

**Joseph Sheridan
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CHAPTER I. MORTLAKE HALL.

There stands about a mile and a half beyond Islington, unless it has come down within the last two years, a singular and grand old house. It belonged to the family of Arden, once distinguished in the Northumbrian counties. About fifty acres of ground, rich with noble clumps and masses of old timber, surround it; old-world fish-ponds, with swans sailing upon them, tall yew hedges, quincunxes, leaden fauns and goddesses, and other obsolete splendours surround it. It rises, tall, florid, built of Caen stone, with a palatial flight of steps, and something of the grace and dignity of the genius of Inigo Jones, to whom it is ascribed, with the shadows of ancestral trees and the stains of two centuries upon it, and a vague character of gloom and melancholy, not improved by some indications not actually of decay, but of something too like neglect.

It is now evening, and a dusky glow envelopes the scene. The setting sun throws its level beams, through tall drawing-room windows, ruddily upon the Dutch tapestry on the opposite walls, and not unbecomingly lights up the little party assembled there.

Good-natured, fat Lady May Penrose, in her bonnet, sips her tea and chats agreeably. Her carriage waits outside. You will ask who is that extremely beautiful girl who sits opposite, her large soft grey eyes gazing towards the western sky with a look of abstraction, too forgetful for a time of her company, leaning upon the slender hand she has placed under her cheek. How silken and golden-tinted the dark brown hair that

grows so near her brows, making her forehead low, and marking with its broad line the beautiful oval of her face! Is there carmine anywhere to match her brilliant lips? And when, recollecting something to tell Lady May, she turns on a sudden, smiling, how soft and pretty the dimples, and how even the little row of pearls she discloses!

This is Alice Arden, whose singularly handsome brother Richard, with some of her tints and outlines translated into masculine beauty, stands leaning on the back of a prie-dieu chair, and chatting gaily.

But who is the thin, tall man—the only sinister figure in the group—with one hand in his breast, the other on a cabinet, as he leans against the wall? Who is that pale, thin-lipped man, “with cadaverous aspect and broken beak,” whose eyes never seem to light up, but maintain their dismal darkness while his pale lips smile? Those eyes are fixed on the pretty face of Alice Arden, as she talks to Lady May, with a strangely intense gaze. His eyebrows rise a little, like those of Mephistopheles, towards his temples, with an expression that is inflexibly sarcastic, and sometimes menacing. His jaw is slightly underhung, a formation which heightens the satirical effect of his smile, and, by contrast, marks the depression of his nose.

There was at this time in London a Mr. Longcluse, an agreeable man, a convenient man, who had got a sort of footing in many houses, nobody exactly knew how. He had a knack of obliging people when they really wanted a trifling kindness, and another of holding fast his advantage, and, without seeming to push, or ever appearing to flatter, of

maintaining the acquaintance he had once founded. He looked about eight-and-thirty: he was really older. He was gentlemanlike, clever, and rich; but not a soul of all the men who knew him had ever heard of him at school or college. About his birth, parentage, and education, about his "life and adventures," he was dark.

How were his smart acquaintance made? Oddly, as we shall learn when we know him a little better. It was a great pity that there were some odd things said about this very agreeable, obliging, and gentlemanlike person. It was a pity that more was not known about him. The man had enemies, no doubt, and from the sort of reserve that enveloped him their opportunity arose. But were there not about town hundreds of men, well enough accepted, about whose early days no one cared a pin, and everything was just as dark?

Now Mr. Longcluse, with his pallid face, his flat nose, his sarcastic eyebrows, and thin-lipped smile, was overlooking this little company, his shoulder leaning against the frame that separated two pieces of the pretty Dutch tapestry which covered the walls.

"By-the-bye, Mr. Longcluse—you can tell me, for you always know everything," said Lady May—"is there still any hope of that poor child's recovering—I mean the one in that dreadful murder in Thames Street, where the six poor little children were stabbed?"

Mr. Longcluse smiled.

"I'm so glad, Lady May, I can answer you upon good authority! I stopped to-day to ask Sir Edwin Dudley that very

question through his carriage window, and he said that he had just been to the hospital to see the poor little thing, and that it was likely to do well."

"I'm so glad! And what do they say can have been the motive of the murder?"

"Jealousy, they say; or else the man is mad."

"I should not wonder. I'm sure I hope he is. But they should take care to put him under lock and key."

"So they will, rely on it; that's a matter of course."

"I don't know how it is," continued Lady May, who was garrulous, "that murders interest people so much, who ought to be simply shocked at them."

"We have a murder in our family, you know," said Richard Arden.

"That was poor Henry Arden—I know," she answered, lowering her voice and dropping her eyes, with a side glance at Alice, for she did not know how she might like to hear it talked of.

"Oh, that happened when Alice was only five months old, I think," said Richard; and slipping into the chair beside Lady May, he laid his hand upon hers with a smile, and whispered, leaning towards her—

"You are always so thoughtful; it is so nice of you!"

And this short speech ended, his eyes remained fixed for some seconds, with a glow of tender admiration, on those of fat Lady May, who simpered with effusion, and did not draw

her hand away until she thought she saw Mr. Longcluse glance their way.

It was quite true, all he said of Lady May. It would not be easy to find a simpler or more good-natured person. She was very rich also, and, it was said by people who love news and satire, had long been willing to share her gold and other chattels with handsome Richard Arden, who being but five-and-twenty, might very nearly have been her son.

“I remember that horrible affair,” said Mr. Longcluse, with a little shrug and a shake of his head. “Where was I then—Paris or Vienna? Paris it was. I recollect it all now, for my purse was stolen by the very man who made his escape—Mace was his name; he was a sort of low man on the turf, I believe. I was very young then—somewhere about seventeen, I think.”

“You can't have been more, of course,” said good-natured Lady May.

“I should like very much some time to hear all about it,” continued Mr. Longcluse.

“So you shall,” said Richard, “whenever you like.”

“Every old family has a murder, and a ghost, and a beauty also, though she does not always live and breathe, except in the canvas of Lely, or Kneller, or Reynolds: and they, you know, had roses and lilies to give away at discretion, in their paint-boxes, and were courtiers,” remarked Mr. Longcluse, “who dealt sometimes in the old-fashioned business of making compliments. *I* say happy the man who lives in those summers when the loveliness of some beautiful family

culminates, and who may, at ever such a distance, gaze and worship.”

This ugly man spoke in a low tone, and his voice was rather sweet. He looked as he spoke at Miss Arden, from whom, indeed, his eyes did not often wander.

“Very prettily said!” applauded Lady May affably.

“I forgot to ask you, Lady May,” inquired Alice, cruelly, at this moment, “how the pretty little Italian greyhound is that was so ill—better, I hope.”

“Ever so much—quite well almost. I'd have taken him out for a drive to-day, poor dear little Pepsie! but that I thought the sun just a little overpowering. Didn't you?”

“Perhaps a little.”

Mr. Longcluse lowered his eyes as he leaned against the wall and sighed, with a pained smile, that even upon his plain, pallid face, was pathetic.

Did proud Richard Arden perceive the devotion of the dubious Longcluse—undefined in position, in history, in origin, in character, in all things but in wealth? Of course he did, perfectly. But that wealth was said to be enormous. There were Jews, who ought to know, who said he was worth one million eight hundred thousand pounds, and that his annual income was considerably more than a hundred thousand pounds a year.

Was a man like that to be dismissed without inquiry? Had he not found him good-natured and gentlemanlike? What about those stories circulated among Jews and croupiers?

Enemies might affect to believe them, and quote the old saw, "There is never smoke without fire;" but dare one of them utter a word of the kind aloud? Did they stand the test of five minutes' inquiry, such even as he had given them? Had he found a particle of proof, of evidence, of suspicion? Not a spark. What man had ever escaped stories who was worth forging a lie about?

Here was a man worth more than a million. Why, if *he* let him slip through his fingers, some duchess would pounce on him for her daughter.

It was well that Longcluse was really in love—well, perhaps, that he did not appreciate the social omnipotence of money.

"Where is Sir Reginald at present?" asked Lady May.

