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A MYSTERY

OF

NEW ORLEANS:

SOLVED BY NEW METHODS.

BY

WM. H. HOLCOMBE, M.D.,

AUTHOR OF "IN BOTH WORLDS," "OUR CHILDREN IN HEAVEN," ETC.

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PREFACE.

HITHERTO my vacations from strictly professional work have been devoted to metaphysical and theological studies and writings. This time the result is a Novel, written not without a purpose. To illustrate the new discoveries in physio-psychology, with certain notes of warning; to throw a little helpful light upon the race-problem; and to cultivate friendly sentiments between North and South, are the moral threads which have been woven into this web of romance.

WM. H. HOLCOMBE, M.D.

NEW ORLEANS, 1890.

Viles 16 Aug. 1725

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER PAGE
I.—The Search proposed 7
II.—Love at First Sight 27
III.—The Probabilities considered 37
IV.—Ninette and Rose 51
V.—On the Trail 62
VI.—Rose discovers Dynamite 79
VII.—The Old Frenchman's Story 98
VIII.—Preparations 113
IX.—Modern Magic 123
X.—The Child looms up 136
XI.—Love in the Cathedral 153
XII.—The Dynamite explodes 167
XIII.—Stanford stands Firm 187
XIV.—The Grievous Insult 202
XV.—The Duel 219
XVI.—The Exposure 237
XVII.—Occult Forces 250
XVIII.—Nemesis 265
XIX.—Contradictions 281
XX.—The Child discovered 296
NOTE ON VIVISECTION 314
SYMPOSIUM ON THE RACE-PROBLEM 315

A
MYSTERY OF NEW ORLEANS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH PROPOSED.

To understand the extraordinary business which brought Mr. Hugh Stanford to New Orleans about the first of March, 1885, it is necessary to go back a fortnight and see him in the city of Chicago, his place of residence.

One cold evening in February he rang the bell of a stately mansion on Indiana Avenue, and was ushered through a luxurious, steam-heated hall into a magnificent parlor and into the presence of Mr. Ephraim Clarke. This white-haired, dignified gentleman, an alderman in proportions, a clergyman in suavity, with a Websterian head and front, was one of the millionaires of Chicago who had not amassed his fortune by the thieving process of cornering wheat or pork, but by honest industry and legitimate speculation. He was an intelligent, public-spirited man, irreproachable in private life and deserving his enviable reputation of being both just and generous.

The young gentleman who entered the room with cultivated ease and grace was a special favorite of the

Western Crœsus. He was an architect by profession, and, although not more than thirty years old, had already proved himself such a genius in his line of work that his talents were in great demand. He was, moreover, a student, especially of all new questions, and his fine imagination was well balanced by his practical sagacity. Mr. Clarke greatly enjoyed his conversations on scientific, social, and metaphysical problems. The old gentleman rose from his chair, readjusted his spectacles, which he had laid aside to read, as all near-sighted men do, and gave him a cordial welcome.

"I am sorry the young ladies are out this evening," he said. "They have gone to McVicker's to see Emmett. All who love children, grandfathers and grandmothers especially, should see 'Fritz' at least once in their lives. I can forgive that rascal all his dissipation—indeed, I cannot believe he ever was dissipated—when I see him march upon the stage in his paper-cap, beating his drum and shouting like a child with the children. Joe Jefferson in his specialty is different and greater, but Emmett is vastly enjoyable."

Stanford merely nodded assent to the criticism.

"I am glad, sir, that the ladies are out to-night," he quietly remarked; but immediately added, with a touch of gallantry, "for the very first time in my life, sir; but I have called to have a special conversation with you, I may say a confidential conversation with you, to-night, uninterrupted by others."

Mr. Clarke elevated his heavy eyebrows with a little expression of surprise, but straightened himself back in his arm-chair, and said,—

"Well, sir, I am entirely at your service."

"Has anything been done, Mr. Clarke, more than was done at the time, to clear up the mystery of the sudden disappearance of your brother Gordon Clarke and his little daughter in New Orleans some twenty years ago?"

At the mention of his brother and the child a deep solemnity settled rapidly upon the millionaire's face, as if the memory of some great sorrow had cast its shadow on his countenance.

"Do not suppose, my dear sir," Stanford hastened to exclaim, "that I recall these painful recollections to you out of idle curiosity. I will explain to you presently the motives of this interview."

"So much was done at the time," said the portly old gentleman, with a sigh, "that it seems impossible that anything else could have been done with the slightest hope of success."

"Some occult studies," said Stanford, "in which I have been lately interested brought the case to my mind, and excited a train of thought which suddenly invested it with a new and startling interest."

Mr. Clarke leaned a little forward and cast a surprised and inquiring look at the speaker.

"You will greatly oblige me," said the latter, "if you will state, as clearly as you can remember, the circumstances of your brother's disappearance, and the measures which were taken at the time to discover what became of him."

"Gordon Clarke," began the lost man's brother after a moment or two of solemn silence, "was a person of great intelligence and industry. In 1859 he married a blooming Chicago girl and went to California with a small capital. He was a bold and a successful speculator. When the civil war broke out in 1861, he found himself in a painful position. We were Kentuckians by birth, and he had been educated at the University of Virginia, where he was taught the doctrine of State rights as against national sovereignty,—the universal political creed of the South from Thomas Jefferson to Jefferson Davis. Devotedly attached to the federal union, he opposed the national unity which was contemplated in coercing the sovereign States, and rather than take part in the struggle he expatriated himself until it was over.

"Before leaving his country he sent me the bulk of his earnings, some twenty thousand dollars, and begged me to invest it for his family in the suburbs of Chicago; another proof of his far-sighted policy, for that investment is now worth half a million dollars."

"Which, I suppose," said Stanford, "have long since been divided among his heirs-at-law."

"No, sir. He had a curious clause inserted in the will he sent me. The property was to remain inalienable from himself and his heirs for twenty-five years, after which, if no heirs appeared, it was to fall to me and my family. The time expires in 1886,—a year from this time."

"Then it is immensely to your interest that the heirs, if any there be, should remain undiscovered."

"Of course, commercially speaking; but I would gladly give a million dollars to-day to see Gordon

Clarke and his child. But to proceed with his story:

"He drifted down to the Pacific coast of Mexico, and finally to Costa Rica in Central America, where he made some mining ventures, which grew from small beginnings until they became very profitable. When he heard of the battle of Gettysburg, foreseeing the end, he began speculating on the differences between gold and greenbacks, and realized a large sum. When he learned that General Grant had taken command in Virginia and was moving towards Richmond, he turned his steps homeward. The end did not come so soon as he expected, and he was detained several months in Havana, where he had the dreadful misfortune to lose his wife and eldest child by yellow fever. On the collapse of the Confederacy he landed in New Orleans with his little girl two years old. I have always wondered why he did not go direct from Havana to New York."

"Considering the chaotic state of affairs in the South at that time," said Stanford, "and the comparatively greater ease and safety of the route by New York to Chicago, it is, indeed, singular that he should have gone to New Orleans, and the reason why would take us the first step, and perhaps a long one, towards the solution of the mystery."

"However that may be," resumed Mr. Clarke, "the step was fatal to him. He and his child disappeared, and we have discovered no trace of either of them since. There is positively nothing left of him but his last letter written the day before he left the city, or at least intended to leave it."

"Did you keep that letter or a copy of it?" said Stanford, eagerly.

"I have preserved it with the greatest care."

"It will be invaluable to me," said Stanford. "Will you permit me to see it?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Clarke, looking curiously upon his young friend as he rose from his seat. "I keep it in a private secretary in my bedroom."

The old gentleman went up-stairs, and Hugh Stanford sank into such a deep revery that he did not hear him return. Mr. Clarke gazed a moment or two at the abstracted man, and then thrust the letter into his hand.

The document was yellow with age and the ink considerably faded. As Stanford opened the letter a little folded piece of paper dropped out. It contained a little lock or curl of golden hair.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Clarke, "that is a lock of his child's hair. You will see Mary Gilford Clarke written on the inside of the paper. Gilford was her mother's maiden name."

"Doubly, doubly fortunate!" exclaimed Stanford, excitedly. "I am on the trail of the child. This little curl belonged to the bud. I shall find the woman who is the full-blown rose of that bud."

"What upon earth do you mean, Hugh Stanford?" said the old gentleman, fixing a stern, critical eye upon his young friend, as if he suspected he was intoxicated or delirious. "You might just as reasonably expect the resurrection of the dead."

"You shall one day exclaim," said Stanford, "'The dead is alive and the lost is found!' But come," he said, quietly, "let us read the letter.

"Hôtel des Étrangers, New Orleans, La., June 20, 1865.

"Dear Brother,—We arrived here a week ago from Havana. I would have written sooner, but have been seeing the sights of this curious old city, a queer mixture of Paris and Madrid. The young doctor and his beautiful wife who came over from Cuba with us are natives here and have contributed much to our entertainment.

"This French hotel is a curiosity, and its mixture of guests, native and foreign, returned refugees and soldiers, drummers and speculators, actors and actresses, is something appalling to a tired American in search of repose. In fact, it is a bedlam,—a chaos in the transition state between war and peace. I wonder the doctor brought us here, when the St. Charles and the City Hotel in the American quarter are really good establishments.

"I shall leave for home with my precious little daughter, now two years old (I enclose a lock of her hair), one week from to-day on the 'Madison Belle.' This is a very good boat running to Cincinnati, but we shall leave her at Cairo and strike by rail for Chicago. I choose the river route because I have the child in charge, and she will have so much comfort and freedom on the boat. Besides, the railways through the South have been badly broken up by the war, and travel is uncertain and sometimes even dangerous. I have nearly a hundred thousand dollars about me in drafts upon New York, London, and Paris, and must be very careful of my valuable person.

"The doctor has been almost officiously attentive to me, and I tire of his endless stories of Parisian medical students. His lovely wife, however, has played the mother charmingly to little Mary, and taken the utmost care of her. She is herself almost a child, not more than fifteen; a strange, brilliant creature, subtle beyond her years, at one moment coquettish as a kitten, the next as sombre as a tragic queen stepping forth from the canvas of some grand old Murillo.

"Ah, well! it is useless to write more, we are to meet so soon. Loving embraces to each and all.

"Your affectionate brother,
"Gordon Clarke."

The two men were silent for several minutes. This old faded letter was the last visible link in a human life, after which all was mystery and darkness. The melancholy relic awakened tender memories in one of these men and profound speculations in the other. At length Stanford roused himself and broke the silence,—

"Please, sir, go on with your story."

"Well," said the old gentleman in a lower and softer voice, "I heard no more from Gordon. Three weeks passed and I became uneasy. I telegraphed to the proprietor of the French hotel. He replied that Mr. Clarke had paid his bill on the 21st and had his baggage removed to a steamer bound for Cincinnati. Then he had started a week earlier than he intended! I consulted the river column of the papers, and found that the 'Madison Belle' had just been laid up for summer repairs at Madison, Indiana, where she was owned. I telegraphed to her officers, and received the startling reply that no such persons were passengers on the up trip of their boat.

"I now became thoroughly alarmed, and hastened at once to New Orleans. I visited the French hotel, and found 'Gordon Clarke and child' registered in his own handwriting on June 10. The proprietor and clerks described my brother accurately, but said they had seen very little of him on account of the crowd continually coming and going in their house. My inquiry for the doctor and his wife reminded them that a young gentleman and lady, apparently foreigners, were frequent visitors to Mr. Clarke's room. They were not guests of the house, and they did not know their names. They understood that the couple were newly-married Cubans on a brief visit to relatives in the city and soon to return to Havana.

"I then instituted the most thorough search imaginable. Not trusting to my own sagacity, I employed an able lawyer to assist me in my investigations. We made the most minute inquiry at all the hospitals and asylums. We advertised for my brother and his child in all the newspapers, and offered large rewards for any information which might lead to their discovery. We set a strong detective police to work on the case, and especially to spot every man about the city who seemed to have come into the sudden possession of a good deal of money. They toiled at it faithfully by all their cunning methods for many months, but finally gave up the pursuit in despair.

"We examined the files of all the daily papers printed about the time of Gordon's disappearance for accidents, murders, thefts, arrests, suspicious people, etc. We found absolutely nothing which had any bearing upon our case, except perhaps one item which startled us for a moment.

"A well-dressed stranger had been found dead on the night of June 20, 1865, in one of the stalls of an oyster-saloon near the Hôtel des Étrangers. We examined the place carefully. The proprietor had just sailed for Europe, but the person left in charge gave us satisfactory information. He said the stranger had gone into the stall for a drunken sleep, but when they went to turn him out at midnight he was discovered to be dead. Some small change was found in his pocket, but no papers or other means of identification. The coroner's inquest rendered a verdict of death from congestion of the brain, induced by heat and excessive drink. He was buried in potter's field. It was so utterly improbable that this circumstance had any relation to Gordon Clarke that we dismissed it from our minds.

"I received the friendliest attentions and aid from all the persons with whom I came into contact in New Orleans. It was with a heavy heart that I turned my face towards New York, where a startling disclosure awaited me. I went from bank to bank inquiring if a man named Gordon Clarke had presented any drafts or any exchanges upon foreign cities for collection. I found two institutions at which Gordon Clarke had been accommodated to the amount of a little more than ninety-seven thousand dollars. The bank officials described him as a tall, fine-looking man, with dark-brown hair and moustache, and a face much tanned by the tropic suns. They said he brought genuine letters of introduction from their correspondents in Havana, and presented papers and vouchers that identified him to their satisfaction. One of them remembered that Mr. Clarke had told him of his wife's death by yellow fever, and that he was about taking his only little child with him to Chicago.

"Nor did my efforts end here. I have since advertised repeatedly at intervals in the New Orleans, Havana, and New York papers, offering large rewards for any reliable information concerning either the father or the child. Nothing has ever come of it.

"Now what am I to think of all this?" the old gentleman continued. "Was my brother murdered in New Orleans? Did the murderer secure his papers, personate him, counterfeit his handwriting, and obtain his money from the banks? Or did Gordon change his mind about taking the 'Madison Belle'? and did he go to New York by rail or by sea, and was he then murdered and robbed, either there or on his way to Chicago? Or, most incredible of all, did he pocket his fortune and sail for Europe or the tropics, abandoning friends and country forever?"

Stanford made no reply to these questions, but re-read the letter, and pondered over it in silence for several minutes.

He suddenly looked up and exclaimed,—

"Did it not appear singular to you that the young doctor and his beautiful wife, who paid such devoted attentions to your brother and his child, did not come forward and assist you in the search when you were advertising for them so extensively in all the papers?"

"I supposed they had gone back to Cuba."

"No; that is a false scent. They were natives and residents of New Orleans. The young doctor had just finished his medical education in Paris. They had returned from Europe *via* Havana after several years' absence, and I see no reason why they should have hurried back to Cuba.

"Your brother speaks of them in that short letter as if he had already mentioned them to you in some previous communication, which probably miscarried. The name of that doctor would be of immense value to me. I have heard that the French population of Louisiana frequently send their children to Paris to be educated. I shall write this evening to a young friend of mine now studying in that city, and beg him to search the catalogues of all the medical schools for the names of New Orleans students who may have graduated in 1864 and 1865, and to send them to me at once in New Orleans."

"You astonish me," said Mr. Clarke. "What can interest you so deeply in this young doctor and his wife?"

Stanford did not answer the question, but sank into an apparent revery. Presently he said,—

"Do you know the immense value of hypothesis? Mill in his Logic declares that a good working hypothesis is sometimes the surest instrument for the discovery of facts. I have framed a strong hypothesis in relation to this case, and already perceive how fruitful of results it is going to be."

"Explain yourself," said Mr. Clarke getting evidently interested.

"Let us suppose that the young doctor and his wife are persons impecunious and without conscience, just returning home from foreign countries in the midst of the social confusion which always exists at the close of a great civil war. They form in Havana the acquaintance of an American gentleman, affable, confiding, generous, and credulous, with an immense sum of money about him. They foresee such favorable opportunities that they devise a cunning scheme of murder and robbery."

"Incredible!" exclaimed Mr. Clarke with emphasis.

"We are only supposing," said Stanford, lifting his hand. "Having matured their plot, they persuade their intended victim to abandon his natural intention of going direct to New York and to visit New Orleans. They represented, and no doubt greatly exaggerated, the wonderful attractions of that semi-tropical city.

"On their arrival, what do they do? Escort the stranger to the best hotel and introduce him to all their charming Creole acquaintances? No: the hypothesis demands that they shall act otherwise. They take him to an obscure, out-of-the-way foreign hotel, where he will be certain not to meet anybody who had ever known or heard of him. They seek other lodgings themselves, still further to conceal their movements. The hotel officials see them constantly with the Clarkes, but do not know their names. They pay father and child the most assiduous attentions, not by introducing them to other people, but by imposing themselves continually upon them. They are even obtrusively, offensively polite, which means that they keep the strictest watch over them, waiting their opportunity."

"You are a veritable Iago at insinuation," said Mr. Clarke, excitedly. "You will make me begin to suspect these people. You astonish me!"

"Prepare for a greater astonishment," said Stanford, coolly. "The man found dead in the oyster-saloon was your brother, not drunk, but poisoned!"

"My God!" exclaimed Clarke, with great feeling. "What a horrible conjecture! Poisoned? You surely do not believe it?"

"My hypothesis demands it and the facts fit the hypothesis. Well-dressed, healthy-looking young gentlemen do not die of drunkenness in oyster-saloons. Such persons also have always some money or papers about them, unless—mark me!—they have been abstracted before the coroner reaches the body. No, sir; the young doctor decoyed his victim into the oyster-saloon and made way with him by some quick poison, while his beautiful wife took excellent care of the child. The doctor paid his friend's bill the next morning, and ordered his baggage to the 'Madison Belle,' but deflected it adroitly to his own quarters."

"My poor brother!" groaned Clarke, beginning to be convinced; "and his bones lie in potter's field!"

"The guilty pair," continued Stanford, conjecturally, "instantly fled to New York. The cunning doctor personated Clarke. The dark-brown hair and moustache and the sun-burnt countenance were artificial presentations, lest some parties might have known or heard of Clarke's physical appearance. He then presented his papers, counterfeited his signature, having practised at it awhile, and obtained his money. The couple sailed for Europe on the first vessel, and spent the most of their ill-gotten fortune in riotous living."

"Why do you think so?"

"The hypothesis demands it. There never yet was but one Eugene Aram, who obtained wealth by murder for lofty, educational purposes and spent it quietly and wisely. Blood sticks to such coin, and finally drives the unfortunate possessor into the depths of misery or into the hands of justice."

"What do you suppose became of those people?"

"If living at all, I am sure they are in New Orleans."

"In New Orleans? It is the last place I would have thought of."

"My theory is that, after expending their fortune, they found it difficult to live in the overcrowded Old World and returned to the New. Do you not know that there is a strange fascination or fatality which impels a murderer with advancing years to return to the scene of his crime? Many a criminal has forfeited his life in that manner. Thinking himself safe and his deed forgotten, he walks thoughtlessly of his own accord into the trap which the avenging Nemesis has laid for him. Yes, there is great probability that I shall find them in New Orleans."

"Hugh Stanford!" exclaimed Mr. Clarke, with unconcealed admiration of his friend's sagacity, "you should have been a detective or a lawyer. Now, what do you think became of the child?"

"I do not believe that they murdered the child. It was not necessary to their success, and would have involved additional risk and difficulty of concealment. They gave it to no one, however, not even to an asylum, for that step would have subjected themselves to observation and have left traces which might have betrayed them. The safest way to get rid of it was to abandon it on the street."

"Poor little creature!" said Mr. Clarke; "how sad to think of it! Your views have interested me as deeply as if you were narrating facts instead of indulging in plausible conjectures. Why was it that the person or persons who took the little girl up did not answer my numerous and urgent appeals for a lost child?"

"That convinces me," said Stanford, "that the party who found the child immediately left the city with it, and never heard of the rewards offered for it. For that reason I believe it will be more difficult to discover Gordon Clarke's daughter than to detect his murderer, but neither is impossible."

"Now, Mr. Stanford," said the old gentleman, "will you please tell me what induces you to suppose that, after the lapse of twenty years, the slightest clue to the discovery of these persons can ever be obtained?"

"When I have succeeded in my enterprise, unearthed the murderer, and restored you the child, you may write upon my narrative of the mystery the words 'solved by new methods.'"

