By

A. Conan Doyle

The Gully of Bluemansdyke

Author of "Micah Clarke," "The White Company," "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," etc.

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THE GULLY OF BLUEMANSDYKE, AND OTHER STORIES.

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By A. CONAN DOYLE,

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THE GULLY OF BLUEMANSDYKE.

A TRUE COLONIAL STORY.

BROADHURST'S store was closed, but the little back room looked very comfortable that night. The fire cast a ruddy glow on ceiling and walls, reflecting itself cheerily on the polished flasks and shot-guns which adorned them. Yet a gloom rested on the two men who sat at either side of the hearth, which neither the fire nor the black bottle upon the table could alleviate.

"Twelve o'clock," said old Tom, the storeman glancing up at the wooden timepiece which had come out with him in '42. "It's a queer thing, George, they haven't come."

"It's a dirty night," said his companion, reaching out his arm for a plug of tobacco. "The Wawirra's in flood, maybe; or maybe their horses is broke down; or they've put it off, perhaps. Great Lord, how it thunders! Pass us over a coal, Tom."

He spoke in a tone which was meant to appear easy, but with a painful thrill in it which was not lost upon his mate. He glanced uneasily at him from under his grizzled eyebrows.

"You think it's all right, George?" he said, after a pause.

"Think what's all right?"

"Why, that the lads are safe."

"Safe! Of course they're safe. What the devil is to harm them?"

"Oh, nothing; nothing, to be sure," said old Tom. "You see, George, since the old woman died, Maurice has been all to me; and it makes me kinder anxious.

It's a week since they started from the mine, and you'd ha' thought they'd be here now. But it's nothing unusual, I s'pose; nothing at all. Just my darned folly."

"What's to harm them?" repeated George Hutton again, arguing to convince himself rather than his comrade. "It's a straight road from the diggin's to Rathurst, and then through the hills past Bluemansdyke, and over the Wawirra by the ford, and so down to Trafalgar by the bush track. There's nothin' deadly in all that, is there? My son Allan's as dear to me as Maurice can be to you, mate," he continued; "but they know the ford well, and there's no other bad place. They'll be here to-morrow night, certain."

"Please God they may!" said Broadhurst; and the two men lapsed into silence for some time, moodily staring into the glow of the fire, and pulling at their short clays.

It was indeed, as Hutton had said, a dirty night. The wind was howling down through the gorges of the western mountains, and whirling and eddying among the streets of Trafalgar; whistling through the chinks in the rough wood cabins, and tearing away the frail shingles which formed the roofs. The streets were deserted, save for one or two stragglers from the drinking shanties, who wrapped their cloaks around them and staggered home through the wind and rain towards their own cabins.

The silence was broken by Broadhurst, who was evidently still ill at ease.

"Say, George," he said, "what's become of Josiah Mapleton?"

"Went to the diggin's."

"Ay; but he sent word he was coming back."

"But he never came."

"An' what's become of Jos Humphrey?" he resumed, after a pause.

"He went diggin', too."

"Well, did he come back?"

"Drop it, Broadhurst; drop it, I say," said Hutton, springing to his feet and pacing up and down the narrow room. "You're trying to make a coward of me! You know the men must have gone up country prospectin' or farmin', maybe. What is it to us where they went? You don't think I have a register of every man

in the colony, as Inspector Burton has of the lags."

"Sit down, George, and listen," said old Tom. "There's something queer about that road; something I don't understand, and don't like. Maybe you remember how Maloney, the one-eyed scoundrel, made his money in the early mining days. He'd a half-way drinking shanty on the main road up on a kind of bluff, where the Lena comes down from the hills. You've heard, George, how they found a sort of wooden slide from his little back room down to the river; an' how it came out that man after man had had his drink doctored, and been shot down that into eternity, like a bale of goods. No one will ever know how many were done away with there. *They* were all supposed to be farmin' and prospectin', and the like, till their bodies were picked out of the rapids. It's no use mincing matters, George; we'll have the troopers along to the diggin's if those lads don't turn up by to-morrow night."

"As you like, Tom," said Hutton.

"By the way, talking of Maloney—it's a strange thing," said Broadhurst, "that Jack Haldane swears he saw a man as like Maloney with ten years added to him as could be. It was in the bush on Monday morning. Chance, I suppose; but you'd hardly think there could be two pair of shoulders in the world carrying such villainous mugs on the top of them."

"Jack Haldane's a fool," growled Hutton, throwing open the door and peering anxiously out into the darkness, while the wind played with his long grizzled beard, and sent a train of glowing sparks from his pipe down the street.

"A terrible night!" he said, as he turned back towards the fire.

Yes, a wild, tempestuous night; a night for birds of darkness and for beasts of prey. A strange night for seven men to lie out in the gully at Bluemansdyke, with revolvers in their hands, and the devil in their hearts.

The sun was rising after the storm. A thick, heavy steam reeked up from the saturated ground, and hung like a pall over the flourishing little town of Trafalgar. A bluish mist lay in wreaths over the wide track of bushland around, out of which the western mountains loomed like great islands in a sea of vapour.

Something was wrong in the town. The most casual glance would have detected that. There was a shouting and a hurrying of feet. Doors were slammed and rude windows thrown open. A trooper of police came clattering down with his carbine unslung. It was past the time for Joe Buchan's saw-mill to commence work, but the great wheel was motionless, for the hands had not appeared.

There was a surging, pushing crowd in the main street before old Tom Broadhurst's house, and a mighty clattering of tongues. "What was it?" demanded the new-comers, panting and breathless. "Broadhurst has shot his mate." "He has cut his own throat." "He has struck gold in the clay floor of his kitchen." "No; it was his son Maurice who had come home rich." "Who had not come back at all." "Whose horse had come back without him." At last the truth had come out; and there was the old sorrel horse in question whinnying and rubbing his neck against the familiar door of the stable, as if entreating entrance; while two haggard, grey-haired men held him by either bridle, and gazed blankly at his reeking sides.

"God help me," said old Tom Broadhurst; "it is as I feared!"

"Cheer up, mate," said Hutton, drawing his rough straw hat down over his brow. "There's hope yet."

A sympathetic and encouraging murmur ran through the crowd.

"Horse ran away, likely."

"Or been stolen."

"Or he's swum the Wawirra an' been washed off," suggested one Job's comforter.

"He ain't got no marks of bruising," said another, more hopeful.

"Rider fallen off drunk, maybe," said a bluff old sheep-farmer. "I kin remember," he continued, "coming into town 'bout this hour myself, with my head in my holster, an' thinking I was a six-chambered revolver—mighty drunk I was."

"Maurice had a good seat; he'd never be washed off."

"Not he."

"The horse has a weal on its off fore-quarter," remarked another, more

observant than the rest.

"A blow from a whip, maybe."

"It would be a darned hard one."

"Where's Chicago Bill?" said someone; "he'll know."

Thus invoked, a strange, gaunt figure stepped out in front of the crowd. He was an extremely tall and powerful man, with the red shirt and high boots of a miner. The shirt was thrown open, showing the sinewy throat and massive chest. His face was seamed and scarred with many a conflict, both with Nature and his brother man; yet beneath his ruffianly exterior there lay something of the quiet dignity of the gentleman. This man was a veteran gold-hunter; a real old Californian 'forty-niner, who had left the fields in disgust when private enterprise began to dwindle before the formation of huge incorporated companies with their ponderous machinery. But the red clay with the little shining points had become to him as the very breath of his nostrils, and he had come half-way round the world to seek it once again.

"Here's Chicago Bill," he said; "what is it?"

Bill was naturally regarded as an oracle, in virtue of his prowess and varied experience. Every eye was turned on him as Braxton, the young Irish trooper of constabulary, said, "What do you make of the horse, Bill?"

The Yankee was in no hurry to commit himself. He surveyed the animal for some time with his shrewd little grey eye. He bent and examined the girths; then he felt the mane carefully. He stooped once more and examined the hoofs and then the quarters. His eye rested on the blue wheal already mentioned. This seemed to put him on a scent, for he gave a long, low whistle, and proceeded at once to examine the hair on either side of the saddle. He saw something conclusive apparently, for, with a sidelong glance under his shaggy eyebrows at the two old men beside him, he turned and fell back among the crowd.

"Well, what d'ye think?" cried a dozen voices.

"A job for you," said Bill, looking up at the young Irish trooper.

"Why, what is it? What's become of young Broadhurst?"

"He's done what better men has done afore. He has sunk a shaft for gold and

panned out a coffin."

"Speak out, man! what have you seen?" cried a husky voice.

"I've seen the graze of a bushranger's bullet on the horse's quarter, an' I've seen a drop of the rider's blood on the edge of the saddle—Here, hold the old man up, boys; don't let him drop. Give him a swig of brandy an' lead him inside. Say," he continued, in a whisper, gripping the trooper by the wrist, "mind, I'm in it. You an' I play this hand together. I'm dead on sich varmin. We'll do as they do in Nevada, strike while the iron is hot. Get any men you can together. I s'pose you're game to come yourself?"

"Yes, I'll come," said young Braxton, with a quiet smile.

The American looked at him approvingly. He had learned in his wanderings that an Irishman who grows quieter when deeply stirred is a very dangerous specimen of the genus *homo*.

"Good lad!" he muttered; and the two went down the street together towards the station-house, followed by half-a-dozen of the more resolute of the crowd.

One word before we proceed with our story, or our chronicle rather, as every word of it is based upon fact. The colonial trooper of fifteen or twenty years ago was a very different man from his representative of to-day. Not that I would imply any slur upon the courage of the latter; but for reckless dare-devilry and knight-errantry the old constabulary has never been equalled. The reason is a simple one. Men of gentle blood, younger sons and wild rakes who had outrun the constable, were sent off to Australia with some wild idea of making their fortunes. On arriving they found Melbourne by no means the El Dorado they expected; they were unfit for any employment, their money was soon dissipated, and they unerringly gravitated into the mounted police. Thus a sort of colonial "Maison Rouge" became formed, where the lowest private had as much pride of birth and education as his officers. They were men who might have swayed the fate of empires, yet who squandered away their lives in many a lone wild fight with native and bushranger, where nothing but a mouldering blue-ragged skeleton was left to tell the tale.

It was a glorious sunset. The whole western sky was a blaze of flame, throwing a purple tint upon the mountains, and gilding the sombre edges of the great forest which spreads between Trafalgar and the river Wawirra. It stretched out, a primeval, unbroken wilderness, save at the one point where a rough track had been formed by the miners and their numerous camp-followers. This wound amid the great trunks in a zigzag direction, occasionally making a long detour to avoid some marshy hollow or especially dense clump of vegetation. Often it could be hardly discerned from the ground around save by the scattered hoof-marks and an occasional rut.

About fifteen miles from Trafalgar there stands a little knoll, well sheltered and overlooking the road. On this knoll a man was lying as the sun went down that Friday evening. He appeared to shun observation, for he had chosen that part in which the foliage was thickest; yet he seemed decidedly at his ease, as he lolled upon his back with his pipe between his teeth, and a broad hat down over his face. It was a face that it was well to cover in the presence of so peaceful a scene—a face pitted with the scars of an immaterial smallpox. The forehead was broad and low; one eye had apparently been gouged out, leaving a ghastly cavity; the other was deep-set, cunning, and vindictive. The mouth was hard and cruel; a rough beard covered the chin. It was the cut of face which, seen in a lonely street, would instinctively make one shift the grasp of one's stick from the knob end to the ferrule—the face of a bold and unscrupulous man.

Some unpleasing thought seemed to occur to him, for he rose with a curse and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "A darned fine thing," he muttered, "that I should have to lie out like this! It was Barrett's fault the job wasn't a clean one, an' now he picks me out to get the swamp-fever. If he'd shot the horse as I did the man, we wouldn't need a watch on this side of the Wawirra. He always was a poor white-livered cuss. Well," he continued, picking up a gun which lay in the grass behind him, "there's no use my waiting longer; they wouldn't start during the night. Maybe the horse never got home, maybe they gave them up as drowned; anyhow it's another man's turn to-morrow, so I'll just give them five minutes and then make tracks." He sat down on the stump of a tree as he spoke and hummed the verse of a song. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, for he plunged his hand into his pocket, and after some searching extracted a pack of playing cards wrapped in a piece of dirty brown paper. He gazed earnestly at their greasy faces for some time. Then he took a pin from his sleeve and pricked a small hole in the corner of each ace and knave. He chuckled as he shuffled them up, and replaced them in his pocket. "I'll have my share of the swag," he

growled. "They're sharp, but they'll not spot that when the liquor is in them. By the Lord, here they are!"

He had sprung to his feet and was bending to the ground, holding his breath as he listened. To the unpractised ear all was as still as before—the hum of a passing insect, the chirp of a bird, the rustle of the leaves; but the bushranger rose with the air of a man who has satisfied himself. "Good-bye to Bluemansdyke," said he; "I reckon it will be too hot to hold us for a time. That thundering idiot! he's spoilt as nice a lay as ever was, an' risked our necks into the bargain. I'll see their number an' who they are, though," he continued; and, choosing a point where a rough thicket formed an effectual screen, he coiled himself up, and lay like some venomous snake, occasionally raising his head and peering between the trunks at the reddish streak which marked the Trafalgar Road.

There could be no question now as to the approach of a body of horsemen. By the time our friend was fairly ensconced in his hiding-place the sound of voices and the clatter of hoofs was distinctly audible, and in another moment a troop of mounted men came sweeping round the curve of the road. They were eleven all told, armed to the teeth, and evidently well on the alert. Two rode in front with rifles unslung, leisurely scanning every bush which might shelter an enemy. The main body kept about fifty yards behind them, while a solitary horseman brought up the rear. The ranger scanned them narrowly as they passed. He seemed to recognise most of them. Some were his natural enemies the troopers; the majority were miners who had volunteered to get rid of an evil which affected their interests so closely. They were a fine bronzed set of men, with a deliberate air about them, as if they had come for a purpose and meant to attain it. As the last rider passed before his hiding-place the solitary watcher started and growled a curse in his beard. "I know his darned face," he said; "it's Bill Hanker, the man who got the drop on Long Nat Smeaton in Silver City in '53; what the thunder brought him here? I must be off by the back track, though, an' let the boys know." So saying, he picked up his gun, and with a scowl after the distant party, he crouched down and passed rapidly and silently out of sight into the very thickest part of the bush.

The expedition had started from Trafalgar on the afternoon of the same day that Maurice Broadhurst's horse, foam-flecked and frightened, had galloped up

to the old stable-door. Burton, the inspector of constabulary, an energetic and able man, as all who knew him can testify, was in command. He had detached Braxton, the young Irishman, and Thompson, another trooper, as a vanguard. He himself rode with the main body, grey-whiskered and lean, but as straight in the back as when he and I built a shanty in '39 in what is now Burke Street, Melbourne. With him were McGillivray, Foley, and Anson of the Trafalgar force, Hartley the sheep-farmer, Murdoch and Summerville, who had made their pile at the mines, and Dan Murphy, who was cleaned out when the clay of the "Orient" turned to gravel, and had been yearning for a solid square fight ever since. Chicago Bill formed the rear-guard, and the whole party presented an appearance which, though far from military, was decidedly warlike.

They camped out that night seventeen miles from Trafalgar, and next day pushed on as far as where the Stirling Road runs across. The third morning brought them to the northern bank of the Wawirra, which they forded. Here a council of war was held, for they were entering what they regarded as enemy's country. The bush track, though wild, was occasionally traversed both by shepherds and sportsmen. It would hardly be the home of a gang of desperate bushrangers. But beyond the Wawirra the great rugged range of the Tápu mountains towered up to the clouds, and across a wild spur of these the mining track passed up to Bluemansdyke. It was here they decided at the council that the scene of the late drama lay. The question now was what means were to be taken to attack the murderers; for that murder had been done no man doubted.

All were of one mind as to what the main line of action should be. To go for them straight, shoot as many as possible on sight, and hang the balance in Trafalgar: that was plain sailing. But how to get at them was the subject of much debate. The troopers were for pushing on at once, and trusting to Fortune to put the rangers in their way. The miners proposed rather to gain some neighbouring peak, from which a good view of the country could be obtained, and some idea gained of their whereabouts. Chicago Bill took rather a gloomy view of things. "Nary one will we see," said he; "they've dusted out of the district 'fore this. They'd know the horse would go home, and likely as not they've had a watch on the road to warn them. I guess, boys, we'd best move on an' do our best." There was some discussion, but Chicago's opinion carried the day, and the expedition pushed on in a body.

After passing the second upland station the scenery becomes more and more grand and rugged. Great peaks two and three thousand feet high rose sheer up at each side of the narrow track. The heavy wind and rain of the storm had brought

down much *débris*, and the road was almost impassable in places. They were frequently compelled to dismount and to lead the horses. "We haven't far now, boys," said the inspector cheerily, as they struggled on; and he pointed to a great dark cleft which yawned in front of them between two almost perpendicular cliffs. "They are there," he said, "or nowhere." A little higher the road became better and their progress was more rapid. A halt was called, guns were unslung, and their pistols loosened in their belts, for the great gully of Bluemansdyke—the wildest part of the whole Tápu range—was gaping before them. But not a thing was to be seen; all was as still as the grave. The horses were picketed in a quiet little ravine, and the whole party crept on on foot. The Southern sun glared down hot and clear on the yellow bracken and banks of fern which lined the narrow winding track. Still not a sign of life. Then came a clear low whistle from the two advanced troopers, announcing that something had been discovered, and the main body hurried up. It was a spot for deeds of blood. On one side of the road there lowered a black gnarled precipice, on the other was the sullen mouth of the rugged gully. The road took a sharp turn at this spot. Just at the angle several large boulders were scattered, lining and overlooking the track. It was at this angle that a little bed of mud and trampled red clay betokened a recent struggle. There could be no question that they were at the scene of the murder of the two young miners. The outline of a horse could still be seen in the soft ground, and the prints of its hoofs as it kicked out in its death-agony were plainly marked. Behind one of the rocks were the tracks of several feet, and some pistol wadding was found in a tuft of ferns. The whole tragedy lay unclosed before them. Two men, careless in the pride of their youth and their strength, had swept round that fatal curve. Then a crash, a groan, a brutal laugh, the galloping of a frightened horse, and all was over.

What was to be done now? The rocks around were explored, but nothing fresh discovered. Some six days had elapsed, and the birds were apparently flown. The party separated and hunted about among the boulders. Then the American, who could follow a trail like a bloodhound, found tracks leading towards a rugged pile of rocks on the north side of the gully. In a crevice here the remains of three horses were found. Close to them the rim of an old straw hat projected through the loose loam. Hartley, the sheep-farmer, sprang over to pick it up; he started back in the act of stooping, and said in an awe-struck whisper to his friend Murphy, "There's a head under it, Dan!" A few strokes of a spade disclosed a face familiar to most of the group—that of a poor travelling photographer well known in the colony by the *sobriquet* of "Stooping Johnny," who had disappeared some time before. It was now in an advanced stage of

putrefaction. Close to him another body was discovered, and another beside that. In all, thirteen victims of these English Thugs were lying under the shadow of the great north wall of the Bluemansdyke gully. It was there, standing in silent awe round the remains of these poor fellows, hurried into eternity and buried like dogs, that the search-party registered a vow to sacrifice all interests and comforts for the space of one month to the single consideration of revenge. The inspector uncovered his grizzled head as he solemnly swore it, and his comrades followed his example. The bodies were then, with a brief prayer, consigned to a deeper grave, a rough cairn was erected over them, and the eleven men set forth upon their mission of stern justice.

Three weeks had passed—three weeks and two days. The sun was sinking over the great waste of bushland, unexplored and unknown, which stretches away from the eastern slope of the Tápu mountains. Save some eccentric sportsman or bold prospector, no colonist had ever ventured into that desolate land; yet on this autumn evening two men were standing in a little glade in the very heart of it. They were engaged tying up their horses, and apparently making preparations for camping out for the night. Though haggard, unkempt, and worn, one still might recognise two of our former acquaintances—the young Irish trooper and the American Chicago Bill.

This was the last effort of the avenging party. They had traversed the mountain gorges, they had explored every gully and ravine, and now they had split into several small bands, and, having named a trysting-place, they were scouring the country in the hope of hitting upon some trace of the murderers. Foley and Anson had remained among the hills, Murdoch and Dan Murphy were exploring towards Rathurst, Summerville and the inspector had ascended along the Wawirra, while the others in three parties were wandering through the eastern bushland.

Both the trooper and the miner seemed dejected and weary. The one had set out with visions of glory, and hopes of a short cut to the coveted stripes which would put him above his fellows; the other had obeyed a rough wild sense of justice; and each was alike disappointed. The horses were picketed, and the men threw themselves heavily upon the ground. There was no need to light a fire; a few dampers and some rusty bacon were their whole provisions. Braxton produced them, and handed his share to his comrade. They ate their rough meal

without a word. Braxton was the first to break the silence.

"We're playing our last card," he said.

"And a darned poor one at that," replied his comrade.

"Why, mate," he continued, "if we did knock up agin these all-fired varmin, ye don't suppose you and I would go for them? I guess I'd up an' shove for Trafalgar first."

Braxton smiled. Chicago's reckless courage was too well known in the colony for any words of his to throw a doubt upon it. Miners still tell how, during the first great rush in '52, a blustering ruffian, relying upon some similar remark of the pioneer's, had tried to establish a reputation by an unprovoked assault upon him; and the narrators then glide imperceptibly into an account of Bill's handsome conduct towards the widow—how he had given her his week's clean-up to start her in a drinking shanty. Braxton thought of this as he smiled at Chicago's remarks, and glanced at the massive limbs and weather-beaten face.

"We'd best see where we are before it grows darker," he said; and rising, he stacked his gun against the trunk of a blue gum-tree, and seizing some of the creepers which hung down from it, began rapidly and silently to ascend it.

"His soul's too big for his body," growled the American, as he watched the dark lithe figure standing out against the pale-blue evening sky.

"What d'ye see, Jack?" he shouted; for the trooper had reached the topmost branch by this time, and was taking a survey of the country.

"Bush, bush; nothing but bush," said the voice among the leaves. "Wait a bit, though; there's a kind of hill about three miles off away to the nor'-east. I see it above the trees right over there. Not much good to us, though," he continued, after a pause, "for it seems a barren, stony sort of place."

Chicago paced about at the bottom of the tree.

"He seems an almighty long time prospectin' it," he muttered, after ten minutes had elapsed. "Ah, here he is!" and the trooper came swinging down and landed panting just in front of him.

"Why, what's come over him? What's the matter, Jack?"

Something was the matter. That was very evident. There was a light in

Braxton's blue eyes, and a flush on the pale cheek.

"Bill," he said, putting his hand on his comrade's shoulder, "it's about time you made tracks for the settlements."

"What d'ye mean?" said Chicago.

"Why, I mean that the murderers are within a league of us, and that I intend going for them. There, don't be huffed, old man," he added; "of course I knew you were only joking. But they are there, Bill; I saw smoke on the top of that hill, and it wasn't good, honest smoke, mind you; it was dry-wood smoke, and meant to be hid. I thought it was mist at first; but no, it was smoke. I'll swear it. It could only be them: who else would camp on the summit of a desolate hill? We've got them, Bill; we have them as sure as Fate."

"Or they've got us," growled the American. "But here, lad, here's my glass; run up and have a look at them."

"It's too dark now," said Braxton; "we'll camp out to-night. No fear of them stirring. They're lying by there until the whole thing blows over, depend upon it; so we'll make sure of them in the morning."

The miner looked plaintively up at the tree, and then down at his fourteen stone of solid muscle.