"Not here, you may be sure," answered Richard. "My father does not admit my visits, you know."

"Really! And is that miserable quarrel kept up still?"

"Only too true. He is in France at present; at Vichy—ain't it Vichy?" he said to Alice.

But she, not choosing to talk, said simply, "Yes—Vichy."

"I'm going to take Alice into town again; she has promised to stay with me a little longer. And I think you neglect her a little, don't you? You ought to come and see her a little oftener," pleaded Lady May, in an undertone.

"I only feared I was boring you all. Nothing, *you* know, would give me half so much pleasure," he answered.

“Well, then, she'll expect your visits, mind.”

A little silence followed. Richard was vexed with his sister; she was, he thought, snubbing his friend Longcluse.

Well, when once he had spoken his mind and disclosed his treasures, Richard flattered himself he had some influence; and did not Lady May swear by Mr. Longcluse? And was his father, the most despotic and violent of baronets, and very much dipt, likely to listen to sentimental twaddle pleading against a hundred thousand a year? So, Miss Alice, if you were disposed to talk nonsense, it was not very likely to be listened to, and sharp and short logic might ensue.

How utterly unconscious of all this she sits there, thinking, I daresay, of quite another person!

Mr. Longcluse was also for a moment in profound reverie; so was Richard Arden. The secrecy of thought is a pleasant privilege to the thinker—perhaps hardly less a boon to the person pondered upon.

If each man's forehead could project its shadows and the light of his spirit shine through, and the confluence of figures and phantoms that cross and march behind it become visible, how that magic-lantern might appal good easy people!

And now the ladies fell to talking and comparing notes about their guipure lacework.

“How charming yours looks, my dear, round that little table!” exclaimed Lady May in a rapture. “I'm sure I hope mine may turn out half as pretty. I wanted to compare; I'm not quite sure whether it is exactly the same pattern.”

And so on, until it was time for them to order their wings for town.

The gentlemen have business of their own to transact, or pleasures to pursue. Mr. Longcluse has his trap there, to carry them into town when their hour comes. They can only put the ladies into their places, and bid them good-bye, and exchange parting reminders and good-natured speeches.

Pale Mr. Longcluse, as he stands on the steps, looks with his dark eyes after the disappearing carriage, and sighs deeply. He has forgotten all for the moment but one dream. Richard Arden wakens him, by laying his hand on his shoulder.

“Come, Longcluse, let us have a cigar in the billiard-room, and a talk. I have a box of Manillas that I think you will say are delicious—that is, if you like them full-flavoured.”

CHAPTER II. MARTHA TANSEY.

“By-the-bye, Longcluse,” said Richard, as they entered together the long tiled passage that leads to the billiard-room, “you like pictures. There is one here, banished to the housekeeper's room, that they say is a Vandyck; we must have it cleaned and backed, and restored to its old place—but would you care to look at it?”

“Certainly, I should like extremely,” said Mr. Longcluse.

They were now at the door of the housekeeper's room, and Richard Arden knocked.

“Come in,” said the quavering voice of the old woman from within.

Richard Arden opened the door wide. The misty rose-coloured light of the setting sun filled the room. From the wall right opposite, the pale portrait of Sir Thomas Arden, who fought for the king during the great Civil War, looked forth from his deep dingy frame full upon them, stern and melancholy; the misty beams touching the softer lights of his long hair and the gleam of his armour so happily, that the figure came out from its dark background, and seemed ready to step forth to meet them. As it happened, there was no one in the room but old Mrs. Tansey, the housekeeper, who received Richard Arden standing.

From the threshold, Mr. Longcluse, lost in wonder at the noble picture, gazed on it, with the exclamation, almost a cry, “Good heaven! what a noble work! I had no idea there could

be such a thing in existence and so little known." And he stood for awhile in a rapture, gazing from the threshold on the portrait.

At sound of that voice, with a vague and terrible recognition, the housekeeper turned with a start towards the door, expecting, you'd have fancied from her face, the entrance of a ghost. There was a tremble in the voice with which she cried, "Lord! what's that?" a tremble in the hand extended towards the door, and a shake also in the pale frowning face, from which shone her glassy eyes.

Mr. Longcluse stepped in, and the old woman's gaze became, as he did so, more shrinking and intense. When he saw her he recoiled, as a man might who had all but trod upon a snake; and these two people gazed at one another with a strange, uncertain scowl.

In Mr. Longcluse's case, this dismal caprice of countenance did not last beyond a second or two. Richard Arden, as he turned his eyes from the picture to say a word to his companion, saw it for a moment, and it faded from his features—saw it, and the darkened countenance of the old housekeeper, with a momentary shock. He glanced from one to the other quickly, with a look of unconscious surprise. That look instantly recalled Mr. Longcluse, who, laying his hand on Richard Arden's arm, said, with a laugh—"I do believe I'm the most nervous man in the world."

"You don't find the room too hot?" said Richard, inwardly ruminating upon the strange looks he had just seen exchanged. "Mrs. Tansey keeps a fire all the year round—don't you, Martha?"

Martha did not answer, nor seem to hear; she pressed her lean hand, instead, to her heart, and drew back to a sofa and sat down, muttering, "My God, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee!" and she looked as if she were on the point of fainting.

"That is a true Vandyck," said Mr. Longcluse, who was now again looking stedfastly at the picture. "It deserves to rank among his finest portraits. I have never seen anything of his more forcible. You really ought not to leave it here, and in this state." He walked over and raised the lower end of the frame gently from the wall. "Yes, just as you said, it wants to be backed. That portrait would not stand a shake, I can tell you. The canvas is perfectly rotten, and the paint—if you stand here you'll see—is ready to flake off. It is an awful pity. You shouldn't leave it in such danger."

"No," said Richard, who was looking at the old woman. "I don't think Martha's well—will you excuse me for a moment?" And he was at the housekeeper's side. "What's the matter, Martha?" he said kindly. "Are you ill?"

"Very bad, Sir. I beg your pardon for sitting, but I could not help; and the gentleman will excuse me."

"Of course—but what's the matter?" said Richard.

"A sudden fright like, Sir. I'm all over on a tremble," she quavered.

"See how exquisitely that hand is painted," continued Mr. Longcluse, pursuing his criticism, "and the art with which the lights are managed. It is a wonderful picture. It makes one positively angry to see it in that state, and anywhere but in

the most conspicuous and honourable place. If I owned that picture, I should never be tired showing it. I should have it where everyone who came into my house should see it; and I should watch every crack and blur on its surface, as I should the symptoms of a dying child, or the looks of the mistress of my heart. Now just look at this. Where is he? Oh!”

“I beg your pardon, a thousand times, but I find my old friend Martha feels a little faint and ill,” said Richard.

“Dear me! I hope she's better,” said Mr. Longcluse, approaching with solicitude. “Can I be of any use? Shall I touch the bell?”

“I'm better, Sir, I thank you; I'm much better,” said the old woman. “It won't signify nothing, only—” She was looking hard again at Mr. Longcluse, who now seemed perfectly at his ease, and showed in his countenance nothing but the commiseration befitting the occasion. “A sort of a weakness—a fright like—and I can't think, quite, what came over me.”

“Don't you think a glass of wine might do her good?” asked Mr. Longcluse.

“Thanks, Sir, I don't drink it. Oh, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee! Good Lord, a' mercy on us! I take them drops, hartshorn and valerian, on a little water, when I feel nervous like. I don't know when I was took wi' t' creepins before.”

“You look better,” said Richard.

“I'm quite right again, Sir,” she said, with a sigh. She had taken her “drops,” and seemed restored.

“Hadn't you better have one of the maids with you? I'm going now; I'll send some one,” he said. “You must get all right, Martha. It pains me to see you ill. You're a very old friend, remember. You must be all right again; and, if you like, we'll have the doctor out, from town.”

He said this, holding her thin old hand very kindly, for he was by no means without good-nature. So sending the promised attendant, he and Longcluse proceeded to the billiard-room, where, having got the lamps lighted, they began to enjoy their smoke. Each, I fancy, was thinking of the little incident in the housekeeper's room. There was a long silence.

