."

"But in the process of which you tell me I see no possible danger unless the ingredients you mix in your caldron have poisonous fumes."

"It is not that. The ingredients I use are not poisons."

"What other danger, except you dread your own Eastern slaves? But, if so, why lead them to these solitudes; and, if so, why not bid me be armed?"

"The Eastern slaves, fulfilling my commands, wait for my summons where their eyes cannot see what we do. The danger is of a kind in which the boldest son of the East would be more craven, perhaps, than the daintiest Sybarite of Europe, who would shrink from a panther and laugh at a ghost. In the creed of the Dervish, and of all who adventure into that realm of nature which is closed to philosophy and open to magic, there are races in the magnitude of space unseen as animalcules in the world of a drop. For the tribes of the drop, science has its microscope. Of the host of yon azure Infinite magic gains sight, and through them gains command over fluid conductors that link all the parts of creation. Of these races, some are wholly indifferent to man, some benign to him, and some dreadly hostile. In all the regular and prescribed conditions of mortal being, this magic realm seems as blank and tenantless as yon vacant air. But when a seeker of powers beyond the rude functions by which man plies the clockwork that measures his hours, and stops when its chain reaches the end of its coil, strives to pass over those boundaries at which philosophy says, 'Knowledge ends,'—then he is like all other travellers in regions unknown; he must propitiate or brave the tribes that are hostile,—must depend for his life on the tribes that are friendly. Though your science discredits the alchemist's dogmas, your learning informs you that all alchemists were not ignorant impostors; yet those whose discoveries prove them to have been the nearest allies to your practical knowledge, ever hint in their mystical works at the reality of that realm which is open to magic,—ever hint that some means less familiar than furnace and bellows are essential to him who explores the elixir of life. He who once quaffs that elixir, obtains in his very veins the bright fluid by which he transmits the force of his will to agencies dormant in nature, to

giants unseen in the space. And here, as he passes the boundary which divides his allotted and normal mortality from the regions and races that magic alone can explore, so, here, he breaks down the safeguard between himself and the tribes that are hostile. Is it not ever thus between man and man? Let a race the most gentle and timid and civilized dwell on one side a river or mountain, and another have home in the region beyond, each, if it pass not the intervening barrier, may with each live in peace. But if ambitious adventurers scale the mountain, or cross the river, with design to subdue and enslave the population they boldly invade, then all the invaded arise in wrath and defiance,—the neighbours are changed into foes. And therefore this process—by which a simple though rare material of nature is made to yield to a mortal the boon of a life which brings, with its glorious resistance to Time, desires and faculties to subject to its service beings that dwell in the earth and the air and the deep—has ever been one of the same peril which an invader must brave when he crosses the bounds of his nation. By this key alone you unlock all the cells of the alchemist's lore; by this alone understand how a labour, which a chemist's crudest apprentice could perform, has baffled the giant fathers of all your dwarfed children of science. Nature, that stores this priceless boon, seems to shrink from conceding it to man; the invisible tribes that abhor him, oppose themselves to the gain that might give them a master. The duller of those who were the life-seekers of old would have told you how some chance, trivial, unlooked-for, foiled their grand hope at the very point of fruition,—some doltish mistake, some improvident oversight, a defect in the sulphur, a wild overflow in the quicksilver, or a flaw in the bellows, or a pupil who failed to replenish the fuel, by falling asleep by the furnace. The invisible foes seldom vouchsafe to make themselves visible where they can frustrate the bungler, as they mock at his toils from their ambush. But the mightier adventurers, equally foiled in despite of their patience and skill, would have said, 'Not with us rests the fault; we neglected no caution, we failed from no oversight. But out from the caldron dread faces arose, and the spectres or demons dismayed and baffled us.' Such, then, is the danger which seems so appalling to a son of the East, as it seemed to a sees in the dark age of Europe. But we can deride all its threats, you and I. For myself, I own frankly I take all the safety that the charms and resources of magic bestow. You, for your safety, have the cultured and disciplined reason which reduces all fantasies to nervous impressions; and I rely on the courage of one who has questioned, unquailing, the Luminous Shadow, and wrested from the hand of the magician himself the wand which concentred the wonders of will!"

To this strange and long discourse I listened without interruption, and now quietly answered,—

"I do not merit the trust you affect in my courage; but I am now on my guard against the cheats of the fancy, and the fumes of a vapour can scarcely bewilder the brain in the open air of this mountain-land. I believe in no races like those which you tell me lie viewless in space, as do gases. I believe not in magic; I ask not its aids, and I dread not its terrors. For the rest, I am confident of one mournful courage,—the courage that comes from despair. I submit to your guidance, whatever it be, as a sufferer whom colleges doom to the grave submits to the quack who says, 'Take my specific and live!' My life is nought in itself; my life lives in another. You and I are both brave from despair; you would turn death from yourself, I would turn death from one I love more than myself. Both know how little aid we can win from the colleges, and both, therefore, turn to the promises most audaciously cheering. Dervish or magician, alchemist or phantom, what care you and I? And if they fail us, what then? They cannot fail us more than the colleges do!"