"I guess I must take your word for it," he grumbled; "but you are bushman enough to tell smoke from mist, and a dry-wood fire from an open one. We can't do anything to-night till we feel our way, so I allow we'd best water the horses an' have a good night's rest."

Braxton seemed to be of the same mind; so after a few minutes' preparation the two men wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay, two little dark spots, on the great green carpet of the primeval bush.

With the first grey light of dawn Chicago sat up and roused his comrade. A heavy mist bung over the bushland. They could hardly see the loom of the trees across the little glade. Their clothes glistened with the little shining beads of moisture. They brushed each other down, and squatted in bush fashion over their rough breakfast. The haze seemed to be lifting a little now; they could see fifty yards in every direction. The miner paced up and down in silence, ruminating over a plug of "Barrett's twist." Braxton sat on a fallen tree sponging and oiling his revolver. Suddenly a single beam of sunshine played over the great blue gum.

It widened and spread, and then in a moment the mist melted away, and the yellow leaves glowed like flakes of copper in the glare of the morning sun. Braxton cheerily snapped the lock of the pistol, loaded it, and replaced it in his belt. Chicago began to whistle, and stopped in the middle of his walk.

"Now, young un," he said, "here's the glass."

Braxton slung it round his neck, and ascended the tree as he had done the night before. It was child's-play to the trooper—a splendid climber, as I can testify; for I saw him two years later swarming up the topmost backstay of the *Hector* frigate in a gale of wind for a bet of a bottle of wine. He soon reached the summit, and shuffling along a naked branch two hundred feet from the ground, he gained a point where no leaves could obstruct his view. Here he sat straddle-legged; and, unslinging the glass, he proceeded to examine the hill, bush by bush and stone by stone.

An hour passed without his moving. Another had almost elapsed before he descended. His face was grave and thoughtful.

"Are they there?" was the eager query.

"Yes; they are there."

"How many?"

"I've only seen five; but there may be more. Wait till I think it out, Bill."

The miner gazed at him with all the reverence matter has towards mind. Thinking things out was not his strong point.

"Blamed if I can help you," he said apologetically. "It kinder don't come nat'ral to me to be plottin' and plannin'. Want o' eddication, likely. My father was allowed to be the hardest-headed man in the States. Judge Jeffers let on as how the old man wanted to hand in his checks; so he down an' put his head on the line when the first engine as ran from Vermont was comin' up. They fined him a hundred dollars for upsettin' that 'ere locomotive; an' the old man got the cussedest headache as ever was."

Braxton hardly seemed to hear this family anecdote; he was deep in thought.

"Look here, old man," said he; "sit down by me on the trunk and listen to what I say. Remember that you are here as a volunteer, Bill—you've no call to come;

now, I am here in the course of duty. Your name is known through the settlement; you were a marked man when I was in the nursery. Now, Bill, it's a big thing I am going to ask you. If you and I go in and take these men, it will be another feather in your cap, and in yours only. What do men know of Jack Braxton, the private of police? He'd hardly be mentioned in the matter. Now, I want to make my name this day. We'll have to secure these men by a surprise after dusk, and it will be as easy for one resolute man to do it as for two; perhaps easier, for there is less chance of detection. Bill, I want you to stay with the horses, and let me go alone."

Chicago sprang to his feet with a snarl of indignation, and paced up and down in front of the fallen trees. Then he seemed to master himself, for he sat down again.

"They'd chaw you up, lad," he said, putting his hand on Braxton's shoulder. "It wouldn't wash."

"Not they," said the trooper. "I'd take your pistol as well as my own, and I'd need a deal of chawing."

"My character would be ruined," said Bill.

"It's beyond the reach of calumny. You can afford to give me one fair chance."

Bill buried his face in his hands, and thought a little.

"Well, lad," he said, looking up, "I'll look after the horses."

Braxton wrung him by the hand. "There are few men would have done it, Bill; you are a friend worth having. Now, we'll spend our day as best we can, old man, and lie close till evening; for I won't start till an hour after dusk; so we have plenty of time on our hands."

The day passed slowly. The trooper lay among the mosses below the great blue gum in earnest thought. Once or twice he imagined he heard the subterranean chuckle and slap of the thigh which usually denoted amusement on the part of the miner; but on glancing up at that individual, the expression of his face was so solemn, not to say funereal, that it was evidently an illusion. They partook of their scanty dinner and supper cheerfully and with hearty appetites. The former listlessness had given place to briskness and activity, now that their object was in view. Chicago blossomed out into many strange experiences and racy reminiscences of Western life. The hours passed rapidly and cheerily. The

trooper produced a venerable pack of cards from his holster and proposed euchre; but their gregariousness, and the general difficulty of distinguishing the king of clubs from the ace of hearts, exercised a depressing influence upon the players. Gradually the sun went down on the great wilderness. The shadow fell on the little glade, while the distant hill was still tipped with gold; then that too became purplish, a star twinkled over the Tápu range, and night crept over the scene.

"Good-bye, old man," said Braxton. "I won't take my carbine; it would only be in the way. I can't thank you enough for letting me have this chance. If they wipe me out, Bill, you'll not lose sight of them, I know; and you'll say I died like a man. I've got no friends and no message, and nothing in the world but this pack of cards. Keep them, Bill; they were a fine pack in '51. If you see a smoke on the hill in the morning you'll know all's well, and you'll bring up the horses at once. If you don't, you'll ride to Fallen Pine, where we were to meet,—ride day and night, Bill,—tell Inspector Burton that you know where the rangers are, that Private Braxton is dead, and that he said he was to bring up his men, else he'd come back from the grave and lead them up himself. Do that, Bill. Good-bye."

A great quiet rested over the heart of that desolate woodland. The croak of a frog, the gurgle of a little streamlet half hidden in the long grass—no other sound. Then a wakeful jay gave a shrill chatter, another joined, and another; a bluefinch screamed; a wombat rushed past to gain its burrow. Something had disturbed them; yet all was apparently as peaceful as before. Had you been by the jay's nest, however, and peered downwards, you would have seen something gliding like a serpent through the brushwood, and caught a glimpse, perhaps, of a pale, resolute face, and the glint of a pocket-compass pointing north-by-east.

It was a long and weary night for Trooper Braxton. Any moment he might come on an outpost of the rangers, so every step had to be taken slowly and with care. But he was an experienced woodman, and hardly a twig snapped as he crawled along. A morass barred his progress, and he was compelled to make a long detour. Then he found himself in thick brushwood, and once more had to go out of his way. It was very dark here in the depth of the forest. There was a heavy smell, and a dense steam laden with miasma rose from the ground. In the dim light he saw strange creeping things around him. A bushmaster writhed across the path in front of him, a cold, dank lizard crawled over his hand as he

crouched down; but the trooper thought only of the human reptiles in front, and made steadily for his goal. Once he seemed to be pursued by some animal; he heard a creaking behind him, but it ceased when he stopped and listened, so he continued his way.

It was when he reached the base of the hill which he had seen from the distance that the real difficulty of his undertaking began. It was almost conical in shape, and very steep. The sides were covered with loose stones and an occasional large boulder. One false step here would send a shower of these tell-tale fragments clattering down the hill. The trooper stripped off his high leather boots and turned up his trousers; then he began cautiously to climb, cowering down behind every boulder.

There was a little patch of light far away on the horizon, a very little grey patch, but it caused the figure of a man who was moving upon the crest of the hill to loom out dim and large. He was a sentry apparently, for he carried a gun under his arm. The top of the hill was formed by a little plateau about a hundred yards in circumference. Along the edge of this the man was pacing, occasionally stopping to peer down into the great dusky sea beneath him. From this raised edge the plateau curved down from every side, so as to form a crater-like depression. In the centre of this hollow stood a large white tent. Several horses were picketed around it, and the ground was littered with bundles of dried grass and harness. You could see these details now from the edge of the plateau, for the grey patch in the east had become white, and was getting longer and wider. You could see the sentry's face, too, as he paced round and round. A handsome, weak-minded face, with more of the fool than the devil impressed on it. He seemed cheerful, for the birds were beginning to sing, and their thousand voices rose from the bush below. He forgot the forged note, I think, and the dreary voyage, and the wild escape, and the dark gully away beyond the Tápu range; for his eye glistened, and he hummed a quaint little Yorkshire country air. He was back again in the West Riding village, and the rough boulder in front shaped itself into the hill behind which Nelly lived before he broke her heart, and he saw the ivied church that crowned it. He would have seen something else had he looked again—something which was not in his picture: a white passionless face which glared at him over the boulder, as he turned upon his heel, still singing, and unconscious that the bloodhounds of justice were close at his heels.

The trooper's time for action had come. He had reached the last boulder; nothing lay between the plateau and himself but a few loose stones. He could hear the song of the sentry dying away in the distance; he drew his regulation

sword, and, with his Adams in his left, he rose and sprang like a tiger over the ridge and down into the hollow.

The sentry was startled from his dream of the past by a clatter and a rattling of stones. He sprang round and cocked his gun. No wonder that he gasped, and that a change passed over his bronzed face. A painter would need a dash of ultramarine in his flesh-tints to represent it now. No wonder, I say; for that dark active figure with the bare feet and the brass buttons meant disgrace and the gallows to him. He saw him spring across to the tent; he saw the gleam of a sword, and heard a crash as the tent-pole was severed, and the canvas came down with a run upon the heads of the sleepers. And then above oaths and shouts he heard a mellow Irish voice—"I've twelve shots in my hands. I have ye, every mother's son. Up with your arms! up, I say, before there is blood upon my soul. One move, and ye stand before the throne." Braxton had stooped and parted the doorway of the fallen tent, and was now standing over six ruffians who occupied it. They lay as they had wakened, but with their hands above their heads, for there was no resisting that quiet voice, backed up by the two black muzzles. They imagined they were surrounded and hopelessly outmatched. Not one of them dreamed that the whole attacking force stood before them. It was the sentry who first began to realise the true state of the case. There was no sound or sign of any reinforcement. He looked to see that the cap was pressed well down on the nipple, and crept towards the tent. He was a good shot, as many a keeper on Braidagarth and the Yorkshire fells could testify. He raised his gun to his shoulder. Braxton heard the click, but dared not remove his eye or his weapon from his six prisoners. The sentry looked along the sights. He knew his life depended upon that shot. There was more of the devil than the fool in his face now. He paused a moment to make sure of his aim, and then came a crash and the thud of a falling body. Braxton was still standing over the prisoners, but the sentry's gun was unfired, and he himself was writhing on the ground with a bullet through his lungs. "Ye see," said Chicago, as he rose from behind a rock with his gun still smoking in his hand, "it seemed a powerful mean thing to leave you, Jack; so I thought as I'd kinder drop around promiscus, and wade in if needed, which I was, as you can't deny. No, ye don't," he added, as the sentry stretched out his hand to grasp his fallen gun; "leave the wepin alone, young man; it ain't in your way as it lies there."

"I'm a dead man!" groaned the ranger.

"Then lie quiet like a respectable corpse," said the miner, "an' don't go a-squirmin' towards yer gun. That's ornary uneddicated conduct."

"Come here, Bill," cried Braxton, "and bring the ropes those horses are picketed with. Now," he continued, as the American, having abstracted the sentry's gun, appeared with an armful of ropes, "you tie these fellows up, and I'll kill any man who moves."

"A pleasant division of labour, eh, old Blatherskite," said Chicago, playfully tapping the one-eyed villain Maloney on the head. "Come on; the ugliest first!" So saying, he began upon him and fastened him securely.

One after another the rangers were tied up; all except the wounded man, who was too helpless to need securing. Then Chicago went down and brought up the horses, while Braxton remained on guard; and by mid-day the cavalcade was in full march through the forest *en route* for Fallen Pine, the rendezvous of the search-party. The wounded man was tied on to a horse in front, the other rangers followed on foot for safety, while the trooper and Chicago brought up the rear.

There was a sad assemblage at Fallen Pine. One by one they had dropped in, tanned with the sun, torn by briers, weakened by the poisonous miasma of the marshlands, all with the same tale of privation and failure. Summerville and the inspector had fallen in with blacks above the upper ford, and had barely escaped with their lives. Troopers Foley and Anson were well, though somewhat gaunt from privation. Hartley had lost his horse from the bite of a bushmaster. Murdoch and Murphy had scoured the bush as far as Rathurst, but without success. All were dejected and weary. They only waited the arrival of two of their number to set out on their return to Trafalgar.

It was mid-day, and the sun was beating down with a pitiless glare on the little clearing. The men were lying about on the shady side of the trunks, some smoking, some with their hats over their faces and half asleep. The horses were tethered here and there, looking as listless as their masters. Only the inspector's old charger seemed superior to the weather—a shrewd, *blasé* old horse, that had seen the world, and was nearly as deeply versed in woodcraft as his master. As Chicago said, "Short of climbin' a tree, there weren't nothin' that horse couldn't do; an' it would make a darned good try at that if it was pushed." Old "Sawback" seemed ill at ease this afternoon. Twice he had pricked up his ears, and once he had raised his head as if to neigh, but paused before committing himself. The inspector looked at him curiously and put his meerschaum back into its case.

Meerschaums were always a weakness of poor Jim Burton's. "Demme it, sir," I have heard him say, "a gentleman is known by his pipe. When he comes down in the world his pipe has most vitality." He put the case inside his uniform and went over to the horse. The ears were still twitching.

"He hears something," said the inspector. "By Jove, so do I! Here, boys, jump up; there's a body of men coming!" Every man sprang to his horse's head. "I hear hoofs, and I hear the tramp of men on foot. They must be a large party. They're heading straight for us. Get under cover, boys, and have your guns loose." The men wheeled right and left, and in a very few moments the glade was deserted. Only the brown barrel of a gun here and there among the long grass and the ferns showed where they were crouching. "Steady, boys!" said Burton; "if they are enemies, don't fire till I give the word. Then one by one aim low, and let the smoke clear. Rangers, by Jove!" he added, as a horseman broke into the clearing some way down, with his head hanging down over his horse's neck. "More," he growled, as several men emerged from the bush at the same point. "By the living powers, they are taken! I see the ropes. Hurrah!" And next moment Braxton and Chicago were mobbed by nine shouting, dancing men, who pulled them and tugged at them, and slapped them on the back, and dragged them about in such a way, that Maloney whispered with a scowl—

"If we'd had the grit to do as much, we'd have been free men this day!"

And now our story is nearly done. We have chronicled a fact which we think is worthy of a wider circulation than the colonial drinking-bar and the sheep-farmer's fireside, for Trooper Braxton and his capture of the Bluemansdyke murderers have long been household words among our brothers in the England of the Southern seas.

We need not detail that joyful ride to Trafalgar, nor the welcome, nor the attempt at lynching; nor how Maloney, the arch criminal, turned Queen's evidence, and so writhed away from the gallows. All that may be read in the colonial press more graphically than I can tell it. My friend Jack Braxton is an officer now, as his father was before him, and still in the Trafalgar force. Bill I saw last in '61, when he came over to London in charge of the barque of the *Wellingtonia* for the International Exhibition. He is laying on flesh, I fear, since he took to sheep-farming; for he was barely brought up by seventeen stone, and his fighting weight used to be fourteen; but he looks well and hearty. Maloney was lynched in Placerville—at least so I heard. I had a letter last mail from the old inspector; he has left the police, and has a farm at Rathurst. I think, stout-

hearted as he is, he must give a little bit of a shudder when he rides down to Trafalgar for the Thursday market, and comes round that sharp turn of the road where the boulders lie, and the furze looks so yellow against the red clay.

THE PARSON OF JACKMAN'S GULCH.

He was known in the Gulch as the Reverend Elias B. Hopkins, but it was generally understood that the title was an honorary one, extorted by his many eminent qualities, and not borne out by any legal claim which he could adduce. "The Parson" was another of his *sobriquets*, which was sufficiently distinctive in a land where the flock was scattered and the shepherds few. To do him justice, he never pretended to have received any preliminary training for the ministry or any orthodox qualification to practise it. "We're all working in the claim of the Lord," he remarked one day, "and it don't matter a cent whether we're hired for the job or whether we waltzes in on our own account," a piece of rough imagery which appealed directly to the instincts of Jackman's Gulch. It is quite certain that during the first few months his presence had a marked effect in diminishing the excessive use both of strong drinks and of stronger adjectives which had been characteristic of the little mining settlement. Under his tuition, men began to understand that the resources of their native language were less limited than they had supposed, and that it was possible to convey their impressions with accuracy without the aid of a gaudy halo of profanity.

We were certainly in need of a regenerator at Jackman's Gulch about the beginning of '53. Times were flush then over the whole colony, but nowhere flusher than there. Our material prosperity had had a bad effect upon our morals. The camp was a small one, lying rather better than a hundred and twenty miles to the south of Ballarat, at a spot where a mountain torrent finds its way down a rugged ravine on its way to join the Arrowsmith River. History does not relate who the original Jackman may have been, but at the time I speak of the camp it contained a hundred or so adults, many of whom were men who had sought an asylum there after making more civilised mining centres too hot to hold them. They were a rough, murderous crew, hardly leavened by the few respectable members of society who were scattered among them.

Communication between Jackman's Gulch and the outside world was difficult and uncertain. A portion of the bush between it and Ballarat was infested by a redoubtable outlaw named Conky Jim, who, with a small gang as desperate as himself, made travelling a dangerous matter. It was customary, therefore, at the Gulch, to store up the dust and nuggets obtained from the mines in a special store, each man's share being placed in a separate bag on which his name was marked. A trusty man, named Woburn, was deputed to watch over this primitive bank. When the amount deposited became considerable, a waggon was hired, and the whole treasure was conveyed to Ballarat, guarded by the police and by a certain number of miners, who took it in turn to perform the office. Once in Ballarat, it was forwarded on to Melbourne by the regular gold waggons. By this plan, the gold was often kept for months in the Gulch before being despatched, but Conky Jim was effectually checkmated, as the escort party were far too strong for him and his gang. He appeared, at the time of which I write, to have forsaken his haunts in disgust, and the road could be traversed by small parties with impunity.

Comparative order used to reign during the daytime at Jackman's Gulch, for the majority of the inhabitants were out with crowbar and pick among the quartz ledges, or washing clay and sand in their cradles by the banks of the little stream. As the sun sank down, however, the claims were gradually deserted, and their unkempt owners, clay-bespattered and shaggy, came lounging into camp, ripe for any form of mischief. Their first visit was to Woburn's gold store, where their clean-up of the day was duly deposited, the amount being entered in the store-keeper's book, and each miner retaining enough to cover his evening's expenses. After that all restraint was at an end, and each set to work to get rid of his surplus dust with the greatest rapidity possible. The focus of dissipation was the rough bar, formed by a couple of hogsheads spanned by planks, which was dignified by the name of the "Britannia drinking saloon." Here, Nat Adams, the burly bar-keeper, dispensed bad whisky at the rate of two shillings a noggin, or a guinea a bottle, while his brother Ben acted as croupier in a rude wooden shanty behind, which had been converted into a gambling hell, and was crowded every night. There had been a third brother, but an unfortunate misunderstanding with a customer had shortened his existence. "He was too soft to live long," his brother Nathaniel feelingly observed on the occasion of his funeral. "Many's the time I've said to him, 'If you're arguin' a pint with a stranger, you should always draw first, then argue, and then shoot, if you judge that he's on the shoot.' Bill was too purlite. He must needs argue first and draw after, when he might just as well have kivered his man before talkin' it over with him." This amiable

weakness of the deceased Bill was a blow to the firm of Adams, which became so short-handed that the concern could hardly be worked without the admission of a partner, which would mean a considerable decrease in the profits.

Nat Adams had had a roadside shanty in the Gulch before the discovery of gold, and might, therefore, claim to be the oldest inhabitant. These keepers of shanties were a peculiar race, and, at the cost of a digression, it may be interesting to explain how they managed to amass considerable sums of money in a land where travellers were few and far between. It was the custom of the "bushmen," *i.e.* bullock drivers, sheep tenders, and the other white hands who worked on the sheep-runs up country, to sign articles by which they agreed to serve their master for one, two, or three years at so much per year and certain daily rations. Liquor was never included in this agreement, and the men remained, per force, total abstainers during the whole time. The money was paid in a lump sum at the end of the engagement. When that day came round, Jimmy, the stockman, would come slouching into his master's office, cabbage-tree hat in hand.

"Morning, master!" Jimmy would say. "My time's up. I guess I'll draw my cheque and ride down to town."

"You'll come back, Jimmy."

"Yes, I'll come back. Maybe I'll be away three weeks, maybe a month. I want some clothes, master, and my bloomin' boots are well-nigh off my feet."

"How much, Jimmy?" asks his master, taking up his pen.

"There's sixty pound screw," Jimmy answers thoughtfully; "and you mind, master, last March, when the brindled bull broke out o' the paddock. Two pound you promised me then. And a pound at the dipping. And a pound when Millar's sheep got mixed with ourn;" and so he goes on, for bushmen can seldom write, but they have memories which nothing escapes.

His master writes the cheque and hands it across the table. "Don't get on the drink, Jimmy," he says.

"No fear of that, master," and the stockman slips the cheque into his leather pouch, and within an hour he is ambling off upon his long-limbed horse on his hundred mile journey to town.

Now Jimmy has to pass some six or eight of the above-mentioned roadside

shanties in his day's ride, and experience has taught him that if he once breaks his accustomed total abstinence, the unwonted stimulant has an overpowering effect upon his brain. Jimmy shakes his head warily as he determines that no earthly consideration will induce him to partake of any liquor until his business is over. His only chance is to avoid temptation; so, knowing that there is the first of these houses some half mile ahead, he plunges into a by-path through the bush which will lead him out at the other side.

Jimmy is riding resolutely along this narrow path, congratulating himself upon a danger escaped, when he becomes aware of a sunburned, black-bearded man who is leaning unconcernedly against a tree beside the track. This is none other than the shanty-keeper, who, having observed Jimmy's manœuvre in the distance, has taken a short cut through the bush in order to intercept him.

"Morning, Jimmy!" he cries, as the horseman comes up to him.

"Morning, mate; morning!"

"Where are ye off to to-day then?"

"Off to town," says Jimmy sturdily.

"No, now—are you though? You'll have bully times down there for a bit. Come round and have a drink at my place. Just by way of luck."

"No," says Jimmy, "I don't want a drink."

"Just a little damp."

"I tell ye I don't want one," says the stockman angrily.

"Well, ye needn't be so darned short about it. It's nothin' to me whether you drinks or not. Good mornin'."

"Good mornin'," says Jimmy, and has ridden on about twenty yards when he hears the other calling on him to stop.

"See here, Jimmy!" he says, overtaking him again. "If you'll do me a kindness when you're up in town I'd be obliged."

"What is it?"

"It's a letter, Jim, as I wants posted. It's an important one too, an' I wouldn't trust it with every one; but I knows you, and if you'll take charge on it it'll be a

powerful weight off my mind."

"Give it here," Jimmy says laconically.

"I hain't got it here. It's round in my caboose. Come round for it with me. It ain't more'n quarter of a mile."

Jimmy consents reluctantly. When they reach the tumble-down hut the keeper asks him cheerily to dismount and to come in.

"Give me the letter," says Jimmy.

"It ain't altogether wrote yet, but you sit down here for a minute and it'll be right," and so the stockman is beguiled into the shanty.

At last the letter is ready and handed over. "Now, Jimmy," says the keeper, "one drink at my expense before you go."

"Not a taste," says Jimmy.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" the other says in an aggrieved tone. "You're too damned proud to drink with a poor cove like me. Here—give us back that letter. I'm cursed if I'll accept a favour from a man whose too almighty big to have a drink with me."

"Well, well, mate, don't turn rusty," says Jim. "Give us one drink an' I'm off."