“Poor old Tansey! She looked awfully ill,” said Richard Arden at last.

“By Jove! she did. Is that her name? She rather frightened me,” said Mr. Longcluse. “I thought we had stumbled on a mad woman—she stared so. Has she ever had any kind of fit, poor thing?”

“No. She grumbles a good deal, but I really think she's a healthy old woman enough. She says she was frightened.”

“We came in too suddenly, perhaps?”

“No, that wasn't it, for I knocked first,” said Arden.

“Ah, yes, so you did. I only know she frightened me. I really thought she was out of her mind, and that she was going to stick me with a knife, perhaps,” said Mr. Longcluse, with a little laugh and a shrug.

Arden laughed, and puffed away at his cigar till he had it

in a glow again. Was this explanation of what he had seen in Longcluse's countenance—a picture presented but for a fraction of a second, but thenceforward ineffaceable—quite satisfactory?

In a short time Mr. Longcluse asked whether he could have a little brandy and water, which accordingly was furnished. In his first glass there was a great deal of brandy, and very little water indeed; and his second, sipped more at his leisure, was but little more diluted. A very faint flush tinged his pallid cheeks.

Richard Arden was, by this time, thinking of his own debts and ill-luck, and at last he said, “I wonder what the art of getting on in the world is. Is it communicable? or is it no art at all, but a simple run of luck?”

Mr. Longcluse smiled scornfully. “There are men who have immense faith in themselves,” said he, “who have indomitable will, and who are provided with craft and pliancy for any situation. Those men are giants from the first to the last hour of action, unless, as happened to Napoleon, success enervates them. In the cradle, they strangle serpents; blind, they pull down palaces; old as Dandolo, they burn fleets and capture cities. It is only when they have taken to bragging that the *lues Napoleonica* has set in. Now I have been, in a sense, a successful man—I am worth some money. If I were the sort of man I describe, I should be worth, if I cared for it, ten times what I have in as many years. But I don't care to confess I made my money by flukes. If, having no tenderness, you have two attributes—profound cunning and perfect audacity—nothing can keep you back. I'm a common-place

man, I say; but I know what constitutes power. Life is a battle, and the general's qualities win."

"I have not got the general's qualities, I think; and I know I haven't luck," said Arden; "so for my part I may as well drift, with as little trouble as may be, wherever the current drives. Happiness is not for all men."

"Happiness is for *no* man," said Mr. Longcluse. And a little silence followed. "Now suppose a fellow has got more money than ever he dreamed of," he resumed, "and finds money, after all, not quite what he fancied, and that he has come to long for a prize quite distinct and infinitely more precious; so that he finds, at last, that he never can be happy for an hour without it, and yet, for all his longing and his pains, sees it is unattainable as that star." (He pointed to a planet that shone down through the skylight.) "Is that man happy? He carries with him, go where he may, an aching heart, the pangs of jealousy and despair, and the longing of the damned for Paradise. That is *my* miserable case."

Richard Arden laughed, as he lighted his second cigar.

"Well, if that's your case, you can't be one of those giants you described just now. Women are not the obdurate and cruel creatures you fancy. They are proud, and vain, and unforgiving; but the misery and the perseverance of a lover constitute a worship that first flatters and then wins them. Remember this, a woman finds it very hard to give up a worshipper, except for another. Now why should you despair? You are a gentleman, you are a clever fellow, an agreeable fellow; you are what is accounted a young man still, and you can make your wife rich. They all like that. It is not avarice,

but pride. I don't know the young lady, but I see no good reason why you should fail."

"I wish, Arden, I dare tell you all; but some day I'll tell you more."

"The only thing is—— You'll not mind my telling you, as you have been so frank with me?"

"Pray say whatever you think. I shall be ever so much obliged. I forget so many things about English manners and ways of thinking—I have lived so very much abroad. Should I be put up for a club?"

"Well, I should not mind a club just yet, till you know more people—quite time enough. But you must manage better. Why should those Jew fellows, and other people, who don't hold, and never can, a position the least like yours, be among your acquaintance? You must make it a rule to drop all objectionable persons, and know none but good people. Of course, when you are strong enough it doesn't so much matter, provided you keep them at arm's length. But you passed your younger days abroad, as you say, and not being yet so well known here, you will have to be particular—don't you see? A man is so much judged by his acquaintance; and, in fact, it is essential."

"A thousand thanks for any hints that strike you," said Longcluse good-humouredly.

"They sound frivolous; but these trifles have immense weight with women," said Arden. "By Jove!" he added, glancing at his watch, "we shall be late. Your trap is at the door—suppose we go?"

CHAPTER III. MR. LONGCLUSE OPENS HIS HEART.

The old housekeeper had drawn near her window, and stood close to the pane, through which she looked out upon the star-lit night. The stars shine down over the foliage of huge old trees. Dim as shadows stand the horse and tax-cart that await Mr. Longcluse and Richard Arden, who now at length appear. The groom fixes the lamps, one of which shines full on Mr. Longcluse's peculiar face.

“Ay—the voice; I could a' sworn to that,” she muttered. “It went through me like a scythe. But that's a strange face; and yet there's summat in it, just a hint like, to call my thoughts out a-seeking up and down, and to and fro; and 'twill not let me rest until I come to find the truth. Mace? No, no. Langly? Not he. Yet 'twas summat *that night*, I think—summat awful. And who *was* there? No one. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord! for my heart is sore troubled.”

Up jumped the groom. Mr. Longcluse had the reins in his hand, and he and his companion passed swiftly by the window, and the flash of the lamps crossed the panelled walls of the housekeeper's room. The light danced wildly from corner to corner of the wainscot, accompanied by the shadows of two geraniums in bow-pots on the window-stool. The lamps flew by, and she still stood there, with the palsied shake of her head and hand, looking out into the darkness, in rumination.

Arden and Longcluse glided through the night air in silence, under the mighty old trees that had witnessed generations of Ardens, down the darker, narrow road, and by the faded old inn, once famous in those regions as the "Guy of Warwick," representing still on its board, in tarnished gold and colours, that redoubted champion, with a boar's head on the point of his sword, and a grotesque lion winding itself fawningly about his horse's legs.

As they passed swiftly along this smooth and deserted road, Longcluse spoke. *Aperit præcordia vinum*. In his brandy and water he had not spared alcohol, and the quantity was considerable.

"I have lots of money, Arden, and I can talk to people, as you say," he suddenly said, as if Richard Arden had spoken but a moment before; "but, on the whole, is there on earth a more miserable dog than I? There are things that trouble me that would make you laugh; there are others that would, if I dare tell them, make you sigh. Soon I shall be able; soon you shall know all. I'm not a bad fellow. I know how to give away money, and, what is harder to bestow on others, my time and labour. But who to look at me would believe it? I'm not a worse fellow than Penruddock. I can cry for pity and do a kind act like him; but I look in my glass, and I also feel like him, 'the mark of Cain' is on me—cruelty in my face. Why should Nature write on some men's faces such libels on their characters? Then here's another thing to make you laugh—you, a handsome fellow, to whom beauty belongs, I say, by right of birth—it would make me laugh also if I were not, as I am, forced every hour I live to count up, in agonies of hope and terror, my chances in that enterprise in which all

my happiness for life is staked so wildly. Common ugliness does not matter, it is got over. But such a face as mine! Come, come! you are too good-natured to say. I'm not asking for consolation; I am only summing up my curses."

"You make too much of these. Lady May thinks your face, she says, very interesting—upon my honour, she does."

"Oh, heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Longcluse, with a shrug and a laugh.

"And what is more to the purpose (will you forgive my reporting all this—you won't mind?), some young lady friends of hers who were by said, I assure you, that you had so much expression, and that your features were extremely refined."

"It won't do, Arden; you are too good-natured," said he, laughing more bitterly.

"I should much rather be as I am, if I were you, than be gifted with vulgar beauty—plump, pink and white, with black beady eyes, and all that," said Arden.

"But the heaviest curse upon me is that which, perhaps, you do not suspect—the curse of—secrecy."

"Oh, really!" said Arden, laughing, as if he had thought up to then that Mr. Longcluse's history was as well known as that of the ex-Emperor Napoleon.