"New methods? I believe truly that Vidocq himself, travelling the old lines of detective thought and pursuit, would achieve nothing here; and I am very curious to know what new methods you propose to follow."

"Methods which at the first mention will excite your incredulity, perhaps your contempt."

"You surely do not mean to consult spiritual mediums?" said Mr. Clarke, in a deprecating tone.

"I have no faith," said Stanford, quietly, "in ninety-nine out of a hundred professional mediums. I am perfectly aware of their own diseased mental conditions, and of the fraud and cunning with which they supply the lack of genuine phenomena. But there is a grain of wheat in the bushel of detestable chaff, and that single grain is the very thing we want, and which may be of inestimable service to us."

"Stanford," said Mr. Clarke, seriously, "it is a great puzzle to me that a man of your strong common sense and practical experience should imagine that anything true or valuable could be extracted from that spiritualistic muddle. Don't be annoyed at my remark. The greatest men are said to have a weak point somewhere in their conformation."

"Spiritualism will always remain a muddle, sir," said Stanford, seriously, "until men of common sense and practical character take earnest hold of it, study it by scientific methods, eliminate the false elements from the true, bring order out of chaos, and teach us to utilize its possibilities."

"The mine is unproductive," said Mr. Clarke, with a resolute shake of the head.

"Do not misconstrue my meaning, sir. I shall have very little to do with mediums, those blind, ignorant workers in the lowest sphere, who do not and cannot comprehend their own mental conditions, or even explain the philosophy of their daily procedures. One gets nothing from them but mystification. No, sir; I take a loftier, broader view of these questions than any of those people are capable of imagining. I have studied the great leaders and masters of idealism, the elucidators of spiritual phenomena, the adepts in occultism, the scientific explorers of the new psychology,—Swedenborg, T. L. Harris, Oliphant, Kingland, Blavatsky, Braid, Charcot, Bernheim, Binet, and the Proceedings of the British and American Societies for Psychical Research,—and, I assure you, sir, not in vain."

"And what, sir," said Mr. Clarke, with a touch of incredulity in his voice, "has been the practical outcome of these investigations, that you propose to apply your knowledge to the discovery of two persons lost under extraordinary conditions twenty years ago?"

"We are discovering a new world of thought, Mr. Clarke,—new ideas, new issues, new methods. We are laying the foundations of a new metaphysics, a new theology, a new therapeutics. We are grasping the true relations between mind and matter, between mind and mind, and between the individual mind and the aggregate mind of the race. We are finding the right keys to psychical phenomena,—transference of thought, transference of sensation, prevision, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and thousands of occurrences hitherto deemed incredible. We understand now the indestructibility of ideas as well as of matter, the permanence of impressions, the registration of everything which has ever happened, in the psychic ether which surrounds us, from which all antecedent phenomena, sights, sounds, thoughts, deeds, may be evoked by special processes under proper conditions. The past is written in invisible ink. We have discovered the secret of making it visible again. The time is coming when nothing can be hidden, when even our thoughts cannot be concealed."

"Hold! enough!" said Mr. Clarke, smilingly. "You overwhelm me with your brilliant ideas. I cannot take them all in at once. And yet, you half persuade me, you half convince me. Your enthusiasm is contagious."

"Yes," said Stanford, earnestly, "and now behold the practical issue, the fruit of all our speculative labors. I am confident I shall find in New Orleans sensitives, clairvoyants, hypnotics, through whom I shall obtain clues of thought, however faint and subtle, which I shall follow step by step according to purely natural laws, hitherto unknown or unrecognized, until I shall be led to tangible and positive proof of what became of Gordon Clarke and his child."

"All this is truly, truly wonderful to me," said Ephraim Clarke. "It dazzles but does not instruct. It is not light to me, but lightning.

"But tell me," he said, after a moment's pause, "since spiritual forces are not limited by times and spaces as natural things are, why not pursue your whole course of exploration here in Chicago, where the facilities, I presume, are just as great as in New Orleans?"

"Because there is some occult atmosphere surrounding localities which retains impressions of all the deeds committed in them. It is reasonable to suppose that a sensitive can perceive them on the spot more readily than elsewhere. Besides, sir, no matter what was discovered in Chicago or elsewhere by psychic methods, we would have to go to New Orleans at last for external verification."

"True," said Mr. Clarke, waiving his objection.

"Now, my dear sir," said Stanford, "we come to the motive and object of this nocturnal visit. I propose, with your consent and assistance, to resume the search for your lost brother and his child on the principles I have indicated. I need a little rest from business, a little recreation and change of air. I shall recuperate my own powers, and work for you as a detective on a new line in our great southern metropolis."

"This interview," said Mr. Clarke, "has interested me profoundly. It has awakened memories which I shall cherish forever. It has aroused hopes which I am almost afraid to indulge. I have perfect confidence in your intelligence and your discretion. I shall be delighted to render you any help you may require in this extraordinary undertaking."

"I shall need the letter and lock of hair you have shown me, some favorable introductions to influential men in New Orleans, and your ready endorsement in offers of very large rewards for information upon the subject I have taken in hand."

"All these you shall have, sir," said Mr. Clarke, benignantly; "and if you bring that niece of mine home unmarried, I will give her to you for a wife, and she shall bring you half a million dollars as a dowry."

"Thank you," said Stanford, smiling. "I already feel the matrimonial yoke materializing about my neck."

"But come," said the old gentleman, as Stanford rose to depart, "wait until the ladies return from the theatre, and we will discuss Fritz and his little folks over a bowl of punch."

Stanford observed that his mind and his heart were too much preoccupied with graver matters and declined the invitation.

Standing in the door-way he said to Mr. Clarke, "Do not mention this conversation to any one. The issue must determine whether I am a fool or a philosopher."

"If you fail," said the old gentleman, "it shall be buried in my bosom; if you succeed, it shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops."

How many learned, scientific men, leaders of public opinion, would have smiled with derision at the folly or the audacity of this undertaking!

So little do we know!

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

On a bright spring morning Jackson Square, New Orleans, is a beautiful place. The dews which had silvered the leaves and the grass have evaporated and left them a brilliant green. The walks which circle about the well-trimmed lawns are composed of tiny white shells and are entirely free from dust. The flower-beds, of varying forms and sizes, are already gorgeous with blooms: jasmines and jonquils and sweet olives, oleanders, myrtles, and roses, verbenas, petunias, pansies, marigolds, and camellias, whose very names are suggestive of grace and fragrance and beauty. This shining area is bounded away off at the four sides by great walls of evergreen. One cannot traverse the whole square without meeting the orange, the fig, the magnolia, the palm, the banana, those special types of southern vegetation.

New Orleans, you will remember, is on the same parallel of latitude with Cairo in Egypt. The Mississippi River is its Nile, and the Gulf of Mexico its Mediterranean. Yet it is much colder than Cairo in winter, and is never so hot in summer.

In the exact centre of the square stands a life-sized equestrian statue of General Andrew Jackson, the hero of the battle of New Orleans, and the seventh President of the United States. It is the artistic work of Clark Mills, and is the first statue ever constructed of the horse in the attitude of rearing. In one of the broad stones of the granite pedestal the famous words of the impetuous rider are engraved:

THE UNION MUST AND SHALL BE PRESERVED,

words accentuated and decreed perpetual by the result of the greatest struggle upon historic record.

Across Chartres Street, which bounds one side of the square, rises the great cathedral of St. Louis, flanked on each side by the curious old court-houses built in the Moorish style of architecture during the Spanish domination in Louisiana. Under the marble flags in front of the Altar of the Sacred Heart in this imposing edifice lie the bones of the founder and builder of it, Don Almonaster, a Spanish grandee, illustrious, wealthy, and pious. Every evening at sunset the cathedral bell is still tolled in memory of this departed spirit.

On the north and south sides of the square, known as St. Peter and St. Anne Streets, are the Pontalba Buildings, two long rows of massive, three-story brick houses with iron verandas in front, twelve in each row, and all exactly alike. They were erected by the Countess Pontalba, the daughter and only child of the munificent founder of the cathedral. These houses were once the favorite abodes of wealth and fashion, but have long since fallen from their high estates, and have been left stranded by the ebbing away into other parts of the city of the fickle tide of prosperity.

On the fourth and last side of the square one sees, across the broad river front that intervenes, the chimneys and smoke-stacks of steamboats and steamers, which show where the greatest commercial artery in the world is pulsing towards the sea.

The great cathedral clock in the tower has just struck six. People of all ages and costumes and colors are passing to and fro, in and out of the square: people going to mass, people going to market, newsboys, shop-girls hurrying along, nurses and children, slow promenaders for health, awkward sailors tanned by sun and wind, loungers, and strangers. Evidently one of the latter class, a fine-looking gentleman, about thirty years of age, quick and elastic in his movements, enters from the river-side gate. He takes a seat about the middle of the square on one of the semicircular iron benches with which the grounds are liberally provided. He glances all about him with an intelligent and pleased curiosity.

This person is evidently a man of culture and refinement. He is a little above medium height, muscular and yet graceful, with fair complexion, chestnut-brown, crispy hair, brown eyes and moustache. His face expresses intelligence and mental strength. He is neatly dressed in fashionable style, with well-fitting gloves, shining boots, and a light cane in his hand. He is apparently a travelled, educated gentleman of leisure. If one were clairvoyant enough to read the visiting-card in his pocket-book, one would discover that he was Mr. Hugh Stanford, of Chicago.

When the stranger had satisfied himself with a contemplation of all the objects around him, he sat musing awhile. Some pleasing train of thought expressed itself in the quiet smile of his handsome face. Perhaps he was reviewing with high hopes the plan he had formed for the success of his singular mission. Perhaps he was only thinking of the curious people and things he had just seen in the old French market; perhaps only of the banana-colored beauty who had served him with a delicious cup of coffee, and whose great pensive, black eyes and enormous gold ear-rings attracted the attention of every passer-by.

Something of more decided and permanent interest suddenly entered his field of vision and gave a new and still more pleasing direction to his thoughts.

The very graceful figure of a young woman, who came out of one of the Pontalba Buildings and entered the square from St. Peter Street attracted his attention. The lady advanced slowly to the bench upon which he was sitting and sat down at the farther end of it, not seeming to be aware of his presence. Her walking-dress was of the finest material and exquisite fit. Her bonnet with its floral adornments was a marvel of taste. Her face was oval, nose and lips as perfect as Cleopatra's were supposed to have been, complexion clear white with a faint rose-tint on the cheeks, hair wavy brown and full of sunbeams, and dark, deep, gray eyes with long eyelashes, such as are often seen in Irish beauties. Strength as well as loveliness of character were revealed in her expressive countenance. There was an air of elegance and refinement about her, which indicated gentle blood and high breeding.

The possessor of these charms sat a few moments in silent, unconscious abstraction, punching the ground at her feet with the bronze tip of a dainty parasol. Stanford regarded her attentively, took her in from head to foot, absorbed her, analyzed her, comprehended her,

Pauline Wilkinson

and said to himself, "This is some splendid rose of southern society with all the color and perfume of aristocratic life, but there is something grandly, beautifully *spirituelle* in her nature which would survive the destruction of all her surroundings."

As if suddenly realizing the proximity of the stranger, and surmising without a glance at him that he had been fixing intensely curious eyes upon her, the young lady rose and walked slowly towards the cathedral. Stanford watched her receding form until it disappeared in the door-way of the sacred edifice, and then, no doubt unconsciously to himself, he gave a deep and unequivocal sigh.

Left alone to his reveries, our hero suddenly experienced a very singular mental perception. When the little blindfolded boy in the old familiar game is receding from the object he is trying to find, the other children cry out, "You are cold, colder, very cold!" When he turns and approaches nearer and nearer to the object, they exclaim, "Oh, you are warm, warmer, very warm!" Moving blindly and unconsciously on the great playground of life, Stanford suddenly felt "very warm," as if he was strangely near to some great realization. He gave this spiritual impression no definite meaning, but he vaguely felt that he would like to know, and indeed must know, something of that beautiful woman who had appeared and disappeared like a dream.

Every reader of the least penetration knows that Mr. Stanford now felt a strong desire to see the interior of the grand cathedral of St. Louis. The central altar was ablaze with light, representative of the spiritual illumination of the soul. The tinkling of silver bells had just announced the elevation of the Host, and the little crowd of early devotees was kneeling before it. He sat down at a respectful distance behind them and awaited, not without some vague sense of religious exaltation, the conclusion of the ceremonies.

When the worshippers were dispersing, he observed that the lady in whom he was interested moved to a side-altar, consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, and engaged in private devotions. He therefore busied himself in studying the paintings, statues, and stained windows which adorned and enriched the cathedral. He thought of the gallant, chivalrous, and aristocratic character of the founders of the French colony in Louisiana, some of whose mortal remains were buried in the vaults beneath his feet. These men were the root-stock or fountain-head of the Creole civilization, a young France in America, a social state distinguished for the courage and honorable bearing of its men, the beauty and refinement of its women, and the highly-polished manners of both sexes.

The young lady now passed out of the cathedral into the wide, paved alley which extends from Chartres to Royal Street, closely followed by the observant gentleman.

Behind the cathedral is a considerable area shaded by trees and ornamented with walks and flower-beds. There Stanford noticed a young priest reading a little book, probably Thomas à Kempis or some manual of devotion, as he moved along. His black robe, open in front, floated behind him. He was bareheaded and his hair was parted in the middle. He had a fair, innocent, boyish face. This child of nature denying nature, this mystic surrounded by realities, this dreamer in the midst of a wide-awake world, was a curious study to the advanced thinker who was passing by.

He had time also to glance at the stately white peacock, which strode about spreading his immense feathers under the myrtle-trees which adorn the spot. He wondered why that monstrous bird, so emblematic of pride, should be harbored in those sacred precincts where humility is taught as the supreme virtue.

At the corner of the alley and Royal Street, the fair saint moving ahead of him dropped a coin into a tin cup held in the mouth of a pitiful black dog, whose master, blind in reality or "by profession," squatted on the pavement grinding a doleful wail out of a little hand-organ. The gentleman behind her did not follow the lady's example. Glancing at the grovelling, obsequious face, which revealed the degrading influence of begging upon the human soul, he said to himself, "It is not charity which the poor require of the rich or of government, it is justice and work. If there were justice on all sides, none would either suffer or beg."

The willowy figure, symmetrical, attractive, with its perfect walking-dress and its pretty bonnet, now moved around into Orleans Street, and passed under the long gallery of the building once known as the Orleans Ball-Room. There the white bohemians of former generations used to meet the octoroon belles and those of still fainter trace of African descent in the festive dance. Inspired by delicious perfumes, frantic violins, and sparkling champagnes, they lost themselves in the labyrinth of pleasure from midnight to daybreak.

Many a misfortune, many a *mésalliance*, many a duel resulted from those nocturnal imprudences.

How changed is everything now! The house has been reconstructed, and is used as a convent for colored Sisters of Charity. The maddening whirl of pleasure has given place to the solemn atmosphere of devotion. Venus, "the silver splendor, the white rose from the rose-white sea, the full flushed, the imperial," has been banished forever, and the Mother of Sorrows has been enthroned in her stead. The only inhabitants of the place, once so full of light and music and dalliance, are some homely black women arrayed in black, who kiss their rosaries and count their beads in sepulchral silence.

Passing around the next corner into Bourbon Street, our morning-walker and her follower were soon opposite the great French Opera-House. This immense building, capable of seating twenty-five hundred listeners, is the only one in the United States solely and permanently devoted to music. This institution is one of the many winter attractions of New Orleans, and one of the most charming centres of social and fashionable life. Perhaps our unknown beauty as she moved along thought of its brilliant assemblies, its gorgeous scenery, its magnificent orchestra, its splendid troupe of Parisian artistes; and perhaps saw herself, as the world had often seen her, sitting in her *baignoire* exquisitely dressed, flushed with innocent and joyous excitement, entertaining the group of admiring young gentlemen before her.

A square or two more and she came to an imposing three-story brick building with a handsome granite front. A considerable grass-plot at the side, with a large water-fountain in the middle, and several fine crape-myrtles in full bloom, could be seen through the iron railing, spear-shaped and bronze-tipped. The whole side of the house towards the yard was covered with delicate clinging vines, so thick that the windows seemed set in a solid wall of green.

The young woman, still unconscious of the handsome fellow who had shadowed her, tripped up the steps, opened the broad door set in a deep recess with a private key, and disappeared from sight. Stanford, half ashamed of having followed a strange lady so far, passed leisurely in front of the house, and read on an old-fashioned, brightly-polished, oval, brass door-plate in script the name

Emile Du Valcourt.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, in a state of high excitement, drawing some letters from his side-pocket and running them over in his hand until he came to a certain one. "What a wonderful coincidence! I have here a letter of introduction to Colonel Emile Du Valcourt. I am the happiest of mortals!"

Delighted with the morning's adventure, he now thought of the good breakfast which awaited him at the Hôtel Royal. As he turned into St. Louis Street, and saw the great white front of the hotel looming imposingly above all the other buildings for a solid block, he noticed a tall man with a large nose and very large black eyes entering a door-way a little ahead of him.

He had the curiosity to observe the building, which had once been quite stylish, but was now considerably out of repair. A little sign upon the door, gold letters on a black tin plate, attracted his attention.

DR. HYPOLITE MEISSONIER,
Magnétiseur.

He recorded the number of the house upon a little tablet and said quietly to himself, "I may have use some time or other for this magnetizing gentleman."

He was soon prefacing his breakfast at the Hôtel Royal with a plate of delicious strawberries and cream. While waiting for the more substantial elements of the meal, he opened the *New Orleans Picayune* and glanced over its pages, but he probably remembered nothing he had read, for presently he muttered to himself,—

"If all the society ladies here are like that one, what a fairy-land New Orleans must be!" but he quickly added,—

"Nonsense! There's only one such woman in the world!"

Ha! ha! Mr. Hugh Stanford! Love at first sight! Now for the reveries, the sweet fancies, the air-castles, the startings, the blushes, the absent-mindedness, and all the traditional signs of the lover!

> "Forever young is Phantasy alone.
> For that which never—nowhere—came to pass,
> That—that alone shall nevermore grow old!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PROBABILITIES CONSIDERED.

STANFORD'S first move in his efforts to solve the Gordon Clarke mystery was to visit a distinguished lawyer, tell him the whole story of Gordon Clarke and his child, explain his own mission and expectations, and retain the gentleman as a legal counsellor in the case.

"I advise you, in the first place, to offer some very, very large reward for satisfactory information concerning the fate of either the father or the child. Beyond that I do not see how I can be of any service to you at present. Your case is without a precedent, sir, and your methods are unknown to the law."

"New methods may possibly establish new precedents, and law and justice be the gainers. I do not expect much help from you during my chase, beyond some general suggestions as to persons and measures; but when we are in at the death, as the hunters say of their game, I may need your assistance very much, for I must have the stamp of legality upon every step I take."

The first speaker in this conversation was George Denfield, attorney-at-law, and the place was his capacious office in the handsome Denegre Building on Carondelet Street. Although still young, his talents and strict attention to business had already secured him a prominent place at a bar always crowded with distinguished men. He was the fortunate possessor of that self-confidence which is born of conscious strength and innate force of character. He was a brilliant representative of an estimable and wealthy Creole family. His figure was slight but perfectly formed and graceful; his voice and his address were pleasing and attractive. One was struck immediately with his very large, expressive black eyes, and his high, evenly-rounded, and ivory-white forehead. He was fond of physical exercises, and whoever tested his strength found him an athlete in body as well as in mind.

"You astonish me," he said to Stanford, "by the positiveness with which you speak of doing things which seem not only improbable but absolutely impossible."

"I would never achieve my end if I did not have positive faith in my power to do it."

"It seems to me," said the lawyer, "that you are endeavoring to construct a grand edifice on a very small material basis,—an old letter and a little lock of hair! Your pyramid is inverted: it cannot stand on its apex. How can you reasonably expect to obtain any information on such a subject and from such sources after twenty years? An Indian would say the trail is dead-cold."

"It is singular," said Stanford, replying indirectly to the question, "how easily men catch the idea that spirit is independent of space, and with what difficulty they comprehend the correlative idea that it is also independent of time. They concede that mind can operate through spaces without regard to space; but it is difficult to conceive that mind under proper conditions can just as readily see what happened a thousand years ago as it cognizes what is now transpiring."