The keeper pours out about half a pannikin of raw rum and hands it to the bushman. The moment he smells the old familiar smell his longing for it returns, and he swigs it off at a gulp. His eyes shine more brightly, and his face becomes flushed. The keeper watches him narrowly. "You can go now, Jim," he says.

"Steady, mate, steady," says the bushman. "I'm as good a man as you. If you stand a drink, I can stand one too, I suppose." So the pannikin is replenished, and Jimmy's eyes shine brighter still.

"Now, Jimmy, one last drink for the good of the house," says the keeper, "and then it's time you were off." The stockman has a third gulp from the pannikin, and with it all his scruples and good resolutions vanish for ever.

"Look here," he says somewhat huskily, taking his cheque out of his pouch. "You take this, mate. Whoever comes along this road, ask 'em what they'll have, and tell them it's my shout. Let me know when the money's done."

So Jimmy abandons the idea of ever getting to town, and for three weeks or a month he lies about the shanty in a state of extreme drunkenness, and reduces every wayfarer upon the road to the same condition. At last one fine morning the keeper comes to him. "The coin's done, Jimmy," he says; "it's about time you made some more." So Jimmy has a good wash to sober him, straps his blanket and his billy to his back, and rides off through the bush to the sheep-run, where he has another year of sobriety, terminating in another month of intoxication.

All this, though typical of the happy-go-lucky manners of the inhabitants, has no direct bearing upon Jackman's Gulch, so we must return to that Arcadian settlement. Additions to the population there were not numerous, and such as came about the time of which I speak were even rougher and fiercer than the original inhabitants. In particular, there came a brace of ruffians named Phillips and Maule, who rode into camp one day and started a claim upon the other side of the stream. They outgulched the Gulch in the virulence and fluency of their blasphemy, in the truculence of their speech and manner, and in their reckless disregard of all social laws. They claimed to have come from Bendigo, and there were some amongst us who wished that the redoubted Conky Jim was on the track once more, as long as he would close it to such visitors as these. After their arrival the nightly proceedings at the "Britannia Bar" and at the gambling hell behind became more riotous than ever. Violent quarrels, frequently ending in bloodshed, were of constant occurrence. The more peaceable frequenters of the bar began to talk seriously of lynching the two strangers who were the principal promoters of disorder. Things were in this unsatisfactory condition when our evangelist, Elias B. Hopkins, came limping into the camp, travel-stained and footsore, with his spade strapped across his back and his Bible in the pocket of his moleskin jacket.

His presence was hardly noticed at first, so insignificant was the man. His manner was quiet and unobtrusive, his face pale, and his figure fragile. On better acquaintance, however, there was a squareness and firmness about his clean-shaven lower jaw, and an intelligence in his widely-opened blue eyes, which marked him as a man of character. He erected a small hut for himself, and started a claim close to that occupied by the two strangers who had preceded him. This claim was chosen with a ludicrous disregard for all practical laws of mining, and at once stamped the new-comer as being a green hand at his work. It was piteous to observe him every morning as we passed to our work, digging and delving with the greatest industry, but, as we knew well, without the smallest possibility of any result. He would pause for a moment as we went by, wipe his pale face

with his bandanna handkerchief, and shout out to us a cordial morning greeting, and then fall to again with redoubled energy. By degrees we got into the way of making a half-pitying, half-contemptuous inquiry as to how he got on. "I hain't struck it yet, boys," he would answer cheerily, leaning on his spade, "but the bed-rock lies deep just hereabouts, and I reckon we'll get among the pay gravel to-day." Day after day he returned the same reply with unvarying confidence and cheerfulness.

It was not long before he began to show us the stuff that was in him. One night the proceedings were unusually violent at the drinking saloon. A rich pocket had been struck during the day, and the striker was standing treat in a lavish and promiscuous fashion, which had reduced three parts of the settlement to a state of wild intoxication. A crowd of drunken idlers stood or lay about the bar, cursing, swearing, shouting, dancing, and here and there firing their pistols into the air out of pure wantonness. From the interior of the shanty behind there came a similar chorus. Maule, Phillips, and the roughs who followed them were in the ascendant, and all order and decency was swept away.

Suddenly, amid this tumult of oaths and drunken cries, men became conscious of a quiet monotone which underlay all other sounds and obtruded itself at every pause in the uproar. Gradually first one man and then another paused to listen, until there was a general cessation of the hubbub, and every eye was turned in the direction whence this quiet stream of words flowed. There, mounted upon a barrel, was Elias B. Hopkins, the newest of the inhabitants of Jackman's Gulch, with a good-humoured smile upon his resolute face. He held an open Bible in his hand, and was reading aloud a passage taken at random—an extract from the Apocalypse, if I remember right. The words were entirely irrelevant, and without the smallest bearing upon the scene before him; but he plodded on with great unction, waving his left hand slowly to the cadence of his words.

There was a general shout of laughter and applause at this apparition, and Jackman's Gulch gathered round the barrel approvingly, under the impression that this was some ornate joke, and that they were about to be treated to some mock sermon or parody of the chapter read. When, however, the reader, having finished the chapter, placidly commenced another, and having finished that rippled on into another one, the revellers came to the conclusion that the joke was somewhat too long-winded. The commencement of yet another chapter confirmed this opinion, and an angry chorus of shouts and cries, with suggestions as to gagging the reader, or knocking him off the barrel, rose from every side. In spite of roars and hoots, however, Elias B. Hopkins plodded away

at the Apocalypse with the same serene countenance, looking as ineffably contented as though the babel around him were the most gratifying applause. Before long an occasional boot pattered against the barrel, or whistled past our parson's head; but here some of the more orderly of the inhabitants interfered in favour of peace and order, aided curiously enough by the afore-mentioned Maule and Phillips, who warmly espoused the cause of the little Scripture-reader. "The little cuss has got grit in him," the latter explained, rearing his bulky red-shirted form between the crowd and the object of its anger. "His ways ain't our ways, and we're all welcome to our opinions, and to sling them round from barrels or otherwise, if so minded. What I says, and Bill says, is, that when it comes to slingin' boots instead o' words it's too steep by half; an' if this man's wronged we'll chip in an' see him righted." This oratorical effort had the effect of checking the more active signs of disapproval, and the party of disorder attempted to settle down once more to their carouse, and to ignore the shower of Scripture which was poured upon them. The attempt was hopeless. The drunken portion fell asleep under the drowsy refrain, and the others, with many a sullen glance at the imperturbable reader, slouched off to their huts, leaving him still perched upon the barrel. Finding himself alone with the more orderly of the spectators, the little man rose, closed his book, after methodically marking with a lead pencil the exact spot at which he stopped, and descended from his perch. "To-morrow night, boys," he remarked in his quiet voice, "the reading will commence at the 9th verse of the 15th chapter of the Apocalypse," with which piece of information, disregarding our congratulations, he walked away with the air of a man who has performed an obvious duty.

We found that his parting words were no empty threat. Hardly had the crowd begun to assemble next night before he appeared once more upon the barrel and began to read with the same monotonous vigour, tripping over words, muddling up sentences, but still boring along through chapter after chapter. Laughter, threats, chaff—every weapon short of actual violence—was used to deter him, but all with the same want of success. Soon it was found that there was a method in his proceedings. When silence reigned, or when the conversation was of an innocent nature, the reading ceased. A single word of blasphemy, however, set it going again, and it would ramble on for a quarter of an hour or so, when it stopped, only to be renewed upon similar provocation. The reading was pretty continuous during that second night, for the language of the opposition was still considerably free. At least it was an improvement upon the night before.

For more than a month Elias B. Hopkins carried on this campaign. There he would sit, night after night, with the open book upon his knee, and at the slightest provocation off he would go, like a musical box when the spring is touched. The monotonous drawl became unendurable, but it could only be avoided by conforming to the parson's code. A chronic swearer came to be looked upon with disfavour by the community, since the punishment of his transgression fell upon all. At the end of a fortnight the reader was silent more than half the time, and at the end of the month his position was a sinecure.

Never was a moral revolution brought about more rapidly and more completely. Our parson carried his principle into private life. I have seen him, on hearing an unguarded word from some worker in the gulches, rush across, Bible in hand, and perching himself upon the heap of red clay which surmounted the offender's claim, drawl through the genealogical tree at the commencement of the New Testament in a most earnest and impressive manner, as though it were especially appropriate to the occasion. In time an oath became a rare thing amongst us. Drunkenness was on the wane too. Casual travellers passing through the Gulch used to marvel at our state of grace, and rumours of it went as far as Ballarat, and excited much comment therein.

There were points about our evangelist which made him especially fitted for the work which he had undertaken. A man entirely without redeeming vices would have had no common basis on which to work, and no means of gaining the sympathy of his flock. As we came to know Elias B. Hopkins better, we discovered that in spite of his piety there was a leaven of old Adam in him, and that he had certainly known unregenerate days. He was no teetotaler. On the

contrary, he could choose his liquor with discrimination, and lower it in an able manner. He played a masterly hand at poker, and there were few who could touch him at "cut-throat euchre." He and the two ex-ruffians, Phillips and Maule, used to play for hours in perfect harmony, except when the fall of the cards elicited an oath from one of his companions. At the first of these offences the parson would put on a pained smile and gaze reproachfully at the culprit. At the second he would reach for his Bible, and the game was over for the evening. He showed us he was a good revolver shot too, for when we were practising at an empty brandy bottle outside Adams' bar, he took up a friend's pistol and hit it plumb in the centre at twenty-four paces. There were few things he took up that he could not make a show at apparently, except gold-digging, and at that he was the veriest duffer alive. It was pitiful to see the little canvas bag, with his name printed across it, lying placid and empty upon the shelf at Woburn's store, while all the other bags were increasing daily, and some had assumed quite a portly rotundity of form, for the weeks were slipping by, and it was almost time for the gold-train to start off for Ballarat. We reckoned that the amount which we had stored at the time represented the greatest sum which had ever been taken by a single convoy out of Jackman's Gulch.

Although Elias B. Hopkins appeared to derive a certain quiet satisfaction from the wonderful change which he had effected in the camp, his joy was not yet rounded and complete. There was one thing for which he still yearned. He opened his heart to us about it one evening.

"We'd have a blessing on the camp, boys," he said, "if we only had a service o' some sort on the Lord's day. It's a temptin' o' Providence to go on in this way without takin' any notice of it, except that maybe there's more whisky drunk and more card-playin' than on any other day."

"We hain't got no parson," objected one of the crowd.

"Ye fool!" growled another, "hain't we got a man as is worth any three parsons, and can splash texts around like clay out o' a cradle? What more d'ye want?"

"We hain't got no church!" urged the same dissentient.

"Have it in the open air," one suggested.

"Or in Woburn's store," said another.

"Or in Adams' saloon."

The last proposal was received with a buzz of approval, which showed that it was considered the most appropriate locality.

Adams' saloon was a substantial wooden building in the rear of the bar, which was used partly for storing liquor and partly for a gambling saloon. It was strongly built of rough-hewn logs, the proprietor rightly judging, in the unregenerate days of Jackman's Gulch, that hogsheads of brandy and rum were commodities which had best be secured under lock and key. A strong door opened into each end of the saloon, and the interior was spacious enough, when the table and lumber were cleared away, to accommodate the whole population. The spirit barrels were heaped together at one end by their owner, so as to make a very fair imitation of a pulpit.

At first the Gulch took but a mild interest in the proceedings, but when it became known that Elias B. Hopkins intended, after reading the service, to address the audience, the settlement began to warm up to the occasion. A real sermon was a novelty to all of them, and one coming from their own parson was additionally so. Rumour announced that it would be interspersed with local hits, and that the moral would be pointed by pungent personalities. Men began to fear that they would be unable to gain seats, and many applications were made to the brothers Adams. It was only when conclusively shown that the saloon could contain them all with a margin that the camp settled down into calm expectancy.

It was as well that the building was of such a size, for the assembly upon the Sunday morning was the largest which had ever occurred in the annals of Jackman's Gulch. At first it was thought that the whole population was present, but a little reflection showed that this was not so. Maule and Phillips had gone on a prospecting journey among the hills, and had not returned as yet; and Woburn, the gold-keeper, was unable to leave his store. Having a very large quantity of the precious metal under his charge, he stuck to his post, feeling that the responsibility was too great to trifle with. With these three exceptions the whole of the Gulch, with clean red shirts, and such other additions to their toilet as the occasion demanded, sauntered in a straggling line along the clayey pathway which led up to the saloon.

The interior of the building had been provided with rough benches; and the parson, with his quiet, good-humoured smile, was standing at the door to welcome them. "Good morning, boys," he cried cheerily, as each group came

lounging up. "Pass in! pass in. You'll find this is as good a morning's work as any you've done. Leave your pistols in this barrel outside the door as you pass; you can pick them out as you come out again; but it isn't the thing to carry weapons into the house of peace." His request was good-humouredly complied with, and before the last of the congregation filed in there was a strange assortment of knives and firearms in this depository. When all had assembled the doors were shut and the service began—the first and the last which was ever performed at Jackman's Gulch.

The weather was sultry and the room close, yet the miners listened with exemplary patience. There was a sense of novelty in the situation which had its attractions. To some it was entirely new, others were wafted back by it to another land and other days. Beyond a disposition which was exhibited by the uninitiated to applaud at the end of certain prayers, by way of showing that they sympathised with the sentiments expressed, no audience could have behaved better. There was a murmur of interest, however, when Elias B. Hopkins, looking down on the congregation from his rostrum of casks, began his address.

He had attired himself with care in honour of the occasion. He wore a velveteen tunic, girt round the waist with a sash of china silk, a pair of moleskin trousers, and held his cabbage-tree hat in his left hand. He began speaking in a low tone, and it was noticed at the time that he frequently glanced through the small aperture which served for a window, which was placed above the heads of those who sat beneath him.

"I've put you straight now," he said, in the course of his address; "I've got you in the right rut, if you will but stick in it." Here he looked very hard out of the window for some seconds. "You've learned soberness and industry, and with those things you can always make up any loss you may sustain. I guess there isn't one of ye that won't remember my visit to this camp." He paused for a moment, and three revolver shots rang out upon the quiet summer air. "Keep your seats, damn ye!" roared our preacher, as his audience rose in excitement. "If a man of ye moves, down he goes! The door's locked on the outside, so ye can't get out anyhow. Your seats, ye canting, chuckle-headed fools! Down with ye, ye dogs, or I'll fire among ye!"

Astonishment and fear brought us back into our seats, and we sat staring blankly at our pastor and each other. Elias B. Hopkins, whose whole face and even figure appeared to have undergone an extraordinary alteration, looked fiercely down on us from his commanding position with a contemptuous smile

on his stern face.

"I have your lives in my hands," he remarked; and we noticed as he spoke that he held a heavy revolver in his hand, and that the butt of another one protruded from his sash. "I am armed and you are not. If one of you moves or speaks, he is a dead man. If not, I shall not harm you. You must wait here for an hour. Why, you *fools*" (this with a hiss of contempt which rang in our ears for many a long day), "do you know who it is that has stuck you up? Do you know who it is that has been playing it upon you for months as a parson and a saint? Conky Jim, the bushranger, ye apes! And Phillips and Maule were my two right-hand men. They're off into the hills with your gold—— Ha! would ye?" This to some restive member of the audience, who quieted down instantly before the fierce eye and the ready weapon of the bushranger. "In an hour they will be clear of any pursuit, and I advise you to make the best of it and not to follow, or you may lose more than your money. My horse is tethered outside this door behind me. When the time is up I shall pass through it, lock it on the outside, and be off. Then you may break your way out as best you can. I have no more to say to you, except that ye are the most cursed set of asses that ever trod in boot-leather."

We had time to endorse mentally this outspoken opinion during the long sixty minutes which followed; we were powerless before the resolute desperado. It is true that if we made a simultaneous rush we might bear him down at the cost of eight or ten of our number. But how could such a rush be organised without speaking, and who would attempt it without a previous agreement that he would be supported? There was nothing for it but submission. It seemed three hours at the least before the ranger snapped up his watch, stepped down from the barrel, walked backwards, still covering us with his weapon, to the door behind him, and then passed rapidly through it. We heard the creaking of the rusty lock, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs as he galloped away.

It has been remarked that an oath had for the last few weeks been a rare thing in the camp. We made up for our temporary abstention during the next half-hour. Never was heard such symmetrical and heartfelt blasphemy. When at last we succeeded in getting the door off its hinges all sight of both rangers and treasure had disappeared, nor have we ever caught sight of either the one or the other since. Poor Woburn, true to his trust, lay shot through the head across the threshold of his empty store. The villains, Maule and Phillips, had descended upon the camp the instant that we had been enticed into the trap, murdered the keeper, loaded up a small cart with the booty, and got safe away to some wild fastness among the mountains, where they were joined by their wily leader.

Jackman's Gulch recovered from this blow, and is now a flourishing township. Social reformers are not in request there, however, and morality is at a discount. It is said that an inquest has been held lately upon an unoffending stranger who chanced to remark that in so large a place it would be advisable to have some form of Sunday service. The memory of their one and only pastor is still green among the inhabitants, and will be for many a long year to come.

MY FRIEND THE MURDERER.

"NUMBER 43 is no better, Doctor," said the head-warder in a slightly reproachful accent, looking in round the corner of my door.

"Confound 43!" I responded from behind the pages of the *Australian Sketcher*.

"And 61 says his tubes are paining him. Couldn't you do anything for him?"

"He's a walking drug shop," said I. "He has the whole British pharmacopœia inside him. I believe his tubes are as sound as yours are."

"Then there's 7 and 108, they are chronic," continued the warder, glancing down a blue slip of paper. "And 28 knocked off work yesterday—said lifting things gave him a stitch in the side. I want you to have a look at him, if you don't mind, Doctor. There's 31, too—him that killed John Adamson in the *Corinthian* brig—he's been carrying on awful in the night, shrieking and yelling, he has, and no stopping him neither."

"All right, I'll have a look at him afterwards," I said, tossing my paper carelessly aside, and pouring myself out a cup of coffee. "Nothing else to report, I suppose, warder?"

The official protruded his head a little further into the room. "Beg pardon, Doctor," he said, in a confidential tone, "but I notice as 82 has a bit of a cold, and it would be a good excuse for you to visit him and have a chat, maybe."

The cup of coffee was arrested half-way to my lips as I stared in amazement at the man's serious face.

"An excuse?" I said. "An excuse? What the deuce are you talking about, McPherson? You see me trudging about all day at my practice, when I'm not looking after the prisoners, and coming back every night as tired as a dog, and you talk about finding an excuse for doing more work."

"You'd like it, Doctor," said Warder McPherson, insinuating one of his shoulders into the room. "That man's story's worth listening to if you could get him to tell it, though he's not what you'd call free in his speech. Maybe you don't know who 82 is?"

"No, I don't, and I don't care either," I answered, in the conviction that some local ruffian was about to be foisted upon me as a celebrity.

"He's Maloney," said the warder, "him that turned Queen's evidence after the murders at Bluemansdyke."

"You don't say so?" I ejaculated, laying down my cup in astonishment. I had heard of this ghastly series of murders, and read an account of them in a London magazine long before setting foot in the colony. I remembered that the atrocities committed had thrown the Burke and Hare crimes completely into the shade, and that one of the most villainous of the gang had saved his own skin by betraying his companions. "Are you sure?" I asked.

"Oh yes, it's him right enough. Just you draw him out a bit, and he'll astonish you. He's a man to know, is Maloney; that's to say, in moderation;" and the head grinned, bobbed, and disappeared, leaving me to finish my breakfast and ruminate over what I had heard.

The surgeonship of an Australian prison is not an enviable position. It may be endurable in Melbourne or Sydney, but the little town of Perth has few attractions to recommend it, and those few had been long exhausted. The climate was detestable, and the society far from congenial. Sheep and cattle were the staple support of the community; and their prices, breeding, and diseases the principal topic of conversation. Now as I, being an outsider, possessed neither the one nor the other, and was utterly callous to the new "dip" and the "rot" and other kindred topics, I found myself in a state of mental isolation, and was ready to hail anything which might relieve the monotony of my existence. Maloney, the murderer, had at least some distinctiveness and individuality in his character, and might act as a tonic to a mind sick of the commonplaces of existence. I determined that I should follow the warder's advice, and take the excuse for making his acquaintance. When, therefore, I went upon my usual matutinal round, I turned the lock of the door which bore the convict's number upon it, and walked into the cell.

The man was lying in a heap upon his rough bed as I entered, but, uncoiling his long limbs, he started up and stared at me with an insolent look of defiance

on his face which augured badly for our interview. He had a pale set face, with sandy hair and a steelly-blue eye, with something feline in its expression. His frame was tall and muscular, though there was a curious bend in his shoulders, which almost amounted to a deformity. An ordinary observer meeting him in the street might have put him down as a well-developed man, fairly handsome, and of studious habits—even in the hideous uniform of the rottenest convict establishment he imparted a certain refinement to his carriage which marked him out among the inferior ruffians around him.

"I'm not on the sick-list," he said gruffly. There was something in the hard, rasping voice which dispelled all softer allusions, and made me realise that I was face to face with the man of the Lena Valley and Bluemansdyke, the bloodiest bushranger that ever stuck up a farm or cut the throats of its occupants.

"I know you're not," I answered. "Warder McPherson told me you had a cold, though, and I thought I'd look in and see you."

"Blast Warder McPherson, and blast you, too!" yelled the convict, in a paroxysm of rage. "Oh, that's right," he added, in a quieter voice; "hurry away; report me to the governor, do! Get me another six months or so—that's your game."

"I'm not going to report you," I said.

"Eight square feet of ground," he went on, disregarding my protest, and evidently working himself into a fury again. "Eight square feet, and I can't have that without being talked to and stared at, and—oh, blast the whole crew of you!" and he raised his two clenched hands above his head and shook them in passionate invective.

"You've got a curious idea of hospitality," I remarked, determined not to lose my temper, and saying almost the first thing that came to my tongue.

To my surprise the words had an extraordinary effect upon him. He seemed completely staggered at my assuming the proposition for which he had been so fiercely contending—namely, that the room in which we stood was his own.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I didn't mean to be rude. Won't you take a seat?" and he motioned towards a rough trestle, which formed the headpiece of his couch.

I sat down rather astonished at the sudden change. I don't know that I liked

Maloney better under his new aspect. The murderer had, it is true, disappeared for the nonce, but there was something in the smooth tones and obsequious manner which powerfully suggested the witness of the Queen, who had stood up and sworn away the lives of his companions in crime.

"How's your chest?" I asked, putting on my professional air.

"Come, drop it, Doctor, drop it!" he answered, showing a row of white teeth as he resumed his seat upon the side of the bed. "It wasn't anxiety after my precious health that brought you along here; that story won't wash at all. You came to have a look at Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, murderer, Sydney-slider, ranger, and Government peach. That's about my figure, ain't it? There it is, plain and straight; there's nothing mean about me."

He paused as if he expected me to say something; but as I remained silent, he repeated once or twice, "There's nothing mean about me."

"And why shouldn't I?" he suddenly yelled, his eyes gleaming and his whole satanic nature reasserting itself. "We were bound to swing, one and all, and they were none the worse if I saved myself by turning against them. Every man for himself, say I, and the devil take the luckiest. You haven't a plug of tobacco, Doctor, have you?"

He tore at the piece of "Barrett's" which I handed him as ravenously as a wild beast. It seemed to have the effect of soothing his nerves, for he settled himself down in the bed, and reassumed his former deprecating manner.