"I don't say that I shall come out like the enchanted hero in a fairy tale, and change in a moment from a beast into a prince; but I am something better than I seem. In a short time, if you cared to be bored with it, I shall have a great deal to tell you."

There followed here a silence of two or three minutes, and then, on a sudden, pathetically, Mr. Longcluse broke forth—

“What has a fellow like me to do with love? and less than beloved, can I ever be happy? I know something of the world—not of this London world, where I live less than I seem to do, and into which I came too late ever to understand it thoroughly—I know something of a greater world, and human nature is the same everywhere. You talk of a girl's pride inducing her to marry a man for the sake of his riches. Could I possess my beloved on those terms? I would rather place a pistol in my mouth, and blow my skull off. Arden, I'm unhappy; I'm the most miserable dog alive.”

“Come, Longcluse, that's all nonsense. Beauty is no advantage to a man. The being agreeable is an immense one. But success is what women worship, and if, in addition to that, you possess wealth—not, as I said, that they are sordid, but only vain-glorious—you become very nearly irresistible. Now *you* are agreeable, successful and wealthy—you must see what follows.”

“I'm out of spirits,” said Longcluse, and relapsed into silence, with a great sigh.

By this time they had got within the lamps, and were threading streets, and rapidly approaching their destination. Five minutes more, and these gentlemen had entered a vast room, in the centre of which stood a billiard-table, with benches rising tier above tier to the walls, and a gallery running round the building above them, brilliantly lighted, as such places are, and already crowded with all kinds of people. There is going to be a great match of a “thousand up” played

between Bill Hood and Bob Markham. The betting has been unusually high; it is still going on. The play won't begin for nearly half an hour. The "admirers of the game" have mustered in great force and variety. There are young peers, with sixty thousand a year, and there are gentlemen who live by their billiards. There are, for once in a way, grave persons, bankers, and counsel learned in the law; there are Jews and a sprinkling of foreigners; and there are members of Parliament and members of the swell mob.

Mr. Longcluse has a good deal to think about this night. He *is* out of spirits. Richard Arden is no longer with him, having picked up a friend or two in the room. Longcluse, with folded arms, and his shoulders against the wall, is in a profound reverie, his dark eyes for the time lowered to the floor, beside the point of his French boot. *There* unfold themselves beneath him picture after picture, the scenes of many a year ago. Looking down, there creeps over him an old horror, a supernatural disgust, and he sees in the dark a pair of wide, white eyes, staring up at him in an agony of terror, and a shrill yell, piercing a distance of many years, makes him shake his ears with a sudden chill. Is this the witches' Sabbath of our pale Mephistopheles—his night of goblins? He raised his eyes, and they met those of a person whom he had not seen for a very long time—a third part of his whole life. The two pairs of eyes, at nearly half across the room, have met, and for a moment fixed. The stranger smiles and nods. Mr. Longcluse does neither. He affects now to be looking over the stranger's shoulder at some more distant object. There is a strange chill and commotion at his heart.

CHAPTER IV. MONSIEUR LEBAS.

Mr. Longcluse leaned still with folded arms, and his shoulder to the wall. The stranger, smiling and fussy, was making his way to him. There is nothing in this man's appearance to associate him with tragic incident or emotion of any kind. He is plainly a foreigner. He is short, fat, middle-aged, with a round fat face, radiant with good humour and good-natured enjoyment. His dress is cut in the somewhat grotesque style of a low French tailor. It is not very new, and has some spots of grease upon it. Mr. Longcluse perceives that he is now making his way towards him. Longcluse for a moment thought of making his escape by the door, which was close to him; but he reflected, "He is about the most innocent and good-natured soul on earth, and why should I seem to avoid him? Better, if he's looking for me, to let him find me, and say his say." So Longcluse looked another way, his arms still folded, and his shoulders against the wall as before.

"Ah, ha! Monsieur is thinking profoundly," said a gay voice in French. "Ah, ha, ha, ha! you are surprised, Sir, to see me here. So am I, my faith! I saw you. I never forget a face."

"Nor a friend, Lebas. Who could have imagined anything to bring you to London?" answered Longcluse, in the same language, shaking him warmly by the hand, and smiling down on the little man. "I shall never forget your kindness. I think I should have died in that *illness* but for you. How can I ever thank you half enough?"

“And the grand secret—the political difficulty—Monsieur found it well evaded,” he said, mysteriously touching his upper lip with two fingers.

“Not all quiet yet. I suppose you thought I was in Vienna?”

“Eh? well, yes—so I did,” answered Lebas, with a shrug. “But perhaps you think this place safer.”

“Hush! You'll come to me to-morrow. I'll tell you where to find me before we part, and you'll bring your portmanteau and stay with me while you remain in London, and the longer the better.”

“Monsieur is too kind, a great deal; but I am staying for my visit to London with my brother-in-law, Gabriel Laroque, the watchmaker. He lives on the Hill of Ludgate, and he would be offended if I were to reside anywhere but in his house while I stay. But if Monsieur would be so good as to permit me to call——”

“You must come and dine with me to-morrow; I have a box for the opera. You love music, or you are not the Pierre Lebas whom I remember sitting with his violin at an open window. So come early, come before six; I have ever so much to ask you. And what has brought you to London?”

“A very little business and a great deal of pleasure; but all in a week,” said the little man, with a shrug and a hearty laugh. “I have come over here about some little things like that.” He smiled archly as he produced from his waistcoat pocket a little flat box with a glass top, and shook something in it. “Commerce, you see. I have to see two or three more of the London people, and then my business will have

terminated, and nothing remain for the rest of the week but pleasure—ha, ha!”

“You left all at home well, I hope—children?” He was going to say “Madame,” but a good many years had passed.

“I have seven children. Monsieur will remember two. Three are by my first marriage, four by my second, and all enjoy the very best health. Three are very young—three, two, one year old; and they say a fourth is not impossible very soon,” he added archly.

Longcluse laughed kindly, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

“You must take charge of a little present for each from me, and one for Madame. And the old business still flourishes?”

“A thousand thanks! yes, the business is the same—the file, the chisel, and knife.” And he made a corresponding movement of his hand as he mentioned each instrument.

“*Hush!*” said Longcluse, smiling, so that no one who did not hear him would have supposed there was so much cautious emphasis in the word. “My good friend, remember there are details we talk of, you and I together, that are not to be mentioned so suitably in a place like this,” and he pressed his hand on his wrist, and shook it gently.

“A thousand pardons! I am, I know, too careless, and let my tongue too often run before my caution. My wife, she says, ‘You can't wash your shirt but you must tell the world.’ It is my weakness truly. She is a woman of extraordinary penetration.”

Mr. Longcluse glanced from the corners of his eyes about the room. Perhaps he wished to ascertain whether his talk with this man, whom you would have taken to be little above the level of a French mechanic, had excited anyone's attention. But there was nothing to make him think so.

“Now, Pierre, my friend, you must win some money upon this match—do you see? And you won't deny me the pleasure of putting down your stake for you; and, if you win, you shall buy something pretty for Madame—and, win or lose, I shall think it friendly of you after so many years, and like you the better.”

“Monsieur is too good,” he said with effusion.

“Now look. Do you see that fat Jew over there on the front bench—you can't mistake him—with the velvet waistcoat all in wrinkles, and the enormous lips, who talks to every second person who passes?”

“I see perfectly, Monsieur.”

“He is betting three to one upon Markham. You must take his offer, and back Hood. I'm told *he'll* win. Here are ten pounds, you may as well make them thirty. Don't say a word. Our English custom is to *tip*, as we say, our friend's sons at school, and to make presents to everybody, as often as we like. Now there—not a word.” He quietly slipped into his hand a little rouleau of ten pounds in gold. “If you say one word you wound me,” he continued. “But, good Heaven! my dear friend, haven't you a breast-pocket?”

“No, Monsieur; but this is quite safe. I was paid, only five minutes before I came here, fifteen pounds in gold, a cheque

of forty-four pounds, and——”

“Be silent. You may be overheard. Speak here in a very low tone, as I do. And do you mean to tell me that you carry all that money in your coat pocket?”