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

The gold has been gained with an easy labour. I knew where to seek for it, whether under the turf or in the bed of the creek. But Margrave's eyes, hungrily gazing round every spot from which the ore was disburied, could not detect the substance of which he alone knew the outward appearance. I had begun to believe that, even in the description given to him of this material, he had been credulously duped, and that no such material existed, when, coming back from the bed of the watercourse, I saw a faint yellow gleam amidst the roots of a giant parasite plant, the leaves and blossoms of which climbed up the sides of the cave with its antediluvian relics. The gleam was the gleam of gold, and on removing the loose earth round the roots of the plant, we came on—No, I will not, I dare not, describe it. The gold-digger would cast it aside, the naturalist would pause not to heed it; and did I describe it, and chemistry deign to subject it to analysis, could chemistry alone detach or discover its boasted virtues?

Its particles, indeed, are very minute, not seeming readily to crystallize with each other; each in itself of uniform shape and size, spherical as the egg which contains the germ of life, and small as the egg from which the life of an insect may quicken.

But Margrave's keen eye caught sight of the atoms upcast by the light of the moon. He exclaimed to me, "Found! I shall live!" And then, as he gathered up the grains with tremulous hands, he called out to the Veiled Woman, hitherto still seated motionless on the crag. At his word she rose and went to the place bard by, where the fuel was piled, busying herself there. I had no leisure to heed her. I continued my search in the soft and yielding soil that time and the decay of vegetable life had accumulated over the Pre-Adamite strata on which the arch of the cave rested its mighty keystone.

When we had collected of these particles about thrice as much as a man might hold in his hand, we seemed to have exhausted their bed. We continued still to find gold, but no more of the delicate substance, to which, in our sight, gold was as dross.

"Enough," then said Margrave, reluctantly desisting. "What we have gained already will suffice for a life thrice as long as legend attributes to Haroun. I shall live,—I shall live through the centuries."

"Forget not that I claim my share."

"Your share—yours! True—your half of my life! It is true." He paused with a low, ironical, malignant laugh; and then added, as he rose and turned away, "But the work is yet to be done."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

While we had thus laboured and found, Ayesha had placed the fuel where the moonlight fell fullest on the sward of the tableland,—a part of it already piled as for a fire, the rest of it heaped confusedly close at hand; and by the pile she had placed the coffer. And there she stood, her arms folded under her mantle, her dark image seeming darker still as the moonlight whitened all the ground from which the image rose motionless. Margrave opened his coffer, the Veiled Woman did not aid him, and I watched in silence, while he as silently made his weird and wizard-like preparations.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

On the ground a wide circle was traced by a small rod, tipped apparently with sponge saturated with some combustible naphtha-like fluid, so that a pale lambent flame followed the course of the rod as Margrave guided it, burning up the herbage over which it played, and leaving a distinct ring, like that which, in our lovely native fable-talk, we call the "Fairy's Ring," but yet more visible because marked in phosphorescent light. On the ring thus formed were placed twelve small lamps, fed with the fluid from the same vessel, and lighted by the same rod. The light emitted by the lamps was more vivid and brilliant than that which circled round the ring.

Within the circumference, and immediately round the woodpile, Margrave traced certain geometrical figures, in which—not without a shudder, that I overcame at once by a strong effort of will in murmuring to myself the name of "Lilian"—I recognized the interlaced triangles which my own hand, in the spell enforced on a sleep-walker, had described on the floor of the wizard's pavilion. The figures were traced, like the circle, in flame, and at the point of each triangle (four in number) was placed a lamp, brilliant as those on the ring. This task performed, the caldron, based on an iron tripod, was placed on the wood-pile. And then the woman, before inactive and unheeding, slowly advanced, knelt by the pile, and lighted it. The dry wood crackled and the flame burst forth, licking the rims of the caldron with tongues of fire.

Margrave flung into the caldron the particles we had collected, poured over them first a liquid, colourless as water, from the largest of the vessels drawn from his coffer, and then, more sparingly, drops from small crystal phials, like the phials I had seen in the hand of Philip Derval.

Having surmounted my first impulse of awe, I watched these proceedings, curious yet disdainful, as one who watches the mummeries of an enchanter on the stage.

"If," thought I, "these are but artful devices to inebriate and fool my own imagination, my imagination

is on its guard, and reason shall not, this time, sleep at her post!"

"And now," said Margrave, "I consign to you the easy task by which you are to merit your share of the elixir. It is my task to feed and replenish the caldron; it is Ayesha's to heed the fire, which must not for a moment relax in its measured and steady heat. Your task is the lightest of all it is but to renew from this vessel the fluid that burns in the lamps, and on the ring. Observe, the contents of the vessel must be thriftily husbanded; there is enough, but not more than enough, to sustain the light in the lamps, on the lines traced round the caldron, and on the farther ring, for six hours. The compounds dissolved in this fluid are scarce,—only obtainable in the East, and even in the East months might have passed before I could have increased my supply.

"I had no months to waste. Replenish, then, the light only when it begins to flicker or fade. Take heed, above all, that no part of the outer ring—no, not an inch—and no lamp of the twelve, that are to its zodiac like stars, fade for one moment in darkness."

I took the crystal vessel from his hand.