"Your statement certainly needs elucidation; for why should we not just as easily see things which are to happen a thousand years hence?"

"Man may know everything of the past, because it has already been recorded or registered somewhere in human consciousness and is preserved forever. Spiritual things—ideas, thoughts, motives, feelings, emotions—are all just as indestructible as material substances. They become quiescent or latent to us, but they are never changed nor annihilated. The difficulty is to find out where they are recorded and how to bring them out again to our perceptions. Now you can see why our insight into the future is very limited. What has not yet been recorded in human consciousness is beyond our reach, except by reasoning from causes to effects."

"How are you going to make the old letter and the lock of hair available in penetrating the mysteries of the past?"

"Let me tell you the story of Robert Browning and his great-uncle's gold shirt-studs."

"Agreed," said the young lawyer, drawing out a cigar-case and offering it to the architect, who discreetly declined, having an instinctive aversion to the great American poison.

"You will find what I am going to relate," said Stanford, "in the London *Spectator* of January 30, 1869. I mention this because lawyers will generally credit nothing except upon authority.

"When Robert Browning, the great poet, was living in Florence, a friend brought to his house, without previous intimation or introduction, a certain Count Giunasi, of Ravenna. This gentleman professed to have great psychometric and clairvoyant faculties, and offered, in reply to Mr. Browning's avowed scepticism, to convince him of his powers. He asked Mr. Browning if he had any memento or relic about him. It so happened that he was wearing some gold shirt-studs, which he had recently put on, in the absence, by mistake of a seamstress, of his ordinary buttons. He had never worn them before in Florence or elsewhere, and had found them in some old drawer, where they had lain forgotten for years.

"One of these studs he took out and handed to the count, who held it silently a little while, looking earnestly into Mr. Browning's face. He suddenly exclaimed, with considerable excitement, 'There is something here which cries in my ears, Murder! murder!'

"Mr. Browning seemed astonished, and candidly confessed that those studs were taken from the dead body of a great-uncle of his who was murdered on his estate in St. Kitt's nearly eighty years before. The studs and a gold watch were produced in a court of justice as proof that robbery was not the motive of the slaves who committed the deed. The occurrence of that murder was unknown to every one in Florence except to Mr. Browning, and he had long, long ago forgotten all about it. The question is, how did Count Giunasi get the conception of murder from merely handling that little article?"

"He must have got it in some other way," said

Denfield, "or that story is as incomprehensible to me as some of Browning's poetry."

Before Stanford could reply a gentleman entered the room, apparently fifty but really sixty years of age; large, well-proportioned, with blue eyes, auburn hair, and slightly gray beard, wearing gold spectacles, neatly but plainly dressed in black.

Denfield rose and greeted him cordially.

"I am glad to see you, doctor. You are the very man needed on this occasion. Let me introduce you to Mr. Stanford, of Chicago. Mr. Stanford, Dr. Holden." The gentlemen shook hands.

"Dr. Holden," he continued, "is classified as a homœopathic doctor, that being the prevailing color he wears; but he maintains that the supreme business of the physician is to cure his patient, and that for such purpose he should study and avail himself of every means provided by nature or art, regardless of names, creeds, or schools."

"Thank you," said the doctor, with a quiet smile, "for defining my professional status so clearly. Hippocrates, the father of Greek medicine, said that diseases could be cured in three different ways,—allopathically, homœopathically, and antipathically. Homœopathy, you see, is a very old idea. It remained nothing but an idea until the scientific genius of the present century made it practical and fruitful. The highest type of physician is one who learns all and uses all, not at the dictate of his patient, but in the exercise of his own enlightened judgment."

"That's so," said Denfield, emphatically; "and now, Mr. Stanford, this is the man to whom I intended to refer you as an authority in the very abstruse matters upon which you are building your hopes. He has studied all spiritual subjects from the occultism of India down to the voudouism of St. Domingo."

"You very greatly overestimate my attainments," said the doctor, with a deprecatory movement of his hand.

Denfield then briefly gave the doctor an outline of Stanford's mission and expectations. At his request Stanford repeated the story of Robert Browning and the Italian count.

"The human mind," said the doctor, "is on the threshold of a new temple of wisdom. The incredible becomes possible and even probable, simply because we have obtained knowledge of laws and forces hitherto unknown to us. This Browning incident was a case of mind-reading or thought-transference: cerebral sympathy as Dr. Elliotson defined it; unconscious cerebration as Dr. Carpenter named it. Unconscious cerebration is thinking without knowing that you are thinking. By cerebral sympathy your unconscious thought is transmitted to another person, who imagines it is his own.

"The story of his great-uncle's murder had once been registered upon Mr. Browning's brain-cells. When the gold studs were put into the clairvoyant's hand an unconscious transfer of thought took place from Mr. Browning's mind to the count's mind, without the cognizance of either, and was perceived by the count as a spontaneous intuition connected with the article held in his hand. It was a fact entirely within the province of natural phenomena, and explicable by laws with which we are acquainted."

"An acute and rational explanation," exclaimed Denfield.

"Now," continued the doctor, "if Mr. Browning's mind had been entirely out of the question; if he had lost the gold stud in the street; if the count had picked it up and derived his impression of the murder from the substance alone, the facts would have been more puzzling, and would give some additional support to the theory that spiritual atmospheres adhere to, or are in some way connected with, material objects. Or, to state the case more clearly, material objects may be connecting links between a mind now surveying them and some other mind which had formerly been impressed by them."

"You state exactly," said Stanford, "the foundation of my hope that this letter and lock of hair will bring some sensitive expert into rapport with the minds of Gordon Clarke and his child. I will now cite you a case in which a material object brought to clairvoyant sight a scene which transpired two hundred and fifty years before, under circumstances which preclude the idea that it could possibly have been a thought-transference from any mind living in this century. It is an incident related by Prof. Gregory, of Edinburgh, in his 'Letters on Animal Magnetism.'

"A gold ring, history entirely unknown to every person present, was put into the hands of a very powerful clairvoyant. He described a terrible scene of murder: armed men rushing into the chamber of a lady, a man of foreign aspect, already in the room, clinging frantically to the skirts of a beautiful woman and imploring protection from his assailants. He is dragged to the door and there stabbed to death in her presence and in spite of her supplications. No one listening to the clairvoyant had the least suspicion of what the vision meant. It was afterwards discovered that the ring had been fished up out of the water, immediately beneath the window of a certain room in the castle where Mary, Queen of Scots, had been imprisoned. It had belonged, no doubt, to that unhappy princess, and was probably worn by her at the moment of the murder of her favorite, the Italian musician, David Rizzio, which happened exactly as it was so vividly described by the modern sensitive."

"It would require," said Denfield, "the closest examination and cross-examination of everybody connected with that transaction before any satisfactory or credible conclusion could be drawn. So let us remand it to the basket of myths, which is being filled so full by the critical researches of the present century."

"I do not agree with you," said Stanford; "but here is something very recent, perfectly authentic, and just as difficult of solution by all your legal acumen. A geological specimen was sent to Professor Denton, author of 'The Soul of Things,' for psychometric analysis, without a word or a line suggesting to him from whom or from whence it came. Holding the stone in his hand, he saw a deep railroad cut, and the precise excavation from which the specimen had been taken. He perceived a tropical region about him, and described fields of sugar-cane, banana-trees, little naked negroes in the distance, and other particulars. The gentleman who brought the mineral from Cuba, a railroad engineer, confirmed the truth of the professor's statements even to the minutest points."

"You must confess, Denfield," said the doctor, "that Mr. Stanford is making out a pretty good case of probability for the success of his undertaking."

"It will take a good deal of explanation," said the lawyer, "for me to master the subject."

"The rationality of Mr. Stanford's pursuit," said the doctor, "rests upon the fact that no traces once made are ever obliterated; no impressions, physical or spiritual, are ever lost. Dr. Draper, a master in natural science, says that upon the walls of our most private apartments, where we think the eye of intrusion is altogether shut out, there exist vestiges of all our acts, silhouettes of everything we have done. I am recalling his very words. The impressions given by Mr. Browning's gold studs, Queen Mary's finger-ring, and the geological specimen are natural and probable. Every object in nature is the leaf of a book in which one may read, under proper conditions, whatever has been impressed upon it by surrounding influences from the beginning of the world."

"You are dealing," said Denfield, "with weird and mysterious subjects, where the mind is either wrapped in darkness or blinded with excess of light, and in either case can obtain nothing reliable."

"You are mistaken," said the doctor. "When we study the phonograph, we see how the vibrations of air can be embedded in a sheet of tin foil, and, by the turning of a crank, can come back to us a thousand years afterwards as the original living voice, full of emotion and thought. The vibrations of light, and indeed all the vibrations in nature, are susceptible of similar fixation and similar restoration. Therefore every word spoken, every thought conceived, every deed done, is fixed and embedded somewhere, so that they can be recalled and unrolled to view as vividly as when they were first transacted. This is the way of the final judgment which no man shall escape."

"Your conceptions almost terrify me," said Denfield; "but where are these images of things said, thought, and done so permanently stamped and registered?"

"That," said the doctor, "will be the subject of future discovery, when we study the laws and phenomena of mind as zealously and intelligently as we are now studying the laws and phenomena of nature.

"I have a friend in this city," he continued, "of rare psychometric powers and singular spiritual experiences. He was once sitting by his hearth in a state of abstraction. Suddenly he noticed that the bricks around the fireplace seemed changed into beautiful little porcelain tiles. Then he observed to his amazement that each tile contained a picture of some incident in his own life. Each picture was a perfect, living reproduction from his memory of scenes just as they actually transpired, with every accessory of form, color, sound, and movement. One was a duel in which he had been engaged. He heard the discharge of the pistols and saw his friend fall dead precisely as it occurred on the fatal field. Now, something of this kind occurs to the genuine clairvoyant, only the pictures are as large as life, and he generally mistakes them for realities. They are the thoughts and images of the mind projected outward, by a mental law, into apparent objectivity, just as occurs in dreams, hallucinations, and hypnotic suggestions."

"You believe, then," said Stanford, "that this letter and lock of hair can bring up to clairvoyant sight images and ideas existing in the mind of Gordon Clarke and of those immediately with him and frequently about him previous to his disappearance?"

"Certainly I do," said the doctor, "always provided that certain conditions are obtained. I would like to make one suggestion as to the management of your case. Trifling and imperfect experiments in this line are of little value. At the first *séance* with the best sensitives and clairvoyants you seldom get more than a mere repetition or echo of your own thoughts, sometimes nothing at all. The visitor then retires in wonder or disgust, as the case may be, and the possibilities of the clairvoyant power are supposed to be exhausted.

"This is a great mistake. Psychometric and clairvoyant powers are susceptible of continuous cultivation. If Mr. Browning had repeatedly visited the Italian sensitive and presented the same subject for his investigation, the psychometrist would probably have penetrated more and more deeply into the mysteries of the case. He might have seen and described the old uncle, even to his eyebrows and vest-buttons; and he might have revealed the minutest incidents of the murder, including the name and character of every slave who participated in the crime."

"What would such evidence be worth in a court of justice?" said Denfield, with a smile.

"Ah, my good lawyer," answered the doctor, gravely, "the courts of justice and everything else will be immensely different in the next century from what they are now."

"You give me great encouragement," said Stanford to the doctor; "the permanence of sensations registered in the human brain, the transference of ideas from one subject to another, the facts of thought-reading and clairvoyance independently of time or space, establish my faith in a mission which, as a mere psychological experiment, is capable of exciting enthusiastic interest.

"Now," continued the young architect, "can you direct me to any superior sensitives in New Orleans, people who might recall and read the thoughts and memories of Gordon Clarke and of the persons who were about him at the time of his strange disappearance?"

"I have three persons in my mind whom you might hopefully consult on the subject."

"Their names and addresses, if you please," said Stanford, drawing out his tablets.

"And such running comments on their marvellous powers," suggested Denfield, "as will encourage our friend in the idea that he is not altogether wasting his time in the pursuit of such phantasmagoria."

"First," said the doctor, without noticing Denfield's remark, "put down Madame Caprell, No. 110 Custom-House Street."

"A New-England adventuress," exclaimed Denfield, "who spends in her charming Massachusetts summer home the money she obtains in the winter by practising her impositions under a false name in this city."

"A psychometrizer," quietly remarked the doctor, "of considerable clairvoyant and prescient power."

"In the next place," he continued, "you might interview a certain magnetizer or hypnotizer, Dr. Hypolite Meissonier, 95 St. Louis Street. I do not suppose that he could assist you himself, but he has developed a number of choice sensitives, thoroughly trained, from whom he has unquestionably obtained some remarkable phenomena. Some of these might be of essential service to you."

"I have that name already on my tablet," said Stanford. The two gentleman looked surprised, but he offered no explanation.

"Dr. Hypolite Meissonier," said Denfield, "is a gambler and a debauchee, carrying on nefarious practices under color of a special form of medical treatment."

"The comment of my legal friend," exclaimed the doctor, "requires a little modification. Meissonier is a well-educated physician. He studied mesmerism, or hypnotism, and the kindred phenomena under Charcot at Paris and under Bernheim at Nancy, the greatest authorities upon those subjects in the world. He has repeated their experiments and verified their conclusions here in this little Paris of America. His knowledge and his experience are decidedly valuable.

"Lastly," continued the doctor, "but by no means leastly, I advise you to see Cora Morette, 312 Rampart Street. This woman is a middle-aged mulattress, quiet, modest, unpretentious, one of the best thought-readers and clairvoyants I have ever seen."

"Yes," said Denfield, "I have heard wonderful things about Cora. She is a grand spiritual figurehead among the Creoles. They consult her on business-affairs, love-matters, lost articles, sickness, and everything. She is actually family physician to many intelligent people."

"Mr. Denfield's running comment on Cora," said the doctor, "is quite as satisfactory as anything I could have done in that line.

"And now, Mr. Stanford," continued the doctor, rising and taking him by the hand, "interview those people, get all you can from them, and bring me your budget of news. I am deeply interested in your singular undertaking. The psychological questions involved are of immense importance from both social and legal stand-points. I shall be exceedingly happy if I can be of any service in promoting the success of your labors."

CHAPTER IV.

NINETTE AND ROSE.

When Gordon Clarke and his child disappeared in the midst of the confusion which the war had produced, New Orleans was in a deplorable condition. Military occupation and a strict blockade for three years had reduced its population to comparative poverty and despair. With the downfall of institutions and the wreck of public and private fortunes, everything was in ruin. The shadow of a great sorrow darkened every house. The emblems of mourning were everywhere seen. Of twelve thousand Louisianians who served in one army alone, the Army of Northern Virginia, only three hundred surrendered with Lee at Appomattox. All the others had been killed or wounded, or had died of disease, or had been incapacitated for duty, or made prisoners of war. The military government was soon succeeded by a political supremacy of negroes, carpetbaggers, and scalawags, which was still more galling and hateful to the people and more destructive to the interests of the city.

Twenty years after, when Hugh Stanford instituted his search for the lost father and child, a wonderful change had taken place. The city had sixty thousand more inhabitants, a great number of new and beautiful residences, new churches and theatres, new pavements and drives, new institutions of all kinds, new railroad lines, the great jetties which had given a new impetus to commerce, and, above all, a stable and intelligent white government which maintained order and administered justice. Society in all its phases had recovered its ground and renewed its prosperous and brilliant career.

Stanford presented his letters of introduction, and was everywhere received with kindness and courtesy. The southern veterans had exchanged many civilities with the gallant men of the North who had defeated them in battle. The asperities of the bloody contest had been quite obliterated except in a few irreconcilable spirits. Confederates and Federals, forgetting those distinctions and respecting each other's honesty and courage, joined hands in social movements and business interests, and mutually assisted every spring in decorating the graves of each other's dead. Stanford remained several weeks in New Orleans, moving in its best society, and he never heard a word or detected a look in man or woman which reminded him unpleasantly that he came from a different section of the Union.

The persons to whom he presented letters introduced him to others, and he was soon overwhelmed with hospitalities. Invitations to dine, to lunch, to "teas," to the opera, to visit the old battle-ground, the cemeteries, West End, the sugar-plantations, Spanish Fort, all poured in upon him in such profusion that he began to fear that his time would be wholly absorbed by these pleasing recreations. He was, moreover, given the *entrée* to all the great clubs. He thus met with the *crême* *de la crême* of New Orleans society, and its fascinations were so great that, if he had been a man of less weight of character and tenacity of purpose, he might have forgotten or neglected the difficult task he had assumed.

One of the first letters he presented was that addressed to Colonel Emile Du Valcourt. The gray-haired, ruddy-faced, genial old sugar-merchant, short in stature, stout in person, affable in manners, received him with that delicate urbanity which is so creditable to the host and so pleasing to the guest. The letter was from a federal officer who had charge of Du Valcourt, wounded and a prisoner, for some weeks after the battle of Missionary Ridge. This officer had treated him so kindly, and even generously, that the warm-hearted Southerner remembered him with truly fraternal feelings.

"Whoever brings me a letter from Colonel Greene," said he, "is received at once into my heart and house. You must dine with me to-morrow, which is Sunday, and, no matter how long you remain in our city, I speak for your company on every Sunday, as that is the only day on which I am entirely at leisure."

Thus was Hugh Stanford brought face to face with Ninette Du Valcourt. He had scarcely ceased to think of her a moment from the time he first beheld her, and the introduction to her in her own parlors was quite a strain upon his emotions. She must have wondered at the diffidence, even awkwardness, of a man who was evidently accustomed to the best society. His constraint was soon dissipated by her singularly bright and engaging manner. There are some women who unconsciously fascinate men by a delicate and genial process of making them think well of themselves without the least appearance of flattery. It is a high art, and Ninette Du Valcourt possessed it without art.

After a few visits Stanford told the object of his admiration how he had followed her from Jackson Square to her place of residence, wisely concealing the extent of the impression she had made upon him. She smiled sweetly, a little delicate blush mantled to her brow, and she said,—

"Yes, I had been visiting Lethe, my old 'mammy,' as we call the nurses of our infancy. She has a room in the third story of one of the Pontalba Buildings. She is old and half paralyzed and requires a good deal of attention and assistance. The colored people, poor things, are generally very improvident and indifferent to their aged and helpless. Mammy never was popular with them anyhow, for, like many good old mammies, she sided with the whites and would not desert us, and now she is left almost entirely alone to my care."

"Which I am sure is sufficient," said the gentleman, with an unmistakable fervor in his tone, "to recompense her for all her other deprivations."

Ninette felt instinctively that Stanford was a serious, candid man who never passed silly compliments, and a deeper blush mounted to her eyes.

"Be not precipitate in your judgment," she said, tapping the rosy tips of her fingers with a delicate fan.

"Judgments may be precipitate," he answered, "because they are the work of the understanding; intuitions never, because they are the secret voices of the heart."

"Then you believe in first impressions," she said.

"The first conclusions of the understanding are often erroneous: the first impressions upon the heart are generally lasting; love at first sight is neither a myth nor a dream."

His voice was so earnest that his thought had the flavor of a personal experience. The lady blushed and tapped her rosy fingers again, while she answered, "I agree with you" so softly, that the words seemed almost wafted upon a sigh.

Thus they sported carelessly, unintentionally, on that sweet border-land of sentiment which is dangerously near to the confines of love.

Du Valcourt's hospitality was proverbial. He entertained in the old princely French style. His table was richly provided, tastefully decorated, and handsomely served. The tall and elegant mulatto head-servant, known as Brown in the family, and as Mr. Brown outside of it, was a master of observances; and the guest who forgot his etiquette or mismanaged his napkin or his finger-bowl excited Mr. Brown's commiseration, and was classed at once with the man who was found at the feast without the wedding garment.

Two other ladies contributed with Ninette to adorn the Du Valcourt parlors and table. Madame Du Valcourt was the colonel's second wife, having succeeded the charming woman who had reared Ninette, just one year before. She had been beautiful in her youth, and was still very good-looking at forty-five. Like so many Creole and Jewish ladies, she was growing fleshier with advancing years, without losing any of her attractions except her once graceful figure. She had little to say, but was always amiable and smiling, the smile being admirably managed so as to display a set of beautiful teeth.