“But in a pocket-book, Monsieur.”

“All the more convenient for the *chevalier d'industrie*,” said Longcluse. “Stop. Pray don't produce it; your fate is, perhaps, sealed if you do. There are gentlemen in this room who would hustle and rob you in the crowd as you get out; or, failing that, who, seeing that you are a stranger, would follow and murder you in the streets, for the sake of a twentieth part of that sum.”

“Gabriel thought there would be none here but men distinguished,” said Lebas, in some consternation.

“Distinguished by the special attention of the police, some of them,” said Longcluse.

“Hé! that is very true,” said Monsieur Lebas—“very true, I am sure of it. See you that man there, Monsieur? Regard him for a moment. The tall man, who leans with his shoulder to the metal pillar of the gallery. My faith! he has observed my steps and followed me. I thought he was a spy. But my friend he says ‘No, that is a man of bad character, dismissed for bad practices from the police.’ Aha! he has watched me sideways, with the corner of his eye. I will watch him with the corner of mine—ha, ha!”

“It proves, at all events, Lebas, that there are people here other than gentlemen and men of honest lives,” said

Longcluse.

“But,” said Lebas, brightening a little, “I have this weapon,” producing a dagger from the same pocket.

“Put it back this instant. Worse and worse, my good friend. Don't you know that just now there is a police activity respecting foreigners, and that two have been arrested only yesterday on no charge but that of having weapons about their persons? I don't know what the devil you had best do.”

“I can return to the Hill of Ludgate—eh?”

“Pity to lose the game; they won't let you back again,” said Longcluse.

“What shall I do?” said Lebas, keeping his hand now in his pocket on his treasure.

Longcluse rubbed the tip of his finger a little over his eyebrow, thinking.

“Listen to me,” said Longcluse, suddenly. “Is your brother-in-law here?”

“No, Monsieur.”

“Well, you have some London friend in the room, haven't you?”

“One—yes.”

“Only be sure he is one whom you can trust, and who has a safe pocket.”

“Oh, yes, Monsieur, entirely! and I saw him place his purse so,” he said, touching his coat, over his heart, with his

fingers.

“Well, now, you can't manage it here, under the gaze of the people; but—*where* is best? Yes—you see those two doors at opposite sides in the wall, at the far end of the room? They open into two parallel corridors leading to the hall, and a little way down there is a cross passage, in the middle of which is a door opening into a smoking-room. That room will be deserted now, and there, unseen, you can place your money and dagger in his charge.”

“Ah, thank you a hundred thousand times, Monsieur!” answered Lebas. “I shall be writing to the Baron van Boeren to-morrow, and I will tell him I have met Monsieur.”

“Don't mind; how is the baron?” asked Longcluse.

“Very well. Beginning to be not so young, you know, and thinking of retiring. I will tell him his work has succeeded. If he demolishes, he also secures. If he sometimes sheds blood——”

“*Hush!*” whispered Longcluse, sternly.

“There is no one,” murmured little Lebas, looking round, but dropping his voice to a whisper. “He also saves a neck sometimes from the blade of the guillotine.”

Longcluse frowned, a little embarrassed. Lebas smiled archly. In a moment Longcluse's impatient frown broke into a mysterious smile that responded.

“May I say one word more, and make one request of Monsieur, which I hope he will not think very impertinent?” asked Monsieur Lebas, who had just been on the point of

taking his leave.

“It mayn't be in my power to grant it; but you can't be what you say—I am too much obliged to you—so speak quite freely,” said Longcluse.

So they talked a little more and parted, and Monsieur Lebas went on his way.

CHAPTER V. A CATASTROPHE.

The play has commenced. Longcluse, who likes and understands the game, sitting beside Richard Arden, is all eye. He is intensely eager and delighted. He joins modestly in the clapping that now and then follows a stroke of extraordinary brilliancy. Now and then he whispers a criticism in Arden's ear. There are many vicissitudes in the game. The players have entered on the third hundred, and still "doubtful it stood." The excitement is extraordinary. The assembly is as hushed as if it were listening to a sermon, and, I am afraid, more attentive. Now, on a sudden, Hood scores a hundred and sixty-eight points in a single break. A burst of prolonged applause follows, and, during the clapping, in which he had at first joined, Longcluse says to Arden,—

"I can't tell you how that run of Hood's delights me. I saw a poor little friend of mine here before the play began—I had not seen him since I was little more than a boy—a Frenchman, a good-natured little soul, and I advised him to back Hood, and I have been trembling up to this moment. But I think he's safe now to win. Markham can't score this time. If he's in 'Queer Street,' as they whisper round the room, you'll find he'll either give a simple miss, or put himself into the pocket."

"Well, I'm sure I hope your friend will win, because it will put three hundred and eighty pounds into my pocket," said Richard Arden.

And now silence was called, and the building became, in a

moment, hushed as a cathedral before the anthem; and Markham knocked his own ball into the pocket as Longcluse had predicted.

On sped the game, and at last Hood scored a thousand, and won the match, greeted by an uproar of applause that, now being no longer restrained, lasted for nearly five minutes. The assemblage had, by this time, descended from the benches, and crowded the floor in clusters, discussing the play or settling bets. The people in the gallery were pouring down by the four staircases, and adding to the crowd and buzz.

Suddenly there is a sort of excitement perceptible of a new kind—a gathering and pressure of men about one of the doors at the far corner of the room. Men are looking back and beckoning to their companions; others are shouldering forward as strenuously as they can. What is it—any dispute about the score?—a pair of men boxing in the passage?

“No suspicion of fire?” the men at this near end exclaim, and sniff over their shoulders, and look about them, and move toward the point where the crowd is thickening, not knowing what to make of the matter. But soon there runs a rumour about the room—“a man has just been found murdered in a room outside,” and the crowd now press forward more energetically to the point of attraction.

In the cross-passage which connects the two corridors, as Mr. Longcluse described, there is an awful crush, and next to no light. A single jet of gas burns in the smoking room, where the pressure of the crowd is not quite so much felt. There are two policemen in that chamber, in the ordinary uniform of

the force, and three detectives in plain clothes, one supporting a corpse already stiffening, in a sitting posture, as it was found, in a far angle of the room, on the bench to your left as you look in. All the people are looking up the room. You can see nothing but hats, and backs of heads, and shoulders. There is a ceaseless buzz and clack of talk and conjecture. Even the policemen are looking, as the rest do, at the body. The man who has mounted on the chair near the door, with the other beside him, who has one foot on the rung and another on the seat, and an arm round the first gentleman's neck, although he has not the honour of his acquaintance, to support himself, can see, over the others' heads, the one silent face which looks back towards the door, upon so many gaping, and staring, and gabbling ones. The light is faint. It has occurred to no one to light the gas lamps in the centre. But that forlorn face is distinct enough. Fixed and leaden it is, with the chin a little raised. The eyes are wide open, with a deep and awful gaze; the mouth slightly distorted with what the doctors call "a convulsive smile," which shows the teeth a little, and has an odd, wincing look.

As I live, it is the little Frenchman, Pierre Lebas, who was talking so gaily to-night with Mr. Longcluse!

The ebony haft of a dagger, sticking straight out, shows where the hand of the assassin planted the last stab of four, through his black satin waistcoat, embroidered with green leaves, red strawberries, and yellow flowers, which, I suppose, was one of the finest articles in the little wardrobe that Madame Lebas packed up for his holiday. It is not worth much now. It has four distinct cuts, as I have said, on the left side, right through it, and is soaked in blood.

His pockets have been rifled. The police have found nothing in them but a red pocket-handkerchief and a papier-maché snuff-box. If that dumb mouth could speak but fifty words, what a world of conjecture it would end, and poor Lebas's story would be listened to as never was story of his before!

A policeman now takes his place at the door to prevent further pressure. No new-comers will be admitted, except as others go out. Those outside are asking questions of those within, and transmitting, over their shoulders, particulars, eagerly repeated. On a sudden there is a subsidence of the buzz and gabble within, and one voice, speaking almost at the pitch of a shriek, is heard declaiming. White as a sheet, Mr. Longcluse, in high excitement, is haranguing in the smoking-room, mounted on a table.