"The vessel is small," said I, "and what is yet left of its contents is but scanty; whether its drops suffice to replenish the lights I cannot guess,—I can but obey your instructions. But, more important by far than the light to the lamps and the circle, which in Asia or Africa might scare away the wild beasts unknown to this land—more important than light to a lamp, is the strength to your frame, weak magician! What will support you through six weary hours of night-watch?"

"Hope," answered Margrave, with a ray of his old dazzling style. "Hope!
I shall live,—I shall live through the centuries!"

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

One hour passed away; the fagots under the caldron burned clear in the sullen sultry air. The materials within began to seethe, and their colour, at first dull and turbid, changed into a pale-rose hue; from time to time the Veiled Woman replenished the fire, after she had done so reseating herself close by the pyre, with her head bowed over her knees, and her face hid under her veil.

The lights in the lamps and along the ring and the triangles now began to pale. I resupplied their nutriment from the crystal vessel. As yet nothing strange startled my eye or my ear beyond the rim of the circle,—nothing audible, save, at a distance, the musical wheel-like click of the locusts, and, farther still, in the forest, the howl of the wild dogs, that never bark; nothing visible, but the trees and the mountain-range girding the plains silvered by the moon, and the arch of the cavern, the flush of wild blooms on its sides, and the gleam of dry bones on its floor, where the moonlight shot into the gloom.

The second hour passed like the first. I had taken my stand by the side of Margrave, watching with him the process at work in the caldron, when I felt the ground slightly vibrate beneath my feet, and, looking up, it seemed as if all the plains beyond the circle were heaving like the swell of the sea, and as if in the air itself there was a perceptible tremor.

I placed my hand on Margrave's shoulder and whispered, "To me earth and air seem to vibrate. Do they seem to vibrate to you?"

"I know not, I care not," he answered impetuously. "The essence is bursting the shell that confined it. Here are my air and my earth! Trouble me not. Look to the circle! feed the lamps if they fail."

I passed by the Veiled Woman as I walked towards a place in the ring in which the flame was waning dim; and I whispered to her the same question which I had whispered to Margrave. She looked slowly around, and answered, "So is it before the Invisible make themselves visible! Did I not bid him forbear?" Her head again drooped on her breast, and her watch was again fixed on the fire.

I advanced to the circle and stooped to replenish the light where it waned. As I did so, on my arm, which stretched somewhat beyond the line of the ring, I felt a shock like that of electricity. The arm fell to my side numbed and nerveless, and from my hand dropped, but within the ring, the vessel that contained the fluid. Recovering my surprise or my stun, hastily with the other hand I caught up the vessel, but some of the scanty liquid was already spilled on the sward; and I saw with a thrill of dismay, that contrasted indeed the tranquil indifference with which I had first undertaken my charge, how

small a supply was now left.

I went back to Margrave, and told him of the shock, and of its consequence in the waste of the liquid.

"Beware," said he, "that not a motion of the arm, not an inch of the foot, pass the verge of the ring; and if the fluid be thus unhappily stinted, reserve all that is left for the protecting circle and the twelve outer lamps! See how the Grand Work advances! how the hues in the caldron are glowing blood-red through the film on the surface!"

And now four hours of the six were gone; my arm had gradually recovered its strength. Neither the ring nor the lamps had again required replenishing; perhaps their light was exhausted less quickly, as it was no longer to be exposed to the rays of the intense Australian moon. Clouds had gathered over the sky, and though the moon gleamed at times in the gaps that they left in blue air, her beam was more hazy and dulled. The locusts no longer were heard in the grass, nor the howl of the dogs in the forest. Out of the circle, the stillness was profound.

And about this time I saw distinctly in the distance a vast Eye! It drew nearer and nearer, seeming to move from the ground at the height of some lofty giant. Its gaze riveted mine; my blood curdled in the blaze from its angry ball; and now as it advanced larger and larger, other Eyes, as if of giants in its train, grew out from the space in its rear; numbers on numbers, like the spearheads of some Eastern army, seen afar by pale warders of battlements doomed to the dust. My voice long refused an utterance to my awe; at length it burst forth shrill and loud,—

"Look! look! Those terrible Eyes! Legions on legions! And hark! that tramp of numberless feet; they are not seen, but the hollows of earth echo the sound of their march!"

Margrave, more than ever intent on the caldron, in which, from time to time, he kept dropping powders or essences drawn forth from his coffer, looked up, defyingly, fiercely.

"Ye come," he said, in a low mutter, his once mighty voice sounding hollow and labouring, but fearless and firm,—"ye come,—not to conquer, vain rebels!—ye whose dark chief I struck down at my feet in the tomb where my spell had raised up the ghost of your first human master, the Chaldee! Earth and air have their armies still faithful to me, and still I remember the war-song that summons them up to confront you! Ayesha! Ayesha! recall the wild troth that we pledged amongst roses; recall the dread bond by which we united our sway over hosts that yet own thee as queen, though my sceptre is broken, my diadem reft from my brows!"

The Veiled Woman rose at this adjuration. Her veil now was withdrawn, and the blaze of the fire between Margrave and herself flushed, as with the rosy bloom of youth, the grand beauty of her softened face. It was seen, detached as it were, from her dark-mantled form; seen through the mist of the vapours which rose from the caldron, framing it round like the clouds. that are yieldingly pierced by the light of the evening star.