The other lady was Madame Du Valcourt's daughter by a first husband. Rose Villemaine was a young woman of striking and intelligent appearance. She had very large and expressive black eyes, black eyebrows, and a quantity of black hair. She had a brunette's complexion, not of that delicate golden tint underneath which the blood surges up in roseate flashes, but dull and sallow. Her exquisite style of dressing diverted attention from her physical defects, and she passed for a handsome woman. Her manner was bright and sparkling, but dignified and suggestive of an immense latent force of passion and temper behind it.

Tastefully and modestly attired, with a simple *coiffure à la Grecque*, graceful in her slightest movements, with a face as full of tenderness as of beauty, Ninette Du Valcourt was a vision of loveliness, which made a charming impression upon all hearts, and electrotyped the one already made upon the susceptible spirit of the young Northerner. One of her principal charms was that she seemed unconscious of her power to charm. It was singular that a woman over twenty years of age, and who must have excited a vast deal of admiration which could not have been voiceless, should have remained so self-depreciative, and so incredulous of her power to inspire others.

A frequent and honored guest in the Du Valcourt and other distinguished families, Stanford met with the fairest and best specimens of Creole society. He soon came to the conclusion that the women were in many respects superior to the men, a relative condition which is fast becoming prominent in other communities besides that of New Orleans. He observed, however, that, unlike the women of his own magnificent city, they seemed deficient in originality and independence of spirit. There was wit, vivacity, grace, piety, intelligence, and exquisite politeness,—all the pleasing charms of the old aristocratic French *régime;* but if you started any of the great new issues of the day, any of the vast, social problems which are demanding thoughtful solution, they shrank from any expression of opinion. Novelty startled and silenced them. Conventionality was the supreme authority. Even the school-girls were so thoroughly trained to obey that they never initiated anything, but followed some distinguished lead.

This criticism, however, is not of universal application. The emancipation of woman is silently progressing even where it seems to make but little progress. There are, no doubt, George Eliots and Margaret Fullers and Harriet Martineaus among our Creole population, just as there were Miltons and Cromwells and Hampdens in the old church-yard of Gray's Elegy; gems of purest ray serene, buried as yet in the dark, unfathomed caves of conservatism.

Stanford soon noticed with surprise and admiration what every acute observer is obliged to see, the singular, ethereal expression of meekness, purity, and tenderness which shines in the faces of Creole women with greater or less distinctness and power according to the varying degrees of education and culture. It is not always or even generally a reliable index of character, but a type of facial expression so frequently met with must have some common cause. What is the meaning of it?

After prolonged observation and reflection on the subject Stanford came to this conclusion. It is the result of the Catholic faith and methods; of the early adoration of the Holy Mother and Child, and the frequent and earnest contemplation of saintly faces and pictures, while their devotions are intensified by the grand, artistic music of the Universal Church. Add to this heredity and prenatal influences, the mothers so reared transmitting the ineffaceable type to their children.

One naturally asks, is there no sly puss, or crafty fox, or cruel panther, or pretentious owl, or chattering magpie underneath all these delicate and placid appearances? It seems impossible, but only those who have tested the matter by intermarriage have any right to answer the question.

Our critical visitor to New Orleans, having read Mr. Cable's delightful novels, was soon struck with the fact that in the circle of Creole society in which he was moving there was little or nothing of that peculiar, imperfect pronunciation of the English language which constitutes one of the entertainments of that author's productions. The Creoles he met in private and at the clubs spoke English so perfectly and fluently that only the most attentive and cultivated ear could detect any deviation from the standard. The differences of accentuation and intonation were so delicate, mere *nuances*, that they never could be transferred to paper, or represented by any possible species of bad spelling.

Before he left New Orleans Stanford enjoyed the great treat of hearing a lecture by the learned and eloquent historian of Louisiana, Charles Gayarré. When you listen to the brilliant sentences of that distinguished gentleman, you know that a Frenchman is speaking, but you feel also that he is a scholar who makes no mistakes, and has reached the highest point of English culture. Therefore the educated Creoles in this story will speak English like the educated Americans of the same class.

Love has acute perceptions, and Stanford soon discovered differences between Ninette Du Valcourt and her companions. She had not been goldened by the southern sun, nor were her features of the delicate French type. She did not exhibit that ethereal meekness and gentleness which he thought was characteristic of the Catholic devotee. She was exceedingly bright and genial, modest and unobtrusive, but she was evidently self-poised, original, and independent. Her conversation sometimes betrayed a puritan sturdiness of thought, ready to question the authority of Authority, which delighted the advanced thinker, who weighed every word she uttered with a kindly but critical spirit.

Stanford had not paid many visits to this interesting family before he discovered, not exactly a skeleton in the house, but a certain atmosphere of disharmony and variance existing between the two young ladies. Colonel Du Valcourt's first wife had been dead four years, and he had been married but one year to the second choice, who brought her stately, black-eyed daughter, fresh from the convent schools, to play the *rôle* of sister to Ninette. The latter, after her mother's death, had been sent at her own request to finish her education at a celebrated female seminary near Boston. The old gentleman had at first demurred strenuously to her proposition, and insisted that Paris had far better finishing schools for a Louisiana belle than any other place in the world. But Ninette, who had read much outside of the curriculum, and who felt the special needs and aspirations of her own spirit, pleaded so earnestly for the literary and social influences of New England upon her early life, that the old colonel kissed her, called her his little Yankee, and acceded to her wishes.

Thus educated and bred apart, with different surroundings, organically unlike in constitution and temperament, unequally gifted both mentally and physically, and both past the age of gushing confidences and eternal friendships, it was not to be expected that the story of Damon and Pythias would find a feminine counterpart in the experiences of these young ladies. It soon became apparent, on the contrary, that they differed radically in their tastes, their opinions, and their aspirations.

"Ninette," said Rose Villemaine to Stanford one day when they happened to be alone for a few minutes, —"Ninette is a very singular girl, not constituted for a quiet and happy life. That Boston education was of incalculable injury to her. It unsettled her opinions, excited her ambitions, and separated her by an immense gulf from the Creole life we are leading. We are always in fear that she will say or do something indiscreet or unsuitable."

Stanford had formed an entirely different estimate of Miss Du Valcourt. Rose's opinion of her did not make the least impression upon him. But he was a good judge of human nature, and there was something in her voice, manner, and expression of countenance which flashed a revelation upon him as to her own character and the true causes of her sentiments. It came to him in two words,—envy! jealousy! They were keys to some little curious and almost unpleasant things which he had noticed but which he had not comprehended.

If any doubt lingered in his mind, it was dissipated by a little incident which took place soon after. He came to the house one evening earlier than usual. The servant had the lighter in her hand when she heard the bell ring, and she opened the door for him. She paused to mount a chair and light the gas before she ushered him into the parlor. In that short space of time, as he stood near the portière, his acute hearing caught these words of Miss Villemaine's elevated voice.

"I don't believe she's a Du Valcourt anyhow. She's nothing like any of their portraits. And if she were, what audacity to monopolize the attentions of our visitors!"

"Hush!" hissed the mother, as the servant held one of the curtains aside and Hugh Stanford entered. Both ladies were confused at first, but quickly concluded that he had heard nothing, from the perfect naturalness of his salutation and of his subsequent manner.

Why are the Italians, Spaniards, and other southern nations, predominantly black-eyed, more jealous in love than the northern races, who are predominantly blue-eyed? The blue-eyed woman says, "Love me, or I die!" The black-eyed woman says, "Love me, or I kill you!"

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL.

WHEN Hugh Stanford left his hotel to visit the three persons indicated by Dr. Holden, he illustrated the vein of mysticism which runs like a golden thread through the mind of every educated man who is also possessed of imagination. The ignorant and stupid are never mystics: they are merely superstitious. The cultivated know that the human mind is perpetually expanding by the solution of mysteries, and that beyond the present bounds of our knowledge there are numberless arcana awaiting scientific solution. Stanford felt conscious that his own common sense, his practical education, and his knowledge of spiritual phenomena would preserve him from any illusions which charlatans might endeavor to impose upon him.

He sat in Madame Caprell's anteroom a good while waiting his turn among a queer set of people. He began to feel quite ashamed of his position. A gentleman among servant-girls, laboring men, and veiled old women, seeking restored lovers, lucky numbers in the lottery, and gilded fortunes in general, he felt decidedly out of place. He was relieved when the red curtain that hung in the door-way between the two rooms was turned aside, and a delicate little woman smiling through her tears tripped by him, while a strong female voice from within called out:

"Mr. Hugh Stanford!"

An uninitiated person might have exclaimed, "How in the world did she know my name?" but Stanford was too well acquainted with mind-reading and with Charlie Foster's method of astounding his visitors to betray the least surprise. The Nathaniels of the present day are not at all astonished when some remote clairvoyant sees them under the fig-tree.

He now found himself in the presence of a portly, middle-aged, square-faced woman with very white hands and forehead, and exceedingly black eyes, eyebrows, and hair. The room was handsomely carpeted, and furnished with plush chairs and gilded mirrors. A marble statue about four feet high stood in one corner with the name Paracelsus chiselled upon the pedestal. On the wall hung a large painting of Cleopatra, semi-nude, applying the venomous asp to her breast. A round table occupied the centre of the room, on which were writing materials, an immense crystal sphere, and a pack of cards. Over it swung, by a gilded chain attached to the ceiling, the bronze statuette of a flying angel. The possessor of these pleasing environments was sedate but agreeable in manner. Her general appearance, although somewhat pretentious, was really imposing and intelligent.

"Give me your relics and I will tell you what I see," she exclaimed, reaching forth her hand, seeming to divine by intuition the object of his visit. The sceptical would have called it guess-work. Believers would have accepted it as proof of spiritual insight and supernatural power. Stanford knew it was only thought-reading, not half so strange or difficult as many of Bishop's performances.

She took Gordon Clarke's letter and his child's lock of hair into her hands, and held them in silence awhile. A slight shudder then seemed to run through her frame. At last she said,—

"He who wrote this letter is dead, long dead. It strikes me somehow or other that his death was sudden and violent. There is a dense atmosphere of sadness about these relics, sadness and mystery. The child from whom this lock of hair was taken is living and has grown into a superb young woman. I see her as one pictures the full-grown flower from the bud; but I cannot find her surroundings. I reach out after her through a difficult and intricate way, but I cannot discover her whereabouts. The strain upon me, the tension of mind, is so great that it has given me a terrible pain in my eyeballs. Let me rest a moment."

"Can you see the figure of the man who wrote this letter?" said Stanford, after a few minutes.

"Yes," she said, after a brief silence; "he is slowly materializing before my sight. He is a large, elderly man, with white hair and beetling brows. His name is Clay?—Claw?—no!—Clarke! His name is Clarke. Is it not?"

Stanford had never seen Gordon Clarke, and he was thinking that moment of Mr. Ephraim Clarke and wondering if the lost brother resembled him. He now felt certain that Madame Caprell saw nothing but the image in his own mind. To test whether she also echoed his thoughts, he said,—

"What became of the man who wrote this letter?"

"He was unquestionably murdered."

"Who was the murderer?"

"A young physician who travelled with Clarke, and whose beautiful wife was an accomplice."

"Can you describe those persons, tell me the incidents of the murder, and show me where the criminals now are?"

After some little hesitation and even confusion of manner, she exclaimed,—

"You require impossibilities, sir! at least without further data and materials to work with."

Stanford declared himself satisfied, paid her fee of three dollars and retired, feeling that the interview had been entirely valueless.

It is said that the blind are made aware of approaching a wall or fence by delicate variations or undulations in the atmosphere, of which those who have vision are always unconscious. It is because their infirmity has compelled them to cultivate to an extraordinary degree the senses of hearing and touch. Thus Madame Caprell's occupation, turning her perpetually from external to interior things, had so sharpened her spiritual perceptions that she felt the antagonism of Stanford's mind pressing against hers like a delicate wave of air, knew his opinions of her and of the science, saw the causes of his dissatisfaction, and even perceived that he had a deeper insight and a profounder solution of the phenomena than her own.

Nettled by her consciousness of failure and desiring apparently to secure something of his confidence, she suddenly called out to her departing visitor, in an earnest tone,—

"There are two dangers ahead of you, sir. One of them you will bring upon yourself, the other will be imposed upon you by enemies. Keep on your guard."

"I am studying the past," he answered, "not the future."

"They are the seed and the fruit of the same tree," said the woman, with solemnity; "and whoever knows the one may know the other also."

Stanford's ring at Dr. Meissonier's door was answered by a pert mulatto girl about fifteen, who said that she believed the doctor was in the back office, pointing to the entrance into that room. Stanford went in, and found a very singular-looking young gentleman seated at a large round table, apparently engaged in studying an anatomical atlas. He had long black hair parted in the middle and curling about his neck and shoulders. His very handsome countenance was defaced by an ugly red scar running down the middle of his forehead, the result of a sword-cut received in a duel. He had large, expressive black eyes full of a certain tender melancholy. His features were of the feminine cast, and but for his clothing and his delicate moustache, he might have passed for a woman.

Stanford saluted him courteously, but received no reply. He raised his voice but made no impression. The young gentleman must be deaf. Presently he raised his eyes and seemed to look naturally about the room. Clearly, however, he did not see the visitor standing before him. Is he also blind? Then how can he read the atlas? Stanford moved forward and passed his hand between his face and the page. The young man reached out and touched Stanford's sleeve. He started and exclaimed in a tender voice,—

"Is it you, Lucia?"

Here the pert servant-girl, who had been looking in at the door, suddenly called out,—

"Well, I'll declare! if the doctor hasn't gone out and left Mr. Hilary hypnosed!"

"Why does he impose this condition upon him," inquired Stanford.

"Don't know," was the answer, "unless," she added, with an astonishing wink at the speaker, "it's to keep him from seeing and hearing his pretty wife when she comes in."

Stanford felt that it was time to leave the premises. "A badly-regulated household," he muttered to himself, as he passed out into the street.

Cora Morette lived in a wooden two-story house on Rampart Street near Esplanade. A high, solid white fence, with a little green door in it, almost concealed the dwelling from view. A pavement of exceedingly red brick, bordered by tasteful little flower-beds, led to the humble door. Everything about the place was scrupulously clean. A small anteroom was full of people, each seeking a special solution of his mystery. In a rear chamber sat Cora Morette in a rocking-chair, plainly but neatly dressed, a quiet, soft-spoken, middle-aged mulattress. She was a good-looking woman, but time, or care, or bad health had planted many wrinkles upon her benevolent face. How different was this silent, modest little seeress from the imposing and pretentious New-England adventuress.

A handsome, smooth-faced, intelligent-looking young Creole, said to be a druggist, sat by a table near to Cora, and recorded her prescriptions, explained them to the patients, took in the fees, and acted as business manager generally. The clairvoyant could neither read nor write, having been a slave the first half of her life. In her waking state she had no knowledge or recollection of the wonderful things she uttered in her trance condition.

Cora was about beginning her office-work when Stanford entered. Impressed by his distinguished appearance, the young clerk ignored the inferior personages present, and, closing the folding-doors between the two rooms, requested the gentleman to state his business. This was done in a brief but clear and impressive manner. The manager listened with polite interest, and then said, with a glance of intelligent comprehension,—

"I am glad you came so early. This kind of case could never be fathomed in the ordinary mediatorial condition in which Mrs. Morette prescribes for the sick or advises on business matters. It belongs to the higher phenomena, and can only be penetrated in the state of profound hypnotism. She is in good condition this morning, her mental state is exceedingly quiet, and I have no doubt she will obtain strong and clear impressions."

Stanford was favorably struck by these words and by Cora Morette's appearance. "There is no humbug or fraud about this woman," he said to himself, "and this man does not talk like a showman exhibiting his treasures, but like a man of science whose words are weighted with thought." He felt a thrill of pleasurable excitement pass through his frame as he contemplated the possibility, indeed the likelihood, of soon receiving the first genuine clue towards the elucidation of his mystery.

While the clerk was speaking Cŏra had fixed her pensive, black eyes upon Stanford's face with a little exhibition of curiosity, but lowered them timidly to her own hands in her lap when he turned upon her an inquisitive glance.

The operator then proceeded to make the mesmeric passes, and throw the subject into that deep and strange sleep of the senses in which the body is indifferent to all external stimuli, and the soul descends from her secret abodes, sees and hears through all obstacles, penetrates to all times and spaces, and confounds all our previous conceptions of mind and matter.

When the interior condition was fully established, Cora drew a deep sigh and exclaimed,—

"What do you want with me?"

Gordon Clarke's letter and the child's lock of hair were then placed in her hands. She sat for at least five minutes with gathered brow, passing one hand softly over the letter as if it were a piece of velvet. Stanford began to fear that he would receive no communication, and even the young clerk grew restless. Suddenly Cora Morette's countenance brightened up surprisingly, and she spoke with a cultivated voice and manner which she did not manifest in her waking state.

"I am in a large room handsomely furnished. The windows look out upon a street so narrow that I can almost hear the people talking in the houses opposite.

In the middle of the room a gentleman is writing at a table. He is a handsome young man with gray eyes, dark-brown hair and moustache. He has a quiet half-smile upon his face as he writes. A little girl about two years old is standing on a chair and looking out of a window at the passers-by. She is very pretty, and very genteel and docile."

Cora Morette was silent. Stanford said,—

"Do these people have no friends about them, no visitors, no persons who come frequently to their room?"

After a considerable pause the seeress answered,—

"I see a man and a woman. The man is young, tall, with black hair, moustache, and imperial, Roman nose, and is very stylish and impressive. The most notable thing about him is the size of his hands, out of proportion, I would say, to his face. Very, very affable externally to the gentleman at the table, he bears about him a singular sphere of silence and concealment which I do not comprehend. The woman stands sideways to me in shadow. She is a beautiful brunette, very young and very engaging, but there is the same curious atmosphere of silence and concealment about her. I do not like those people."

A thought suddenly occurred to Stanford, and he said,—

"Can you describe the room to me so that I would recognize it if I saw it?"

"It has a little piano or melodeon in one corner."

"I do not mean the furniture: that is movable. Tell me some permanent feature about it."

Cora looked all around her and up to the ceiling.

She seemed apparently to be surveying her own room, but her spiritual eye was looking through Gordon Clarke's mind into one of the chambers of the old Hôtel des Étrangers as it was twenty years before.

"The walls are painted in panels of a light green bordered with delicate vines and flowers. The ceiling is frescoed, and it has two large portraits on it. Everybody knows those faces,—they are George Washington and General Andrew Jackson."

Cora Morette now seemed to fall into a deep sleep, her face settled into a fixed frown, and she breathed heavily. The young clerk felt her pulse, and declared it was necessary to terminate the *séance*. He requested Stanford to call again in a day or two, and proceeded to make the upward mesmeric passes which deliver the suspended senses from their enchantment.

Stanford repaired at once to the old hotel on Chartres Street. Entering the office, he inquired of a dapper little clerk, who had a pen behind his ear, an immense gold pin in his shirt-bosom, and a cigarette in his mouth, if there was a room in the hotel fronting the street with walls painted in a pale green and the portraits of Washington and Jackson on the ceiling.

"Certainly not, sir," the clerk exclaimed, emphatically; "there is no such room in this building."

"But, Alphonse, there used to be exactly such a room in this building," said an old lady near the window, looking up from her crochet-work and regarding the stranger inquisitively.

"When was all that?" inquired Alphonse, snappishly.

"A long time ago, when you were playing marbles and flying kites, sir. About fifteen years ago a fire occurred in the room, which so disfigured it that all the old work was erased, and the walls and ceiling were calcimined as you see them now."

Stanford bowed and retired, the couple staring after him in wonder at his question and at the great pleasure the answer seemed to give him.

For he was saying or thinking to himself something like this. "I never saw that room, nor did Ephraim Clarke, nor any one whom I know. Cora Morette did not get the ideal picture from my mind, but from Gordon Clarke's mind. She is a real clairvoyant. She is truthful and trustworthy. What she describes once actually existed. Her vision of the man and the woman is doubtless as correct as her vision of the room. How to find this worthy couple is the problem. How to break their silence and drag them from their concealment. It is not impossible, it is even probable. I am on the trail."

Dr. Hypolite Meissonier's front office was ostentatiously provided with electrical and magnetic machines, surgical instruments and apparatus, preserved specimens of the standard hideousness, and colored anatomical maps quite as disgusting. At a small table the handsome young gentleman with his black hair parted in the middle, whom Stanford had seen the day before in a semi-hypnotic condition, was giving a nasal douche of electrized water to a young woman in a scarlet-red dress. He looked up from his work, but did not seem to recognize the visitor, and pointed him politely to the back office, where the doctor was seated at a large table full of books, bottles, magazines, and papers.