“I say,” he cried, “gentlemen, excuse me. There are so many together here, so many known to be wealthy, it is an opportunity for a word. Things are coming to a pretty pass—garotters in our streets and assassins in our houses of entertainment! Here is a poor little fellow—look at him—here to-night to see the game, perfectly well and happy, murdered by some miscreant for the sake of the money he had about him. It might have been the fate of anyone of us. I spoke to him to-night. I had not seen him since I was a boy almost. Seven children and a wife, he told me, dependent on him. I say there are two things wanted—first, a reward of such magnitude as will induce exertion. I promise, for my own share, to put down double the amount promised by the highest subscriber. Secondly, something should be done for the family he has left, in proportion to the loss they have

sustained. Upon this point I shall make inquiry myself. But this is plain, the danger and scandal have attained a pitch at which none of us who cares to walk the streets at night, or at any time to look in upon amusements like that we attended this evening, can permit them longer to stand. There is a fatal defect somewhere. Are our police awake and active? Very possibly; but if so the force is not adequate. I say this frightful scandal must be abated if, as citizens of London, we desire to maintain our reputation for common sense and energy."

There was a tall thin fellow, shabbily dressed, standing nearly behind the door, with a long neck, and a flat mean face, slightly pitted with small-pox, rather pallid, who was smiling lazily, with half-closed eyes, as Mr. Longcluse declaimed; and when he alluded pointedly to the inadequacy of the police, this man's amusement improved, and he winked pleasantly at the clock which he was consulting at the moment with the corner of his eye.

And now a doctor arrived, and Gabriel Laroque the watchmaker, and more police, with an inspector. Laroque faints when he sees his murdered friend. Recovered after a time, he identifies the body, identifies the dagger also as the property of poor Lebas.

The police take the matter now quite into their hands, and clear the room.

CHAPTER VI. TO BED.

Mr. Longcluse jumped into a cab, and told the man to drive to his house in Bolton Street, Piccadilly. He rolled his coat about him with a kind of violence, and threw himself into a corner. Then, as it were, *in furore*, and with a stamp on the floor, he pitched himself into the other corner.

“I've seen to-night what I never thought I should see. What devil possessed me to tell him to go into that black little smoking-room?” he muttered. “What a room it is! It has seized my brain somehow. Am I in a fever, or going mad, or what? That cursed smoking-room! I can't get out of it. It is in the centre of the earth. I'm built round and round in it. The moment I begin to think, I'm in it. The moment I close my eyes, its four stifling walls are round me. There is no way out. It is like hell.”

The wind had come round to the south, and a soft rain was pattering on the windows. He stopped the cab somewhere near St. James's Street, and got out. It was late—it was just past two o'clock, and the streets were quiet. Wonderfully still was the great city at this hour, and the descent of the rain went on with a sound like a prolonged “hush” all round. He paid the man, and stood for a while on the kerbstone, looking up and down the street, under the downpour of the rain. You might have taken this millionaire for a man who knew not where to lay his head that night. He took off his hat, and let the refreshing rain saturate his hair, and stream down his forehead and temples.

“Your cab's stuffy and hot, ain't it? Standing half the day with the glass in the sun, I daresay,” said he to the man, who was fumbling in his pockets, and pretending a difficulty about finding change.

“See, never mind, if you haven't got change; I'll go on. Heavier rain than I fancied; very pleasant though. When did the rain begin?” asked Mr. Longcluse, who seemed in no hurry to get back again.

“A trifle past ten, Sir.”

“I say, your horse's knees are a bit broken, ain't they? Never mind, I don't care. He can pull you and me to Bolton Street, I daresay.”

“Will you please to get in, Sir?” inquired the cabman.

Mr. Longcluse nodded, frowning and thinking of something else; the rain still descending on his bare head, his hat in his hand.

The cabman thought this “cove” had been drinking and must be a trifle “tight.” He would not mind if he stood so for a couple of hours; it would run his fare up to something pretty. So cabby had thoughts of clapping a nosebag to his horse's jaws, and was making up his mind to a bivouac. But Mr. Longcluse on a sudden got in, repeating his direction to the driver in a gay and brisk tone, that did not represent his real sensations.

“Why should I be so disturbed at that little French fellow? Have I been ill, that my nerve is gone and I such a fool? One would think I had never seen a dead fellow till now. Better

for him to be quiet than at his wit's ends, devising ways and means to keep his seven cubs in bread and butter. I should have gone away when the game was over. What earthly reason led me into that d——d room, when I heard the fuss there? I've a mind to go and play hazard, or see a doctor. Arden said he'd look in, in the morning. I should like that; I'll talk to Arden. I sha'n't sleep, I know; I can't, all night; I've got imprisoned in that suffocating room. Shall I ever close my eyes again?"

They had now reached the door of the small, unpretending house of this wealthy man. The servant who opened the door, though he knew his business, stared a little, for he had never seen his master return in such a plight before, and looking so haggard.

"Where's Franklin?"

"Arranging things in your room, Sir."

"Give me a candle. The cab is paid. Mr. Arden, mind, may call in the morning; if I should not be down, show him to my room. You are not to let him go without seeing me."

Up-stairs went the pale master of the house. "Franklin!" he called, as he mounted the last flight of stairs, next his bed-room.

"Yes, Sir."

"I sha'n't want you to-night, I think—that is, I shall manage what I want for myself; but I mean to ring for you by-and-by." He was in his dressing-room by this time, and looked round to see that his comforts were provided for as

usual—his foot-bath and hot water.

“Shall I fetch your tea, Sir?”

“I'll drink no tea to-night; I've been disgusted. I've seen a dead man, quite unexpectedly; and I sha'n't get over it for some hours, I daresay. I feel ill. And what you must do is this: when I ring my bell, you come back, and you must sit up here till eight in the morning. I shall leave the door between this and the next room open; and should you hear me sleeping uneasily, moaning, or anything like nightmare, you must come in and waken me. And you are not to go to sleep, mind; the moment I call, I expect you in my room. Keep yourself awake how you can; you may sleep all to-morrow, if you like.”

With this charge Franklin departed.

But Mr. Longcluse's preparations for bed occupied a longer time than he had anticipated. When nearly an hour had passed, Mr. Franklin ventured up-stairs, and quietly approached the dressing-room door; but there he heard his master still busy with his preparations, and withdrew. It was not until nearly half-an-hour more had passed that his bell gave the promised signal, and Mr. Franklin established himself for the night, in the easy-chair in the dressing-room, with the connecting door between the two rooms open.

Mr. Longcluse was right. The shock which his nerves had received did not permit him to sleep very soon. Two hours later he called for the Eau-de-Cologne that stood on his dressing-table; and although he made belief to wet his temples with it, and kept it at his bedside with that professed design, it was Mr. Franklin's belief that he drank the greater

part of what remained in the capacious cut-glass bottle. It was not until people were beginning to "turn out" for their daily labour that sleep at length visited the wearied eye-balls of the Cræsus.

Three hours of death-like sleep, and Mr. Longcluse, with a little start, was wide awake.

"Franklin!"

"Yes, Sir." And Mr. Franklin stood at his bedside.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Just struck ten, Sir."

"Hand me the *Times*." This was done.

"Tell them to get breakfast as usual. I'm coming down. Open the shutters, and draw the curtains, quite."

When Franklin had done this and gone down, Mr. Longcluse read the *Times* with a stern eagerness, still in bed. The great billiard match between Hood and Markham was given in spirited detail; but he was looking for something else. Just under this piece of news, he found it—"Murder and Robbery, in the Saloon Tavern." He read this twice over, and then searched the paper in vain for any further news respecting it. After this search, he again read the short account he had seen before, very carefully, and more than once. Then he jumped out of bed, and looked at himself in the glass in his dressing-room.

"How awfully seedy I am looking!" he muttered, after a careful inspection. "Better by-and-by."

His hand was shaking like that of a man who had made a debauch, or was worn out with ague. He looked ten years older.

“I should hardly know myself,” muttered he. “What a confounded, sinful old fogey I look, and I so young and innocent!”