Through the haze of the vapour came her voice, more musical, more plaintive than I had heard it before, but far softer, more tender; still in her foreign tongue; the words unknown to me, and yet their sense, perhaps, made intelligible by the love, which has one common language and one common look to all who have loved,—the love unmistakably heard in the loving tone, unmistakably seen in the loving face.

A moment or so more, and she had come round from the opposite side of the fire-pile, and bending over Margrave's upturned brow, kissed it quietly, solemnly; and then her countenance grew fierce, her crest rose erect; it was the lioness protecting her young. She stretched forth her arm from the black mantle, athwart the pale front that now again bent over the caldron,—stretched it towards the haunted and hollow-sounding space beyond, in the gesture of one whose right hand has the sway of the sceptre. And then her voice stole on the air in the music of a chant, not loud, yet far-reaching; so thrilling, so sweet, and yet so solemn, that I could at once comprehend how legend united of old the spell of enchantment with the power of song. All that I recalled of the effects which, in the former time, Margrave's strange chants had produced on the ear that they ravished and the thoughts they confused, was but as the wild bird's imitative carol, compared to the depth and the art and the soul of the singer, whose voice seemed endowed with a charm to enthrall all the tribes of creation, though the language it used for that charm might to them, as to me, be unknown. As the song ceased, I heard, from behind, sounds like those I had heard in the spaces before me,—the tramp of invisible feet, the whir of invisible wings, as if armies were marching to aid against armies in march to destroy.

"Look not in front nor around," said Ayesha. "Look, like him, on the caldron below. The circle and the lamps are yet bright; I will tell you when the light again fails."

I dropped my eyes on the caldron.

"See," whispered Margrave, "the sparkles at last begin to arise, and the rose-hues to deepen,—signs that we near the last process."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

The fifth hour had passed away, when Ayesha said to me, "Lo! the circle is fading; the lamps grow dim. Look now without fear on the space beyond; the eyes that appalled thee are again lost in air, as lightnings that fleet back into cloud."

I looked up, and the spectres had vanished. The sky was tinged with sulphurous hues, the red and the black intermixed. I replenished the lamps and the ring in front, thriftily, heedfully; but when I came to the sixth lamp, not a drop in the vessel that fed them was left. In a vague dismay, I now looked round the half of the wide circle in rear of the two bended figures intent on the caldron. All along that disk the light was already broken, here and there flickering up, here and there dying down; the six lamps in that half of the circle still twinkled, but faintly, as stars shrinking fast from the dawn of day. But it was not the fading shine in that half of the magical ring which daunted my eye and quickened with terror the pulse of my heart; the Bushland beyond was on fire. From the background of the forest rose the flame and the smoke,—the smoke, there, still half smothering the flame. But along the width of the grasses and herbage, between the verge of the forest and the bed of the water-creek just below the raised platform from which I beheld the dread conflagration, the fire was advancing,—wave upon wave, clear and red against the columns of rock behind,—as the rush of a flood through the mists of some Alp crowned with lightnings.

Roused from my stun at the first sight of a danger not foreseen by the mind I had steeled against far rarer portents of Nature, I cared no more for the lamps and the circle. Hurrying back to Ayesha, I exclaimed: "The phantoms have gone from the spaces in front; but what incantation or spell can arrest the red march of the foe, speeding on in the rear! While we gazed on the caldron of life, behind us, unheeded, behold the Destroyer!"

Ayesha looked, and made no reply; but, as by involuntary instinct, bowed her majestic head, then rearing it erect, placed herself yet more immediately before the wasted form of the young magician (he still bending over the caldron, and hearing me not in the absorption and hope of his watch),—placed herself before him, as the bird whose first care is her fledgling.

As we two there stood, fronting the deluge of fire, we heard Margrave behind us, murmuring low, "See the bubbles of light, how they sparkle and dance! I shall live, I shall live!" And his words scarcely died in our ears before, crash upon crash, came the fall of the age-long trees in the forest; and nearer, all near us, through the blazing grasses, the hiss of the serpents, the scream of-the birds, and the bellow and tramp of the herds plunging wild through the billowy red of their pastures.

Ayesha now wound her arms around Margrave, and wrenched him, reluctant and struggling, from his watch over the seething caldron. In rebuke; of his angry exclamations, she pointed to the march of the fire, spoke in sorrowful tones a few words in her own language, and then, appealing to me in English, said,—

"I tell him that here the Spirits who oppose us have summoned a foe that is deaf to my voice, and—"

"And," exclaimed Margrave, no longer with gasp and effort, but with the swell of a voice which drowned all the discords of terror and of agony sent forth from the Phlegethon burning below,—"and this witch, whom I trusted, is a vile slave and impostor, more desiring my death than my life. She thinks that in life I should scorn and forsake her, that in death I should die in her arms! Sorceress, avaunt! Art thou useless and powerless now when I need thee most? Go! Let the world be one funeral pyre! What to me is the world? My world is my life! Thou knowest that my last hope is here,—that all the strength left me this night will die down, like the lamps in the circle, unless the elixir restore it. Bold friend, spurn that sorceress away. Hours yet ere those flames can assail us! A few minutes more, and life to your Lilian and me!"