The high-priest of this magnetic sanctuary was a tall man with iron-gray hair, keen, restless black eyes, a large nose, a very sallow face prematurely wrinkled, and a dissatisfied, petulant expression of countenance. A black dressing-gown bordered with red, a round black velvet cap with a red tassel, and a gold eye-glass gave him quite an imposing professional aspect. Still, there was something curious and uncanny about the place and the man which made Stanford compare himself to a fly entering the silvery web of a large black spider.

The doctor pointed silently to a chair, but his cross looks said almost as plainly as words,—

"Well, sir, why do you trouble me?"

"I have been referred to you, sir," said Stanford, in quite a deferential manner, "as an adept in hypnotism or mesmerism."

"Hypnotism," said the doctor, in a somewhat pompous tone, "is nothing but mesmerism, stripped of its charlatanic rags, baptized with a new name and adopted into the family of legitimate sciences."

"It seems to have come to the front of late years as a powerful agent for advancing our hitherto rather scanty positive knowledge of the human mind."

"It is the starting-point, sir," exclaimed the doctor, with the exaggerating enthusiasm of the specialist, "of a new psychology, a new physiology, a new medicine. I can almost affirm that it will initiate a universal revolution in human affairs."

"Do you not think," said Stanford, "that the effects of this mesmeric power have been overstated?"

"Understated," said the doctor, positively. "I have repeated, sir, on my own patients almost every experiment made in this line from Mesmer to Charcot. Those who have been once hypnotized by me remain under my control. That young man in the front room, Dr. Hilary Dupont, is a mere automaton in my hands. By hypnotic suggestions imposed in his negative state I could make him do any ridiculous or dangerous action I pleased to order. I could make him lie, steal, fight, murder. I could commit all the crimes by proxy and remain myself concealed."

"Is not this a fearful power for one man to possess over his fellow-men?"

"Why, sir," continued the doctor, excitedly, "I can change or impose opinions; I can obliterate animosities; I can sow dissensions; I can excite antipathies; I can arouse affections; I can create and cure diseases; I can make men invisible to each other; I can compel witnesses to see and swear to things which have never happened; I can overpower the judge on the bench, and while he seems to be acting spontaneously, he will make the decisions I dictate. As easily as you clean a slate with a sponge, so easily can I erase the virtue of woman and the honor of man from the tablet of the heart. And all this, sir, by hypnotic suggestion. Do you believe these things?"

"However strange and terrible they are," said Stanford, "I have read enough of Braid, Charcot, Binet, Bernheim, and others to know that, under certain improbable combinations of circumstances, they are at least possibilities. The fact that under any circumstances whatever such things are possible, should cause the severest restrictions of the law to be imposed upon this magnetizing work."

"And as ever before," said the doctor, with an ugly sneer, "the big fish would break through the meshes and only the little ones be caught in the net of the law."

There was something disagreeably jubilant in the air of the magnetizer as he uttered these words, which made Stanford suspect that Dr. Hypolite Meissonier enjoyed his vast powers, present and prospective, so much, that he would not like to have his occupation supervised by the law.

"We have spoken," he said, "only of the evil side of hypnotism. It certainly possesses also great power for good. It has given us new and startling conceptions of the spiritual side of life. It has already cured diseases, corrected bad habits, removed false opinions, cemented friendships, and done other good things. Do you not believe it will enable us to penetrate the mysteries of the past and in a limited manner to anticipate the future?"

"Unquestionably," said the doctor; "but the mere hypnotic can do nothing of the sort. It requires that great and rare gift of nature, the clairvoyant faculty. Almost all men and women can be hypnotized and made the subjects and victims of suggestions. Only the clairvoyants can see the past and the future. Such a person hypnotized by an intelligent operator is capable of the most amazing revelations. And right here I have made a wonderful discovery. If the magnetizer, after bringing a good clairvoyant into the ordinary hypnotic state, will then proceed by persistent mesmeric processes to throw the subject into a still profounder sleep, he will evoke phenomena of the most extraordinary nature."

"Have you any subjects of that kind now under your control?"

"None who are capable of any very surprising things."

"Do you know any clairvoyant in the city who is likely to be useful in a problem exceedingly difficult of solution?"

"Cora Morette on Rampart Street is the best clairvoyant I have seen in this city, better even than any I ever saw in Paris."

There was silence for about a minute. Meissonier suddenly said,—

"Have you any objection, sir, to telling me the nature of the problem you are seeking to solve?"

Stanford brought out the letter of Gordon Clarke and his child's lock of hair and laid them upon the table before him. The doctor eyed the articles curiously, but did not offer to touch them.

"This letter," said Stanford, gravely, "was written by a man who suddenly disappeared in New Orleans twenty years ago, and this little lock of hair was from the head of his daughter two years old who disappeared with him."

He was looking down at the relics as he spoke, and did not notice a singular and sudden change on the doctor's countenance. That gentleman took up a book and turned the leaves as if looking for something, saying slowly and with a tone intended to be indifferent,—

"What was the name of that man?"

"Gordon Clarke, and the child's name was Mary Gilford Clarke."

Meissonier's eyes evaded Stanford's. Reaching out his hand, he said, in quite a subdued voice,—

"Will you permit me to examine those articles?"

As he reached to take them, Stanford started a little and said to himself,—

"What a large hand! out of proportion to the face."

Meissonier, quite unnecessarily, moved to a window and silently read the letter with his face turned away from Stanford.

The latter was thinking to himself,—

"A large hand indeed! How many men have large hands! What an absurd thing on which to base a suspicion!"

At length the doctor turned slowly round and said, quietly,—

"I would like to submit these relics to one of my best-developed subjects."

"I cannot let them go out of my hand," said Stanford, reaching for them; "but find your person and name your time and place, and we will study the mystery together."

The doctor was evidently disconcerted, and gave back the articles with reluctance.

"And now," he said, in a louder tone, looking at his watch, "my time is up. Business takes me out. Do me the honor of calling again, sir."

Stanford felt that he was hastily dismissed, but thanked the doctor for the interview accorded him, and passed out of the room.

When Meissonier had shut his door, he pressed both hands to his temples and gave a long, low whistle, a peculiar human sound, in which astonishment, curiosity, and apprehension were strangely mingled. He then called out to the pert young mulatto girl who attended to his door,—

"Élise, did you note that gentleman who just passed into the street?"

"Yes, sir; he was here yesterday."

"Let him never come in again. Do you hear me? Whenever he calls, I am not at home."

"Yes, sir."

And the worthy magnetizer sat at his table for a good while with his head between his two hands.

What was Dr. Hypolite Meissonier thinking about?

CHAPTER VI.

ROSE DISCOVERS DYNAMITE.

If Hugh Stanford ever had an idea of making love to Ninette Du Valcourt in the most approved American fashion, he found an insuperable obstacle in the customs of Creole society. The unmarried daughters of that estimable class are supervised and chaperoned with a strictness entirely unknown to the rest of the people of the United States. The Creole girl obtains comparative liberty only by marriage, after the ancient manner of *la belle* France. The American girl, free until marriage, surrenders her liberty on accepting the marriage ring.

The handsome and talented young architect from Chicago, full of tender sentiments pining to be embodied in complimentary phrases, could seldom see the object of his admiration alone, and then only for a few minutes. In the parlor it was *toujours* mamma, or *toujours* papa, or *toujours* sister Rose, with her great, watchful black eyes. They were not permitted to go unattended to the theatre or opera, or to the public squares, or even to church. It was an espionage like that of the old Jesuits, who never permitted two members of their society to remain together without the presence of a third, to act as a spy upon their conversation and conduct.

How two young people ever do make comprehensible love to each other under such limitations is a mystery to all but the very numerous couples who have tried and succeeded in the experiment. There must be a special sensibility in true lovers to the slightest changes in the pressure of the hands, or in the minutest expressions of the eye, or in the faintest intonations of the voice, which reveal their secret thoughts and feelings in a manner intelligible only to themselves.

Certain it is, that in less than three weeks Hugh Stanford acknowledged to himself that he was deeply in love with Ninette Du Valcourt. That charming young lady knew it as well as he did, although he had not spoken a word on the subject, for his conduct had been a silent proposal. She thought of her own feelings towards her suitor with involuntary blushes, and would not have breathed her delicious secret to another person for all the world. And yet Hugh Stanford, by some secret and magical rapport, felt himself quite secure in her affections.

While these young lovers were sporting about each other like two doves in that golden atmosphere which imagination weaves at least once for us all, Fatality sat silent at her loom, secretly weaving a dark, dark thread into the web of their lives.

Miss Rose Villemaine was thoroughly dissatisfied with the situation. Of an envious and jealous disposition, she was not a favorite with either sex. A woman who is not lovable to her female companions will rarely prove permanently attractive to the best class of men. This young lady had pressed forward very early into that fascinating arena where women contend with each other for the favor and the conquest of men. As several years of endeavor had passed with little result, she began to be soured in temper and anxious in mind. This unhappy condition was manifested by a disagreeable fretfulness at home and a cynical turn of thought in society.

Her mother's marriage to Colonel Du Valcourt had brought with it great expectations. She was introduced thereby into a new and somewhat larger field of social advantages and opportunities. The lustre of the Du Valcourt name added to the prestige of her own, assured her of brilliant success, and she saw some grand alliance looming up in the near future, when the return home of Ninette Du Valcourt from the Boston seminary cast a shadow over her bright hopes, and shot to her aching heart the anticipation of a thwarted destiny. She disliked the daughter of the house from the moment she lifted her eyes upon her.

Evidently more beautiful than herself, more accomplished, more attractive, this new *débutante*, by the mere force of natural superiority, without any effort on her part, took the precedence on all occasions. The least attentive observer could discern that everywhere and by everybody Ninette Du Valcourt was more admired and more beloved than Rose Villemaine.

Ninette was disconcerted and pained by these preferences. She felt herself unworthy of the attentions showered upon her, and was grieved at the comparative neglect with which Rose was treated. She endeavored, in the most generous and delicate manner, to bring her step-sister to the front at every opportunity. Her

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kindly efforts were misconstrued. Rose quietly but emphatically repulsed her advances. Her very tenderness towards her seemed to irritate the black-eyed, black-browed young woman, for it showed that Ninette was aware of circumstances which excited her compassion, and her compassion was proudly resented.

The gulf between the two young ladies of the household was greatly widened by the advent of Mr. Hugh Stanford. His preferences for Ninette were soon so positive and conspicuous that no one thought of Rose as a competitor for his affections. The mother, who was instinctively aware of the jealousy which was gnawing at Rose's heart, one day congratulated her that Mr. Stanford was likely to win Ninette's hand.

"He will take her away to Chicago," she said, "and that will leave you a clear field and no rival in your own house."

"I had rather see them both dead," exclaimed Rose, abruptly.

Her mother looked up at her in a startled and puzzled manner, and suddenly inquired,—

"Why, surely, Rose, you do not care for this Mr. Stanford yourself?"

Rose did not reply, but threw her arms around her mother's neck.

"Poor child! poor child!" said the mother, stroking her hair tenderly, and imprinting kiss after kiss upon her brow.

Long ago, when a mere child, she had heard that the little Du Valcourt girl, with whom she was not then acquainted, was an adopted child, the offspring of distant relatives. When she found herself destined to enter into sisterly relations with Ninette, she made various inquiries among the elderly ladies of her acquaintance to ascertain something of the connection which existed between Colonel Du Valcourt and the pretty young woman who bore his name, but not the least resemblance to him or to any of his family. Every one said, "Oh, Mr. Du Valcourt came here from his sugar plantation just after the war, with his wife and child, and that's all we know certainly about it."

Rose Villemaine was satisfied that some mystery surrounded Ninette, and she pondered over it secretly and with increasing interest. Jealousy begot dislike, and dislike fostered suspicion. One day it suddenly occurred to her to ask old Cæsar about it. Cæsar was an octogenarian, in the second line of descent from the genuine imported African, and the oldest living representative of the once very large slave property of the Du Valcourt family. With crisp, snow-white hair, white circles in his eyes, indicating advanced age, a crooked back, immense knuckles upon his hands, a vast mouth, and a flat nose with nostrils like two great holes in his black face, this recently-made American citizen possessed great knowledge and a tenacious memory of the old times and the old people.

His son Mingo had been Colonel Du Valcourt's faithful body-servant in the army, and now had charge of his mercantile rooms at a respectable salary. Old Cæsar, being half savage and knowing no better, had not been so loyal to the family banner. He had stayed at home and watched his opportunities. Often hearing the white people denounce the invaders as "blue-bellied Yankees," he seriously regarded his approaching liberators as a species of men with blue-tinted abdomens! But old Cæsar scented liberty as well as powder in the air, and was among the first to precipitate himself into the arms of the advancing "enemy." To his credit, however, be it said, that he was the first to become disgusted with the "contraband corral" in which he was penned, and to return to his old home, convinced that the Du Valcourts had more to give him, and were more disposed to give it, than the Federals.

Having heard that Cæsar had a sick grandchild, Rose Villemaine armed herself with a propitiatory basket of delicacies for the invalid, and found her way out to Mingo's cottage upon St. Claude Street. The old freedman was sitting on the little front gallery, smoking his pipe serenely, and thinking probably of what his barbaric grandfather used to tell him of the elephants and river-horses of the Congo River. He hobbled up slowly from his seat, and received Miss Villemaine with the obsequious politeness which the old plantation "slave-driver" always exhibited to the white man.

She was ushered into the negro's little parlor. The humble parlors of the colored race in the South prove the immense superiority of that people over the Indian, and its capacity for progressive civilization. Nicely-papered walls, carpeted floors, comfortable sofa and chairs, centre-table bearing a big family Bible and a large album for family photographs, chromos over the mantel, and a profusion of china bric-à-brac everywhere, all told the story of ambitious and successful imitation of the white man. Given a race with the imitative faculty, conscious of its deficiencies, anxious to overcome them, and with a good model before it, and its future progress is certain.

One of the walls of this little room was adorned with a large wood-engraving, which is frequently seen in the humble abodes of the southern Republicans. It is called "The Death-Bed of Lincoln." That distinguished gentleman is lying upon a couch, with his shoulders slightly elevated and a seraphic expression of countenance. Generals Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, with several colored preachers in white cravats, stand gazing upon the Moses of Emancipation, who is here credited with making a farewell speech to the children of Ham whom he had led out of the wilderness of slavery! This truthful picture and others of the same sort have contributed much to hold the colored race loyal to the party of liberty and progress. The educative power of art has been duly appreciated by the artful politician.

While Rose was surveying this masterpiece of genius, the door of the inner room was opened, and Dr. Holden came forth, closely followed by an old colored woman wearing the ancient red-and-yellow-striped cotton handkerchief so well known in slavery times as the "head-hankcher," but mostly repudiated by the emancipated ladies of the present day. This person was Cæsar's wife, her exact numeral not stated, for the gay old Lothario had made many changes of matrimonial base without the assistance of magistrate or clergy.

Dr. Holden was giving his last instructions in regard to the care of his little patient.

"The disease is fairly over now," he said. "Feed him cautiously, watch him carefully. Treat him like a little lamb: let him lie down in the green pastures and lead him beside the still waters."

The doctor bowed politely to Miss Villemaine, and passed out.

"Dar!" said the old woman to Cæsar. "I told you so. I knowed dat man was furmilyer wid de Word."

"Ob course, Melindy Jane!" growled old Cæsar; "ob course. De doctor is a collidge man: he knows de Bible by heart."

"Knowing de Bible by heart is one thing," said Melinda Jane, shaking her forefinger at her husband, "und feelin' de Bible in your soul is anodder thing. Dat doctor does bofe, and you don't do needer."

Rose here interrupted what might have proved one of those religious altercations in which negroes love to indulge, by presenting her basket and explaining the apparent object of her visit.

After receiving their thanks, Rose said, in a soft, insinuating manner, to the old man,—

"Uncle Cæsar, you knew all the great, rich old families in St. Landry and St. Mary before the war, didn't you?"

"Indeed I did, mistis! I knowed um all."

"Yes, I have often heard the Du Valcourts say that you were a great favorite in the old times."

"So I was, mistis! so I was," exclaimed the flattered African, with an immense grin. "Dem Valcores nebber had a better nigger den I was, sho'."

"Do you remember Colonel Du Valcourt's first wife?"

"Why, don't I! I knowed her when she was a teefing baby. She was Élise Durell, she was. Oh, she was mons'us fine woman!"

"She never had any children, did she?"

"Nebber a chile, mum; and de worl' was wuss off for de fac'."

"Then where did Miss Ninette Du Valcourt come from?"

"Dunno; mought er drapped fum hebben."

"Oh, Uncle Cæsar! children don't drop from heaven."

"Well, dare ain't a speck of Valcourt blood in her veins, anyhow, sho'."

"Oh, yes, there must be; for she was the child of some distant relatives."

"Whar's dem relatives? 'Tain't so. I knowed all de kinfolks, bofe sides, fur sebenty year; and she don't come in nowhar on de line. Oh, no, mistis! dat's some orphing or picked-up chile."

Rose was so well pleased that the old man's evidence gave support to her own conjectures that she slipped a silver dollar into his hand, and tripped homeward with a lighter heart.

With increasing assurance she had the temerity one day to address Colonel Du Valcourt on the subject.

"Colonel Du Valcourt," she said, "I am very much interested in everything which concerns our dear Ninette. Tell me something about her infancy and childhood. Why does she say that her earliest recollection is of a very large house with a great many children in it?"

Du Valcourt was a man of genial and kindly spirit, but he had a hasty temper, and resented quickly any encroachment upon what he considered his private affairs. Rose's voice grew weak and tremulous as she noticed the effect of her words upon her step-father. His expression was at first one of startled surprise, then his countenance paled perceptibly, and by the time she had finished her probing process a flash of anger was upon his brow and he replied sternly,—

"Ninette is the child of Emile Du Valcourt and Élise Durell, and Miss Villemaine should rest contented with the fact."

"Your acknowledgment of the paternity reassures me, sir," said Rose, in a cold and almost haughty manner. "One should always be very certain, you know, of the respectability of one's associates."

"Good heavens!" said Du Valcourt to himself, as the young lady moved slowly out of the room. "What does she mean? What are we coming to? Confound the curiosity of women! There was no necessity for her ever to know it, or even to suspect it."

He felt that he had spoken hastily and unwisely, and that his want of tact would foment rather than divert any suspicions Rose might entertain. The more he thought of it, the more uneasy he became.

"There's mischief in that woman's eye," he muttered; and, with a deep sigh, he added, "We bury the dead in vain."

Rose was stimulated by Du Valcourt's manner to prosecute her researches in a direction she had long contemplated. She had often noticed Ninette's affectionate attentions to an old colored woman whom she sometimes called Lethe and sometimes "Mammy." How often were little delicacies from the table, articles of clothing, or small sums of money set aside for "old Mammy!" She thought of course that Lethe, whom she had never seen, was one of the ancient slaves of the Du Valcourt family, and, knowing that southern gentlemen frequently assisted the aged colored people they once owned, she was not surprised at Ninette's dispensation of charity. But now, for accumulating reasons of her own, she determined to visit the old negress in the Pontalba Buildings, and, by cunning, coaxing, or threats, to draw from her what she knew of the birth and infancy of Ninette Du Valcourt.

After passing the rough scrutiny of the frowsy-headed, barefooted, saucy-faced young Irish damsel who seemed to be the picket-guard of the establishment, she found her way into the third story, back, and into Lethe's room. It was plainly but neatly furnished. A clean bed with a new mosquito-bar turned back, a stand at its side with a little vase of flowers and a plate of fruit upon it, and a table in the corner with a crucifix leaned against the wall and a small wax candle burning before it, revealed the kindly attentions of some charitable soul administering to the physical and spiritual wants of an invalid.

The recipient of these favors was an old semi-paralyzed, bedridden woman, once a handsome and stylish octoroon, but long since faded and wrinkled, and now of a darker shade, a change of color common to persons of African descent as they grow older. Her disease was paraplegia,—a form of paralysis in which the lower limbs are useless, but the upper half of the body is as sound as ever, the mental faculties remaining unimpaired.