The sneer was for himself and at himself. The delivery of such is an odd luxury which, at one time or other, most men indulge in. Perhaps it should teach us to take them more kindly when other people crack such cynical jokes on our heads, or, at least, to perceive that they don't always argue personal antipathy.

The sour smile which had, for a moment, flickered with a wintry light on his face, gave place suddenly to a dark fatigue; his features sank, and he heaved a long, deep, and almost shuddering sigh.

There are moments, happily very rare, when the idea of suicide is distinct enough to be dangerous, and having passed which, a man feels that Death has looked him very nearly in the face. Nothing more trite and true than the omnipresence of suffering. The possession of wealth exempts the unfortunate owner from, say, two-thirds of the curse that lies heavy on the human race. Two thirds is a great deal; but so is the other third, and it may have in it, at times, something as terrible as human nature can support.

Mr. Longcluse, the millionaire, had, of course, many poor enviers. Had any one of all these uttered such a sigh that morning? Or did any one among them feel wearier of life?

“When I have had my tub, I shall be quite another man,” said he.

But it did not give him the usual fillip; on the contrary, he felt rather chilled.

“What can the matter be? I'm a changed man,” said he, wondering, as people do at the days growing shorter in autumn, that time had produced some changes. “I remember when a scene or an excitement produced no more effect upon me, after the moment, than a glass of champagne; and now I feel as if I had swallowed poison, or drunk the cup of madness. Shaking!—hand, heart, every joint. I have grown such a muff!”

Mr. Longcluse had at length completed his very careless toilet, and looking ill, went down-stairs in his dressing-gown and slippers.

CHAPTER VII. FAST FRIENDS.

In little more than half-an-hour, as Mr. Longcluse was sitting at his breakfast in his dining-room, Richard Arden was shown in.

“Dressing-gown and slippers—what a lazy dog I am compared with you!” said Longcluse gaily as he entered.

“Don't say another word on that subject, I beg. I should have been later myself, had I dared; but my Uncle David had appointed to meet me at ten.”

“Won't you take something?”

“Well, as I have had no breakfast, I don't mind if I do,” said Arden, laughing.

Longcluse rang the bell.

“When did you leave that place last night?” asked Longcluse.

“I fancy about the same time that you went—about five or ten minutes after the match ended. You heard there was a man murdered in a passage there? I tried to get down and see it but the crowd was awful.”

“I was more lucky—I came earlier,” said Longcluse. “It was perfectly sickening, and I have been seedy ever since. You may guess what a shock it was to me. The murdered man was that poor little Frenchman I told you of, who had been talking to me, in high spirits, just before the play began—and

there he was, poor fellow! You'll see it all there; it makes me sick."

He handed him the *Times*.

"Yes, I see. I daresay the police will make him out," said Arden, as he glanced hastily over it. "Did you remark some awfully ill-looking fellows there?"

"I never saw so many together in a place of the kind before," said Longcluse.

"That's a capital account of the match," said Arden, whom it interested more than the tragedy of poor little Lebas did. He read snatches of it aloud as he ate his breakfast: and then, laying the paper down, he said, "By-the-bye, I need not bother you by asking your advice, as I intended. My uncle David has been blowing me up, and I think he'll make everything straight. When he sends for me and gives me an awful lecture, he always makes it up to me afterwards."

"I wish, Arden, I stood as little in need of your advice as you do, it seems, of mine," said Longcluse suddenly, after a short silence. His dark eyes were fixed on Richard Arden's. "I have been fifty times on the point of making a confession to you, and my heart has failed me. The hour is coming. These things won't wait. I must speak, Arden, soon or never—*very* soon, or never. *Never*, perhaps, would be wisest."

"Speak *now*, on the contrary," said Arden, laying down his knife and fork, and leaning back. "Now is the best time always. If it's a bad thing, why, it's over; and if it's a good one, the sooner we have it the better."

Longcluse rose, looking down in meditation, and in silence walked slowly to the window, where, for a time, without speaking he stood in a reverie. Then, looking up, he said, "No man likes a crisis. 'No good general ever fights a pitched battle if he can help it.' Wasn't that Napoleon's saying? No man who has not lost his head likes to get together all he has on earth, and make one stake of it. I have been on the point of speaking to you often. I have always recoiled."

"Here I am, my dear Longcluse," said Richard Arden, rising and following him to the window, "ready to hear you. I ought to say, only too happy if I can be of the least use."

"Immense! everything?" said Longcluse vehemently. "And yet I don't know how to ask you—how to begin—so much depends. Don't you conjecture the subject?"

"Well, perhaps I do—perhaps I don't. Give me some clue."

"Have you formed no conjecture?" asked Longcluse.

"Perhaps."

"Is it anything in any way connected with your sister, Miss Arden?"

"It may be, possibly."

"Say what you think, Arden, I beseech you."

"Well, I think, perhaps, you admire her."

"Do I? Do I? Is that all? Would to God I could say that is all! Admiration, what is it?—Nothing. Love?—Nothing. Mine is adoration and utter madness. I have told my secret. What do you say? Do you hate me for it?"

“Hate you, my dear fellow! Why on earth should I hate you? On the contrary, I ought, I think, to like you better. I'm only a little surprised that your feelings should so much exceed anything I could have supposed.”

“Yesterday, Arden, you spoke as if you liked me. As we drove into that place, I fancied you half understood me; and cheered by what you then said, I have spoken that which might have died with me, but for that.”

“Well, what's the matter? My dear Longcluse, you talk as if I had shown signs of wavering friendship. Have I? Quite the contrary.”

“Quite the contrary, that is true,” said Longcluse eagerly. “Yes, you *should* like me better for it—that is true also. Yours is no wavering friendship, I'm sure of it. Let us shake hands upon it. A treaty, Arden, a treaty!”

With a fierce smile upon his pale face, and a sudden fire in his eyes, he extended his hand energetically, and took that of Arden, who answered the invitation with a look in which gleamed faintly something of amusement.

“Now, Richard Arden,” he continued excitedly, “you have more influence with Miss Arden than falls commonly to the lot of a brother. I have observed it. It results from her having had during her earlier years little society but yours, and from your being some years her senior. It results from her strong affection for you, from her admiration of your talents, and from her having neither brother nor sister to divide those feelings. I never yet saw brother possessed of so evident and powerful an influence with a sister. You must use it all for

me.”

He continued to hold Arden's hand in his as he spoke.

“You can withdraw your hand if you decline,” said he. “I sha'n't complain. But your hand remains—you don't. It is a treaty, then. Henceforward we live *fædere icto*. I'm an exacting friend, but a good one.”

“My dear fellow, you do me but justice. I am your friend, altogether. But you must not mistake me for a guardian or a father in the matter. I wish I could make my sister think exactly as I do upon every subject, and *that* above all others. All I can say is, in me you have a fast friend.”

Longcluse pressed his hand, which he had not relinquished, at these words, with a firm grasp and a quick shake.

“Now listen. I must speak on this point, the one that is in my mind, my chief difficulty. Personally, there is not, I think, a living being in England who knows my history. I am glad of it, for reasons which you will approve by-and-by. But this is an enormous disadvantage, though only temporary, and the friends of the young lady must weigh my wealth against it for the present. But when the time comes, which can't now be distant, upon my honour! upon my soul!—by Heaven, I'll show you I'm of as good and old a family as any in England! We have been gentlemen up to the time of the Conqueror, here in England, and as far before him as record can be traced in Normandy. If I fail to show you this when the hour comes, stigmatise me as you will.”

“I have not a doubt, dear Longcluse. But you are urging a

point that really has no weight with us people in England. We have taken off our hats to the gentlemen in casques and tabards, and feudal glories are at a discount everywhere but in Debrett, where they are taken with allowance. Your ideas upon these matters are more Austrian than ours. We expect, perhaps, a little more from the man, but certainly less from his ancestors than our forefathers did. So till a title turns up, and the heralds want them, make your mind easy on matters of pedigree, and then you can furnish them with effect. All I can tell you is this—there are hardly fifty men in England who dare tell all the truth about their families.”