Thus having said, Margrave turned from us, and cast into the caldron the last essence yet left in his empty coffer. Ayesha silently drew her black veil over her face; and turned, with the being she loved, from the terror he scorned, to share in the hope that he cherished.

Thus left alone, with my reason disenthralled, disenchanted, I surveyed more calmly the extent of the

actual peril with which we were threatened, and the peril seemed less, so surveyed.

It is true all the Bush-land behind, almost up to the bed of the creek, was on fire; but the grasses, through which the flame spread so rapidly, ceased at the opposite marge of the creek. Watery pools were still, at intervals, left in the bed of the creek, shining tremulous, like waves of fire, in the glare reflected from the burning land; and even where the water failed, the stony course of the exhausted rivulet was a barrier against the march of the conflagration. Thus, unless the wind, now still, should rise, and waft some sparks to the parched combustible herbage immediately around us, we were saved from the fire, and our work might yet be achieved.

I whispered to Ayesha the conclusion to which I came. "Thinkest thou," she answered, without raising her mournful head, "that the Agencies of Nature are the movements of chance? The Spirits I invoked to his aid are leagued with the hosts that assail. A mightier than I am has doomed him!"

Scarcely had she uttered these words before Margrave exclaimed, "Behold how the Rose of the alchemist's dream enlarges its blooms from the folds of its petals! I shall live, I shall live!"

I looked, and the liquid which glowed in the caldron had now taken a splendour that mocked all comparisons borrowed from the lustre of gems. In its prevalent colour it had, indeed, the dazzle and flash of the ruby; but out from the mass of the molten red, broke coruscations of all prismal hues, shooting, shifting, in a play that made the wavelets them selves seem living things, sensible of their joy. No longer was there scum or film upon the surface; only ever and anon a light rosy vapour floating up, and quick lost in the haggard, heavy, sulphurous air, hot with the conflagration rushing towards us from behind. And these coruscations formed, on the surface of the molten ruby, literally the shape of a Rose, its leaves made distinct in their outlines by sparks of emerald and diamond and sapphire.

Even while gazing on this animated liquid lustre, a buoyant delight seemed infused into my senses; all terrors conceived before were annulled; the phantoms, whose armies had filled the wide spaces in front, were forgotten; the crash of the forest behind was unheard. In the reflection of that glory, Margrave's wan cheek seemed already restored to the radiance it wore when I saw it first in the framework of blooms.

As I gazed, thus enchanted, a cold hand touched my own.

"Hush!" whispered Ayesha, from the black veil, against which the rays of the caldron fell blunt, and absorbed into Dark. "Behind us, the light of the circle is extinct, but there we are guarded from all save the brutal and soulless destroyers. But before!—but before !—see, two of the lamps have died out!—see the blank of the gap in the ring Guard that breach,—there the demons will enter."

"Not a drop is there left in his vessel by which to replenish the lamps on the ring."

"Advance, then; thou hast still the light of the soul, and the demons may recoil before a soul that is dauntless and guiltless. If not, Three are lost!—as it is, One is doomed."

Thus adjured, silently, involuntarily, I passed from the Veiled Woman's side, over the sere lines on the turf which had been traced by the triangles of light long since extinguished, and towards the verge of the circle. As I advanced, overhead rushed a dark cloud of wings,—birds dislodged from the forest on fire, and screaming, in dissonant terror, as they flew towards the farthermost mountains; close by my feet hissed and glided the snakes, driven forth from their blazing coverts, and glancing through the ring, unscared by its waning lamps; all undulating by me, bright-eyed and hissing, all made innocuous by fear,—even the terrible Death-adder, which I trampled on as I halted at the verge of the circle, did not turn to bite, but crept harmless away. I halted at the gap between the two dead lamps, and bowed my head to look again into the crystal vessel. Were there, indeed, no lingering drops yet left, if but to recruit the lamps for some priceless minutes more? As I thus stood, right into the gap between the two dead lamps strode a gigantic Foot. All the rest of the form was unseen; only, as volume after volume of smoke poured on from the burning land behind, it seemed as if one great column of vapour, eddying round, settled itself aloft from the circle, and that out from that column strode the giant Foot. And, as strode the Foot, so with it came, like the sound of its tread, a roll of muttered thunder.

I recoiled, with a cry that rang loud through the lurid air.

"Courage!" said the voice of Ayesha. "Trembling soul, yield not an inch to the demon!"

At the charm, the wonderful charm, in the tone of the Veiled Woman's voice, my will seemed to take a force more sublime than its own. I folded my arms on my breast, and stood as if rooted to the spot, confronting the column of smoke and the stride of the giant Foot. And the Foot halted, mute.

Again, in the momentary hush of that suspense, I heard a voice,—it was

Margrave's.

"The last hour expires, the work is accomplished! Come! come! Aid me to take the caldron from the fire; and quick!—or a drop may be wasted in vapour—the Elixir of Life from the caldron!"

At that cry I receded, and the Foot advanced.