Lethe Maxwell had been born free. The liberated negroes of Louisiana constituted a large, growing, and intelligent class in ante-bellum days. This woman had been left with respectable means by her white progenitor, but the little fortunes as well as the great ones were dissipated by the war. She had received a good English education, and there was little or no trace of the negro dialect in her conversation. She had a very pleasant expression of countenance, marred a little now and then by a glance of suspicion or cunning, vestiges, no doubt, of her slave heredity.

The African is naturally as suspicious as a hare in a garden, turning his ears in all directions. Old Lethe regarded her finely-dressed, black-eyed young visitor with curiosity, not unmingled with distrust. The latter feeling grew into apprehension when the lady announced her name,—Miss Villemaine, sister to Miss Ninette.

Even while Lethe was greeting her and asking her to be seated, she was saying or thinking to herself, "I wonder what she comes here for? She's been Ninette's sister, as she calls it, for a whole year, but she has never troubled herself to see me before. And why should she come here without Ninette? She's up to something on her own account, I am sure."

Rose's manner, however, was affable and engaging. She first presented the old lady with a handsome and fragrant bouquet just purchased from a flower-girl near the cathedral. After conversing awhile on indifferent subjects she began talking about Ninette, whose many good qualities she praised in quite an enthusiastic manner. She felt sure on this ground of winning

Lethe's heart, but the replies of the colored woman were so cautious and non-committal that our inquisitor felt quite at a loss how to proceed. She was conscious that she had met her match in diplomacy, and began to fear that Lethe could neither be surprised nor forced into revelations.

"And so, Aunt Lethe," she at last said, "we are likely to lose our darling Ninette forever."

If Rose had inspired absolute confidence in the beginning, this question or intimation might have shocked Lethe inexpressibly; but her growing suspicion of the young lady's intentions mitigated the blow. She merely said, with assumed indifference,—

"How is that, Miss Villemaine?"

"Has she not told you of her engagement to Mr. Stanford, and that she is going to live in Chicago?"

The old woman's heart throbbed with the shock of a painful surprise, but she felt intuitively that she must hold this visitor at arm's length. So she answered, coldly,—

"Young ladies in her station of life are not apt to make confidantes of old colored women."

"But you," cried Rose, with increasing emphasis,—"*you*, Aunt Lethe, her old mammy, her nurse, who knew her father and mother, who knew all about her birth and the secret of her life."

Intentionally or not, Rose had emphasized the word *secret* in such a way that Lethe guessed at a flash that Miss Villemaine suspected there was some mystery about Ninette's birth, and had come to extract it from her. The visit and the manner of the visitor were explicable on this hypothesis. "This inquisitive young woman shall get nothing out of me," said Lethe to herself, and made no reply to Rose.

Disconcerted at Lethe's silence just when she expected to surprise her into some words of revelation, Rose Villemaine was secretly annoyed. She felt that a more direct attack was absolutely necessary; so she said, in a cajoling manner,—

"Now, please, Aunt Lethe, tell me who was Ninette's father."

"You are acquainted with Colonel Du Valcourt better than I am."

"Colonel Du Valcourt is not her father," said Rose, sternly; "why do you trifle with me?"

"He is the only father to her that I have ever seen or known," answered Lethe, with corresponding firmness.

This was literally true, but it conveyed a false impression to Rose.

"You astonish me, Aunt Lethe. Then why should Ninette say that her first recollection was of a great big house with many little children in it? That looks like an orphan asylum, and not like the Du Valcourt mansion with only one child in it."

Rose's eye might have caught a faint expression of alarm or apprehension on the countenance of the "old mammy."

"Nonsense!" said Lethe, boldly, "sheer nonsense! She must have been thinking of some grand child's party at the house, or perhaps of the Infants' School at the Sisters'. Anyhow, you may put that orphan asylum out of your mind, clean out——"

"Lethe!" said Rose, energetically, "you deceive me, you baffle me. I tell you plainly that there is something wrong, something hidden, about Ninette's parentage, and I want to know it. I am rich in my own right, and I will pay you handsomely for the information. Come, now, be reasonable, and tell me the whole truth——"

"Miss Villemaine," said Lethe, with a simple dignity that made her eloquent, "Colonel Du Valcourt is the proper person to consult on this subject. He has the right to speak; it is my duty to be silent. My knowledge, little as it is, is beyond the reach of your persuasion or your purchase."

"You are a stupid, obstinate old lock-box!" exclaimed Rose, losing her patience and her temper, as she rose to leave.

"I am truly sorry, Miss Villemaine, that I have offended you," said Lethe, quietly, "but don't you forget to put that orphan asylum theory of yours entirely out of your mind."

Lethe unwittingly made a great mistake in that repetition of her warning about the orphan asylum. It struck Rose at once that the old woman was anxious to bluff her off from that direction, and, with that perversity which is falsely attributed to her sex, she determined to pursue it. Accordingly, she returned home, replenished her purse with a bank-note of considerable value, and proceeded to the New Orleans Female Orphan Asylum, on Clio Street between Camp and Prytania.

"I will not speak of this to Ninette," said Lethe to herself after Rose's departure. "It would vex and worry her, as it does me. It might lead her to make inquiries herself, and to unearth secrets which ought to remain hidden forever. Oh, Lord, Lord, I feel that some evil thing is coming upon us."

The old negress looked to the crucifix in the corner, made the sign of the cross, and moved her lips in prayer, that one forever accessible resource of the helpless and the unhappy.

In a large triangular space in front of the New Orleans Female Orphan Asylum, laid out in walks and green plats, rises a granite pedestal surmounted by the marble statue of a corpulent, homely, middle-aged woman, seated in an old chair, with a little child standing by her side and looking up trustingly into her face. This is no symbolical representation of Charity, guardian angel of the institution opposite. It is a statue and a good likeness of dear old "Margaret," the great baker-woman, the pride of New Orleans, who distributed freely her loaves of bread, "bread enough and to spare," every day for many years, to all the orphan asylums in the city, without distinction of creed, race, or color. What a touching funeral was hers, with thousands of children in its train, when Catholic and Protestant and Jewish tears and flowers fell all together into her grave! May the Bread of Heaven be her portion forever!

The old mother superior who had managed the affairs of this institution twenty years before had gone to her eternal rest. The new mother superior, in whose handsome face a mingled softness and energy of character were depicted, received Rose Villemaine very sweetly, and proved herself affable and communicative, for she knew that the Villemaine and Du Valcourt families had been for many generations devoted adherents of the Catholic faith.

Rose stated that she came on a little matter of business inquiry, of no importance to any one but herself, but she would first take the opportunity of doing what she had neglected of late, and what she always reproached herself for neglecting; and with that she produced a hundred-dollar note and begged the good mother to apply it to the needs of the institution. The superior smiled benignantly upon this pious and liberal daughter of the church.

"And now," said Rose, in the most insinuating manner, "is it permissible for me to examine the old records of the admissions and discharges of the orphans for several years just after the war?"

Ah! if the old mother had been living who knew all, she would have put her finger upon her sweet lips and have said, "No, my child."

But the new mother was ignorant of the facts, and unsuspicious and accommodative; and where could be the harm? So Miss Rose was escorted to a small private library, the old records for several years after the war were placed before her, and she was left alone to find what she wanted.

In the volume for 1867, under the heading "Admission 43. April 10," she found something which made her give a little shriek of astonishment, followed by a sort of chuckle of fiendish satisfaction. It read thus: "Admitted. Mary Emily Gordon: aged 4 years. Of African descent, although apparently white. Placed by her grandmother, Lethe Maxwell, an octoroon, who states that the mother, Emily Gordon, is leading a disreputable life and wishes to consign her child to the protection of the church." Underneath was written: "See Book of Discharges, page 313."

Rose hastily turned to this reference, and read,—"Discharge No. 31. Oct. 20. Mary Emily Gordon. Transferred to the care of Colonel Emile Du Valcourt and his wife, who positively declined inspecting the records, and preferred to know nothing whatever of the origin of the child." Underneath was written: "This child was subsequently rebaptized Ninette Du Valcourt, and adopted by regular process of law."

Rose Villemaine copied these records with rapid and trembling hand, and put the paper in her pocket.

Passing out of the room, she encountered the mother superior. "Did you find what you were looking for, my child?"

"I did, mother; many thanks for your kindness."

"Your researches among the old records seem to have excited you considerably," said the good woman, studious of faces.

"They were very interesting," said Rose, hurrying away.

Whoever examines the regulations of that asylum at the present day will discover that it receives no children under nine years of age, and admits no person of African descent.

Rose Villemaine was so amazed and, it must be said, so delighted by her terrible discovery, that she drew down her veil and hastened home, afraid that some one might detect her great excitement. Passing Ninette in the hall, she bestowed upon her a smile of unusual sweetness. When she had locked the door of her own room behind her, she exclaimed, with a clinched hand and a beaming countenance,—

"This is dynamite!"

Ninette Du Valcourt dreamed that night that she was moving along a beautiful woodland path overhung with vines and flowers. Suddenly she discovered an immense spider's web stretched entirely across the way. A huge black spider sat in the centre of it, and, on closer inspection, Ninette perceived, with horror, that the monstrous insect had the head and face of Rose Villemaine.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD FRENCHMAN'S STORY.

WHEN Hugh Stanford had shaken hands with Dr. Hypolite Meissonier at his door, he repaired at once to Cora Morette's office, anxious to act upon the learned magnetizer's suggestion, to plunge the medium in the trance state into a second and deeper trance, so as to secure a more vivid impression of the most remote events and objects.

Before Cora was hypnotized she received him with her usual stolid indifference, but so soon as she passed into the interior condition she seemed like a new person, animated by new feelings. She remembered every incident of the former *séance*, and manifested the liveliest interest in her visitor and his undertaking.

As soon as she took his hand in hers she exclaimed, with some little agitation,—

"The last person you shook hands with is your enemy: you have inspired him with fear and anger."

"How could I, a perfect stranger, affect him in that way?"

"Your life-current has run counter to his. In some way you have awakened his past, and he regards you with distrust and enmity. He is cowardly, and all cowards are cruel. Keep out of his way."

"Can you see that person as I now see him in my mind's eye?"

"Certainly I see him, just as you do." And she proceeded to describe Dr. Hypolite Meissonier in a very minute and correct manner.

Suddenly she exclaimed, with trepidation, "Do you not see, sir, that this last person you have brought me greatly resembles the intimate friend of Gordon Clarke? He is older, browner, sterner; but the outline, the features, the large hands out of proportion to the face, are the same. This new enemy of yours is the young doctor twenty years after."

Hugh Stanford was profoundly affected. "Is it possible," he said to himself, "that I have thus, accidentally as it were, stumbled upon the murderer of Gordon Clarke?"

His common sense immediately reproached him for his precipitate conclusion. Nothing had been really discovered or gained. Cora Morette had suggested the identity of Meissonier and the friend who visited Gordon Clarke in the old Hôtel des Étrangers, and nothing more. It had never been proven that any murder had been committed. Not a shadow of proof had been found to substantiate his hypothesis that the young doctor committed it. Evidently he had to go deeper.

He now suggested to the young druggist who operated for Cora to renew his mesmeric passes and throw her into a still deeper trance. At first he protested against it, not knowing, he said, what effect such an unusual proceeding would have upon the frame of such a sensitive and delicate woman. He was finally per-

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suaded to make the experiment, and the result was surprising.

Cora Morette seemed to be a still different woman, to have evolved a third personality. Her voice and manner were changed. She was more cultivated, more astute, more communicative, and displayed deeper insight and more vivid impressions. These strange effects of a trance within a trance, then almost unknown, have since (1890) been fully verified by the experiments of the French psychologists.

She read Gordon Clarke's thoughts at the time of writing the last letter to his brother, perceived the pleasure he anticipated in rejoining his old friends, saw his determination to establish himself in some great commercial business in New York, even looked backward and read his memory of the death-bed of his wife and all the harrowing scenes connected with it.

"That's yellow fever," she exclaimed; "I know it. See! the old dead gold of the face, the bleeding of the gums, the stains of black vomit on the gown; the muttering, the tossing of the arms. Horrible!"

When her attention was directed to the young doctor as Clarke's best friend, she said,—

"Yes—friend! such friend as the wolf is to the lamb it is about to devour. What a cunning, sensual, cruel fellow! His thoughts are fixed upon those trunks of Mr. Clarke. There's an immense sum of money in those trunks. That man has robbery on his mind,—but how to perpetrate it without the risk of discovery!

"I heard him whisper to his beautiful wife, 'I'll make away with Clarke while you make away with the child.' I see the she-wolf fawning upon the lamb! Monstrous!

"I now hear the young doctor say, 'Come, Clarke, let us take a stroll.'

"It is night; it is bedtime. They walk the streets; both are tired. Clarke says, 'Let us go home to the child.' The doctor replies, 'Oh, she is sound asleep by this time, and Lucia is watching over her. Let us go in here and get some ice-cream.'

"A curious little oyster-saloon! What a queer old Frenchman! and a splendid parrot in a great gilded cage; a fine talker. That Frenchman knows a great deal about the very things you want to know. You must find that man."

"How can I find him?" said Stanford; "he is probably dead or moved away."

"No," said Cora; "I cannot explain to you how I know it, but I tell you he is living and in the same place, and so is the parrot."

"Where is the place?" he asked, eagerly.

But Cora was silent. A great and sudden change had come over her. She stared into vacancy like one witnessing a terrible scene. Her countenance was sad and anxious. Her breathing was heavy. She seemed suffocated.

Stanford questioned her anxiously about what she saw and heard, for he felt confident that her inner sight had penetrated to the very heart of the mystery, but she gave no answer. On the very threshold of the great discovery the door was suddenly shut in his face.

In fact, Cora Morette looked almost like a dying woman. She was in a cold, clammy perspiration, and her heart beat feebly.

"It is useless to question her," said the operator. "When she is plunged into these very deep trances, and sees distressing things, especially if they compromise others, Cora remains absolutely silent. See! I must relieve her from this dangerous strain upon her nervous system."

He opened her eyelids and blew forcibly upon her eyeballs. He then made the upward mesmeric passes, exclaiming, in a strong, cheerful voice, "It is all right! all right! Now you are yourself again!"

Natural respiration returned; the skin became warmer; Cora opened her eyes and looked languidly around. She then said, with a faint smile,—

"You must have sent me to an immense distance, I feel so exhausted."

In a moment or two, however, Stanford and the operator observed that Cora Morette was not in her natural condition, but was still in the first trance state, talking about Stanford's newly-made enemy and unconscious of external objects. A renewal of the mesmeric passes restored her to her normal state, in which she remembered nothing at all of her interior impressions. Singular it was, but on coming into her ordinary condition she made use of the same words,—

"You must have sent me to an immense distance, I feel so exhausted."

Profoundly impressed with this interview, Stanford hurried forth, immediately to begin his search for the old Frenchman and his parrot. He remembered his own supposition in the hypothesis he had laid before

Mr. Ephraim Clarke, that the stranger found dead in the oyster-saloon not far from the Hôtel des Étrangers was his brother Gordon. What if this old Frenchman to whom Cora had directed him was the very man who kept the saloon when the supposed tragedy occurred in it! If he could find this man, he might possibly obtain some positive, tangible, legal evidence which would connect Meissonier with the murder which he felt sure had been committed.

He entered Chartres Street, and explored the front of every store with anxious, inquisitive eyes. Everything seemed *à la Française*, quite unlike the same kind of establishments in the American quarter. He passed that curious bird-store where not only birds of all kinds, but the strangest fowls that were ever seen, guinea-pigs, rabbits, monkeys, and even alligators are kept on sale. He passed milliner-shops which displayed such curious and beautiful things in the windows, so un-American, that he could scarcely believe he was not in Paris. The people moving about seemed to him to have foreign faces, and on all sides his ear caught the musical tones of the French language.

He suddenly felt a thrill of pleasurable excitement, for his eye caught sight of a large hanging cage which contained an old, frowsy, faded, sleepy-looking parrot. Glancing into the door-way, he saw that the place was a little restaurant or saloon, with a counter on one side with the usual array of shelves and bottles behind it, and a row of stalls on the other side, each with a long red curtain hanging before it. He stepped into the little establishment for further exploration.

A diminutive, wrinkled, sallow, black-eyed old fellow came forward, with a red velvet skull-cap on his head and a white napkin across his left arm.

"Enter, monsieur," he said, in broken English. "Wad shall I geef you?"

"Nothing to eat at present," said Stanford; "I am in search of information."

"Eh?"

"How long have you lived in this house?"

"Since ten year 'fo' de war."

"That is good. It happened within that time."

"Wad ees happen? Happen here?"

"A stranger was found dead in some saloon upon this street one night in June, 1865,—just after the war. Do you remember the incident?"

"Rememb'? mee? Ah, *mon Dieu!* Joos lig' las' night. Forgeet it nevaire!"

"Will you have the kindness to tell me the story?"

"*Certainement*, monsieur. Seat yourse'f." They sat down on the chairs at the far end of the counter. "You no speak Franche?—no?"

"Not well enough for this purpose."

"*Eh bien!* I speak much bad Angleesh, me! I meex my Franche and my Angleesh many time."

"Never mind. I shall comprehend you very well."

"De two stranger, *vous savez*," he began, "were stay at de hotel cloze by, and dey come tree, four time in my lill' shop for ize-cream. It made ver' warm, and ze oyster was no more eat. Ah, monsieur, we haf oysters *superbe* in dese water here. You know dad?"

Stanford readily acquiesced by an affirmative nod in the truth of this interested statement, and the little Frenchman continued:

"One night dese men come in late. I was by myse'f, me. Dey went into *cette* stall *la!* nummer 6. I lite de gaz. De tall young man, de utter man call him *le docteur*, he follow me back to de counter, and he command two ize-cream. Den he wheesper to me, hees tum point over hees shoulder to de stall, 'My fren' ees drhonk.'

"I was *étonné*, me. Hees fren' no seem to me drhonk! *Eh bien*, I serve dem, and I go and seet at de door by myse'f.

"Dey make many noise in de street dad night. By and by I hear move in de stall lig' dey was shove de chair to go. When I was come cloze at de stall, de tall docteur he poke hees head out from de curtain, and he say, sharp, queek, 'We want nut'in' more at present.' So I go back at my door, me.

"In five or ten minutes de docteur he come out by he'se'f, and he pay for de creams. Den he put one dollar in my han', and he say, lig' wheesper, 'My drhonken fren' is 'sleep. Doan you wake heem. Let him sleep one, two hour. I will come at your shop and take heem home.'

"When de docteur was *parti*, I go at de stall, eesy, creep lig' cat, to look at de drhonken man. I said to myse'f, 'He got dhronk mightee queek!' De docteur had turned down de gaz low, make hees fren' sleep good. I push de curtains to one side. I smell sump'en funny. I din' put peach-leaves in my creams, no! *Eh bien*, I see de drhonken man in one corner, lean up at de wall, wid hees hat mash down over hees eye. 'Sleep or drhonk, or *peut-être* bofe,' says I.

"I no lig' dad in my lill' shop. I no lig' sleep here; I no lig' drhonk here; but de one dollar make me silence. Ah, monsieur, I had wrong; I wish many time I had refuse.

"*Eh bien!* I go back at de door. Nobody come. I talk to my Pollee. Ah, dad Pollee talk good when he was young: he is silence now. I see one beeg torch-light procession of nager go by. Dose nager were much happee for deir freedom. Dey make many noise: dey was fool happee. A nager is nevaire more happee den in one procession or one funeraille wid some museek and one beeg flag. Doan you know dad? Eh?"

Stanford confessed that he was not aware of such an African characteristic. Having reasserted the fact and charged his visitor to look out for it in future, the old fellow continued:

"Two more partee came in for ize-cream. I serve dem in dose stall, *la!* two and four.

"*Mais,*" he said, suddenly returning to his last train of thought, "doze nager, dey so lazee and dey so much lig' museek, dey god all de han'-organ 'way from de Italiennes. Ha! ha!"

"Do they train the monkeys as well as the Italians did?" said Stanford.

"No, no!" said he, laughing and shrugging his shoulders. "No, no; Monsieur le nègre will not touch Monsieur le Monkee. No, no. He haf not much love for hees near relation."

Stanford gratified the old man with a little smile at his malicious sally, and said, "Now, please go on with your story, which is becoming intensely interesting to me."