"You wouldn't like it yourself, you know, Doctor," he said; "it's enough to make any man a little queer in his temper. I'm in for six months this time for assault, and very sorry I shall be to go out again, I can tell you. My mind's at ease in here; but when I'm outside, what with the Government, and what with Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury, there's no chance of a quiet life."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He's the brother of John Grimthorpe; the same that was condemned on my evidence, and an infernal scamp he was too! Spawn of the devil, both of them! This tattooed one is a murderous ruffian, and he swore to have my blood after that trial. It's seven year ago, and he's following me yet; I know he is, though he lies low and keeps dark. He came up to me in Ballarat in '75; you can see on the back of my hand here where the bullet clipped me. He tried again in '76, at Port

Philip, but I got the drop on him and wounded him badly. He knifed me in '79 though, in a bar at Adelaide, and that made our account about level. He's loafing round again now, and he'll let daylight into me—unless—unless by some extraordinary chance some one does as much for him." And Maloney gave a very ugly smile.

"I don't complain of *him* so much," he continued. "Looking at it in his way, no doubt it is a sort of family matter that can hardly be neglected. It's the Government that fetches me. When I think of what I've done for this country, and then of what this country has done for me, it makes me fairly wild—clean drives me off my head. There's no gratitude nor common decency left, Doctor!"

He brooded over his wrongs for a few minutes, and then proceeded to lay them before me in detail.

"Here's nine men," he said, "they've been murdering and killing for a matter of three years, and maybe a life a week wouldn't more than average the work that they've done. The Government catches them and the Government tries them, but they can't convict; and why?—because the witnesses have all had their throats cut, and the whole job's been very neatly done. What happens then? Up comes a citizen called Wolf Tone Maloney; he says, 'The country needs me, and here I am.' And with that he gives his evidence, convicts the lot, and enables the beaks to hang them. That's what I did. There's nothing mean about me! And now what does the country do in return? Dogs me, sir, spies on me, watches me night and day, turns against the very man that worked so hard for it. There's something mean about that, anyway. I didn't expect them to knight me, nor to make me Colonial Secretary; but, damn it, I did expect that they would let me alone!"

"Well," I remonstrated, "if you choose to break laws and assault people, you can't expect it to be looked over on account of former services."

"I don't refer to my present imprisonment, sir," said Maloney, with dignity. "It's the life I've been leading since that cursed trial that takes the soul out of me. Just you sit there on that trestle, and I'll tell you all about it; and then look me in the face and tell me that I've been treated fair by the police."

I shall endeavour to transcribe the experiences of the convict in his own words, as far as I can remember them, preserving his curious perversions of right and wrong. I can answer for the truth of his facts, whatever may be said for his deductions from them. Months afterwards, Inspector H. W. Hann, formerly governor of the gaol at Dunedin, showed me entries in his ledger which

corroborated every statement. Maloney reeled the story off in a dull, monotonous voice, with his head sunk upon his breast and his hands between his knees. The glitter of his serpent-like eyes was the only sign of the emotions which were stirred up by the recollection of the events which he narrated.

You've read of Bluemansdyke (he began, with some pride in his tone). We made it hot while it lasted; but they ran us to earth at last, and a trap called Braxton, with a damned Yankee, took the lot of us. That was in New Zealand, of course, and they took us down to Dunedin, and there they were convicted and hanged. One and all they put up their hands in the dock, and cursed me till your blood would have run cold to hear them, which was scurvy treatment, seeing that we had all been pals together; but they were a blackguard lot, and thought only of themselves. I think it is as well that they were hung.

They took me back to Dunedin gaol, and clapped me into the old cell. The only difference they made was, that I had no work to do, and was well fed. I stood this for a week or two, until one day the governor was making his round, and I put the matter to him.

"How's this?" I said. "My conditions were a free pardon, and you're keeping me here against the law."

He gave a sort of a smile. "Should you like very much to go out?" he asked.

"So much," said I, "that, unless you open that door, I'll have an action against you for illegal detention."

He seemed a bit astonished by my resolution. "You're very anxious to meet your death," he said.

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"Come here, and you'll know what I mean," he answered. And he led me down the passage to a window that overlooked the door of the prison. "Look at that!" said he.

I looked out, and there were a dozen or so rough-looking fellows standing outside in the street, some of them smoking, some playing cards on the pavement. When they saw me they gave a yell, and crowded round the door,

shaking their fists and hooting.

"They wait for you, watch and watch about," said the governor. "They're the executive of the vigilance committee. However, since you are determined to go, I can't stop you."

"D'ye call this a civilised land," I cried, "and let a man be murdered in cold blood in open daylight?"

When I said this the governor and the warder and every fool in the place grinned, as if a man's life was a rare good joke.

"You've got the law on your side," says the governor; "so we won't detain you any longer. Show him out, warder."

He'd have done it too, the black-hearted villain, if I hadn't begged and prayed and offered to pay for my board and lodging, which is more than any prisoner ever did before me. He let me stay on those conditions; and for three months I was caged up there with every larrikin in the township clamouring at the other side of the wall. That was pretty treatment for a man that had served his country!

At last, one morning, up came the governor again.

"Well, Maloney," he said, "how long are you going to honour us with your society?"

I could have put a knife into his cursed body, and would, too, if we had been alone in the bush; but I had to smile, and smooth him and flatter, for I feared that he might have me sent out.

"You're an infernal rascal," he said; those were his very words to a man that had helped him all he knew how. "I don't want any rough justice here, though; and I think I see my way to getting you out of Dunedin."

"I'll never forget you, governor," said I; and, by God, I never will.

"I don't want your thanks nor your gratitude," he answered; "it's not for your sake that I do it, but simply to keep order in the town. There's a steamer starts from the West Quay to Melbourne to-morrow, and we'll get you aboard it. She is advertised at five in the morning, so have yourself in readiness."

I packed up the few things I had, and was smuggled out by a back door just before daybreak. I hurried down, took my ticket, under the name of Isaac Smith,

and got safely aboard the Melbourne boat. I remember hearing her screw grinding into the water as the warps were cast loose, and looking back at the lights of Dunedin, as I leaned upon the bulwarks, with the pleasant thought that I was leaving them behind me for ever. It seemed to me that a new world was before me, and that all my troubles had been cast off. I went down below and had some coffee, and came up again feeling better than I had done since the morning that I woke to find that cursed Irishman that took me standing over me with a six-shooter.

Day had dawned by that time, and we were steaming along by the coast, well out of sight of Dunedin. I loafed about for a couple of hours, and when the sun got well up some of the other passengers came on deck and joined me. One of them, a little perky sort of fellow, took a good long look at me, and then came over and began talking.

"Mining, I suppose?" says he.

"Yes," I says.

"Made your pile?" he asks.

"Pretty fair," says I.

"I was at it myself," he says; "I worked at the Nelson fields for three months, and spent all I made in buying a salted claim which busted up the second day. I went at it again, though, and struck it rich; but when the gold waggon was going down to the settlements, it was stuck up by those cursed rangers, and not a red cent left."

"That was a bad job," I says.

"Broke me—ruined me clean. Never mind, I've seen them all hanged for it; that makes it easier to bear. There's only one left—the villain that gave the evidence. I'd die happy if I could come across him. There are two things I have to do if I meet him."

"What's that?" says I carelessly.

"I've got to ask him where the money lies—they never had time to make away with it, and it's *cachéd* somewhere in the mountains—and then I've got to stretch his neck for him, and send his soul down to join the men that he betrayed."

It seemed to me that I knew something about that *caché*, and I felt like laughing; but he was watching me, and it struck me that he had a nasty, vindictive kind of mind.

"I'm going up on the bridge," I said, for he was not a man whose acquaintance I cared much about making.

He wouldn't hear of my leaving him, though. "We're both miners," he says, "and we're pals for the voyage. Come down to the bar. I'm not too poor to shout."

I couldn't refuse him well, and we went down together; and that was the beginning of the trouble. What harm was I doing any one on the ship? All I asked for was a quiet life, leaving others alone, and getting left alone myself. No man could ask fairer than that. And now just you listen to what came of it.

We were passing the front of the ladies' cabins, on our way to the saloon, when out comes a servant lass—a freckled currency she-devil—with a baby in her arms. We were brushing past her, when she gave a scream like a railway whistle, and nearly dropped the kid. My nerves gave a sort of a jump when I heard that scream, but I turned and begged her pardon, letting on that I thought I might have trod on her foot. I knew the game was up though, when I saw her white face, and her leaning against the door and pointing.

"It's him!" she cried; "it's him! I saw him in the court-house. Oh, don't let him hurt the baby!"

"Who is it?" asks the steward and half-a-dozen others in a breath.

"It's him—Maloney—Maloney, the murderer—oh, take him away—take him away!"

I don't rightly remember what happened just at that moment. The furniture and me seemed to get kind of mixed, and there was cursing, and smashing, and some one shouting for his gold, and a general stamp round. When I got steadied a bit, I found somebody's hand in my mouth. From what I gathered afterwards, I conclude that it belonged to that same little man with the vicious way of talking. He got some of it out again, but that was because the others were choking me. A poor chap can get no fair-play in this world when once he is down—still I think he will remember me till the day of his death—longer, I hope.

They dragged me out into the poop and held a damned court-martial—on *me*, mind you; *me*, that had thrown over my pals in order to serve them. What were

they to do with me? Some said this, some said that; but it ended by the captain deciding to send me ashore. The ship stopped, they lowered a boat, and I was hoisted in, the whole gang of them hooting at me from over the bulwarks. I saw the man I spoke of tying up his hand though, and I felt that things might be worse.

I changed my opinion before we got to the land. I had reckoned on the shore being deserted, and that I might make my way inland; but the ship had stopped too near the Heads, and a dozen beach-combers and such like had come down to the water's edge, and were staring at us, wondering what the boat was after. When we got to the edge of the surf the coxswain hailed them, and after singing out who I was, he and his men threw me into the water. You may well look surprised—neck and crop into ten feet of water, with shark as thick as green parrots in the bush, and I heard them laughing as I floundered to the shore.

I soon saw it was a worse job than ever. As I came scrambling out through the weeds, I was collared by a big chap with a velveteen coat, and half-a-dozen others got round me and held me fast. Most of them looked simple fellows enough, and I was not afraid of them; but there was one in a cabbage-tree hat that had a very nasty expression on his face, and the big man seemed to be chummy with him.

They dragged me up the beach, and then they let go their hold of me and stood round in a circle.

"Well, mate," says the man with the hat, "we've been looking out for you some time in these parts."

"And very good of you too," I answers.

"None of your jaw," says he. "Come, boys, what shall it be—hanging, drowning, or shooting? Look sharp!"

This looked a bit too like business. "No you don't!" I said. "I've got Government protection, and it'll be murder."

"That's what they call it," answered the one in the velveteen coat as cheery as a piping crow.

"And you're going to murder me for being a ranger?"

"Ranger be damned!" said the man. "We're going to hang you for peaching

against your pals; and that's an end of the palaver."

They slung a rope round my neck and dragged me up to the edge of the bush. There were some big she-oaks and blue-gums, and they pitched on one of these for the wicked deed. They ran the rope over a branch, tied my hands, and told me to say my prayers. It seemed as if it was all up; but Providence interfered to save me. It sounds nice enough sitting here and telling about it, sir; but it was sick work to stand with nothing but the beach in front of you, and the long white line of surf, with the steamer in the distance, and a set of bloody-minded villains round you thirsting for your life.

I never thought I'd owe anything good to the police; but they saved me that time. A troop of them were riding from Hawkes Point Station to Dunedin, and hearing that something was up, they came down through the bush, and interrupted the proceedings. I've heard some bands in my time, Doctor, but I never heard music like the jingle of those traps' spurs and harness as they galloped out on to the open. They tried to hang me even then, but the police were too quick for them; and the man with the hat got one over the head with the flat of a sword. I was clapped on to a horse, and before evening I found myself in my old quarters in the city gaol.

The governor wasn't to be done, though. He was determined to get rid of me, and I was equally anxious to see the last of him. He waited a week or so until the excitement had begun to die away, and then he smuggled me aboard a three-masted schooner bound to Sydney with tallow and hides.

We got fair away to sea without a hitch, and things began to look a bit more rosy. I made sure that I had seen the last of the prison, anyway. The crew had a sort of an idea who I was, and if there'd been any rough weather, they'd have hove me overboard like enough; for they were a rough, ignorant lot, and had a notion that I brought bad luck to the ship. We had a good passage, however, and I was landed safe and sound upon Sydney Quay.

Now just you listen to what happened next. You'd have thought they would have been sick of ill-using me and following me by this time—wouldn't you, now? Well, just you listen. It seems that a cursed steamer started from Dunedin to Sydney on the very day we left, and got in before us, bringing news that I was coming. Blessed if they hadn't called a meeting—a regular mass meeting—at the docks to discuss about it, and I marched right into it when I landed. They didn't take long about arresting me, and I listened to all the speeches and resolutions. If

I'd been a prince there couldn't have been more excitement. The end of it all was that they agreed that it wasn't right that New Zealand should be allowed to foist her criminals upon her neighbours, and that I was to be sent back again by the next boat. So they posted me off again as if I was a damned parcel; and after another eight hundred mile journey I found myself back for the third time moving in the place that I started from.

By this time I had begun to think that I was going to spend the rest of my existence travelling about from one port to another. Every man's hand seemed turned against me, and there was no peace or quiet in any direction. I was about sick of it by the time I had come back; and if I could have taken to the bush I'd have done it, and chanced it with my old pals. They were too quick for me, though, and kept me under lock and key; but I managed, in spite of them, to negotiate that *caché* I told you of, and sewed the gold up in my belt. I spent another month in gaol, and then they slipped me aboard a barque that was bound for England.

This time the crew never knew who I was, but the captain had a pretty good idea, though he didn't let on to me that he had any suspicions. I guessed from the first that the man was a villain. We had a fair passage, except a gale or two off the Cape; and I began to feel like a free man when I saw the blue loom of the old country, and the saucy little pilot-boat from Falmouth dancing towards us over the waves. We ran down the Channel, and before we reached Gravesend I had agreed with the pilot that he should take me ashore with him when he left. It was at this time that the captain showed me that I was right in thinking him a meddling, disagreeable man. I got my things packed, such as they were, and left him talking earnestly to the pilot, while I went below for my breakfast. When I came up again we were fairly into the mouth of the river, and the boat in which I was to have gone ashore had left us. The skipper said the pilot had forgotten me; but that was too thin, and I began to fear that all my old troubles were going to commence once more.

It was not long before my suspicions were confirmed. A boat darted out from the side of the river, and a tall cove with a long black beard came aboard. I heard him ask the mate whether they didn't need a mud-pilot to take them up the reaches, but it seemed to me that he was a man who would know a deal more about handcuffs than he did about steering, so I kept away from him. He came across the deck, however, and made some remark to me, taking a good look at me the while. I don't like inquisitive people at any time, but an inquisitive stranger with glue about the roots of his beard is the worst of all to stand,

especially under the circumstances. I began to feel that it was time for me to go.

I soon got a chance, and made good use of it. A big collier came athwart the bows of our steamer, and we had to slacken down to dead slow. There was a barge astern, and I slipped down by a rope and was into the barge before any one had missed me. Of course I had to leave my luggage behind me, but I had the belt with the nuggets round my waist, and the chance of shaking the police off my track was worth more than a couple of boxes. It was clear to me now that the pilot had been a traitor, as well as the captain, and had set the detectives after me. I often wish I could drop across those two men again.

I hung about the barge all day as she drifted down the stream. There was one man in her, but she was a big, ugly craft, and his hands were too full for much looking about. Towards evening, when it got a bit dusky, I struck out for the shore, and found myself in a sort of marsh place, a good many miles to the east of London. I was soaking wet and half dead with hunger, but I trudged into the town, got a new rig-out at a slop-shop, and after having some supper, engaged a bed at the quietest lodgings I could find.

I woke pretty early—a habit you pick up in the bush—and lucky for me that I did so. The very first thing I saw when I took a look through a chink in the shutter was one of these infernal policemen standing right opposite, and staring up at the windows. He hadn't epaulettes nor a sword, like our traps, but for all that there was a sort of family likeness, and the same busybody expression. Whether they'd followed me all the time, or whether the woman that let me the bed didn't like the looks of me, is more than I have ever been able to find out. He came across as I was watching him, and noted down the address of the house in a book. I was afraid that he was going to ring at the bell, but I suppose his orders were simply to keep an eye on me, for after another good look at the windows he moved on down the street.

I saw that my only chance was to act at once. I threw on my clothes, opened the window softly, and, after making sure that there was nobody about, dropped out on to the ground and made off as hard as I could run. I travelled a matter of two or three miles, when my wind gave out; and as I saw a big building with people going in and out, I went in too, and found that it was a railway station. A train was just going off for Dover to meet the French boat, so I took a ticket and jumped into a third-class carriage.

There were a couple of other chaps in the carriage, innocent-looking young

beggars, both of them. They began speaking about this and that, while I sat quiet in the corner and listened. Then they started on England and foreign countries, and such like. Look ye now, Doctor, this is a fact. One of them begins jawing about the justice of England's laws. "It's all fair and above-board," says he; "there ain't any secret police, nor spying, like they have abroad," and a lot more of the same sort of wash. Rather rough on me, wasn't it, listening to the damned young fool, with the police following me about like my shadow?

I got to Paris right enough, and there I changed some of my gold, and for a few days I imagined I'd shaken them off, and began to think of settling down for a bit of a rest. I needed it by that time, for I was looking more like a ghost than a man. You've never had the police after you, I suppose? Well, you needn't look offended, I didn't mean any harm. If ever you had you'd know that it wastes a man away like a sheep with the rot.

I went to the opera one night and took a box, for I was very flush. I was coming out between the acts when I met a fellow lounging along in the passage. The light fell on his face, and I saw that it was the mud-pilot that had boarded us in the Thames. His beard was gone, but I recognised the man at a glance, for I've a good memory for faces.

I tell you, Doctor, I felt desperate for a moment. I could have knifed him if we had been alone, but he knew me well enough never to give me the chance. It was more than I could stand any longer, so I went right up to him and drew him aside, where we'd be free from all the loungers and theatre-goers.

"How long are you going to keep it up?" I asked him.

He seemed a bit flustered for a moment, but then he saw there was no use beating about the bush, so he answered straight—

"Until you go back to Australia," he said.

"Don't you know," I said, "that I have served the Government and got a free pardon?"

He grinned all over his ugly face when I said this.

"We know all about you, Maloney," he answered. "If you want a quiet life, just you go back where you came from. If you stay here, you're a marked man; and when you are found tripping it'll be a lifer for you, at the least. Free trade's a fine thing, but the market's too full of men like you for us to need to import

any!"

It seemed to me that there was something in what he said, though he had a nasty way of putting it. For some days back I'd been feeling a sort of home-sick. The ways of the people weren't my ways. They stared at me in the street; and if I dropped into a bar, they'd stop talking and edge away a bit, as if I was a wild beast. I'd sooner have had a pint of old Stringybark, too, than a bucketful of their rotgut liquors. There was too much damned propriety. What was the use of having money if you couldn't dress as you liked, nor bust it properly? There was no sympathy for a man if he shot about a little when he was half-over. I've seen a man dropped at Nelson many a time with less row than they'd make over a broken window-pane. The thing was slow, and I was sick of it.

"You want me to go back?" I said.

"I've my orders to stick fast to you until you do," he answered.

"Well," I said, "I don't care if I do. All I bargain is that you keep your mouth shut, and don't let on who I am, so that I may have a fair start when I get there."

He agreed to this, and we went over to Southampton the very next day, where he saw me safely off once more. I took a passage round to Adelaide, where no one was likely to know me; and there I settled, right under the nose of the police. I've been there ever since, leading a quiet life, but for little difficulties like the one I'm in for now, and for that devil, Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury. I don't know what made me tell you all this, Doctor, unless it is that being kind of lonely makes a man inclined to jaw when he gets a chance. Just you take warning from me, though. Never put yourself out to serve your country; for your country will do precious little for you. Just you let them look after their own affairs; and if they find a difficulty in hanging a set of scoundrels, never mind chipping in, but let them alone to do as best they can. Maybe they'll remember how they treated me after I'm dead, and be sorry for neglecting me. I was rude to you when you came in, and swore a trifle promiscuous; but don't you mind me, it's only my way. You'll allow, though, that I have cause to be a bit touchy now and again when I think of all that's passed. You're not going, are you? Well, if you must, you must; but I hope you will look me up at odd times when you are going your round. Oh, I say, you've left the balance of that cake of tobacco behind you, haven't you? No; it's in your pocket—that's all right. Thank ye, Doctor, you're a good sort, and as quick at a hint as any man I've met.

A couple of months after narrating his experiences, Wolf Tone Maloney finished his term, and was released. For a long time I neither saw him nor heard of him; and he had almost slipped from my memory, until I was reminded, in a somewhat tragic manner, of his existence. I had been attending a patient some distance off in the country, and was riding back, guiding my tired horse among the boulders which strewed the pathway, and endeavouring to see my way through the gathering darkness, when I came suddenly upon a little wayside inn. As I walked my horse up towards the door, intending to make sure of my bearings before proceeding further, I heard the sound of a violent altercation within the little bar. There seemed to be a chorus of expostulation or remonstrance, above which two powerful voices rang out loud and angry. As I listened, there was a momentary hush, two pistol shots sounded almost simultaneously, and, with a crash, the door burst open, and a pair of dark figures staggered out into the moonlight. They struggled for a moment in a deadly wrestle, and then went down together among the loose stones. I had sprung off my horse, and, with the help of half-a-dozen rough fellows from the bar, dragged them away from one another.

A glance was sufficient to convince me that one of them was dying fast. He was a thick-set, burly fellow, with a determined cast of countenance. The blood was welling from a deep stab in his throat, and it was evident that an important artery had been divided. I turned away from him in despair, and walked over to where his antagonist was lying. He was shot through the lungs, but managed to raise himself upon his hand as I approached, and peered anxiously up into my face. To my surprise I saw before me the haggard features and flaxen hair of my prison acquaintance, Maloney.

"Ah, Doctor!" he said, recognising me. "How is he? Will he die?"

He asked the question so earnestly that I imagined he had softened at the last moment, and feared to leave the world with another homicide upon his conscience. Truth, however, compelled me to shake my head mournfully, and to intimate that the wound would prove a mortal one.

Maloney gave a wild cry of triumph, which brought the blood welling out from between his lips. "Here, boys," he gasped to the little group around him. "There's money in my inside pocket. Damn the expense! Drinks round. There's nothing mean about me. I'd drink with you, but I'm going. Give the Doc. my

share, for he's as good——" Here his head fell back with a thud, his eye glazed, and the soul of Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, convict, ranger, murderer, and Government peach, drifted away into the Great Unknown.

I cannot conclude without borrowing the account of the fatal quarrel which appeared in the columns of the *West Australian Sentinel*. The curious will find it in the issue of the 4th of October 1881:—

"Fatal Affray.—W. T. Maloney, a well-known citizen of New Montrose, and proprietor of the Yellow Boy gambling saloon, has met with his death under rather painful circumstances. Mr. Maloney was a man who had led a chequered existence, and whose past history is replete with interest. Some of our readers may recall the Lena Valley murders, in which he figured as the principal criminal. It is conjectured that, during the seven months that he owned a bar in that region, from twenty to thirty travellers were hocussed and made away with. He succeeded, however, in evading the vigilance of the officers of the law, and allied himself with the bushrangers of Bluemansdyke, whose heroic capture and subsequent execution are matters of history. Maloney extricated himself from the fate which awaited him by turning Queen's evidence. He afterwards visited Europe, but returned to West Australia, where he has long played a prominent part in local matters. On Friday evening he encountered an old enemy, Thomas Grimthorpe, commonly known as Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury. Shots were exchanged, and both men were badly wounded, only surviving a few minutes. Mr. Maloney had the reputation of being, not only the most wholesale murderer that ever lived, but also of having a finish and attention to detail in matters of evidence which has been unapproached by any European criminal. *Sic transit gloriâ mundi!*"

THE SILVER HATCHET.