And at that moment, suddenly, unawares, from behind, I was stricken down. Over me, as I lay, swept a whirlwind of trampling hoofs and glancing horns. The herds, in their flight from the burning pastures, had rushed over the bed of the watercourse, scaled the slopes of the banks. Snorting and bellowing, they plunged their blind way to the mountains. One cry alone, more wild than their own savage blare, pierced the reek through which the Brute Hurricane swept. At that cry of wrath and despair I struggled to rise, again dashed to earth by the hoofs and the horns. But was it the dream-like deceit of my reeling senses, or did I see that giant Foot stride past through the close-serried ranks of the maddening herds? Did I hear, distinct through all the huge uproar of animal terror, the roll of low thunder which followed the stride of that Foot?

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

When my sense had recovered its shock, and my eyes looked dizzily round, the charge of the beasts had swept by; and of all the wild tribes which had invaded the magical circle, the only lingerer was the brown Death-adder, coiled close by the spot where my head had rested. Beside the extinguished lamps which the hoofs had confusedly scattered, the fire, arrested by the watercourse, had consumed the grasses that fed it, and there the plains stretched, black and desert as the Phlegroean Field of the Poet's Hell. But the fire still raged in the forest beyond,—white flames, soaring up from the trunks of the tallest trees, and forming, through the sullen dark of the smoke-reek, innumerable pillars of fire, like the halls in the City of fiends.

Gathering myself up, I turned my eyes from the terrible pomp of the lurid forest, and looked fearfully down on the hoof-trampled sward for my two companions.

I saw the dark image of Ayesha still seated, still bending, as I had seen it last. I saw a pale hand feebly grasping the rim of the magical caldron, which lay, hurled down from its tripod by the rush of the beasts, yards away from the dim fading embers of the scattered wood-pyre. I saw the faint writhings of a frail wasted frame, over which the Veiled Woman was bending. I saw, as I moved with bruised limbs to the place, close by the lips of the dying magician, the flash of the ruby-like essence spilled on the sward, and, meteor-like, sparkling up from the torn tufts of herbage.

I now reached Margrave's side. Bending over him as the Veiled Woman bent, and as I sought gently to raise him, he turned his face, fiercely faltering out, "Touch me not, rob me not! You share with me! Never! never! These glorious drops are all mine! Die all else! I will live! I will live!" Writhing himself from my pitying arms, he plunged his face amidst the beautiful, playful flame of the essence, as if to lap the elixir with lips scorched away from its intolerable burning. Suddenly, with a low shriek, he fell back, his face upturned to mine, and on that face unmistakably reigned Death!

Then Ayesha tenderly, silently, drew the young head to her lap, and it vanished from my sight behind her black veil.

I knelt beside her, murmuring some trite words of comfort; but she heeded me not, rocking herself to and fro as the mother who cradles a child to sleep. Soon the fast-flickering sparkles of the lost elixir died out on the grass; and with their last sportive diamond-like tremble of light, up, in all the suddenness of Australian day, rose the sun, lifting himself royally above the mountain-tops, and fronting the meaner blaze of the forest as a young king fronts his rebels. And as there, where the bush-fires had ravaged, all was a desert, so there, where their fury had not spread, all was a garden. Afar, at the foot of the mountains, the fugitive herds were grazing; the cranes, flocking back to the pools, renewed the strange grace of their gambols; and the great kingfisher, whose laugh, half in mirth, half in mockery, leads the choir that welcome the morn,—which in Europe is night,—alighted bold on the roof of the cavern, whose floors were still white with the bones of races, extinct before—so helpless through instincts, so royal through Soul—rose Man!

But there, on the ground where the dazzling elixir had wasted its virtues,—there the herbage already had a freshness of verdure which, amid the duller sward round it, was like an oasis of green in a desert.

And there wild-flowers, whose chill hues the eye would have scarcely distinguished the day before, now glittered forth in blooms of unfamiliar beauty. Towards that spot were attracted myriads of happy insects, whose hum of intense joy was musically loud. But the form of the life-seeking sorcerer lay rigid and stark; blind to the bloom of the wild-flowers, deaf to the glee of the insects,—one hand still resting heavily on the rim of the emptied caldron, and the face still hid behind the Black Veil. What! the wondrous elixir, sought with such hope and well-nigh achieved through such dread, fleeting back to the earth from which its material was drawn, to give bloom, indeed,—but to herbs: joy indeed,—but to insects!

And now, in the flash of the sun, slowly wound up the slopes that led to the circle the same barbaric procession which had sunk into the valley under the ray of the moon. The armed men came first, stalwart and tall, their vests brave with crimson and golden lace, their weapons gayly gleaming with holiday silver. After them, the Black Litter. As they came to the place, Ayesha, not raising her head, spoke to them in her own Eastern tongue. A wail was her answer. The armed men bounded forward, and the bearers left the litter.

All gathered round the dead form with the face concealed under the black veil; all knelt, and all wept. Far in the distance, at the foot of the blue mountains, a crowd of the savage natives had risen up as if from the earth; they stood motionless, leaning on their clubs and spears, and looking towards the spot on which we were,—strangely thus brought into the landscape, as if they too, the wild dwellers on the verge which Humanity guards from the Brute, were among the mourners for the mysterious Child of mysterious Nature! And still, in the herbage, hummed the small insects, and still, from the cavern, laughed the great kingfisher. I said to Ayesha, "Farewell! your love mourns the dead, mine calls me to the living. You are now with your own people, they may console you; say if I can assist."