"*Eh bien!* It came midnight. *Il me faut* shut up my lill' shop. I peep into de stall nummer 6. De dhronken man was *précisément* in same position,—lean' up at de wall, hat mash over hees eye. He sleep good! I walk at my door, and I look up and down de street for de tall docteur, but he no come." And, throwing up his eyes and both hands, he added, "He nevaire come!

"*En fin, vous savez,* I lose my patience, me. I go at de stall. I had put out all de light but one, and it made some dark. I say to myse'f, 'Dees man must go out. Dad one dollar doan pay no more.' I call heem two, tree time, loud. I shook him hard; but no, he stay all de same. I feel hees han'. 'Twas ice! *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* He was cold and dead. I spring oud dad stall lig' one live alligator was on de bench. Oh, it made me much fear!"

"What did you do then?" said Stanford.

"I rush at de door. I call, 'Police! police!' One crowd of peop' come soon. Dee police run in and drive dem all oud. Dey bring one coroner,—you call heem?—and dey hole one eenques'. Verdeek—'Dead by congestion of hees brain from drhinking and from heat excessif.' De eenques' was all right, but de verdeek? was dad right? 'May be so! May be not!

"No monnaie was by dad man, joos one-half dollar; no watch, no papers. He look too *gentil* for dad. No docteur come for heem, no fren', and—ah, *mon Dieu!* —no confession, no absolution, no mass for hees soul! He was bury in one pine coffin wid de pauper. Sump'en was wrong in dad beesness. Doan you thing so? Eh?"

"Yes, there must have been something terribly wrong about it," said Stanford, looking into the little stall where he believed Gordon Clarke had met his mysterious death.

"Did you tell all this," said he, "to the gentleman who called several weeks afterwards to inquire into the matter?"

"Ah, monsieur! I was not here. I had gone to see my poor *mère*, who was lef' at Rouen ten years 'fo' de war. I was crazzie to go at my *belle France* one time more. One agent, he keep my lill' shop. Ah, 'tis hard time, dese: no more good time lig' 'fo' de war."

"Why not?" said Stanford, curious to know what idea, if any, this poor Frenchman had of the economic problem.

"*Vous savez*," said he, "de nager and de Yankee meex make one bad, bad *gouvernement*, and de Democrat, dey learn all de treeks, and dey din' do no better when dey god power.

"Lemme tell you sump'en strange, *bien étrange*," he said, suddenly, "about dad parrot, dad old Pollee in de cage. You will not beleef. *C'est impossible.*"

Stanford desired him to put his credulity to the test.

"*Eh bien!* Dad bird emeetate fine. He is moze human. Eef de firemen run by, he flop hees wings and he scream 'Fire! fire!' lig' a lill' boy! If one man pass at de door, and he say loud, 'O you fool!' to his frien', dad ole parrot will say, 'fool, fool, fool!' all de day. He peek up some bad words dad way many time, and dad make me trow some water in hees face.

"*Écoutez, monsieur!* De night dad poor man was lay on the floor for de eenques', de Pollee was *très-excité*.

He make noise, he flap hees wing, he scream. Nobody lissen. He say, 'Clarke! Clarke!' first hoarse in hees trote; nex' time more loud, 'Clarke! Clarke!' Nobody lissen. He geet mad: he scream, 'Clarke! Clarke! Clarke!' 'till I trow some water in hees face to make heem silence.

"*Oui, monsieur! c'est vrai:* every day till we lef' to go at France, poor Pollee would say, 'Clarke! Clarke!' I said, 'Wad make Pòllee do dese strange way? Wad he mean by dad word?' When we come back from France the peop' tell us how de Mister Clarke was look all about here for his lost brotter! You thing dad man might be name Clarke? Pollee might hear his fren', de docteur, call him so. Doan you thing? I beleef it, me."

"I believe you are right in your conjecture," said Stanford, remembering how the intelligent cry of the cranes had brought the appalled murderers of Ibycus to confession and justice. "But answer me one more question: did you ever see the young doctor again?"

"Yez and no, bofe!" he answered, with a quizzical expression.

"What do you mean by that contradiction?"

"I mean dad I say, 'Yez, I have seen heem, me;' *mais le docteur*, he says, 'No, no, you have not seen him.'

"For long, long time, I nevaire see Monsieur le Docteur. I had forgeet him. One day one docteur open hees office on Rue St. Louis. I watch heem some time. I say to myse'f, 'I know dad man, but where did I see heem?' At las' one day, sudden, I recognize him as de fren' of de man who died in my saloon. He was more large, more rough, more dark skin, hees voice more stern; but I know heem! His beeg nose, his beeg, black eyes, his height,—mos' Creole man is small,—his broad hands, and his gestures, all tell me I have reason.

"One time I stop heem on de street and I ask heem if he no rememb' dad his fren' died in my lill' shop. He made beeg, beeg eyes at me: he was mad lig' one savage. He say, loud, loud, 'No, no! monsieur, *vous vous trompez.*'"

As Stanford said nothing, the garrulous old Frenchman continued:

"Dad is one strange man,—dad Docteur Hypolite Meissonier. He goes to de dog or to de diable, *bien vite.* I know dad, me.

"I have much fear to meet dad man. When I am by myse'f, *seule*, I thing it all over, and I know he lies, and dad he is de same docteur. But when he feex hees beeg, beeg, black eyes on me, I feel much shame, and dad *il faut* apologize for make some mistake."

Stanford concealed from the old Frenchman the immense satisfaction the conversation had given him, thanked him for his information, and hurried off to lay his discoveries before Denfield and Holden.

"This is the first genuine clue," said the lawyer, "which you have obtained towards the solution of your mystery. The old Frenchman is a living witness, whose evidence in connection with other things may be of great importance. Cora's visions may be ruled out of the case."

"Without Cora," said Stanford, "I would never have suspected Meissonier or discovered the old Frenchman."

"I dare say," remarked the doctor, looking at Stanford, "that Mr. Denfield thinks that Cora's detection of Meissonier's antipathy to you, on touching your hand, was altogether incredible. Such things are common in psychometric experiences. Rev. C. H. Townsend, in a letter to Dr. Elliotson, of London, relates this well-authenticated story:

"A distinguished physician comes in to see his patient, a little behind the expected time. She is prostrated with typhoid fever, but is perfectly rational. He takes her offered hand in his usual sympathetic way. She instantly drops it, exclaiming in a distressed manner, 'Oh, that poor little boy! Why did you cut his head open, doctor? Oh! the blood upon your hands! How is he now?' The doctor had just come from trepanning a little boy on account of a fall upon his head. No person in the house had heard of the accident or the operation, but when the patient took hold of the doctor's hand she entered at once into a knowledge of the circumstances. In fact, she simply saw the images which had been impressed upon the doctor's mind."

"What do you think, doctor," said Stanford, "of that strange condition of Cora when she seemed to be nearly dead, and would make no response to any of my questions?"

"I believe she was witnessing the minutest scenes of Gordon Clarke's murder just as they really occurred. I am reminded here of the wonderful experiences of Zschokke, the great and good German sensitive. Looking at people, he could see some event of their lives represented before him as a living, moving drama. It was not only thought-reading, it was memory-reading, a visual perception of a duly-connected crowd of images stored up in the memory of men. This faculty, indeed all faculties, exist latent in us all. It appeared in Zschokke spontaneously in the waking state. It was produced in the typhoid patient by morbid processes in the nervous system. It was developed in Cora by the hypnotic condition. It is susceptible of progressive cultivation. You will evolve the whole secret by and by, detect the murderer, and discover the child."

"I am sure of it," said Stanford, exultingly.

These two friends then entered upon a free interchange of thought about spiritualism, psychometry, theosophy, Swedenborg, mind-cure, homœopathy, and the occult forces of nature. Denfield listened incredulously as usual, but before they parted he was obliged to confess to himself, with a touch of shame, that, like many other prejudiced people, he had often expressed opinions upon great subjects of which he really knew little or nothing.

CHAPTER VIII.

PREPARATIONS.

While Rose Villemaine was arranging her dynamite in the little mine she intended to spring upon Ninette Du Valcourt, the adroit young lawyer on Carondelet Street had set a trap for some other parties connected with this story.

Madame Lucia Meissonier, having just finished her breakfast, remained still at the table reading the New Orleans *Picayune.* Her husband sat by the window smoking his cigar in a state of profound abstraction. The lady was attired in a rose-colored morning wrapper, embroidered with gold thread and delicately trimmed with lace. She had soft brown eyes, wavy black hair, and an exquisite rose-and-gold brunette complexion. Her voice was pleasing, a little oversweet if anything, and her manners were soft and fascinating. A very beautiful woman at sixteen is still beautiful at thirty-six, especially if, like Madame Lucia, she has never borne children.

This charming reader of the *Picayune,* feeling, like most ladies, a deeper interest in private than in public affairs, had eschewed the editorials and heavy articles, devoured the marriages and deaths, ran her eye along the columns for murders, elopements, robberies, and suicides, and had just settled with zeal upon the new advertisements.

She suddenly clapped her hands in girlish glee, and called out joyously to her husband,—

"Hypolite! Hypolite! look here. What a bonanza for us! What a fortune! What a magnificent opportunity!"

"What is it, *ma belle petite?*" growled the doctor; "are you crazy?"

"Listen!" she answered, with a radiant smile.

"'$50,000 REWARD! A child two years old was lost or stolen in New Orleans in June, 1865. Her name was Mary Gilford Clarke. The above reward will be paid for the discovery and identification of this person. Apply to George Denfield, Attorney-at-Law, Denegre Building, 33 and 35 Carondelet Street, New Orleans.'

"What do you think of that?" said Lucia, looking up to her husband's face. But in a moment she exclaimed, anxiously, "Meissonier, what is the matter with you?"

The doctor's countenance expressed the utmost concern, amounting almost to dismay.

"Bonanza indeed!" he muttered, between his teeth. "It is more like the knell of doom."

"What upon earth do you mean?" said the woman, impatiently.

"I connect this advertisement with the visit of that Chicago man to New Orleans, with an old letter and a lock of hair, to find out what became of Gordon Clarke and his child."

"Well, I see in that no reason for fear."

"Are you so stupid, Lucia, as not to infer that the parties who offer fifty thousand dollars for the discovery of the child are not also busying themselves to find traces of the murderer of the father?"

"Let them search! Their work is chimerical. The facts are positively beyond the reach of detection."

"I wish I could feel so, but there is a subtle, unconquerable fear in my heart, a deep and dark foreboding of evil, which I cannot shake off. Let us keep perfectly quiet, not speak nor move, until the storm blows over and we are safe."

"Preposterous!" said the woman, almost fiercely. "On the contrary, let us come boldly forward, produce the child, and claim the reward."

"Are you mad, Lucia? Where did you train to go into lion's cages?"

"My father," said the wife, haughtily, "was a Spanish matador, and the bravest bull-fighter in Madrid. My mother was a French ballet-dancer who captivated mechanics and emperors. I inherit something of their dash and spirit. It is often the best thing to do, to beard the lion in his den."

"Inimitable woman!" said the doctor, his face brightening up with admiration of his beautiful partner. "You led me to fortune once through a difficult and dangerous way——"

"And will lead you to another, only half as large, but imperatively necessary to us in our present condition."

"You spoke of producing the child," said the doctor, suddenly dropping into a despairing tone. "What folly! Who knows anything of the child?"

"Have you no wit, Hypolite, no cunning, no power of invention? Why bother ourselves about the child?

We hold in our hands relics of the little girl and of her mother, positive proofs, which will substantiate the claims of any young woman we may designate as Gordon Clarke's daughter."

"Any young woman?"

"Of course, Monsieur Hypolite Stupid! The child not being discoverable, we must produce a substitute."

"A substitute! Have you reflected upon the difficulties, the dangers, the impossibility of such a scheme?"

"They are all imaginary," said the charmer, with a graceful wave of her hand, "all imaginary. In a week's time I will have a plan arranged and perfected, so that even your fears will vanish at its obvious practicability."

"But, mark you," said the doctor, in a low, grave tone, "I am not to be seen nor heard in the matter. I must remain absolutely in the dark, unknown, unsuspected."

"Agreed," said his wife, with a smile. "I will monopolize the risk and the glory. And then," she added, advancing upon him coquettishly, "I will give you all the money."

"Inimitable woman! *ma belle rose!*" cried the doctor, as he folded the subtle creature in his arms.

A few days after the inception of this conspiracy, Mr. George Denfield, happening to go to his office a little earlier than usual, found a visitor waiting in the anteroom. Jim, the office-boy, with a very red head, freckled face, and turned-up nose, was quietly keeping his eye upon him, for he had an intuition that, as he expressed it, "this customer needs watching."

The customer was a tall, sallow-faced man, rather shabbily dressed, with a long, bushy, iron-gray beard, green goggles, and a black felt hat well pushed down upon his forehead. He advanced awkwardly towards Denfield, and, without a word of introduction, held out a paper in one hand and pointed to an advertisement in it with a finger of the other.

"Does this mean business?" he said, in a low tone.

"Why do you ask such a question?" said the lawyer.

"There are so many ruses, tricks, and traps, that plain, honest folks don't know what to believe."

"Do you suppose," said Denfield, sternly, "that I would lend my name to anything illegal or unfair?"

"I know nothing of your name," said the other, gruffly. "I want to learn if you really have fifty thousand dollars to pay the person who produces Mary Gilford Clarke and identifies her to your satisfaction."

"I am authorized to draw a check for that amount so soon as the young woman is produced and identified."

"It is the largest reward ever offered in the world," said the visitor, suspiciously.

"The man who offers it is worth ten millions. The sum is only the two-hundredth part of his fortune. Your payment is absolutely certain."

"Oh, I have no interest whatever in the matter," said the tall man, rather quickly. "I have a lady friend, a neighbor, who picked up a child of that name, of that age, and at that very time. The grown-up woman is living in this city, and my friend will produce her on assurance that this is a *bona fide* transaction, the very largeness of the reward having made her doubt it."

"Will you give the name and address of your friend."

"Mrs. Lucia Maspero. She will call upon you in person at any time you may designate."

"Next Thursday morning at ten o'clock," said the lawyer, "I will give her an interview. "Now, sir, your own name and address, if you please."

"Pierre Gentilly," said the visitor, and then slowly added, "125 Locust Street. You do not need my address, for, I assure you, I shall take no further part in the business." He then nodded behind his green goggles and withdrew.

"Jim," said Mr. Denfield, quickly, to the office-boy, who had been all ear to this interview, without having seemed to notice anything,—"Jim, step down the back way, follow that man without attracting notice, report where he goes to, and who lives at 125 Locust Street. Here's a dollar for you."

Jim darted away as only swallows, small boys, and chicken-hawks can dart.

"I suspect that fellow was disguised," said Denfield, softly, to himself.

Jim was absent about two hours, but he executed his commission to the letter. He spotted the green goggles to 980 Esplanade Street, away out by the race-track. The man entered a little cottage which was concealed from the street by a very high green fence, over which one could see the red clusters of the crape-myrtle trees. He asked at the first corner grocery who lived there, and was answered, "Old Madame Fortier." He then found his way to the remote locality penetrated by Locust Street, and discovered, to use his own expression, that "125 was a vacant, fenced-in lot, and nobody lived there but a cow and calf."

Hugh Stanford had not been in New Orleans more than a month before he discovered that he had two missions to fulfil,—one, of an ephemeral although important nature, for Mr. Ephraim Clarke; the other for himself, of a sacred and eternal character. There is no need to put too mystical a point upon it or to paraphrase it in flowery language. He was desperately in love with Ninette Du Valcourt, a fact he no longer endeavored to hide from himself, and which indeed he found it very difficult to conceal from other people.

He had very little opportunity, owing to the restraints of Creole society, to tell his love in the gushing, impetuous manner which his own feelings perpetually tempted him to adopt. Yet such is the subtile magnetic rapport between lovers that he was agreeably conscious that the tender tones of his voice and the admiring glances of his eye were understood, appreciated, and accepted by the charming woman who enacted the part of supreme ignorance in the matter.

Determined to obtain freer access to the object of his affections, he availed himself of a good Creole custom, not unknown elsewhere, and proceeded to lay his case before her highly-esteemed father. He therefore solicited a special interview, and he repaired by appointment at a certain hour to Colonel Du Valcourt's office. He was well fortified with letters and documents which established the respectability of his family, his own high character for integrity and capacity, and the very important fact that he was in good circumstances and engaged in lucrative business. He then asked

Colonel Du Valcourt's permission to pay court to his daughter.

"Your own appearance, conversation, and manners," said the ruddy old gentleman, with easy politeness, "make these formalities quite unnecessary to me. You are at liberty, sir, to make your advances and declarations in your own time and manner. I have perfect confidence in you and a growing affection for you, and I shall not hesitate to trust my daughter's happiness into your hands whenever she shall signify her consent.

"Of one thing, however," he continued, "it is my duty to apprise you. Ninette is not our own child, but was adopted by us when she was barely out of her infancy."

"I have already learned that fact, sir," said Stanford, "from mutual friends."

"As to her parentage——" began Du Valcourt.

"It is unnecessary, sir, to enter into that question. I shall seek Miss Du Valcourt at my own valuation of her, and it is enough for me to know that she has been reared from infancy in your own family and under your influences."

Colonel Du Valcourt now touched his bell and called for a bottle of champagne, which was brought in by his old army-servant, Mingo, and served in handsome style. The success of Stanford's double enterprises was drunk by the colonel, the health and happiness of the Du Valcourt family was pledged by Stanford, and an additional bumper was consecrated to the perpetual Union of the States and of all true lovers, North and South.

"Now, Mingo," said the colonel, with an arch smile, "tell Mr. Stanford how you came to run away at the battle of Antietam."

"Now, Mars' Emile," said Mingo, deprecatingly,—if any other colored gentleman had been present, Mingo would have called his employer Colonel Du Valcourt; when only white people were about, he usually said "Mars' Emile,"—"Now, Mars' Emile, you always joke me bout dat little accident."

"What accident?" said Stanford.

"You see," said Mingo, who always enjoyed telling the story, "you see, Mars' Emile he went on wid de boys to de front ob de battle, and he lef' me behind in de tent dar to fry him a big chicken which I had cotch; for, says he, 'I'll be monsus hungry, Mingo, when I come back.' Dat's what he said.

"Well, sir, dey was making such a noise and a racket wid dar guns and dar cannons close by, dat, for a fac', I coulden' hardly see how to fry dat chicken. But I got him fried for all dat, de puttiest you ever seed, I did; and jes' as I was taking him up to keep him from getting burnt, here come one of dem great big bumbs a whizzin' and a zizzin' as it come, and it lit right down on dat tent and it went froo into de groun', and it bust, sir, it did, and it blowed dat tent and everything in it into dust and ashes, for a fac'!"

Mingo threw his hands and arms wildly into the air, and then added, with a comical leer, "And what you reckon, sir, somebody picked up 'bout forty foot off?"

"What was it, Mingo?"

"It was dis nigger, for a fac'!"

There was a pause.

"Well, Mingo, go on," said the colonel; "tell the rest of it."

"Dat's all," said Mingo, emphatically.

"No, it was not all," said the colonel. "You took to your heels; you pitched into the woods; nothing could stop you."

"What was de use, Mars' Emile, ob me staying dar in de ashes, when I didn' had no chicken to fry? How you know I didn' go in dem woods to fin' you anudder chicken, or to catch a rabbit for you, or sump'in?"

"Fiddlesticks, Mingo!" said the colonel; "you ran away like a race-horse, and we didn't catch up with you until the next day, ten miles off!"

"And you wouldn't 'a' cotch up wid me den," said Mingo, with a broad grin, "if de Yankees hadn't er made you run dat night faster den I did."

"That's a fact," said the colonel; "the laugh has got over to your side. We are even now. Drink the rest of that champagne, Mingo, to the repose of John Brown's soul."

So the preparations go on. The Meissoniers are preparing for their cunning raid upon Ephraim Clarke's treasury. Rose Villemaine is preparing her dynamite for the social destruction of her friend. Hugh Stanford is preparing to make his declarations to Ninette Du Valcourt. Ninette Du Valcourt is preparing the last throw of the fairy-net which shall land the dallying victim at her feet. Destiny, invisible, regardless of human hopes or fears, is preparing incredible surprises for them all.

CHAPTER IX.

MODERN MAGIC.

We must now penetrate into Dr. Hypolite Meissonier's upper room, above his electro-magnetic offices into his chamber of mysteries, where he held his hypnotic *séances*, and wove at will the dark threads of cunning thought into the web of human lives.