On the 3rd of December 1861, Dr. Otto von Hopstein, Regius Professor of Comparative Anatomy of the University of Buda-Pesth, and Curator of the Academical Museum, was foully and brutally murdered within a stone-throw of the entrance to the college quadrangle.

Besides the eminent position of the victim and his popularity amongst both students and townsfolk, there were other circumstances which excited public interest very strongly, and drew general attention throughout Austria and Hungary to this murder. The *Pesther Abendblatt* of the following day had an article upon it, which may still be consulted by the curious, and from which I translate a few passages giving a succinct account of the circumstances under which the crime was committed, and the peculiar features in the case which puzzled the Hungarian police.

"It appears," said that very excellent paper, "that Professor von Hopstein left the University about half-past four in the afternoon, in order to meet the train which is due from Vienna at three minutes after five. He was accompanied by his old and dear friend, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger, sub-Curator of the Museum and Privat-docent of Chemistry. The object of these two gentlemen in meeting this particular train was to receive the legacy bequeathed by Graf von Schulling to the University of Buda-Pesth. It is well known that this unfortunate nobleman, whose tragic fate is still fresh in the recollection of the public, left his unique collection of mediæval weapons, as well as several priceless black-letter editions, to enrich the already celebrated museum of his Alma Mater. The worthy Professor was too much of an enthusiast in such matters to intrust the reception or care of this valuable legacy to any subordinate; and, with the assistance of Herr Schlessinger, he succeeded in removing the whole collection from the train, and stowing it away in a light cart which had been sent by the University authorities. Most of the books and more fragile articles were packed

in cases of pine-wood, but many of the weapons were simply done round with straw, so that considerable labour was involved in moving them all. The Professor was so nervous, however, lest any of them should be injured, that he refused to allow any of the railway employés (*Eisenbahn-diener*) to assist. Every article was carried across the platform by Herr Schlessinger, and handed to Professor von Hopstein in the cart, who packed it away. When everything was in, the two gentlemen, still faithful to their charge, drove back to the University, the Professor being in excellent spirits, and not a little proud of the physical exertion which he had shown himself capable of. He made some joking allusion to it to Reinmaul, the janitor, who, with his friend Schiffer, a Bohemian Jew, met the cart on its return and unloaded the contents. Leaving his curiosities safe in the store-room, and locking the door, the Professor handed the key to his sub-curator, and, bidding every one good evening, departed in the direction of his lodgings. Schlessinger took a last look to reassure himself that all was right, and also went off, leaving Reinmaul and his friend Schiffer smoking in the janitor's lodge.

"At eleven o'clock, about an hour and a half after Von Hopstein's departure, a soldier of the 14th regiment of Jäger, passing the front of the University on his way to barracks, came upon the lifeless body of the Professor lying a little way from the side of the road. He had fallen upon his face, with both hands stretched out. His head was literally split in two halves by a tremendous blow, which, it is conjectured, must have been struck from behind, there remaining a peaceful smile upon the old man's face, as if he had been still dwelling upon his new archæological acquisition when death had overtaken him. There is no other mark of violence upon the body, except a bruise over the left patella, caused probably by the fall. The most mysterious part of the affair is that the Professor's purse, containing forty-three gulden, and his valuable watch have been untouched. Robbery cannot, therefore, have been the incentive to the deed, unless the assassins were disturbed before they could complete their work.

"This idea is negatived by the fact that the body must have lain at least an hour before any one discovered it. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. Dr. Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, has pronounced that the wound is such as might have been inflicted by a heavy sword-bayonet wielded by a powerful arm. The police are extremely reticent upon the subject, and it is suspected that they are in possession of a clue which may lead to important results."

Thus far the *Pesther Abendblatt*. The researches of the police failed, however, to throw the least glimmer of light upon the matter. There was absolutely no

trace of the murderer, nor could any amount of ingenuity invent any reason which could have induced any one to commit the dreadful deed. The deceased Professor was a man so wrapped in his own studies and pursuits that he lived apart from the world, and had certainly never raised the slightest animosity in any human breast. It must have been some fiend, some savage, who loved blood for its own sake, who struck that merciless blow.

Though the officials were unable to come to any conclusions upon the matter, popular suspicion was not long in pitching upon a scapegoat. In the first published accounts of the murder the name of one Schiffer had been mentioned as having remained with the janitor after the Professor's departure. This man was a Jew, and Jews have never been popular in Hungary. A cry was at once raised for Schiffer's arrest; but as there was not the slightest grain of evidence against him, the authorities very properly refused to consent to so arbitrary a proceeding. Reinmaul, who was an old and most respected citizen, declared solemnly that Schiffer was with him until the startled cry of the soldier had caused them both to run out to the scene of the tragedy. No one ever dreamed of implicating Reinmaul in such a matter; but still, it was rumoured that his ancient and well-known friendship for Schiffer might have induced him to tell a falsehood in order to screen him. Popular feeling ran very high upon the subject, and there seemed a danger of Schiffer's being mobbed in the street, when an incident occurred which threw a very different light upon the matter.

On the morning of the 12th of December, just nine days after the mysterious murder of the Professor, Schiffer the Bohemian Jew was found lying in the north-western corner of the Grand Platz stone dead, and so mutilated that he was hardly recognisable. His head was cloven open in very much the same way as that of Von Hopstein, and his body exhibited numerous deep gashes, as if the murderer had been so carried away and transported with fury that he had continued to hack the lifeless body. Snow had fallen heavily the day before, and was lying at least a foot deep all over the square; some had fallen during the night, too, as was evidenced by a thin layer lying like a winding-sheet over the murdered man. It was hoped at first that this circumstance might assist in giving a clue by enabling the footsteps of the assassin to be traced; but the crime had been committed, unfortunately, in a place much frequented during the day, and there were innumerable tracks in every direction. Besides, the newly-fallen snow had blurred the footsteps to such an extent that it would have been impossible to draw trustworthy evidence from them.

In this case there was exactly the same impenetrable mystery and absence of

motive which had characterised the murder of Professor von Hopstein. In the dead man's pocket there was found a note-book containing a considerable sum in gold and several very valuable bills, but no attempt had been made to rifle him. Supposing that any one to whom he had lent money (and this was the first idea which occurred to the police) had taken this means of evading his debt, it was hardly conceivable that he would have left such a valuable spoil untouched. Schiffer lodged with a widow named Gruga, at 49 Marie Theresa Strasse, and the evidence of his landlady and her children showed that he had remained shut up in his room the whole of the preceding day in a state of deep dejection, caused by the suspicion which the populace had fastened upon him. She had heard him go out about eleven o'clock at night for his last and fatal walk, and as he had a latch-key she had gone to bed without waiting for him. His object in choosing such a late hour for a ramble obviously was that he did not consider himself safe if recognised in the streets.

The occurrence of this second murder so shortly after the first threw not only the town of Buda-Pesth, but the whole of Hungary, into a terrible state of excitement, and even of terror. Vague dangers seemed to hang over the head of every man. The only parallel to this intense feeling was to be found in our own country at the time of the Williams murders described by De Quincey. There were so many resemblances between the cases of Von Hopstein and of Schiffer that no one could doubt that there existed a connection between the two. The absence of object and of robbery, the utter want of any clue to the assassin, and, lastly, the ghastly nature of the wounds, evidently inflicted by the same or a similar weapon, all pointed in one direction. Things were in this state when the incidents which I am now about to relate occurred, and in order to make them intelligible I must lead up to them from a fresh point of departure.

Otto von Schlegel was a younger son of the old Silesian family of that name. His father had originally destined him for the army, but at the advice of his teachers, who saw the surprising talent of the youth, had sent him to the University of Buda-Pesth to be educated in medicine. Here young Schlegel carried everything before him, and promised to be one of the most brilliant graduates turned out for many a year. Though a hard reader, he was no bookworm, but an active, powerful young fellow, full of animal spirits and vivacity, and extremely popular among his fellow-students.

The New Year examinations were at hand, and Schlegel was working hard—so hard that even the strange murders in the town, and the general excitement in men's minds, failed to turn his thoughts from his studies. Upon Christmas Eve,

when every house was illuminated, and the roar of drinking songs came from the Bierkeller in the Student-quartier, he refused the many invitations to roystering suppers which were showered upon him, and went off with his books under his arm to the rooms of Leopold Strauss, to work with him into the small hours of the morning.

Strauss and Schlegel were bosom friends. They were both Silesians, and had known each other from boyhood. Their affection had become proverbial in the University. Strauss was almost as distinguished a student as Schlegel, and there had been many a tough struggle for academic honours between the two fellow-countrymen, which had only served to strengthen their friendship by a bond of mutual respect. Schlegel admired the dogged pluck and never-failing good temper of his old playmate; while the latter considered Schlegel, with his many talents and brilliant versatility, the most accomplished of mortals.

The friends were still working together, the one reading from a volume on anatomy, the other holding a skull and marking off the various parts mentioned in the text, when the deep-toned bell of St. Gregory's church struck the hour of midnight.

"Hark to that!" said Schlegel, snapping up the book and stretching out his long legs towards the cheery fire. "Why, it's Christmas morning, old friend! May it not be the last that we spend together!"

"May we have passed all these confounded examinations before another one comes!" answered Strauss. "But see here, Otto, one bottle of wine will not be amiss. I have laid one up on purpose;" and with a smile on his honest South German face, he pulled out a long-necked bottle of Rhenish from amongst a pile of books and bones in the corner.

"It is a night to be comfortable indoors," said Otto von Schlegel, looking out at the snowy landscape, "for 'tis bleak and bitter enough outside. Good health, Leopold!"

"*Lebe hoch!*" replied his companion. "It is a comfort indeed to forget sphenoid bones and ethmoid bones, if it be but for a moment. And what is the news of the corps, Otto? Has Graube fought the Swabian?"

"They fight to-morrow," said Von Schlegel. "I fear that our man will lose his beauty, for he is short in the arm. Yet activity and skill may do much for him. They say his hanging guard is perfection."

"And what else is the news amongst the students?" asked Strauss.

"They talk, I believe, of nothing but the murders. But I have worked hard of late, as you know, and hear little of the gossip."

"Have you had time," inquired Strauss, "to look over the books and the weapons which our dear old Professor was so concerned about the very day he met his death? They say they are well worth a visit."

"I saw them to-day," said Schlegel, lighting his pipe. "Reinmaul, the janitor, showed me over the store-room, and I helped to label many of them from the original catalogue of Graf Schulling's museum. As far as we can see, there is but one article missing of all the collection."

"One missing!" exclaimed Strauss. "That would grieve old Von Hopstein's ghost. Is it anything of value?"

"It is described as an antique hatchet, with a head of steel and a handle of chased silver. We have applied to the railway company, and no doubt it will be found."

"I trust so," echoed Strauss; and the conversation drifted off into other channels. The fire was burning low and the bottle of Rhenish was empty before the two friends rose from their chairs, and Von Schlegel prepared to depart.

"Ugh! It's a bitter night!" he said, standing on the doorstep and folding his cloak round him. "Why, Leopold, you have your cap on. You are not going out, are you?"

"Yes, I am coming with you," said Strauss, shutting the door behind him. "I feel heavy," he continued, taking his friend's arm, and walking down the street with him. "I think a walk as far as your lodgings, in the crisp frosty air, is just the thing to set me right."

The two students went down Stephen Strasse together and across Julien Platz, talking on a variety of topics. As they passed the corner of the Grand Platz, however, where Schiffer had been found dead, the conversation turned naturally upon the murder.

"That's where they found him," remarked Von Schlegel, pointing to the fatal spot.

"Perhaps the murderer is near us now," said Strauss. "Let us hasten on."

They both turned to go, when Von Schlegel gave a sudden cry of pain and stooped down.

"Something has cut through my boot!" he cried; and feeling about with his hand in the snow, he pulled out a small glistening battle-axe, made apparently entirely of metal. It had been lying with the blade turned slightly upwards, so as to cut the foot of the student when he trod upon it.

"The weapon of the murderer!" he ejaculated.

"The silver hatchet from the museum!" cried Strauss in the same breath.

There could be no doubt that it was both the one and the other. There could not be two such curious weapons, and the character of the wounds was just such as would be inflicted by a similar instrument. The murderer had evidently thrown it aside after committing the dreadful deed, and it had lain concealed in the snow some twenty mètres from the spot ever since. It was extraordinary that of all the people who had passed and repassed none had discovered it; but the snow was deep, and it was a little off the beaten track.

"What are we to do with it?" said Von Schlegel, holding it in his hand. He shuddered as he noticed by the light of the moon that the head of it was all dabbled with dark-brown stains.

"Take it to the Commissary of Police," suggested Strauss.

"He'll be in bed now. Still, I think you are right. But it is nearly four o'clock. I will wait until morning, and take it round before breakfast. Meanwhile, I must carry it with me to my lodgings."

"That is the best plan," said his friend; and the two walked on together talking of the remarkable find which they had made. When they came to Schlegel's door, Strauss said good-bye, refusing an invitation to go in, and walked briskly down the street in the direction of his own lodgings.

Schlegel was stooping down putting the key into the lock, when a strange change came over him. He trembled violently, and dropped the key from his quivering fingers. His right hand closed convulsively round the handle of the silver hatchet, and his eye followed the retreating figure of his friend with a vindictive glare. In spite of the coldness of the night the perspiration streamed down his face. For a moment he seemed to struggle with himself, holding his hand up to his throat as if he were suffocating. Then, with crouching body and rapid, noiseless steps, he crept after his late companion.

Strauss was plodding sturdily along through the snow, humming snatches of a student song, and little dreaming of the dark figure which pursued him. At the Grand Platz it was forty yards behind him; at the Julien Platz it was but twenty; in Stephen Strasse it was ten, and gaining on him with panther-like rapidity. Already it was almost within arm's length of the unsuspecting man, and the hatchet glittered coldly in the moonlight, when some slight noise must have reached Strauss's ears, for he faced suddenly round upon his pursuer. He started and uttered an exclamation as his eye met the white set face, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, which seemed to be suspended in the air behind him.

"What, Otto!" he exclaimed, recognising his friend. "Art thou ill? You look pale. Come with me to my—— Ah! hold, you madman, hold! Drop that axe! Drop it, I say, or by heaven I'll choke you!"

Von Schlegel had thrown himself upon him with a wild cry and uplifted weapon; but the student was stout-hearted and resolute. He rushed inside the

sweep of the hatchet and caught his assailant round the waist, narrowly escaping a blow which would have cloven his head. The two staggered for a moment in a deadly wrestle, Schlegel endeavouring to shorten his weapon; but Strauss with a desperate wrench managed to bring him to the ground, and they rolled together in the snow, Strauss clinging to the other's right arm and shouting frantically for assistance. It was as well that he did so, for Schlegel would certainly have succeeded in freeing his arm had it not been for the arrival of two stalwart gendarmes, attracted by the uproar. Even then the three of them found it difficult to overcome the maniacal strength of Schlegel, and they were utterly unable to wrench the silver hatchet from his grasp. One of the gendarmes, however, had a coil of rope round his waist, with which he rapidly secured the student's arms to his sides. In this way, half pushed, half dragged, he was conveyed, in spite of furious cries and frenzied struggles, to the central police station.

Strauss assisted in coercing his former friend, and accompanied the police to the station; protesting loudly at the same time against any unnecessary violence, and giving it as his opinion that a lunatic asylum would be a more fitting place for the prisoner. The events of the last half-hour had been so sudden and inexplicable that he felt quite dazed himself. What did it all mean? It was certain that his old friend from boyhood had attempted to murder him, and had nearly succeeded. Was Von Schlegel then the murderer of Professor von Hopstein and of the Bohemian Jew? Strauss felt that it was impossible, for the Jew was not even known to him, and the Professor had been his especial favourite. He followed mechanically to the police station, lost in grief and amazement.

Inspector Baumgarten, one of the most energetic and best known of the police officials, was on duty in the absence of the Commissary. He was a wiry little active man, quiet and retiring in his habits, but possessed of great sagacity and a vigilance which never relaxed. Now, though he had had a six hours' vigil, he sat as erect as ever, with his pen behind his ear, at his official desk, while his friend, Sub-inspector Winkel, snored in a chair at the side of the stove. Even the inspector's usually immovable features betrayed surprise, however, when the door was flung open and Von Schlegel was dragged in with pale face and disordered clothes, the silver hatchet still grasped firmly in his hand. Still more surprised was he when Strauss and the gendarmes gave their account, which was duly entered in the official register.

"Young man, young man," said Inspector Baumgarten, laying down his pen and fixing his eyes sternly upon the prisoner, "this is pretty work for Christmas morning; why have you done this thing?"

"God knows!" cried Von Schlegel, covering his face with his hands and dropping the hatchet. A change had come over him, his fury and excitement were gone, and he seemed utterly prostrated with grief.

"You have rendered yourself liable to a strong suspicion of having committed the other murders which have disgraced our city."

"No, no, indeed!" said Von Schlegel earnestly. "God forbid!"

"At least you are guilty of attempting the life of Herr Leopold Strauss."

"The dearest friend I have in the world," groaned the student. "Oh, how could I! How could I!"

"His being your friend makes your crime ten times more heinous," said the inspector severely. "Remove him for the remainder of the night to the—— But steady! Who comes here?"

The door was pushed open, and a man came into the room, so haggard and careworn that he looked more like a ghost than a human being. He tottered as he walked, and had to clutch at the backs of the chairs as he approached the inspector's desk. It was hard to recognise in this miserable-looking object the once cheerful and rubicund sub-curator of the museum and privat-docent of chemistry, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. The practised eye of Baumgarten, however, was not to be baffled by any change.

"Good morning, mein herr," he said; "you are up early. No doubt the reason is that you have heard that one of your students, Von Schlegel, is arrested for attempting the life of Leopold Strauss?"

"No; I have come for myself," said Schlessinger, speaking huskily, and putting his hand up to his throat. "I have come to ease my soul of the weight of a great sin, though, God knows, an unmeditated one. It was I who—— But, merciful heavens! there it is—the horrid thing! Oh, that I had never seen it!"

He shrank back in a paroxysm of terror, glaring at the silver hatchet where it lay upon the floor, and pointing at it with his emaciated hand.

"There it lies!" he yelled. "Look at it! It has come to condemn me. See that brown rust on it! Do you know what that is? That is the blood of my dearest, best friend, Professor von Hopstein. I saw it gush over the very handle as I drove the blade through his brain. Mein Gott, I see it now!"

"Sub-inspector Winkel," said Baumgarten, endeavouring to preserve his official austerity, "you will arrest this man, charged on his own confession with the murder of the late Professor. I also deliver into your hands Von Schlegel here, charged with a murderous assault upon Herr Strauss. You will also keep this hatchet"—here he picked it from the floor—"which has apparently been used for both crimes."

Wilhelm Schlessinger had been leaning against the table, with a face of ashy paleness. As the inspector ceased speaking, he looked up excitedly.

"What did you say?" he cried. "Von Schlegel attack Strauss! The two dearest friends in the college! I slay my old master! It is magic, I say; it is a charm! There is a spell upon us! It is—Ah, I have it! It is that hatchet—that thrice accursed hatchet!" and he pointed convulsively at the weapon which Inspector Baumgarten still held in his hand.

The inspector smiled contemptuously.

"Restrain yourself, mein herr," he said. "You do but make your case worse by such wild excuses for the wicked deed you confess to. Magic and charms are not known in the legal vocabulary, as my friend Winkel will assure you."

"I know not," remarked his sub-inspector, shrugging his broad shoulders. "There are many strange things in the world. Who knows but that——"

"What!" roared Inspector Baumgarten furiously. "You would undertake to contradict me! You would set up your opinion! You would be the champion of these accursed murderers! Fool, miserable fool, your hour has come!" and rushing at the astounded Winkel, he dealt a blow at him with the silver hatchet which would certainly have justified his last assertion had it not been that, in his fury, he overlooked the lowness of the rafters above his head. The blade of the hatchet struck one of these, and remained there quivering, while the handle was splintered into a thousand pieces.

"What have I done?" gasped Baumgarten, falling back into his chair. "What have I done?"

"You have proved Herr Schlessinger's words to be correct," said Von Schlegel, stepping forward, for the astonished policemen had let go their grasp of him. "That is what you have done. Against reason, science, and everything else though it be, there is a charm at work. There must be! Strauss, old boy, you

know I would not, in my right senses, hurt one hair of your head. And you, Schlessinger, we both know you loved the old man who is dead. And you, Inspector Baumgarten, you would not willingly have struck your friend the sub-inspector?"

"Not for the whole world," groaned the inspector, covering his face with his hands.

"Then is it not clear? But now, thank Heaven, the accursed thing is broken, and can never do harm again. But see, what is that?"

Right in the centre of the room was lying a thin brown cylinder of parchment. One glance at the fragments of the handle of the weapon showed that it had been hollow. This roll of paper had apparently been hidden away inside the metal case thus formed, having been introduced through a small hole, which had been afterwards soldered up. Von Schlegel opened the document. The writing upon it was almost illegible from age; but as far as they could make out it stood thus, in mediæval German—

"Diese Waffe benutzte Max von Erlichingen um Joanna Bodeck zu ermorden, deshalb beschuldige Ich, Johann Bodeck, mittelst der macht welche mir als mitglied des Concils des rothen Kreuzes verliehan wurde, dieselbe mit dieser unthat. Mag sie anderen denselben schmerz verursachen den sie mir verursacht hat. Mag Jede hand die sie ergreift mit dem blut eines freundes geröthet sein.

“ ‘Immer übel—niemals gut,
Geröthet mit des freundes blut.’ ”

Which may be roughly translated—

"This weapon was used by Max von Erlichingen for the murder of Joanna Bodeck. Therefore do I, Johann Bodeck, accurse it by the power which has been bequeathed to me as one of the Council of the Rosy Cross. May it deal to others the grief which it has dealt to me! May every hand that grasps it be reddened in the blood of a friend!

“ ‘Ever evil, never good,
Reddened with a loved one’s blood.’ ”

There was a dead silence in the room when Von Schlegel had finished spelling out this strange document. As he put it down Strauss laid his hand affectionately

upon his arm.

"No such proof is needed by me, old friend," he said. "At the very moment that you struck at me I forgave you in my heart. I well know that if the poor Professor were in the room he would say as much to Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger."

"Gentlemen," remarked the inspector, standing up and resuming his official tones, "this affair, strange as it is, must be treated according to rule and precedent. Sub-inspector Winkel, as your superior officer, I command you to arrest me upon a charge of murderously assaulting you. You will commit me to prison for the night, together with Herr von Schlegel and Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. We shall take our trial at the coming sitting of the judges. In the meantime take care of that piece of evidence"—pointing to the piece of parchment—"and, while I am away, devote your time and energy to utilising the clue you have obtained in discovering who it was who slew Herr Schiffer, the Bohemian Jew."

The one missing link in the chain of evidence was soon supplied. On the 28th of December the wife of Reinmaul the janitor, coming into the bedroom after a short absence, found her husband hanging lifeless from a hook in the wall. He had tied a long bolster-case round his neck and stood upon a chair in order to commit the fatal deed. On the table was a note in which he confessed to the murder of Schiffer the Jew, adding that the deceased had been his oldest friend, and that he had slain him without premeditation, in obedience to some incontrollable impulse. Remorse and grief, he said, had driven him to self-destruction; and he wound up his confession by commending his soul to the mercy of Heaven.