"There is no consolation for me! What mourner can be consoled if the dead die forever? Nothing for him is left but a grave; that grave shall be in the land where the song of Ayesha first lulled him to sleep. Thou assist Me,—thou, the wise man of Europe! From me ask assistance. What road wilt thou take to thy home?"

"There is but one road known to me through the maze of the solitude,—that which we took to this upland."

"On that road Death lurks, and awaits thee! Blind dupe, couldst thou think that if the grand secret of life had been won, he whose head rests on my lap would have yielded thee one petty drop of the essence which had filched from his store of life but a moment? Me, who so loved and so cherished him,—me he would have doomed to the pitiless cord of my servant, the Strangler, if my death could have lengthened a hair-breadth the span of his being. But what matters to me his crime or his madness? I loved him! I loved him!"

She bowed her veiled head lower and lower; perhaps, under the veil, her lips kissed the lips of the dead. Then she said whisperingly,—

"Juma the Strangler, whose word never failed to his master, whose prey never slipped from his snare, waits thy step on the road to thy home! But thy death cannot now profit the dead, the beloved. And thou hast had pity for him who took but thine aid to design thy destruction. His life is lost, thine is saved."

She spoke no more in the tongue that I could interpret. She spoke, in the language unknown, a few murmured words to her swarthy attendants; then the armed men, still weeping, rose, and made a dumb sign to me to go with them. I understood by the sign that Ayesha had told them to guard me on my way; but she gave no reply to my parting thanks.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

I descended into the valley; the armed men followed. The path, on that side of the watercourse not reached by the flames, wound through meadows still green, or amidst groves still unscathed. As a turning in the way brought in front of my sight the place I had left behind, I beheld the black litter creeping down the descent, with its curtains closed, and the Veiled Woman walking by its side. But soon the funeral procession was lost to my eyes, and the thoughts that it roused were erased. The waves in man's brain are like those of the sea, rushing on, rushing over the wrecks of the vessels that rode on their surface, to sink, after storm, in their deeps. One thought cast forth into the future now

mastered all in the past: "Was Lilian living still?" Absorbed in the gloom of that thought, hurried on by the goad that my heart, in its tortured impatience, gave to my footstep, I outstripped the slow stride of the armed men, and, midway between the place I had left and the home which I sped to, came, far in advance of my guards, into the thicket in which the bushmen had started up in my path on the night that Lilian had watched for my coming. The earth at my feet was rife with creeping plants and many-coloured flowers, the sky overhead was half-hid by motionless pines. Suddenly, whether crawling out from the herbage, or dropping down from the trees, by my side stood the white-robed and skeleton form,—Ayesha's attendant, the Strangler.

I sprang from him shuddering, then halted and faced him. The hideous creature crept towards me, cringing and fawning, making signs of humble good-will and servile obeisance. Again I recoiled,—wrathfully, loathingly; turned my face homeward, and fled on. I thought I had baffled his chase, when, just at the mouth of the thicket, he dropped from a bough in my path close behind me. Before I could turn, some dark muffling substance fell between my sight and the sun, and I felt a fierce strain at my throat. But the words of Ayesha had warned me; with one rapid hand I seized the noose before it could tighten too closely, with the other I tore the bandage away from my eyes, and, wheeling round on the dastardly foe, struck him down with one spurn of my foot. His hand, as he fell, relaxed its hold on the noose; I freed my throat from the knot, and sprang from the copse into the broad sunlit plain. I saw no more of the armed men or the Strangler. Panting and breathless, I paused at last before the fence, fragrant with blossoms, that divided my home from the solitude.

The windows of Lilian's room were darkened; all within the house seemed still.

Darkened and silenced Home! with the light and sounds of the jocund day all around it. Was there yet hope in the Universe for me? All to which I had trusted Hope had broken down! The anchors I had forged for her hold in the beds of the ocean, her stay from the drifts of the storm, had snapped like the reeds which pierce the side that leans on the barb of their points, and confides in the strength of their stems. No hope in the baffled resources of recognized knowledge! No hope in the daring adventures of Mind into regions unknown; vain alike the calm lore of the practised physician, and the magical arts of the fated Enchanter! I had fled from the commonplace teachings of Nature, to explore in her Shadow-land marvels at variance with reason. Made brave by the grandeur of love, I had opposed without quailing the stride of the Demon, and by hope, when fruition seemed nearest, had been trodden into dust by the hoofs of the beast! And yet, all the while, I had scorned, as a dream more wild than the word of a sorcerer, the hope that the old man and the child, the wise and the ignorant, took from their souls as inborn. Man and fiend had alike failed a mind, not ignoble, not skilless, not abjectly craven; alike failed a heart not feeble and selfish, not dead to the hero's devotion, willing to shed every drop of its blood for a something more dear than an animal's life for itself! What remained—what remained for man's hope?—man's mind and man's heart thus exhausting their all with no other result but despair! What remained but the mystery of mysteries, so clear to the sunrise of childhood, the sunset of age, only dimmed by the clouds which collect round the noon of our manhood? Where yet was Hope found? In the soul; in its every-day impulse to supplicate comfort and light, from the Giver of soul, wherever the heart is afflicted, the mind is obscured.