“We are friends, then; and in that relation, Arden, if there are privileges, there are also liabilities, remember, and both extend into a possibly distant future.”

Longcluse spoke with a gloomy excitement that his companion did not quite understand.

“That is quite true, of course,” said Arden.

Each was looking in the other's face for a moment, and each face grew suddenly dark, darker—and the whole room darkened as the air was overshadowed by a mass of cloud that eclipsed the sun, threatening thunder.

“By Jove! How awfully dark in a moment!” said Arden, looking from the face thus suddenly overcast through the window towards the sky.

“Dark as the future we were speaking of,” said Longcluse, with a sad smile.

“Dark in one sense, I mean unseen, but not darkened in

the ill-omened sense," said Richard Arden. "I have great confidence in the future. I suppose I am sanguine."

"I ought to be sanguine, if having been lucky hitherto should make one so, and yet I'm not. My happiness depends on that which I cannot, in the least, control. Thought, action, energy, contribute nothing, and so I but drift, and—my heart fails me. Tell me, Arden, for Heaven's sake, truth—spare me nothing, conceal nothing. Let me but know it, however bitter. First tell me, does Miss Arden dislike me—has she an antipathy to me?"

"Dislike you! Nonsense. How could that be? She evidently enjoys your society, when you are in spirits and choose to be amusing. Dislike you? Oh, my dear Longcluse, you can't have fancied such a thing!" said Arden.

"A man placed as I am may fancy anything—things infinitely more unlikely. I sometimes hope she has never perceived my admiration. It seems strange and cruel, but I believe where a man cannot be beloved, nothing is so likely to make him *hated* as his presuming to love. *There* is the secret of half the tragedies we read of. The man cannot cease to love, and the idol of his passion not only disregards but insults it. It is their cruel nature; and thus the pangs of jealousy and the agitations of despair are heightened by a peculiar torture, the hardest of all hell's torture to endure."

"Well, I have seen you pretty often together, and you must see there is nothing of that kind," said Arden.

"You speak quite frankly, do you? For Heaven's sake don't spare me!" urged Longcluse.

“I say exactly what I think. There can't be any such feeling,” said Arden.

Longcluse sighed, looked down thoughtfully, and then, raising his eyes again, he said—

“You must answer me another question, dear Arden, and I shall, for the present, task your kindness no more. If you think it a fair question, will you promise to answer me with unsparing frankness? Let me hear the worst.”

“Certainly,” answered his companion.

“Does your sister like anyone in particular—is she attached to anyone—are her affections quite disengaged?”

“So far as I am aware, certainly. She never cared for any one among all the people who admired her, and I am quite certain such a thing could not be without my observing it,” answered Richard Arden.

“I don't know; perhaps not,” said Longcluse. “But there is a young friend of yours, who I thought was an admirer of Miss Arden's, and possibly a favoured one. You guess, I daresay, who it is I mean?”

“I give you my honour I have not the least idea.”

“I mean an early friend of yours—a man about your own age—who has often been staying in Yorkshire and at Mortlake with you, and who was almost like a brother in your house—very intimate.”

“Surely you can't mean Vivian Darnley?” exclaimed Richard Arden.

“I do. I mean no other.”

“Vivian Darnley? Why, he has hardly enough to live on, much less to marry on. He has not an idea of any such thing. If my father fancied such an absurdity possible, he would take measures to prevent his ever seeing her more. You could not have hit upon a more impossible man,” he resumed, after a moment's examination of a theory which, notwithstanding, made him a little more uneasy than he would have cared to confess. “Darnley is no fool either, and I think he is a honourable fellow; and altogether, knowing him as I do, the thing is utterly incredible. And as for Alice, the idea of his imagining any such folly, I can undertake to say, positively never entered her mind.”

Here was another pause. Longcluse was again thoughtful.

“May I ask one other question, which I think you will have no difficulty in answering?” said he.

“What you please, dear Longcluse; you may command me.”

“Only this, how do you think Sir Reginald would receive me?”

“A great deal better than he will ever receive me; with his best bow—no, not that, but with open arms and his brightest smile. I tell you, and you'll find it true, my father is a man of the world. Money won't, of course, do everything; but it can do a great deal. It can't make a vulgar man a gentleman, but it may make a gentleman anything. I really think you would find him a very fast friend. And now I must leave you, dear Longcluse. I have just time, and no more, to keep my

appointment with old Mr. Blount, to whom my uncle commands me to go at twelve.”

“Heaven keep us both, dear Arden, in this cheating world! Heaven keep us true in this false London world! And God punish the first who breaks faith with the other!”

So spoke Longcluse, taking his hand again, and holding it hard for a moment, with his unfathomable dark eyes on Arden. Was there a faint and unconscious menace in his pale face, as he uttered these words, which a little stirred Arden's pride?

“That's a comfortable litany to part with—a form of blessing elevated so neatly, at the close, into a malediction. However, I don't object. Amen, by all means,” laughed Arden.

Longcluse smiled.

“A malediction? I really believe it was. Something very like it, and one that includes myself, doesn't it? But we are not likely to earn it. An arrow shot into the sea, it can hurt no one. But oh, dear Arden, what does such language mean but suffering? What is all bitterness but pain? Is any mind that deserves the name ever cruel, except from misery? We are good friends, Arden: and if ever I seem to you for a moment other than friendly, just say, ‘It is his heart-ache and not he that speaks.’ Good-bye! God bless you!”

At the door there was another parting.

“There's a long dull day before me—say, rather, *night*; weary eyes, sleepless brain,” murmured Longcluse, in a rather dismal soliloquy, standing in his slippers and

dressing-gown again at the window. "Suspense! What a hell is in that word! Chain a man across a rail, in a tunnel—pleasant situation! let him listen for the faint finging and drumming of the engine, miles away, not knowing whether deliverance or death may come first. Bad enough, that suspense. What is it to mine! I shall see her to-night. I shall see her, and how will it all be? Richard Arden wishes it—yes, he does. 'Away, slight man!' It is Brutus who says that, I think. Good Heaven! Think of my life—the giddy steps I go by. That dizzy walk by moonlight, when I lost my way in Switzerland—beautiful nightmare!—the two mile ledge of rock before me, narrow as a plank; up from my left, the sheer wall of rock; at my right so close that my glove might have dropped over it, the precipice; and curling vapour on the cliffs above, that seem about to break, and envelope all below in blinding mist. There is my life translated into landscape. It has been one long adventure—danger—fatigue. Nature is full of beauty—many a quiet nook in life, where peace resides; many a man whose path is broad and smooth. Woe to the man who loses his way on Alpine tracks, and is benighted!"

Now Mr. Longcluse recollected himself. He had letters to read and note. He did this rapidly. He had business in town. He had fifty things on his hands; and, the day over, he would see Alice Arden again.

CHAPTER VIII. CONCERNING A BOOT.

Several pairs of boots were placed in Mr. Longcluse's dressing-room.

"Where are the boots that I wore yesterday?" asked he.

"If you please, Sir," said Mr. Franklin, "the man called this morning for the right boot of that pair."

"What man?" asked Mr. Longcluse, rather grimly.

"Mr. Armagnac's man, Sir."

"Did you desire him to call for it?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"No, Sir. I thought you must have told some one else to order him to send for it," said Franklin.

"*I?* You ought to know I leave those things to *you*," said Mr. Longcluse, staring at him more aghast and fierce than the possible mislaying of a boot would seem to warrant. "Did you see Armagnac's man?"

"No, Sir. It was Charles who came up, at eight o'clock, when you were still asleep, and said the shoemaker had called for the right boot of the pair you wore yesterday. I had placed them outside the door, and I gave it him, Sir, supposing it all right."

"Perhaps it *was* all right; but you know Charles has not been a week here. Call him up. I'll come to the bottom of

this.”

Franklin disappeared, and Mr. Longcluse, with a stern frown, was staring vaguely at the varnished boot, as if it could tell something about its missing companion. His brain was already at work. What the plague was the meaning of this manœuvre about his boot? And why on earth, think I, should he make such a fuss and a tragedy about it? Charles followed Mr. Franklin up the stairs.