The trial which ensued was one of the strangest which ever occurred in the whole history of jurisprudence. It was in vain that the prosecuting council urged the improbability of the explanation offered by the prisoners, and deprecated the introduction of such an element as magic into a nineteenth-century law-court. The chain of facts was too strong, and the prisoners were unanimously acquitted. "This silver hatchet," remarked the judge in his summing up, "has hung untouched upon the wall in the mansion of the Graf von Schulling for nearly two hundred years. The shocking manner in which he met his death at the hands of his favourite house steward is still fresh in your recollection. It has come out in evidence that, a few days before the murder, the steward had overhauled the old weapons and cleaned them. In doing this he must have touched the handle of this

hatchet. Immediately afterwards he slew his master, whom he had served faithfully for twenty years. The weapon then came, in conformity with the Count's will, to Buda-Pesth, where, at the station, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger grasped it, and, within two hours, used it against the person of the deceased Professor. The next man whom we find touching it is the janitor Reinmaul, who helped to remove the weapons from the cart to the store-room. At the first opportunity he buried it in the body of his friend Schiffer. We then have the attempted murder of Strauss by Schlegel, and of Winkel by Inspector Baumgarten, all immediately following the taking of the hatchet into the hand. Lastly, comes the providential discovery of the extraordinary document which has been read to you by the clerk of the court. I invite your most careful consideration, gentlemen of the jury, to this chain of facts, knowing that you will find a verdict according to your consciences without fear and without favour."

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence to the English reader, though it found few supporters among the Hungarian audience, was that of Dr. Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, who has written text-books upon metallurgy and toxicology. He said—

"I am not so sure, gentlemen, that there is need to fall back upon necromancy or the black art for an explanation of what has occurred. What I say is merely a hypothesis, without proof of any sort, but in a case so extraordinary every suggestion may be of value. The Rosicrucians, to whom allusion is made in this paper, were the most profound chemists of the early Middle Ages, and included the principal alchemists whose names have descended to us. Much as chemistry has advanced, there are some points in which the ancients were ahead of us, and in none more so than in the manufacture of poisons of subtle and deadly action. This man Bodeck, as one of the elders of the Rosicrucians, possessed, no doubt, the recipe of many such mixtures, some of which, like the *aqua tofana* of the Medicis, would poison by penetrating through the pores of the skin. It is conceivable that the handle of this silver hatchet has been anointed by some preparation which is a diffusible poison, having the effect upon the human body of bringing on sudden and acute attacks of homicidal mania. In such attacks it is well known that the madman's rage is turned against those whom he loved best when sane. I have, as I remarked before, no proof to support me in my theory, and simply put it forward for what it is worth."

With this extract from the speech of the learned and ingenious professor, we may close the account of this famous trial.

The broken pieces of the silver hatchet were thrown into a deep pond, a clever poodle being employed to carry them in his mouth, as no one would touch them for fear some of the infection might still hang about them. The piece of parchment was preserved in the museum of the University. As to Strauss and Schlegel, Winkel and Baumgarten, they continued the best of friends, and are so still for all I know to the contrary. Schlessinger became surgeon of a cavalry regiment; and was shot at the battle of Sadowa five years later, while rescuing the wounded under a heavy fire. By his last injunctions his little patrimony was to be sold to erect a marble obelisk over the grave of Professor von Hopstein.

THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL.

On the fourth day of March, in the year 1867, I being at that time in my five-and-twentieth year, I wrote the following words in my note-book, the result of much mental perturbation and conflict:—

"The solar system, amidst a countless number of other systems as large as itself, rolls ever silently through space in the direction of the constellation of Hercules. The great spheres of which it is composed spin and spin through the eternal void ceaselessly and noiselessly. Of these one of the smallest and most insignificant is that conglomeration of solid and of liquid particles which we have named the earth. It whirls onwards now as it has done before my birth, and will do after my death—a revolving mystery, coming none know whence, and going none know whither. Upon the outer crust of this moving mass crawl many mites, of whom I, John McVittie, am one, helpless, impotent, being dragged aimlessly through space. Yet such is the state of things amongst us that the little energy and glimmering of reason which I possess is entirely taken up with the labours which are necessary in order to procure certain metallic disks, wherewith I may purchase the chemical elements necessary to build up my ever-wasting tissues, and keep a roof over me to shelter me from the inclemency of the weather. I thus have no thought to expend upon the vital questions which surround me on every side. Yet, miserable entity as I am, I can still at times feel some degree of happiness, and am even—save the mark!—puffed up occasionally with a sense of my own importance."

These words, as I have said, I wrote down in my note-book, and they reflected accurately the thoughts which I found rooted far down in my soul, ever present and unaffected by the passing emotions of the hour. Every day for seven months I read over my words, and every day when I had finished them I said to myself, "Well done, John McVittie; you have said the thought which was in you. You have reduced things to their least common measure!" At last came a time when

my uncle, McVittie of Glencairn, died—the same who was at one time chairman of committees of the House of Commons. He divided his great wealth among his many nephews, and I found myself with sufficient to provide amply for my wants during the remainder of my life, and became at the same time owner of a bleak tract of land upon the coast of Caithness, which I think the old man must have bestowed upon me in derision, for it was sandy and valueless, and he had ever a grim sense of humour. Up to this time I had been an attorney in a midland town in England. Now I saw that I could put my thoughts into effect, and, leaving all petty and sordid aims, could elevate my mind by the study of the secrets of nature. My departure from my English home was somewhat accelerated by the fact that I had nearly slain a man in a quarrel, for my temper was fiery, and I was apt to forget my own strength when enraged. There was no legal action taken in the matter, but the papers yelped at me, and folk looked askance when I met them. It ended by my cursing them and their vile, smoke-polluted town, and hurrying to my northern possession, where I might at last find peace and an opportunity for solitary study and contemplation. I borrowed from my capital before I went, and so was able to take with me a choice collection of the most modern philosophical instruments and books, together with chemicals and such other things as I might need in my retirement.

The land which I had inherited was a narrow strip, consisting mostly of sand, and extending for rather over two miles round the coast of Mansie Bay, in Caithness. Upon this strip there had been a rambling, grey-stone building—when erected or wherefore none could tell me—and this I had repaired, so that it made a dwelling quite good enough for one of my simple tastes. One room was my laboratory, another my sitting-room, and in a third, just under the sloping roof, I slung the hammock in which I always slept. There were three other rooms, but I left them vacant, except one which was given over to the old crone who kept house for me. Save the Youngs and the McLeods, who were fisher-folk living round at the other side of Fergus Ness, there were no other people for many miles in each direction. In front of the house was the great bay, behind it were two long barren hills, capped by other loftier ones beyond. There was a glen between the hills, and when the wind was from the land it used to sweep down this with a melancholy sough and whisper among the branches of the fir trees beneath my attic window.

I dislike my fellow-mortals. Justice compels me to add that they appear for the most part to dislike me. I hate their little crawling ways, their conventionalities, their deceits, their narrow rights and wrongs. They take offence at my brusque

outspokenness, my disregard for their social laws, my impatience of all constraint. Among my books and my drugs in my lonely den at Mansie I could let the great drove of the human race pass onwards with their politics and inventions and tittle-tattle, and I remained behind stagnant and happy. Not stagnant either, for I was working in my own little groove, and making progress. I have reason to believe that Dalton's atomic theory is founded upon error, and I know that mercury is not an element.

During the day I was busy with my distillations and analyses. Often I forgot my meals, and when old Madge summoned me to my tea I found my dinner lying untouched upon the table. At night I read Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant —all those who have pried into what is unknowable. They are all fruitless and empty, barren of result, but prodigal of polysyllables, reminding me of men who while digging for gold have turned up many worms, and then exhibit them exultantly as being what they sought. At times a restless spirit would come upon me, and I would walk thirty and forty miles without rest or breaking fast. On these occasions, when I used to stalk through the country villages, gaunt, unshaven, and dishevelled, the mothers would rush into the road and drag their children indoors, and the rustics would swarm out of their pot-houses to gaze at me. I believe that I was known far and wide as the "mad laird o' Mansie." It was rarely, however, that I made these raids into the country, for I usually took my exercise upon my own beach, where I soothed my spirit with strong black tobacco, and made the ocean my friend and my confidant.

What companion is there like the great restless, throbbing sea? What human mood is there which it does not match and sympathise with? There are none so gay but that they may feel gayer when they listen to its merry turmoil, and see the long green surges racing in, with the glint of the sunbeams in their sparkling crests. But when the grey waves toss their heads in anger, and the wind screams above them, goading them on to madder and more tumultuous efforts, then the darkest-minded of men feels that there is a melancholy principle in Nature which is as gloomy as his own thoughts. When it was calm in the Bay of Mansie the surface would be as clear and bright as a sheet of silver, broken only at one spot some little way from the shore, where a long black line projected out of the water looking like the jagged back of some sleeping monster. This was the top of the dangerous ridge of rocks known to the fishermen as the "ragged reef o' Mansie." When the wind blew from the east the waves would break upon it like thunder, and the spray would be tossed far over my house and up to the hills behind. The bay itself was a bold and noble one, but too much exposed to the

northern and eastern gales, and too much dreaded for its reef, to be much used by mariners. There was something of romance about this lonely spot. I have lain in my boat upon a calm day, and, peering over the edge, I have seen far down the flickering ghostly forms of great fish—fish, as it seemed to me, such as naturalists never knew, and which my imagination transformed into the genii of that desolate bay. Once, as I stood by the brink of the waters upon a quiet night, a great cry, as of a woman in hopeless grief, rose from the bosom of the deep, and swelled out upon the still air, now sinking and now rising, for a space of thirty seconds. This I heard with my own ears.

In this strange spot, with the eternal hills behind me and the eternal sea in front, I worked and brooded for more than two years unpestered by my fellow-men. By degrees I had trained my old servant into habits of silence, so that she now rarely opened her lips, though I doubt not that when twice a year she visited her relations in Wick, her tongue during those few days made up for its enforced rest. I had come almost to forget that I was a member of the human family, and to live entirely with the dead whose books I pored over, when a sudden incident occurred which threw all my thoughts into a new channel.

Three rough days in June had been succeeded by one calm and peaceful one. There was not a breath of air that evening. The sun sank down in the west behind a line of purple clouds, and the smooth surface of the bay was gashed with scarlet streaks. Along the beach the pools left by the tide showed up like gouts of blood against the yellow sand, as if some wounded giant had toilfully passed that way, and had left these red traces of his grievous hurt behind him. As the darkness closed in, certain ragged clouds which had lain low on the eastern horizon coalesced and formed a great irregular cumulus. The glass was still low, and I knew that there was mischief brewing. About nine o'clock a dull moaning sound came up from the sea, as from a creature who, much harassed, learns that the hour of suffering has come round again. At ten a sharp breeze sprang up from the eastward. At eleven it had increased to a gale, and by midnight the most furious storm was raging which I ever remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

As I went to bed the shingle and sea-weed was pattering up against my attic-window, and the wind was screaming as though every gust were a lost soul. By that time the sounds of the tempest had become a lullaby to me. I knew that the grey walls of the old house would buffet it out, and for what occurred in the world outside I had small concern. Old Madge was usually as callous to such things as I was myself. It was a surprise to me when, about three in the morning, I was awoke by the sound of a great knocking at my door and excited cries in the

wheezy voice of my housekeeper. I sprang out of my hammock, and roughly demanded of her what was the matter.

"Eh, maister, maister!" she screamed in her hateful dialect. "Come doun, mun; come doun! There's a muckle ship gaun ashore on the reef, and the puir folks are a' yammerin' and ca'in' for help—and I doobt they'll a' be drooned. Oh, Maister McVittie, come doun!"

"Hold your tongue, you hag!" I shouted back in a passion. "What is it to you whether they are drowned or not? Get back to your bed and leave me alone." I turned in again, and drew the blankets over me. "Those men out there," I said to myself, "have already gone through half the horrors of death. If they be saved they will but have to go through the same once more in the space of a few brief years. It is best, therefore, that they should pass away now, since they have suffered that anticipation which is more than the pain of dissolution." With this thought in my mind I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep once more, for that philosophy which had taught me to consider death as a small and trivial incident in man's eternal and ever-changing career, had also broken me of much curiosity concerning worldly matters. On this occasion I found, however, that the old leaven still fermented strongly in my soul. I tossed from side to side for some minutes endeavouring to beat down the impulses of the moment by the rules of conduct which I had framed during months of thought. Then I heard a dull roar amid the wild shriek of the gale, and I knew that it was the sound of a signal-gun. Driven by an uncontrollable impulse, I rose, dressed, and, having lit my pipe, walked out on to the beach.

It was pitch dark when I came outside, and the wind blew with such violence that I had to put my shoulder against it and push my way along the shingle. My face pringled and smarted with the sting of the gravel which was blown against it, and the red ashes of my pipe streamed away behind me dancing fantastically through the darkness. I went down to where the great waves were thundering in, and, shading my eyes with my hand to keep off the salt spray, I peered out to sea. I could distinguish nothing, and yet it seemed to me that shouts and great inarticulate cries were borne to me by the blasts. Suddenly as I gazed I made out the glint of a light, and then the whole bay and the beach were lit up in a moment by a vivid blue glare. They were burning a coloured signal-light on board of the vessel. There she lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the jagged reef, hurled over to such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. She was a large, two-masted schooner, of foreign rig, and lay perhaps a hundred and eighty or two hundred yards from the shore. Every spar and rope and writhing

piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the livid light which sputtered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume, and to hurry on more impetuously until, with a roar and a jarring crash, it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds I could distinctly see some ten or twelve frightened seamen, who, when their light revealed my presence, turned their white faces towards me and waved their hands imploringly. I felt my gorge rise against these poor cowering worms. Why should they presume to shirk the narrow pathway along which all that is great and noble among mankind has travelled? There was one there who interested me more than they. He was a tall man who stood apart from the others, balancing himself upon the swaying wreck as though he disdained to cling to rope or bulwark. His hands were clasped behind his back, and his head was sunk upon his breast; but even in that despondent attitude there was a litheness and decision in his pose and in every motion which marked him as a man little likely to yield to despair. Indeed, I could see by his occasional rapid glances up and down and all around him that he was weighing every chance of safety; but though he often gazed across the raging surf to where he could see my dark figure upon the beach, his self-respect, or some other reason, forbade him from imploring my help in any way. He stood, dark, silent, and inscrutable, looking down on the black sea, and waiting for whatever fortune Fate might send him.

It seemed to me that that problem would very soon be settled. As I looked, an enormous billow, topping all the others, and coming after them, like a driver following a flock, swept over the vessel. Her foremast snapped short off, and the men who clung to the shrouds were brushed away like a swarm of flies. With a rending, riving sound the ship began to split in two, where the sharp back of the Mansie reef was sawing into her keel. The solitary man upon the forecastle ran rapidly across the deck and seized hold of a white bundle which I had already observed, but failed to make out. As he lifted it up the light fell upon it, and I saw that the object was a woman, with a spar lashed across her body and under her arms in such a way that her head should always rise above water. He bore her tenderly to the side and seemed to speak for a minute or so to her, as though explaining the impossibility of remaining upon the ship. Her answer was a singular one. I saw her deliberately raise her hand and strike him across the face with it. He appeared to be silenced for a moment or so by this; but he addressed her again, directing her, as far as I could gather from his motions, how she

should behave when in the water. She shrank away from him, but he caught her in his arms. He stooped over her for a moment and seemed to press his lips against her forehead. Then a great wave came welling up against the side of the breaking vessel, and, leaning over, he placed her upon the summit of it as gently as a child might be committed to its cradle. I saw her white dress flickering among the foam on the crest of the dark billow, and then the light sank gradually lower, and the riven ship and its lonely occupant were hidden from my eyes.

As I watched those things my manhood overcame my philosophy, and I felt a frantic impulse to be up and doing. I threw my cynicism to one side as a garment which I might don again at leisure, and I rushed wildly to my boat and my sculls. She was a leaky tub, but what then? Was I, who had cast many a wistful, doubtful glance at my opium bottle, to begin now to weigh chances and to cavil at danger? I dragged her down to the sea with the strength of a maniac, and sprang in. For a moment or two it was a question whether she could live among the boiling surge, but a dozen frantic strokes took me through it, half-full of water but still afloat. I was out on the unbroken waves now, at one time climbing, climbing up the broad black breast of one, then sinking down, down on the other side, until looking up I could see the gleam of the foam all around me against the dark heavens. Far behind me I could hear the wild wailings of old Madge, who, seeing me start, thought no doubt that my madness had come to a climax. As I rowed I peered over my shoulder, until at last on the belly of a great wave which was sweeping towards me I distinguished the vague white outline of the woman. Stooping over I seized her as she swept by me, and with an effort lifted her, all sodden with water, into the boat. There was no need to row back, for the next billow carried us in and threw us upon the beach. I dragged the boat out of danger, and then lifting up the woman I carried her to the house, followed by my housekeeper, loud with congratulation and praise.

Now that I had done this thing a reaction set in upon me. I felt that my burden lived, for I heard the faint beat of her heart as I pressed my ear against her side in carrying her. Knowing this, I threw her down beside the fire which Madge had lit, with as little sympathy as though she had been a bundle of faggots. I never glanced at her to see if she were fair or no. For many years I had cared little for the face of a woman. As I lay in my hammock upstairs, however, I heard the old woman, as she chafed the warmth back into her, crooning a chorus of "Eh, the puir lassie! Eh, the bonnie lassie!" from which I gathered that this piece of jetsam was both young and comely.

The morning after the gale was peaceful and sunny. As I walked along the long sweep of sand I could hear the panting of the sea. It was heaving and swirling about the reef, but along the shore it rippled in gently enough. There was no sign of the schooner, nor was there any wreckage upon the beach, which did not surprise me, as I knew there was a great undertow in those waters. A couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times I could hear their raucous voices as they spoke to one another of what they saw.

When I came back from my walk the woman was waiting at the door for me. I began to wish when I saw her that I had never saved her, for here was an end of my privacy. She was very young—at the most nineteen, with a pale, somewhat refined face, yellow hair, merry blue eyes, and shining teeth. Her beauty was of an ethereal type. She looked so white and light and fragile that she might have been the spirit of that storm-foam from out of which I plucked her. She had wreathed some of Madge's garments round her in a way which was quaint and not unbecoming. As I strode heavily up the pathway she put out her hands with a pretty childlike gesture, and ran down towards me, meaning, as I surmise, to thank me for having saved her, but I put her aside with a wave of my hand and passed her. At this she seemed somewhat hurt, and the tears sprang into her eyes; but she followed me into the sitting-room and watched me wistfully. "What country do you come from?" I asked her suddenly.

She smiled when I spoke, but shook her head.

"Francais?" I asked. "Deutsch?" "Espagnol?"—each time she shook her head, and then she rippled off into a long statement in some tongue of which I could not understand one word.

After breakfast was over, however, I got a clue to her nationality. Passing along the beach once more, I saw that in a cleft of the ridge a piece of wood had been jammed. I rowed out to it in my boat and brought it ashore. It was part of the sternpost of a boat, and on it, or rather on the piece of wood attached to it, was the word "Archangel," painted in strange, quaint lettering. "So," I thought, as I paddled slowly back, "this pale damsel is a Russian. A fit subject for the White Czar, and a proper dweller on the shores of the White Sea!" It seemed to me strange that one of her apparent refinement should perform so long a journey

in so frail a craft. When I came back into the house I pronounced the word "Archangel" several times in different intonations, but she did not appear to recognise it.

I shut myself up in the laboratory all the morning, continuing a research which I was making upon the nature of the allotropic forms of carbon and of sulphur. When I came out at mid-day for some food, she was sitting by the table with a needle and thread mending some rents in her clothes, which were now dry. I resented her continued presence, but I could not turn her out on the beach to shift for herself. Presently she presented a new phase of her character. Pointing to herself and then to the scene of the shipwreck, she held up one finger, by which I understood her to be asking whether she was the only one saved. I nodded my head to indicate that she was. On this she sprang out of the chair, with a cry of great joy, and holding the garment which she was mending over her head, and swaying it from side to side with the motion of her body, she danced as lightly as a feather all round the room, and then out through the open door into the sunshine. As she whirled round she sang in a plaintive, shrill voice some uncouth, barbarous chant, expressive of exultation. I called out to her, "Come in, you young fiend; come in, and be silent!" but she went on with her dance. Then she suddenly ran towards me, and catching my hand before I could pluck it away, she kissed it. While we were at dinner she spied one of my pencils, and taking it up she wrote the two words "Sophie Ramusine" upon a piece of paper, and then pointed to herself as a sign that that was her name. She handed the pencil to me, evidently expecting that I would be equally communicative, but I put it in my pocket as a sign that I wished to hold no intercourse with her.

Every moment of my life now I regretted the unguarded precipitancy with which I had saved this woman. What was it to me whether she had lived or died? I was no young hot-headed youth to do such things. It was bad enough to be compelled to have Madge in the house, but she was old and ugly, and could be ignored. This one was young and lively, and so fashioned as to divert attention from graver things. Where could I send her, and what could I do with her? If I sent information to Wick it would mean that officials and others would come to me, and pry, and peep, and chatter—a hateful thought. It was better to endure her presence than that.

I soon found that there were fresh troubles in store for me. There is no place safe from the swarming, restless race of which I am a member. In the evening, when the sun was dipping down behind the hills, casting them into dark shadow, but gilding the sands and casting a great glory over the sea, I went, as is my

custom, for a stroll along the beach. Sometimes on these occasions I took my book with me. I did so on this night, and stretching myself upon a sand-dune I composed myself to read. As I lay there I suddenly became aware of a shadow which interposed itself between the sun and myself. Looking round, I saw, to my great surprise, a very tall, powerful man, who was standing a few yards off, and who, instead of looking at me, was ignoring my existence completely, and was gazing over my head with a stern set face at the bay and the black line of the Mansie reef. His complexion was dark, with black hair and short curling beard, a hawk-like nose, and golden earrings in his ears—the general effect being wild and somewhat noble. He wore a faded velveteen jacket, a red flannel shirt, and high sea-boots, coming half-way up his thighs. I recognised him at a glance as being the same man who had been left on the wreck the night before.

"Hullo!" I said, in an aggrieved voice. "You got ashore all right, then?"

"Yes," he answered, in good English. "It was no doing of mine. The waves threw me up. I wish to God I had been allowed to drown!" There was a slight foreign lisp in his accent which was rather pleasing. "Two good fishermen, who live round yonder point, pulled me out and cared for me—yet I could not honestly thank them for it."

"Ho! ho!" thought I, "here is a man of my own kidney. Why do you wish to be drowned?" I asked.

"Because," he cried, throwing out his long arms with a passionate, despairing gesture, "there—there in that blue smiling bay lies my soul, my treasure—everything that I loved and lived for."

"Well, well," I said. "People are ruined every day, but there's no use making a fuss about it. Let me inform you that this ground on which you walk is my ground, and that the sooner you take yourself off it the better pleased I shall be. One of you is quite trouble enough."

"One of us?" he gasped.

"Yes—if you could take her off with you I should be still more grateful."

He gazed at me for a moment as if hardly able to realise what I said, and then, with a wild cry, he ran away from me with prodigious speed and raced along the sands towards my house. Never before or since have I seen a human being run so fast. I followed as rapidly as I could, furious at this threatened invasion, but long

before I reached the house he had disappeared through the open door. I heard a great scream from the inside, and, as I came nearer, the sound of the man's bass voice speaking rapidly and loudly. When I looked in, the girl Sophie Ramusine was crouching in a corner, cowering away, with fear and loathing expressed on her averted face and in every line of her shrinking form. The other, with his dark eyes flashing, and his outstretched hands quivering with emotion, was pouring forth a torrent of passionate, pleading words. He made a step forward to her as I entered, but she writhed still further away, and uttered a sharp cry like that of a rabbit when the weazel has him by the throat.