Then the words of Ayesha rushed over me: "What mourner can be consoled, if the Dead die forever?" Through every pulse of my frame throbbed that dread question. All Nature around seemed to murmur it. And suddenly, as by a flash from heaven, the grand truth in Faber's grand reasoning shone on me, and lighted up all, within and without. Alan alone, of all earthly creatures, asks, "Can the Dead die forever?" and the instinct that urges the question is God's answer to man! No instinct is given in vain.

And born with the instinct of soul is the instinct that leads the soul from the seen to the unseen, from time to eternity, from the torrent that foams towards the Ocean of Death, to the source of its stream, far aloft from the Ocean.

"Know thyself," said the Pythian of old. "That precept descended from Heaven." Know thyself! Is that maxim wise? If so, know thy soul. But never yet did man come to the thorough conviction of soul but what he acknowledged the sovereign necessity of prayer. In my awe, in my rapture, all my thoughts seemed enlarged and illumined and exalted. I prayed,—all my soul seemed one prayer. All my past, with its pride and presumption and folly, grew distinct as the form of a penitent, kneeling for pardon before setting forth on the pilgrimage vowed to a shrine. And, sure now, in the deeps of a soul first revealed to myself, that the Dead do not die forever, my human love soared beyond its brief trial of terror and sorrow. Daring not to ask from Heaven's wisdom that Lilian, for my sake, might not yet pass away from the earth, I prayed that my soul might be fitted to bear with submission whatever my Maker might ordain. And if surviving her—without whom no beam from yon material sun could ever warm into joy a morrow in human life—so to guide my steps that they might rejoin her at last, and, in rejoining, regain forever!

How trivial now became the weird riddle that, a little while before, had been clothed in so solemn an awe! What mattered it to the vast interests involved in the clear recognition of Soul and Hereafter, whether or not my bodily sense, for a moment, obscured the face of the Nature I should one day behold as a spirit? Doubtless the sights and the sounds which had haunted the last gloomy night, the calm reason of Faber would strip of their magical seemings; the Eyes in the space and the Foot in the circle might be those of no terrible Demons, but of the wild's savage children whom I had seen, halting, curious and mute, in the light of the morning. The tremor of the ground (if not, as heretofore, explicable by the illusory impression of my own treacherous senses) might be but the natural effect of elements struggling yet under a soil unmistakably charred by volcanoes. The luminous atoms dissolved in the caldron might as little be fraught with a vital elixir as are the splendours of naphtha or phosphor. As it was, the weird rite had no magic result. The magician was not rent limb from limb by the fiends. By causes as natural as ever extinguished life's spark in the frail lamp of clay, he had died out of sight—under the black veil.

What mattered henceforth to Faith, in its far grander questions and answers, whether Reason, in Faber, or Fancy, in me, supplied the more probable guess at a hieroglyph which, if construed aright, was but a word of small mark in the mystical language of Nature? If all the arts of enchantment recorded by Fable were attested by facts which Sages were forced to acknowledge, Sages would sooner or later find some cause for such portents—not supernatural. But what Sage, without cause supernatural, both without and within him, can guess at the wonders he views in the growth of a blade of grass, or the tints on an insect's wing? Whatever art Man can achieve in his progress through time, Man's reason, in time, can suffice to explain. But the wonders of God? These belong to the Infinite; and these, O Immortal! will but develop new wonder on wonder, though thy sight be a spirit's, and thy leisure to track and to solve an eternity.

As I raised my face from my clasped hands, my eyes fell full upon a form standing in the open doorway. There, where on the night in which Lilian's long struggle for reason and life had begun, the Luminous Shadow had been beheld in the doubtful light of a dying moon and a yet hazy dawn; there, on the threshold, gathering round her bright locks the aureole of the glorious sun, stood Amy, the blessed child! And as I gazed, drawing nearer and nearer to the silenced house, and that Image of Peace on its threshold, I felt that Hope met me at the door,—Hope in the child's steadfast eyes, Hope in the child's welcoming smile!

"I was at watch for you," whispered Amy. "All is well."

"She lives still—she lives! Thank God! thank God!"

"She lives,—she will recover!" said another voice, as my head sunk on Faber's shoulder. "For some hours in the night her sleep was disturbed, convulsed. I feared, then, the worst. Suddenly, just before the dawn, she called out aloud, still in sleep,—

"'The cold and dark shadow has passed away from me and from Allen,—passed away from us both forever!'

"And from that moment the fever left her; the breathing became soft, the pulse steady, and the colour stole gradually back to her cheek. The crisis is past. Nature's benign Disposer has permitted Nature to restore your life's gentle partner, heart to heart, mind to mind—"

"And soul to soul," I cried, in my solemn joy. "Above as below, soul to soul!" Then, at a sign from Faber, the child took me by the hand and led me up the stairs into Lilian's room.

Again those clear arms closed around me in wife-like and holy love, and those true lips kissed away my tears,—even as now, at the distance of years from that happy morn, while I write the last words of this Strange Story, the same faithful arms close around me, the same tender lips kiss away my tears.

THE END.

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