"Here!" I said, pulling him back from her. "This is a pretty to-do! What do you mean? Do you think this is a wayside inn or place of public accommodation?"

"Oh, sir," he said, "excuse me. This woman is my wife, and I feared that she was drowned. You have brought me back to life."

"Who are you?" I asked roughly.

"I am a man from Archangel," he said simply: "a Russian man."

"What is your name?"

"Ourganeff."

"Ourganeff!—and hers is Sophie Ramusine. She is no wife of yours. She has no ring."

"We are man and wife in the sight of Heaven," he said solemnly, looking upwards. "We are bound by higher laws than those of earth." As he spoke the girl slipped behind me and caught me by the other hand, pressing it as though beseeching my protection. "Give me up my wife, sir," he went on. "Let me take her away from here."

"Look here, you—whatever your name is," I said sternly, "I don't want this wench here. I wish I had never seen her. If she died it would be no grief to me. But as to handing her over to you, when it is clear she fears and hates you, I won't do it. So now just clear your great body out of this, and leave me to my books. I hope I may never look upon your face again."

"You won't give her up to me?" he said hoarsely.

"I'll see you damned first!" I answered.

"Suppose I take her," he cried, his dark face growing darker.

All my tigerish blood flushed up in a moment. I picked up a billet of wood from beside the fireplace. "Go," I said, in a low voice; "go quick, or I may do you an injury." He looked at me irresolutely for a moment, and then he left the house. He came back again in a moment, however, and stood in the doorway looking in at us.

"Have a heed what you do," he said. "The woman is mine, and I shall have her. When it comes to blows, a Russian is as good a man as a Scotchman."

"We shall see that," I cried, springing forward, but he was already gone, and I could see his tall form moving away through the gathering darkness.

For a month or more after this things went smoothly with us. I never spoke to the Russian girl, nor did she ever address me. Sometimes when I was at work at my laboratory she would slip inside the door and sit silently there watching me with her great eyes. At first this intrusion annoyed me, but by degrees, finding that she made no attempt to distract my attention, I suffered her to remain. Encouraged by this concession, she gradually came to move the stool on which she sat nearer and nearer to my table, until, after gaining a little every day during some weeks, she at last worked her way right up to me, and used to perch herself beside me whenever I worked. In this position she used, still without ever obtruding her presence in any way, to make herself very useful by holding my pens, test-tubes, bottles, etc., and handing me whatever I wanted, with never-failing sagacity. By ignoring the fact of her being a human being, and looking upon her as a useful automatic machine, I accustomed myself to her presence so far as to miss her on the few occasions when she was not at her post. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself at times when I work, so as to fix my results better in my mind. The girl must have had a surprising memory for sounds, for she could always repeat the words which I let fall in this way, without, of course, understanding in the least what they meant. I have often been amused at hearing her discharge a volley of chemical equations and algebraic symbols at old Madge, and then burst into a ringing laugh when the crone would shake her head, under the impression, no doubt, that she was being addressed in Russian.

She never went more than a few yards from the house, and indeed never put her foot over the threshold without looking carefully out of each window, in order to be sure that there was nobody about. By this I knew that she suspected that her fellow-countryman was still in the neighbourhood, and feared that he

might attempt to carry her off. She did something else which was significant. I had an old revolver with some cartridges, which had been thrown away among the rubbish. She found this one day, and at once proceeded to clean it and oil it. She hung it up near the door, with the cartridges in a little bag beside it, and whenever I went for a walk she would take it down and insist upon my carrying it with me. In my absence she would always bolt the door. Apart from her apprehensions she seemed fairly happy, busying herself in helping Madge when she was not attending upon me. She was wonderfully nimble-fingered and natty in all domestic duties.

It was not long before I discovered that her suspicions were well founded, and that this man from Archangel was still lurking in the vicinity. Being restless one night, I rose and peered out of the window. The weather was somewhat cloudy, and I could barely make out the line of the sea and the loom of my boat upon the beach. As I gazed, however, and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I became aware that there was some other dark blur upon the sands, and that in front of my very door, where certainly there had been nothing of the sort the preceding night. As I stood at my diamond-paned lattice still peering and peeping to make out what this might be, a great bank of clouds rolled slowly away from the face of the moon, and a flood of cold, clear light was poured down upon the silent bay and the long sweep of its desolate shores. Then I saw what this was which haunted my doorstep. It was he, the Russian. He squatted there like a gigantic toad, with his legs doubled under him in strange Mongolian fashion, and his eyes fixed apparently upon the window of the room in which the young girl and the housekeeper slept. The light fell upon his upturned face, and I saw once more the hawk-like grace of his countenance, with the single deeply-indented line of care upon his brow, and the protruding beard which marks the passionate nature. My first impulse was to shoot him as a trespasser, but as I gazed my resentment changed into pity and contempt. "Poor fool," I said to myself, "is it then possible that you, whom I have seen looking open-eyed at present death, should have your whole thoughts and ambition centred upon this wretched slip of a girl—a girl, too, who flies from you and hates you! Most women would love you—were it but for that dark face and great handsome body of yours—and yet you must needs hanker after the one in a thousand who will have no traffic with you." As I returned to my bed I chuckled much to myself over this thought. I knew that my bars were strong and my bolts thick. It mattered little to me whether this strange man spent his night at my door or a hundred leagues off, so long as he was gone by the morning. As I expected, when I rose and went out there was no sign of him, nor had he left any trace of

his midnight vigil.

It was not long, however, before I saw him again. I had been out for a row one morning, for my head was aching, partly from prolonged stooping and partly from the effects of a noxious drug which I had inhaled the night before. I pulled along the coast some miles, and then, feeling thirsty, I landed at a place where I knew that a fresh water stream trickled down into the sea. This rivulet passed through my land, but the mouth of it, where I found myself that day, was beyond my boundary line. I felt somewhat taken aback when, rising from the stream at which I had slaked my thirst, I found myself face to face with the Russian. I was as much a trespasser now as he was, and I could see at a glance that he knew it.

"I wish to speak a few words to you," he said gravely.

"Hurry up, then!" I answered, glancing at my watch. "I have no time to listen to chatter."

"Chatter!" he repeated angrily. "Ah, but there! You Scotch people are strange men. Your face is hard and your words rough, but so are those of the good fishermen with whom I stay, yet I find that beneath it all there lies kind, honest natures. No doubt you are kind and good too, in spite of your roughness."

"In the name of the devil," I said, "say your say, and go your way. I am weary of the sight of you."

"Can I not soften you in any way?" he cried. "Ah, see—see here"—he produced a small Grecian cross from inside his velvet jacket. "Look at this. Our religions may differ in form, but at least we have some common thoughts and feelings when we see this emblem."

"I am not so sure of that," I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"You are a very strange man," he said at last. "I cannot understand you. You still stand between me and Sophie. It is a dangerous position to take, sir. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. If you did but know what I have done to gain that woman—how I have risked my body, how I have lost my soul. You are a small obstacle to some which I have surmounted—you, whom a rip with a knife, or a blow from a stone, would put out of my way for ever. But God preserve me from that," he cried wildly. "I am deep—too deep—already. Anything rather than that."

"You would do better to go back to your country," I said, "than to skulk about these sand-hills and disturb my leisure. When I have proof that you have gone away, I shall hand this woman over to the protection of the Russian Consul at Edinburgh. Until then, I shall guard her myself, and not you, nor any Muscovite that ever breathed, shall take her from me."

"And what is your object in keeping me from Sophie?" he asked. "Do you imagine that I would injure her? Why, man, I would give my life freely to save her from the slightest harm. Why do you do this thing?"

"I do it because it is my good pleasure to act so," I answered. "I give no man reasons for my conduct."

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly blazing into fury, and advancing towards me with his shaggy mane bristling and his brown hands clenched. "If I thought you had one dishonest thought towards this girl—if for a moment I had reason to believe that you had any base motive for detaining her—as sure as there is a God in Heaven I should drag the heart out of your bosom with my hands." The very idea seemed to have put the man in a frenzy, for his face was all distorted and his hands opened and shut convulsively. I thought that he was about to spring at my throat.

"Stand off!" I said, putting my hand on my pistol. "If you lay a finger on me I shall kill you."

He put his hand into his pocket, and for a moment I thought that he was about to produce a weapon too, but instead of that he whipped out a cigarette and lit it, breathing the smoke rapidly into his lungs. No doubt he had found by experience that this was the most effectual way of curbing his passions.

"I told you," he said in a quieter voice, "that my name is Ourganeff—Alexis Ourganeff. I am a Finn by birth, but I have spent my life in every part of the world. I was one who could never be still, nor settle down to a quiet existence. After I came to own my own ship there is hardly a port from Archangel to Australia which I have not entered. I was rough and wild and free, but there was one at home, sir, who was prim and white-handed and soft-tongued, skilful in little fancies and conceits which women love. This youth by his wiles and tricks stole from me the love of the girl whom I had ever marked as my own, and who up to that time had seemed in some sort inclined to return my passion. I had been on a voyage to Hammerfest for ivory, and coming back unexpectedly, I learned that my pride and treasure was to be married to this soft-skinned boy, and that

the party had actually gone to the church. In such moments, sir, something gives way in my head, and I hardly know what I do. I landed with a boat's crew—all men who had sailed with me for years, and who were as true as steel. We went up to the church. They were standing, she and he, before the priest, but the thing had not been done. I dashed between them and caught her round the waist. My men beat back the frightened bridegroom and the lookers-on. We bore her down to the boat and aboard our vessel, and then getting up anchor, we sailed away across the White Sea until the spires of Archangel sank down behind the horizon. She had my cabin, my room, every comfort. I slept among the men in the forecastle. I hoped that in time her aversion to me would wear away, and that she would consent to marry me in England or in France. For days and days we sailed. We saw the North Cape die away behind us, and we skirted the grey Norwegian coast, but still, in spite of every attention, she would not forgive me for tearing her from that pale-faced lover of hers. Then came this cursed storm which shattered both my ship and my hopes, and has deprived me even of the sight of the woman for whom I have risked so much. Perhaps she may learn to love me yet. You, sir," he said wistfully, "look like one who has seen much of the world. Do you not think that she may come to forget this man and to love me?" "I am tired of your story," I said, turning away. "For my part, I think you are a great fool. If you imagine that this love of yours will pass away, you had best amuse yourself as best you can until it does. If, on the other hand, it is a fixed thing, you cannot do better than cut your throat, for that is the shortest way out of it. I have no more time to waste on the matter." With this I hurried away and walked down to the boat. I never looked round, but I heard the dull sound of his feet upon the sands as he followed me.

"I have told you the beginning of my story," he said, "and you shall know the end some day. You would do well to let the girl go."

I never answered him, but pushed the boat off. When I had rowed some distance out I looked back and saw his tall figure upon the yellow sand as he stood gazing thoughtfully after me. When I looked again, some minutes later, he had disappeared.

For a long time after this my life was as regular and as monotonous as it had been before the shipwreck. At times I hoped that the man from Archangel had gone away altogether, but certain footsteps which I saw upon the sand, and more particularly a little pile of cigarette ash which I found one day behind a hillock from which a view of the house might be obtained, warned me that, though invisible, he was still in the vicinity. My relations with the Russian girl remained

the same as before. Old Madge had been somewhat jealous of her presence at first, and seemed to fear that what little authority she had would be taken away from her. By degrees, however, as she came to realise my utter indifference, she became reconciled to the situation, and, as I have said before, profited by it, as our visitor performed much of the domestic work.

And now I am coming near the end of this narrative of mine, which I have written a great deal more for my own amusement than for that of any one else. The termination of the strange episode in which these two Russians had played a part was as wild and as sudden as the commencement. The events of one single night freed me from all my troubles, and left me once more alone with my books and my studies, as I had been before their intrusion. Let me endeavour to describe how this came about.

I had had a long day of heavy and wearying work, so that in the evening I determined upon taking a long walk. When I emerged from the house my attention was attracted by the appearance of the sea. It lay like a sheet of glass, so that never a ripple disturbed its surface. Yet the air was filled with that indescribable moaning sound which I have alluded to before—a sound as though the spirits of all those who lay beneath those treacherous waters were sending a sad warning of coming troubles to their brethren in the flesh. The fishermen's wives along that coast know the eerie sound, and look anxiously across the waters for the brown sails making for the land. When I heard it I stepped back into the house and looked at the glass. It was down below 29°. Then I knew that a wild night was coming upon us.

Underneath the hills where I walked that evening it was dull and chill, but their summits were rosy-red and the sea was brightened by the sinking sun. There were no clouds of importance in the sky, yet the dull groaning of the sea grew louder and stronger. I saw, far to the eastward, a brig beating up for Wick, with a reef in her topsails. It was evident that her captain had read the signs of nature as I had done. Behind her a long, lurid haze lay low upon the water, concealing the horizon. "I had better push on," I thought to myself, "or the wind may rise before I get back."

I suppose I must have been at least half a mile from the house when I suddenly stopped and listened breathlessly. My ears were so accustomed to the noises of nature, the sighing of the breeze and the sob of the waves, that any other sound made itself heard at a great distance. I waited, listening with all my ears. Yes, there it was again—a long-drawn, shrill cry of despair, ringing over

the sands and echoed back from the hills behind me—a piteous appeal for aid. It came from the direction of my house. I turned and ran back homewards at the top of my speed, ploughing through the sand, racing over the shingle. In my mind there was a great dim perception of what had occurred.

About a quarter of a mile from the house there is a high sandhill, from which the whole country round is visible. When I reached the top of this I paused for a moment. There was the old grey building—there the boat. Everything seemed to be as I had left it. Even as I gazed, however, the shrill scream was repeated, louder than before, and the next moment a tall figure emerged from my door—the figure of the Russian sailor. Over his shoulder was the white form of the young girl, and even in his haste he seemed to bear her tenderly and with gentle reverence. I could hear her wild cries and see her desperate struggles to break away from him. Behind the couple came my old housekeeper, staunch and true, as the aged dog, who can no longer bite, still snarls with toothless gums at the intruder. She staggered feebly along at the heels of the ravisher, waving her long, thin arms, and hurling, no doubt, volleys of Scotch curses and imprecations at his head. I saw at a glance that he was making for the boat. A sudden hope sprang up in my soul that I might be in time to intercept him. I ran for the beach at the top of my speed. As I ran I slipped a cartridge into my revolver. This I determined should be the last of these invasions.

I was too late. By the time I reached the water's edge he was a hundred yards away, making the boat spring with every stroke of his powerful arms. I uttered a wild cry of impotent anger, and stamped up and down the sands like a maniac. He turned and saw me. Rising from his seat he made me a graceful bow, and waved his hand to me. It was not a triumphant or a derisive gesture. Even my furious and distempered mind recognised it as being a solemn and courteous leave-taking. Then he settled down to his oars once more, and the little skiff shot away out over the bay. The sun had gone down now, leaving a single dull, red streak upon the water, which stretched away until it blended with the purple haze on the horizon. Gradually the skiff grew smaller and smaller as it sped across this lurid band, until the shades of night gathered round it and it became a mere blur upon the lonely sea. Then this vague loom died away also, and darkness settled over it—a darkness which should never more be raised.

And why did I pace the solitary shore, hot and wrathful as a wolf whose whelp has been torn from it? Was it that I loved this Muscovite girl? No—a thousand times no. I am not one who, for the sake of a white skin or a blue eye, would belie my own life, and change the whole tenor of my thoughts and existence. My

heart was untouched. But my pride—ah, there I had been cruelly wounded. To think that I had been unable to afford protection to the helpless one who craved it of me, and who relied on me! It was that which made my heart sick and sent the blood buzzing through my ears.

That night a great wind rose up from the sea, and the wild waves shrieked upon the shore as though they would tear it back with them into the ocean. The turmoil and the uproar were congenial to my vexed spirit. All night I wandered up and down, wet with spray and rain, watching the gleam of the white breakers, and listening to the outcry of the storm. My heart was bitter against the Russian. I joined my feeble pipe to the screaming of the gale. "If he would but come back again!" I cried, with clenched hands; "if he would but come back!"

He came back. When the grey light of morning spread over the eastern sky and lit up the great waste of yellow, tossing waters, with the brown clouds drifting swiftly over them, then I saw him once again. A few hundred yards off along the sand there lay a long dark object, cast up by the fury of the waves. It was my boat, much shattered and splintered. A little farther on, a vague, shapeless something was washing to and fro in the shallow water, all mixed with shingle and with sea-weed. I saw at a glance that it was the Russian, face downwards and dead. I rushed into the water and dragged him up on to the beach. It was only when I turned him over that I discovered that she was beneath him, his dead arms encircling her, his mangled body still intervening between her and the fury of the storm. It seemed that the fierce German Sea might beat the life from him, but with all its strength it was unable to tear this one-idea'd man from the woman whom he loved. There were signs which led me to believe that during that awful night the woman's fickle mind had come at last to learn the worth of the true heart and strong arm which struggled for her and guarded her so tenderly. Why else should her little head be nestling so lovingly on his broad breast, while her yellow hair entwined itself with his flowing beard? Why, too, should there be that bright smile of ineffable happiness and triumph, which death itself had not had power to banish from his dusky face? I fancy that death had been brighter to him than life had ever been.

Madge and I buried them there on the shores of the desolate northern sea. They lie in one grave deep down beneath the yellow sand. Strange things may happen in the world around them. Empires may rise and may fall, dynasties may perish, great wars may come and go, but, heedless of it all, those two shall embrace each other for ever and aye in their lonely shrine by the side of the sounding ocean. I sometimes have thought that their spirits flit like shadowy sea-

mews over the wild waters of the bay. No cross or symbol marks their resting-place, but old Madge puts wild flowers upon it at times; and when I pass on my daily walk, and see the fresh blossoms scattered over the sand, I think of the strange couple who came from afar and broke for a little space the dull tenor of my sombre life.

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.

"ALL aboard?" said the captain.

"All aboard, sir!" said the mate.

"Then stand by to let her go."

It was nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship *Spartan* was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice, the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landsmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight—a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the

weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship *Spartan*. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours, I would even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

"Time's up!" said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. "Time's up!" said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. "Look sharp!" shouted the crowd. "Hold hard!" cried the captain. "Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!" and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight's voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my *compagnons de voyage*. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a specialty of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to "Yurrup," a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the *olla podrida* of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel's side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. "Here's a quiet place," said the voice. "Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety."

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short, plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. "This is just the place," I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

"Well, Muller," said the taller of the two, "we've got it aboard right enough."

"Yes," assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller; "it's safe aboard."

"It was rather a near go."

"It was that, Flannigan."

"It wouldn't have done to have missed the ship."

"No; it would have put our plans out."

"Ruined them entirely," said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

"I've got it here," he said at last.

"Let me see it."

"Is no one looking?"

"No; they are nearly all below."

"We can't be too careful where so much is at stake," said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come

over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

"It seems right enough," he said at last.

"I tried not to shake it," said his companion.

"Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller."

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both the men smiled in a satisfied way.

"Nothing much wrong there," said Flannigan.

"Right as a trivet," answered his companion.

"Look out! here's some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn't do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake."

"Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off," said Muller.

"They'd be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger," said the taller, with a sinister laugh. "Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It's not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself."

"No," said Muller. "I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn't it?"

"Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own."

"We should take out a patent."

And the two men laughed again with a cold, harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package and concealed it in Muller's voluminous overcoat.

"Come down, and we'll stow it in our berth," said Flannigan. "We won't need it until to-night, and it will be safe there."

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

"Do you mind moving out of that, sir?" he said. "We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck."

His bluff manner and ruddy, healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl, which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted—solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and, climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizzen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of "Flannigan" smacked of Fenianism, while "Muller" suggested nothing but Socialism and murder. Then their mysterious

manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake—could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of some body, political or otherwise, and intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable, or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which

nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

"Is that you, Hammond?" said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

"God bless me," I said as I turned round, "it can't be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?"

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

"Hullo!" he said, in his kindly way, "what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. *Mal de mer*, eh?"

"No, not that altogether," said I. "Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm."

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

"Have a cigar," said he, breaking the silence.

"No, thanks," said I. "Dick, we shall all be corpses to-night."

"That's no reason against your having a cigar now," said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

"No," I continued; "it's no laughing matter, and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;" and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. "There, Dick," I said, as I concluded, "what do you think of that? and, above all, what am I to do?"

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I'd be frightened," he said, "if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a

ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror? Why, man," he continued, "what object would any one have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine."

"Nothing of the sort, sir," said I, rather touchily. "You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it."

"You'd make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo," said Dick, "if that is to be your only test."

"The man's name was Flannigan," I continued.

"I don't think that would go very far in a court of law," said Dick; "but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin."

"All right," I answered; "I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don't look hard at them, though; for I don't want them to think that they are being watched."

"Trust me," said Dick; "I'll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;" and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet-bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth; but there was no sign of them. "Heavens!" thought I, "perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!" It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

"Steward," said Dick, "are there any other gentlemen about?"

"There's two in the smoking-room, sir," answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snuggery, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was "Napoleon." Both were adepts at it; and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulating of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath and refused to go on.

"No, I'm hanged if I do!" he said; "I haven't had more than two of a suit for five hands."

"Never mind," said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; "a few dollars one way or the other won't go very far after to-night's work."

I was astonished at the rascal's audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily—

"Nonsense! Why shouldn't I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us."

"I believe you want it not to come off," said Flannigan.

"You believe nothing of the sort," said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. "You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won't have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man; I have as much interest in our success as you have—more, I hope."

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for a few minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I

knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart; but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion, and turned towards me.

"Can you tell me, sir," he said, "when this ship will be heard of again?"

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered—

"I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the angry little man; "I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan; I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir," he continued, turning to me; "utterly wrong."

"Some passing ship, perhaps," suggested Dick.

"No, nor that either."

"The weather is fine," I said; "why should we not be heard of at our destination?"

"I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. No doubt we shall in the course of time; but that is not where we shall be heard of first."

"Where then?" asked Dick.

"That you will never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!" and he chuckled once again.

"Come on deck!" growled his comrade; "you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!" and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room,

and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

"Well, what do you think now?" I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

"Think!" he said; "why, I think what his companion thinks—that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy."

"Nonsense, Dick! you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue."

"Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible."

"Oh, Dick, Dick," I cried; "how can you be so blind? Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?"

"Humbug, man!" said Dick; "you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do *you* make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?"

"I'll tell you what he meant, Dick," I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. "He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant."

"I didn't think you were such a fool, Hammond," said Dick Merton testily. "If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good."

"If ever I see the end of this one," I groaned, "I'll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it's hardly worth while my going up. I'll stay below and finish my smoke."

"I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind," said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred

first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances, I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine—so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

"Now, ladies," said our genial captain, "I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here's to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in twelve days, or a fortnight at the very latest."

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former's thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the captain's thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

"May I ask, captain," I said, bending forward, and speaking very distinctly, "what you think of Fenian manifestoes?"

The captain's ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

"They are poor cowardly things," he said, "as silly as they are wicked."

"The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels," said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

"Oh, captain!" said the fat lady at my side, "you don't really think they would blow up a ship?"

"I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they will never blow up mine."

"May I ask what precautions are taken against them?" said an elderly man at the end of the table.

"All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined," said Captain Dowie.

"But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?" said I.

"They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way."

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now, and looked at the captain.

"Don't you think you are rather underrating them?" he said. "Every secret society has produced desperate men—why shouldn't the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong."

"Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody's eyes," said the little clergyman.

"The bombardment of Paris was nothing else," said Flannigan; "yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word 'murder' into the more euphonious one of 'war.' It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn't dynamite seem so to the Fenian?"

"At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet," said the captain.

"Excuse me," returned Flannigan, "but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the *Dotterel*? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel."

"Then they lied," said the captain. "It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas—but we had better change

the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night;" and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and captain? Should I demand a few minutes' conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence, and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered upon deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It seemed like a sea of blood. A single star was twinkling faintly above our main-mast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It seemed hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

"After all," I thought, as I gazed upon the blue depths beneath me, "if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land." A man's life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented

myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

"Well, old man," he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, "we've not been blown up yet."

"No, not yet," said I; "but that's no proof that we are not going to be."

"Nonsense, man!" said Dick; "I can't conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks."

"Dick," I said, "I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse."

"Well, if you really think so," said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, "it is your duty to let the captain know of your suspicions."

"You are right," I said; "I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him."

"Well, go and do it now," said Dick; "but for goodness' sake don't mix me up in the matter."

"I'll speak to him when he comes off the bridge," I answered; "and in the meantime I don't mean to lose sight of them."

"Let me know of the result," said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one

of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now—so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the side of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

"This place will do," said a voice.

"Yes, the leeward side is best."

"I wonder if the trigger will act?"

"I am sure it will."

"We were to let it off at ten, were we not?"

"Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet." There was a pause. Then the voice began again—

"They'll hear the drop of the trigger, won't they?"

"It doesn't matter. It will be too late for any one to prevent its going off."

"That's true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won't there?"

"Rather! How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?"

"The first news will get in in about twenty-four hours."

"That will be mine."

"No, mine."

"Ha, ha! we'll settle that."

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller's voice in a ghastly whisper, "There's only five minutes more."

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

"It'll make a sensation on land," said a voice.

"Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers."

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

"Three minutes more," he said. "Put it down upon the deck."

"No, put it here on the bulwarks."

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular—the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

"A minute and a half more," he said. "Shall you or I pull the string?"

"I will pull it," said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

"Stop!" I screamed, springing to my feet. "Stop, misguided and unprincipled men!"

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

"Cain was damned," I cried, "and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souls?"

"He's mad!" said Flannigan. "Time's up! Let it off, Muller."

I sprang down upon the deck.

"You shan't do it!" I said.

"By what right do you prevent us?"

"By every right, human and divine."

"It's no business of yours. Clear out of this!"

"Never!" said I.

"Confound the fellow! There's too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I'll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger."

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

"Now," he said, "look sharp. He can't prevent us."

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off—*two grey carrier-pigeons*!

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the *New York Herald* fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America:—

"Pigeon-flying Extraordinary.—A novel match has been brought off, last week, between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Ashport. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship *Spartan*, at ten o'clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as British captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock. Muller's bird arrived in Ashport in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following afternoon, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years."

A NIGHT AMONG THE NIHILISTS.

"ROBINSON, the boss wants you!"

"The dickens he does!" thought I; for Mr. Dickson, Odessa agent of Bailey & Co., corn merchants, was a bit of a Tartar, as I had learned to my cost. "What's the row now?" I demanded of my fellow-clerk; "has he got scent of our Nicolaieff escapade, or what is it?"

"No idea," said Gregory: "the old boy seems in a good enough humour; some business matter, probably. But don't keep him waiting." So summoning up an air of injured innocence, to be ready for all contingencies, I marched into the lion's den.

Mr. Dickson was standing before the fire in a Briton's time-honoured attitude, and motioned me into a chair in front of him. "Mr. Robinson," he said, "I have great confidence in your discretion and common sense. The follies of youth will break out, but I think that you have a sterling foundation to your character underlying any superficial levity."

I bowed.

"I believe," he continued, "that you can speak Russian pretty fluently."

I bowed again.

"I have, then," he proceeded, "a mission which I wish you to undertake, and on the success of which your promotion may depend. I would not trust it to a subordinate, were it not that duty ties me to my post at present."

"You may depend upon my doing my best, sir," I replied.

"Right, sir; quite right! What I wish you to do is briefly this: The line of railway has just been opened to Solteff, some hundred miles up the country.

Now, I wish to get the start of the other Odessa firms in securing the produce of that district, which I have reason to believe may be had at very low prices. You will proceed by rail to Solteff, and interview a Mr. Dimidoff, who is the largest landed proprietor in the town. Make as favourable terms as you can with him. Both Mr. Dimidoff and I wish the whole thing to be done as quietly and secretly as possible—in fact, that nothing should be known about the matter until the grain appears in Odessa. I desire it for the interests of the firm, and Mr. Dimidoff on account of the prejudice his peasantry entertain against exportation. You will find yourself expected at the end of your journey, and will start to-night. Money shall be ready for your expenses. Good-morning, Mr. Robinson; I hope you won't fail to realise the good opinion I have of your abilities."

"Gregory," I said, as I strutted into the office, "I'm off on a mission—a secret mission, my boy; an affair of thousands of pounds. Lend me your little portmanteau—mine's too imposing—and tell Ivan to pack it. A Russian millionaire expects me at the end of my journey. Don't breathe a word of it to any of Simpkins's people, or the whole game will be up. Keep it dark!"

I was so charmed at being, as it were, behind the scenes, that I crept about the office all day in a sort of cloak-and-bloody-dagger style, with responsibility and brooding care marked upon every feature; and when at night I stepped out and stole down to the station, the unprejudiced observer would certainly have guessed, from my general behaviour, that I had emptied the contents of the strong-box before starting into that little valise of Gregory's. It was imprudent of him, by the way, to leave English labels pasted all over it. However, I could only hope that the "Londons" and "Birminghams" would attract no attention, or at least that no rival corn-merchant might deduce from them who I was and what my errand might be.

Having paid the necessary roubles and got my ticket, I ensconced myself in the corner of a snug Russian car, and pondered over my extraordinary good fortune. Dickson was growing old now, and if I could make my mark in this matter it might be a great thing for me. Dreams arose of a partnership in the firm. The noisy wheels seemed to clank out "Bailey, Robinson & Co.," "Bailey, Robinson & Co.," in a monotonous refrain, which gradually sank into a hum, and finally ceased as I dropped into a deep sleep. Had I known the experience which awaited me at the end of my journey it would hardly have been so peaceable.

I awoke with an uneasy feeling that some one was watching me closely; nor

was I mistaken. A tall dark man had taken up his position on the seat opposite, and his black sinister eyes seemed to look through me and beyond me, as if he wished to read my very soul. Then I saw him glance down at my little trunk.

"Good heavens!" thought I, "here's Simpkins's agent, I suppose. It was careless of Gregory to leave those confounded labels on the valise."

I closed my eyes for a time, but on reopening them I again caught the stranger's earnest gaze.

"From England, I see," he said in Russian, showing a row of white teeth in what was meant to be an amiable smile.

"Yes," I replied, trying to look unconcerned, but painfully aware of my failure.

"Travelling for pleasure, perhaps?" said he.

"Yes," I answered eagerly. "Certainly for pleasure; nothing else."

"Of course not," said he, with a shade of irony in his voice. "Englishmen always travel for pleasure, don't they? Oh, no; nothing else."

His conduct was mysterious, to say the least of it. It was only explainable upon two hypotheses—he was either a madman, or he was the agent of some firm bound upon the same errand as myself, and determined to show me that he guessed my little game. They were about equally unpleasant, and, on the whole, I was relieved when the train pulled up in the tumble-down shed which does duty for a station in the rising town of Solteff—Solteff, whose resources I was about to open out, and whose commerce I was to direct into the great world channels. I almost expected to see a triumphal arch as I stepped on to the platform.

I was to be expected at the end of my journey, so Mr. Dickson had informed me. I looked about among the motley crowd, but saw no Mr. Dimidoff. Suddenly a slovenly, unshaved man passed me rapidly, and glanced first at me and then at my trunk—that wretched trunk, the cause of all my woes. He disappeared in the crowd; but in a little time came strolling past me again, and contrived to whisper as he did so, "Follow me, but at some distance," immediately setting off out of the station and down the street at a rapid pace. Here was mystery with a vengeance! I trotted along in his rear with my valise, and on turning the corner found a rough droschky waiting for me. My unshaven friend opened the door, and I stepped in.

"Is Mr. Dim——" I was beginning.

"Hush!" he cried. "No names, no names; the very walls have ears. You will hear all to-night;" and with that assurance he closed the door, and, seizing the reins, we drove off at a rapid pace—so rapid that I saw my black-eyed acquaintance of the railway carriage gazing after us in surprise until we were out of sight.

I thought over the whole matter as we jogged along in that abominable springless conveyance.

"They say the nobles are tyrants in Russia," I mused; "but it seems to me to be the other way about, for here's this poor Mr. Dimidoff, who evidently thinks his ex-serfs will rise and murder him if he raises the price of grain in the district by exporting some out of it. Fancy being obliged to have recourse to all this mystery and deception in order to sell one's own property! Why, it's worse than an Irish landlord. It is monstrous! Well, he doesn't seem to live in a very aristocratic quarter either," I soliloquised, as I gazed out at the narrow crooked streets and the unkempt dirty Muscovites whom we passed. "I wish Gregory or some one was with me, for it's a cut-throat-looking shop! By Jove, he's pulling up; we must be there!"

We *were* there, to all appearance; for the droschky stopped, and my driver's shaggy head appeared through the aperture.

"It is here, most honoured master," he said, as he helped me to alight.

"Is Mr. Dimi——" I commenced; but he interrupted me again.

"Anything but names," he whispered; "anything but that. You are too used to a land that is free. Caution, oh sacred one!" and he ushered me down a stone-flagged passage, and up a stair at the end of it. "Sit for a few minutes in this room," he said, opening a door, "and a repast will be served for you;" and with that he left me to my own reflections.

"Well," thought I, "whatever Mr. Dimidoff's house may be like, his servants are undoubtedly well trained. 'Oh sacred one!' and 'revered master!' I wonder what he'd call old Dickson himself, if he is so polite to the clerk! I suppose it wouldn't be the thing to smoke in this little crib; but I could do a pipe nicely. By the way, how confoundedly like a cell it looks!"

It certainly did look like a cell. The door was an iron one, and enormously

strong, while the single window was closely barred. The floor was of wood, and sounded hollow and insecure as I strode across it. Both floor and walls were thickly splashed with coffee or some other dark liquid. On the whole, it was far from being a place where one would be likely to become unreasonably festive.

I had hardly concluded my survey when I heard steps approaching down the corridor, and the door was opened by my old friend of the droschky. He announced that my dinner was ready, and, with many bows and apologies for leaving me in what he called the "dismissal room," he led me down the passage, and into a large and beautifully furnished apartment. A table was spread for two in the centre of it, and by the fire was standing a man very little older than myself. He turned as I came in, and stepped forward to meet me with every symptom of profound respect.

"So young and yet so honoured!" he exclaimed; and then seeming to recollect himself, he continued, "Pray sit at the head of the table. You must be fatigued by your long and arduous journey. We dine *tête-à-tête*; but the others assemble afterwards."

"Mr. Dimidoff, I presume?" said I.

"No, sir," said he, turning his keen grey eyes upon me. "My name is Petrokine; you mistake me perhaps for one of the others. But now, not a word of business until the council meets. Try your *chef's* soup; you will find it excellent, I think."

Who Mr. Petrokine or the others might be I could not conceive. Land stewards of Dimidoff's, perhaps; though the name did not seem familiar to my companion. However, as he appeared to shun any business questions at present, I gave in to his humour, and we conversed on social life in England—a subject in which he displayed considerable knowledge and acuteness. His remarks, too, on Malthus and the laws of population were wonderfully good, though savouring somewhat of Radicalism.

"By the way," he remarked, as we smoked a cigar over our wine, "we should never have known you but for the English labels on your luggage; it was the luckiest thing in the world that Alexander noticed them. We had had no personal description of you; indeed we were prepared to expect a somewhat older man. You are young indeed, sir, to be entrusted with such a mission."

"My employer trusts me," I replied; "and we have learned in our trade that

youth and shrewdness are not incompatible."

"Your remark is true, sir," returned my newly-made friend; "but I am surprised to hear you call our glorious association a trade! Such a term is gross indeed to apply to a body of men banded together to supply the world with that which it is yearning for, but which, without our exertions, it can never hope to attain. A spiritual brotherhood would be a more fitting term."

"By Jove!" thought I, "how pleased the boss would be to hear him! He must have been in the business himself, whoever he is."

"Now, sir," said Mr. Petrokine, "the clock points to eight, and the council must be already sitting. Let us go up together, and I will introduce you. I need hardly say that the greatest secrecy is observed, and that your appearance is anxiously awaited."

I turned over in my mind as I followed him how I might best fulfil my mission and secure the most advantageous terms. They seemed as anxious as I was in the matter, and there appeared to be no opposition, so perhaps the best thing would be to wait and see what they would propose.

I had hardly come to this conclusion when my guide swung open a large door at the end of a passage, and I found myself in a room larger and even more gorgeously fitted up than the one in which I had dined. A long table, covered with green baize and strewn with papers, ran down the middle, and round it were sitting fourteen or fifteen men conversing earnestly. The whole scene reminded me forcibly of a gambling hell I had visited some time before.

Upon our entrance the company rose and bowed. I could not but remark that my companion attracted no attention, while every eye was turned upon me with a strange mixture of surprise and almost servile respect. A man at the head of the table, who was remarkable for the extreme pallor of his face as contrasted with his blue-black hair and moustache, waved his hand to a seat beside him, and I sat down.

"I need hardly say," said Mr. Petrokine, "that Gustave Berger, the English agent, is now honouring us with his presence. He is young, indeed, Alexis," he continued to my pale-faced neighbour, "and yet he is of European reputation."

"Come, draw it mild!" thought I, adding aloud, "If you refer to me, sir, though I am indeed acting as English agent, my name is not Berger, but Robinson—Mr.

Tom Robinson, at your service."

A laugh ran round the table.

"So be it, so be it," said the man they called Alexis. "I commend your discretion, most honoured sir. One cannot be too careful. Preserve your English *sobriquet* by all means. I regret that any painful duty should be performed upon this auspicious evening; but the rules of our association must be preserved at any cost to our feelings, and a dismissal is inevitable to-night."

"What the deuce is the fellow driving at?" thought I. "What is it to me if he does give his servant the sack? This Dimidoff, wherever he is, seems to keep a private lunatic asylum."

"*Take out the gag!*" The words fairly shot through me, and I started in my chair. It was Petrokine who spoke. For the first time I noticed that a burly stout man, sitting at the other end of the table, had his arms tied behind his chair and a handkerchief round his mouth. A horrible suspicion began to creep into my heart. Where was I? Was I in Mr. Dimidoff's? Who were these men, with their strange words?

"Take out the gag!" repeated Petrokine; and the handkerchief was removed.

"Now, Paul Ivanovitch," said he, "what have you to say before you go?"

"Not a dismissal, sirs," he pleaded; "not a dismissal: anything but that! I will go into some distant land, and my mouth shall be closed for ever. I will do anything that the society asks; but pray, pray do not dismiss me."

"You know our laws, and you know your crime," said Alexis, in a cold, harsh voice. "Who drove us from Odessa by his false tongue and his double face? Who wrote the anonymous letter to the Governor? Who cut the wire that would have destroyed the arch-tyrant? You did, Paul Ivanovitch; and you must die."

I leaned back in my chair and fairly gasped.

"Remove him!" said Petrokine; and the man of the droschky, with two others, forced him out.

I heard the footsteps pass down the passage, and then a door open and shut. Then came a sound as of a struggle, ended by a heavy, crunching blow and a dull thud.

"So perish all who are false to their oath," said Alexis solemnly; and a hoarse "Amen" went up from his companions.

"Death alone can dismiss us from our order," said another man further down; "but Mr. Berg—Mr. Robinson is pale. The scene has been too much for him after his long journey from England."

"Oh, Tom, Tom," thought I, "if ever you get out of this scrape you'll turn over a new leaf. You're not fit to die, and that's a fact." It was only too evident to me now that by some strange misconception I had got in among a gang of cold-blooded Nihilists, who mistook me for one of their order. I felt, after what I had witnessed, that my only chance of life was to try to play the *rôle* thus forced upon me until an opportunity for escape should present itself; so I tried hard to regain my air of self-possession, which had been so rudely shaken.

"I am indeed fatigued," I replied; "but I feel stronger now. Excuse my momentary weakness."

"It was but natural," said a man with a thick beard at my right hand. "And now, most honoured sir, how goes the cause in England?"

"Remarkably well," I answered.

"Has the great commissioner condescended to send a missive to the Solteff branch?" asked Petrokine.

"Nothing in writing," I replied.

"But he has spoken of it?"

"Yes: he said he had watched it with feelings of the liveliest satisfaction," I returned.

"'Tis well! 'tis well!" ran round the table.

I felt giddy and sick from the critical nature of my position. Any moment a question might be asked which would show me in my true colours. I rose and helped myself from a decanter of brandy which stood on a side table. The potent liquor flew to my excited brain, and as I sat down I felt reckless enough to be half amused at my position, and inclined to play with my tormentors. I still, however, had all my wits about me.

"You have been to Birmingham?" asked the man with the beard.

"Many times," said I.

"Then you have of course seen the private workshop and arsenal?"

"I have been over them both more than once."

"It is still, I suppose, entirely unsuspected by the police?" continued my interrogator.

"Entirely," I replied.

"Can you tell us how it is that so large a concern is kept so completely secret?"

Here was a poser; but my native impudence and the brandy seemed to come to my aid.

"That is information," I replied, "which I do not feel justified in divulging even here. In withholding it I am acting under the direction of the chief commissioner."

"You are right—perfectly right," said my original friend Petrokine. "You will no doubt make your report to the central office at Moscow before entering into such details."

"Exactly so," I replied, only too happy to get a lift out of my difficulty.

"We have heard," said Alexis, "that you were sent to inspect the *Livadia*. Can you give us any particulars about it?"

"Anything you ask I will endeavour to answer," I replied, in desperation.

"Have any orders been made in Birmingham concerning it?"

"None when I left England."

"Well, well, there's plenty of time yet," said the man with the beard—"many months. Will the bottom be of wood or iron?"

"Of wood," I answered at random.

"'Tis well!" said another voice. "And what is the breadth of the Clyde below Greenock?"

"It varies much," I replied; "on an average about eighty yards."

"How many men does she carry?" asked an anæmic-looking youth at the foot of the table, who seemed more fit for a public school than this den of murder.

"About three hundred," said I.

"A floating coffin!" said the young Nihilist, in a sepulchral voice.

"Are the store-rooms on a level with or underneath the state-cabins?" asked Petrokine.

"Underneath," said I decisively, though I need hardly say I had not the smallest conception.

"And now, most honoured sir," said Alexis, "tell us what was the reply of Bauer, the German socialist, to Ravinsky's proclamation."

Here was a deadlock with a vengeance. Whether my cunning would have extricated me from it or not was never decided, for Providence hurried me from one dilemma into another and a worse one.

A door slammed downstairs, and rapid footsteps were heard approaching. Then came a loud tap outside, followed by two smaller ones.

"The sign of the society!" said Petrokine; "and yet we are all present; who can it be?"

The door was thrown open, and a man entered, dusty and travel-stained, but with an air of authority and power stamped on every feature of his harsh but expressive face. He glanced round the table, scanning each countenance carefully. There was a start of surprise in the room. He was evidently a stranger to them all.

"What means this intrusion, sir?" said my friend with the beard.

"Intrusion!" said the stranger. "I was given to understand that I was expected, and had looked forward to a warmer welcome from my fellow-associates. I am personally unknown to you, gentlemen, but I am proud to think that my name should command some respect among you. I am Gustave Berger, the agent from England, bearing letters from the chief commissioner to his well-beloved brothers of Solteff."

One of their own bombs could hardly have created greater surprise had it been fired in the midst of them. Every eye was fixed alternately on me and upon the

newly-arrived agent.

"If you are indeed Gustave Berger," said Petrokine, "who is this?"

"That I am Gustave Berger these credentials will show," said the stranger, as he threw a packet upon the table. "Who that man may be I know not; but if he has intruded himself upon the lodge under false pretences, it is clear that he must never carry out of the room what he has learned. Speak, sir," he added, addressing me: "who and what are you?"

I felt that my time had come. My revolver was in my hip-pocket; but what was that against so many desperate men? I grasped the butt of it, however, as a drowning man clings to a straw, and I tried to preserve my coolness as I glanced round at the cold, vindictive faces turned towards me.

"Gentlemen," I said, "the *rôle* I have played to-night has been a purely involuntary one on my part. I am no police spy, as you seem to suspect; nor, on the other hand, have I the honour to be a member of your association. I am an inoffensive corn-dealer, who by an extraordinary mistake has been forced into this unpleasant and awkward position."

I paused for a moment. Was it my fancy that there was a peculiar noise in the street—a noise as of many feet treading softly? No, it had died away; it was but the throbbing of my own heart.

"I need hardly say," I continued, "that anything I may have heard to-night will be safe in my keeping. I pledge my solemn honour as a gentleman that not one word of it shall transpire through me."

The senses of men in great physical danger become strangely acute, or their imagination plays them curious tricks. My back was towards the door as I sat, but I could have sworn that I heard heavy breathing behind it. Was it the three minions whom I had seen before in the performance of their hateful functions, and who, like vultures, had sniffed another victim?

I looked round the table. Still the same hard, cruel faces. Not one glance of sympathy. I cocked the revolver in my pocket.

There was a painful silence, which was broken by the harsh, grating voice of Petrokine.

"Promises are easily made and easily broken," he said. "There is but one way

of securing eternal silence. It is our lives or yours. Let the highest among us speak."

"You are right, sir," said the English agent; "there is but one course open. He must be dismissed."

I knew what that meant in their confounded jargon, and sprang to my feet.

"By Heaven," I shouted, putting my back against the door, "you shan't butcher a free Englishman like a sheep! The first among you who stirs, drops!"

A man sprang at me. I saw along the sights of my Derringer the gleam of a knife and the demoniacal face of Gustave Berger. Then I pulled the trigger, and, with his hoarse scream sounding in my ears, I was felled to the ground by a crashing blow from behind. Half unconscious, and pressed down by some heavy weight, I heard the noise of shouts and blows above me, and then I fainted away.

When I came to myself I was lying among the *débris* of the door, which had been beaten in on the top of me. Opposite were a dozen of the men who had lately sat in judgment upon me, tied two and two, and guarded by a score of Russian soldiers. Beside me was the corpse of the ill-fated English agent, the whole face blown in by the force of the explosion. Alexis and Petrokine were both lying on the floor like myself, bleeding profusely.

"Well, young fellow, you've had a narrow escape," said a hearty voice in my ear.

I looked up, and recognised my black-eyed acquaintance of the railway carriage.

"Stand up," he continued: "you're only a bit stunned; no bones broken. It's no wonder I mistook you for the Nihilist agent, when the very lodge itself was taken in. Well, you're the only stranger who ever came out of this den alive. Come downstairs with me. I know who you are, and what you are after now; I'll take you to Mr. Dimidoff. Nay, don't go in there," he cried, as I walked towards the door of the cell into which I had been originally ushered. "Keep out of that: you've seen evil sights enough for one day. Come down and have a glass of liquor."

He explained as we walked back to the hotel that the police of Solteff, of which he was the chief, had had warning and been on the look-out during some time for this Nihilist emissary. My arrival in so unfrequented a place, coupled with my air of secrecy and the English labels on that confounded portmanteau of Gregory's, had completed the business.

I have little more to tell. My Socialistic acquaintances were all either transported to Siberia or executed. My mission was performed to the satisfaction of my employers. My conduct during the whole business has won me promotion, and my prospects for life have been improved since that horrible night, the remembrance of which still makes me shiver.

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