It was a heavily-carpeted room of moderate size. The carpet, the papering, the curtains, the furniture, were all in dark colors, black and red and old gold. A large antique bookcase with closed doors occupied nearly the whole space against one wall. The figure of an immense brown owl was perched upon its top. There were two windows on the side fronting the street, with panes of stained glass, through which a dim and strangely mutilated light struggled into the room. On the black marble mantel were two finely executed figures bound together by a bronze chain. They were called Sleep and his brother Death. On a small centre-table, supported on gilded panther's feet and covered by a blood-red cloth, lay a single article,—the small, polished, ivory-colored skull of a child. Near it was a curiously covered chair, heavily cushioned and tilted back, in which the hypnotic victims were placed for experiment. A large, very wide sofa stood in the corner. The whole atmosphere of the place was calculated to plunge one into a delicious languor or a magical sleep.

It was the middle hour of the morning, when Dr. Meissonier was always out visiting his patients. It was a very bright day, but the chamber of mysteries was densely shaded. The curtains were so drawn that objects were scarcely visible. The hypnotic chair was unoccupied. On the sofa in the corner two human figures were vaguely outlined. They were Hilary Dupont and Lucia Meissonier. He was hypnotized; she was the hypnotizer. She was the magician; he the victim.

"You love me, and you love me only," commanded the woman.

"I love you, and I love you only," echoed the man.

"You will remember nothing whatever of what we have said and done," commanded the magician.

"I will remember nothing whatever of what we have said and done," responded the victim.

At that moment the acute ear of the woman caught the sound of her own name echoing in some other chamber of the house. She sprang to her feet, commanded Hilary into the hypnotic chair, drew back the bolts, raised the curtains, and took a little bundle from the drawer of a chiffonnière; and, when Meissonier threw open the door with violence, she was standing before her subject in full light, questioning him coolly about the child.

"Thousand devils!" cried the doctor, in a tone of fury, "what are you doing in here with Hilary Dupont?"

"Speak respectfully to me, sir, or not at all," said the woman, proudly, the spirit of the old bull-fighter flashing in the eyes of his daughter.

"Pardon me, Lucia," exclaimed the doctor, taking in what he conceived to be the situation, "pardon me; I have done you injustice."

"Now you are yourself again," responded the siren, the wiles of the ballet-dancer sporting about the lips of her child.

"You see," she said, "I have been exhibiting these little articles of dress which belonged to Mary Clarke, and trying to get Hilary to trace the child."

"You labor in vain," said Meissonier. "I understand Dupont thoroughly. He has no organic aptitude for this work. He is a good clairvoyant for short distances and the present time, but he is incapable of going away back and reviving images which have been nearly obliterated. For that delicate and yet powerful faculty, Cora Morette exceeds all others."

"But we cannot go out of the family without incurring danger or exciting suspicion."

"True, and least of all to Cora Morette, who might read our own thoughts and expose us. Besides, I am sure she is working in the interest of that dangerous Chicago detective who is endeavoring to get upon our trail.

"That reminds me," he said; and, coming up to Hilary Dupont, he threw upon him some powerful mesmeric passes, that developed the trance within a trance upon him. He suddenly struck the young man forcibly on the shoulder, and shouted in his ear,—

"See that black bull-dog bounding towards you. Look out for your legs! You can't budge an inch, and he will gnaw them into mince-meat."

The poor fellow groaned faintly and struggled to move his feet, but in vain, while a clammy perspiration broke out on his face.

The doctor turned to his wife, who had watched his proceedings with evident disgust.

"I came home thus early in order to tell you that I have found a woman who will make a splendid substitute for Gordon Clarke's child."

"Indeed?"

"Do you remember a young person named Lilly Montrose, over whom I once obtained a profound mesmeric control?"

"I do," said the lady, with a sudden lightening in her eyes, "and she did you no credit. You remember, perhaps, that I forbade her the house."

"*N'importe!*" said the doctor, coolly shrugging his shoulders; "you will invite her to the house again. She is worth fifty thousand dollars to us now. She is at present acting leading parts at the Oriental Varieties. She is intelligent, self-possessed, and a wonderful mimic. She has just the right age and appearance. With your instructions she can personate the lost child to perfection. Let us baptize her Mary Gilford Clarke and restore her to her anxious friends and relatives! Ha! ha! All parties will be made happier and some of us richer by the transaction."

"Have you spoken to her on the subject?"

"Of course not. I am to remain absolutely invisible in this whole affair. It is your own scheme and your own business. I am merely giving you a friendly suggestion for carrying it out."

"Thank you. I will see Miss Montrose this very day."

Turning suddenly to Hilary Dupont, who had been all this time moaning, perspiring, and struggling to move his limbs, Mrs. Meissonier angrily exclaimed,—

"Hypolite! What a monster of cruelty you are! Poor Hilary has been lying here all this time with your horrible illusion of the black dog fastened upon him!"

"It is only an illusion," sneered the doctor.

"But you know it is real to him, and he suffers just as intensely as if the thing suggested was being done."

"Let him suffer!" exclaimed the doctor, rudely pushing his wife aside when she attempted to make the contrary passes which cast off the mesmeric influence. "Let him suffer! You are too sweet upon this young fellow, anyhow."

"Hypolite! Hypolite!" said the madame, in a reproachful tone. Then added, between her teeth, "Cruel, cruel."

"You are just as cruel as I am when it suits your purpose," said the doctor, sternly. "I have an object in view in this matter, and you had as well understand it at once. I dominate this young man absolutely, soul, body, and spirit."

"Yes," interrupted the woman, "you have nearly obliterated his personality. He is growing more and more stupid, patient, and imbecile. He will soon have no spontaneity of thought or action."

"Exactly so," said the doctor. "I command, he obeys. He is my tool, my automaton. I am preparing him for work. So soon as we get the reward for Mary Gilford Clarke,—ha! ha! Lilly Montrose, I mean,—Hilary, under hypnotic suggestion, will stick a knife into that Chicago detective, and arrest any further researches in my direction. Self-preservation is the first law of nature. Hilary alone will suffer the consequences. We have discovered a new fine art, murder by proxy."

"You surely would not immolate this poor, innocent boy in that manner," said Lucia, with a look of horror. "Where is your conscience?"

"I have no conscience. Have you?" and he laughed mockingly in the face of the wretched woman.

"Oh, Hypolite, Hypolite!" said his wife, earnestly, seizing him by the arm, "release this poor wretch from his horrible nightmare."

"Softly, *ma chère brunette*," said the magnetizer. "Let me tell you the use of Hilary's present sufferings. He will remember nothing of them when he awakes. If he did, he would fly from me: he would put the ocean between us. He will not remember, nor will he be afraid of me when he awakes; but far down beneath the reach of his external consciousness I am creating an intense fear of me, a fear which will compel him to obey not only my words but my looks and my unspoken thoughts. I have other people also under as great control."

"Horrible! horrible!" muttered the woman.

"Oh, the thing has a bright side to it also," said the doctor, smiling. A man can hypnotize a woman, and lead her at his own sweet will. He can plant his image so strongly upon her heart that nothing can ever efface it. When husbands learn this divine science, they will reduce their wives to a state of perfect, automatic obedience."

"How about the wives?" said the wife, sullenly.

"Oh, the woman can acquire these sublime powers also. She can hypnotize a man and make him do what she wishes. She can say to him, 'Love me, and love me only,' and, though he will remember nothing of it when awake, he will regard all other women with indifference and would fight and die for this spiritual mistress."

Lucia cast her eyes upon the floor. A faint flush of rosy fire crept along the golden surface of her cheek. Meissonier did not notice it. She slowly lifted her lids and gazed far out of the window.

"Hypolite," she inquired, sadly, without looking at him, "did this cruel nature first develop in you after I persuaded you to enrich ourselves by the murder of Gordon Clarke?"

"Oh, no, *ma belle rose!* the cause of my hard-heartedness and brutality dates farther back than that profitable transaction, which your juvenile genius suggested to me. I was no doubt cunning, cruel, and violent by heredity. There are flashes of these barbaric states in all men. But these qualities were nurtured and developed in the schools of science, in the vivisection-rooms of Paris, when I was a medical student. The slow cuttings, the burnings, the poisonings, the torturings of living, groaning, palpitating animals, those unevolved men and women, shocking and terrible at first, became familiar to us, then excusable, then interesting, and finally, monstrous to relate, even amusing and fascinating! Great God!—if there be a God—how the human soul can become petrified and demonized! justifying itself all the while in the names of science and humanity!"

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Suddenly the man, who had just confessed himself habituated to crime and destitute of conscience, turned to Hilary Dupont, and rapidly demagnetized him from the trance within a trance by a double series of passes, saying to him, "Hilary, awake quietly and comfortably, and you will see and hear nobody in the room," with a gentleness and tenderness of tone of which he had seemed hitherto incapable.

Did he feel some twinges of remorse? or did the angel of his better nature descend invisibly and stir the waters of life?

The victim of these two magicians now slowly opened his eyes and looked languidly around, evidently unaware of the presence of his master and mistress. He stretched himself several times, and muttered, "I feel as if I had been beaten nearly to death. My legs are terribly sore. I must have slept a long time. This business is undermining my health: I am so weak and timid and nervous. I wonder why Mrs. Meissonier left me alone."

He rose from the chair and passed slowly out of the room and down stairs into the office.

"He certainly did not see us," said Mrs. Meissonier.

"No, indeed," said the doctor. "I have rendered people invisible to my subjects for many hours. This invisibility by hypnotic suggestion is an amazing phenomenon. I once hypnotized a shopkeeper who was alone in his store. I hypnotized Hilary Dupont, who was across the street, and made him come over to the store. I rendered him invisible to the shopkeeper, and made him rob all the drawers and put the money in my pocket. I then sent him back across the street and waked him up at the point from which he had started. He never knew he had been in the store or committed the robbery. The shopkeeper had seen nothing of it, and was only conscious of having been conversing with me all the while. He never knew how he lost his money. That is what I call stealing by proxy, one of the fine arts of the future."

"Let us drop that dangerous subject," said his wife, "and discuss the question of Lilly Montrose."

"Not now," said the doctor; "I must hurry to see some patients."

When she thought her lord and master was several squares away, the pretty madame came softly into the office, where Hilary was reading. She stood beside his chair. He looked up timidly at her face. She regarded him with a tender expression.

"*Ah, mon pauvre enfant,*" she said, stroking his long, black hair with her delicate hand. "The doctor is very cruel to you."

"And you are very kind," he responded.

"Yes, I am very kind. Do you remember what the doctor does to you in the *séances?*"

"Nothing whatever, madame."

"Do you never remember what you do in the *séances*, or are commanded to do?"

"Never, madame."

"I am so glad that you do not remember. You would be very unhappy."

"The doctor is very cold and cruel to me also," she added, with a little sigh.

"What a shame! And you so lovely! Ah, madame, you are my *grande consolation!*"

Suddenly the man, who had just confessed himself addicted to crime and destitute of conscience, turned o Hilary Dupont, and rapidly demagnetized him from the trance within a trance by a double series of passes, saying to him, "Hilary, awake quietly and comfortably, and you will see and hear nobody in the room," with a gentleness and tenderness of tone of which he had seemed hitherto incapable.

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She smiled; he rose from his chair; but she evaded his outstretched hand, and ran laughing out of the room.

"*Coquette!*" he exclaimed, "*toujours coquette.*"

"It is a pity," said Dr. Holden to Stanford one day, "that people generally are not better informed about the great advances now being made in psychological science. Such knowledge would protect them from many illusions and impositions."

"Illustrate your meaning," said Stanford.

"An astonished visitor to a spiritual medium says, 'She told me things which were known only to myself and God!' There is nothing wonderful in that. Every thing known to yourself can be known to another who simply takes it from your own mind. The single fact of thought-reading can prick a thousand bubbles of false spiritualism and deliver us from its follies and fantasies.

"Cora Morette prescribed for diseases with considerable accuracy and learning. Outside of her trance condition she was utterly ignorant of all such things. The uninformed and superstitious thought the spirit of some deceased physician prescribed through her. I visited Cora Morette several times and studied her case. It was explained by thought-reading. The young druggist at her side was the unconscious fountain of her medical knowledge. I once took a patient of my own to her, for whom I was prescribing arsenic homœopathically. Cora had never in her life prescribed according to that system, but, when she examined my patient, while I sat by in silence, having the thought reflected from my mind, she said, '*Arsenic en très-petite dose.*'

"Again, an excited mother hears a medium, whom she has never seen before, describe her lost child in the most perfect manner, even to the minutest peculiarity of person and dress. The medium says that she hears the child speak, and delivers a cheering message to the mother, who weeps with joy, thinking she has received a veritable communication from the dead. It is a sheer fallacy, founded upon misunderstood appearances.

"For, think of it! Charcot, Bernheim, and other scientists have produced precisely similar phenomena in their hypnotic *séances*. They make absent people, either living or dead, appear before their subjects and carry on long conversations with them. The phenomenon resolves itself into a peculiar state of the nervous system, accidental, acquired, or imposed, mysterious because we do not understand it, but susceptible, I am sure, of scientific solution."

"Have you any hypothesis on the subject which can give the facts at least a provisional explanation?"

"Every thought and imagination of the human mind, every object, every scene ever witnessed by every created being, all are ineffaceably registered and stamped upon what has been called the psychic ether, astral light, or spiritual atmosphere, where they exist like objects reflected in a mirror. The phenomena and laws of the impression, transmission, and reflection of images on the psychic ether are legitimate subjects for scientific study. The facts, reliable facts, are now being rapidly accumulated.

"Well, now," continued the doctor, "the persons and scenes described by mediums are not real persons and scenes, but images or pictures of them seen in or through the mind of some living persons. These reflections seem living and real to the medium, whose opened faculties (and we all possess the same faculties in a closed or undeveloped state) enable him to look into the astral mirror. If he does not understand the philosophy of it, and not one in fifty of them does, he is self-deceived while he is deceiving others."

"I am very well satisfied with your suggestions."

"If these things were understood, an incident which occurred lately in a western city would no longer excite the incredulity of some people or the superstitious wonder of others. A lady just arrived from a distant State rented a house, having no knowledge of the previous occupants. Soon after she took possession she saw, when wide awake, in one of the rooms, a coffin extended between two chairs. It contained the body of a young man, whose face she observed thoroughly before the appearance vanished. She sought the party who had just vacated the house, and was told that a young man exactly answering that description had died and been laid out in that room. It was no ghost, or spiritual visitation, or warning from the other world. The new-comer saw nothing but a reflected image upon the psychic ether of a scene which existed as a memory in the mind of the first occupant."

"Doctor, do you believe that what are called spiritual phenomena have any genuine reach into the spiritual world which we enter after death?"

"I do not. So-called spiritual phenomena which can be subjected to our natural powers of analysis are in reality natural phenomena. They are only psychical demonstrations. They belong to the interior sphere or invisible side of nature. They have hitherto eluded discovery, or have been so feebly and partially manifested that they have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. The human mind is now, however, upon the right track. The occult forces of nature—including the occult forces of the nervous system,—the relations of mind to matter, of the different parts of the mind to each other, of one mind to another mind, and of the individual mind to the composite mind of the race—will be henceforth subjected to scientific study by scientific methods."

"Will natural science, doctor, ever give us any knowledge of the genuine spiritual world and its phenomena?"

"Never, sir! The spiritual and natural worlds are separated from each other by an impassable gulf, what Swedenborg calls a discrete degree, and are conjoined only by correspondence. 'Spiritual things,' said Paul, a grand old adept in these matters, 'can only be spiritually discerned.'"

"Then you do not believe that the spiritualists have ever given us any genuine communication from the dead?"

"I do not, sir. The golden gate which is opened by death has never been otherwise opened except by divine interposition."

"Then is there no sure means of knowing anything about the real and eternal spiritual life?"

"Only one means, sir,—Divine Revelation."

CHAPTER X.

THE CHILD LOOMS UP.

HUGH STANFORD repaired, the next Thursday morning, according to appointment, to Mr. Denfield's office, to meet the claimant of the fifty-thousand-dollar reward offered for the discovery of Gordon Clarke's child. That magnificent offer had created great excitement among the detective gentry, and inquiries after children, lost or stolen in 1865, were pushed in all directions with great assiduity.

The curious fact was brought to light that no less than seven little children had disappeared in New Orleans during that year of peace and reconstruction, not one of whom had been restored to its parents. The Charlie Rosses of the world are numerous.

Denfield laid down his papers as Stanford entered, and said, smilingly,—

"I have an item of good news for our case.

"Jim, the office-boy, and I have turned detectives, and we have done pretty good amateur work. Jim went prying about old Madame Fortier's premises, until he got acquainted with a little mulatto servant-girl who waits on the lady. From her he learned the very interesting fact that old Madame Fortier had by a first husband a son named Dr. Hypolite Meissonier, who came occasionally to see her.

"Jim described the man with the gray head and the green goggles to the little girl, and asked if she had seen such a man. Yes, she let him in to see the madame on business one day last week. Did she see him go out? No. Did she see anybody go out a short while after? Yes, she saw Dr. Meissonier leave the house. 'Now,' said Jim, 'Dr. Meissonier and green goggles is the same man.'

"Very well," continued Denfield, "taking their identity for granted, you see that Dr. Meissonier, ostensibly in the interest of another person, comes to my office, attracted by the fifty-thousand-dollar prize, and offers to produce the child of Gordon Clarke. Now, whoever had or took Gordon Clarke's child at the beginning must have known something about the fate of the father. If not, and the child was honestly and charitably picked up on the street without knowledge of its father, why the necessity of any concealment? Meissonier's disguise proves a guilty conscience.

"Jim having succeeded so well, I determined to visit Madame Fortier myself, and I scored another point and a strong one. I pretended to be a real-estate agent buying up property in the neighborhood. I found a very old lady, quite infirm, but very affable and communicative, even to garrulity.

"Oh, no! she couldn't think of selling her property. That house and lot had been given to her by her dear son, her only son, Hypolite, twenty years before. Hypolite was a good, generous boy. He drew the hundred-thousand-dollar prize in the Havana lottery that year. And he bought this house, and settled ten thousand dollars at interest on his old mother. She had no occasion to sell anything. She had two good servants to wait on her, her own cow for milk, plenty of chickens for a fresh egg every day, a big bull-dog for night guard, a Maltese cat, a musical-box, a flower-garden, mocking-birds, canaries——

"I don't know how far her catalogue would have extended, but I interrupted her by asking her what became of Hypolite?"

"'Oh,' she said, 'Hypolite had just come from Paris, where he had spent the last cent of money his poor father—killed in the war, sir, killed at Shiloh—had given him. If we hadn't driven that boy off to Paris at the beginning of the war to get educated, he would have stayed and gone into the army, and been killed, too. Oh, but that lottery-prize was a godsend! The poor boy had brought a wife home!—think of such a thing!—a mere child, but she was pretty as a blood-red rose and *très-gentile.* They didn't stay but a week or two, when Hypolite went off to get his prize. Then he returned to Europe,—dear me! where was the use of it?—but he stayed ten years, and made himself the great doctor he is now. He lives on St. Louis Street. You surely must have heard of him——'

"Now," said Denfield, after imitating the language and manner of the garrulous old woman to perfection, "I have examined all the files of French and Spanish papers for that year, and find that no large prize whatever was drawn from the Havana lottery during that period. The question is, where did Dr. Meissonier get his money?"

"A question rapidly approaching solution," said Stanford. "I have also a little item to add to our budget.

"My friend in Paris, to whom I wrote before I left Chicago, has replied to this effect: A medical student from New Orleans, named Hypolite Meissonier, graduated at the University of Paris, medical department, April, 1865. He returned to New Orleans *via* Havana. He took with him a very young girl of great beauty, but wild and unmanageable, Lucia Esteva, who eloped with him from a boarding-school where she had been placed by her mother, a very gay lady connected with the stage."

"We have good reason to suspect, I will not say believe too hastily," said the lawyer, "that 'the young doctor and his beautiful wife,' of Gordon Clarke's letter, were Dr. Meissonier and his wife Lucia; that Gordon Clarke perished in some manner in the old Frenchman's saloon at the hands of Meissonier, who immediately disappeared; that the great sum of money he soon after became possessed of was derived from Gordon Clarke's valuables; that Meissonier and his wife are now plotting another raid on the Clarke treasury, either by restoring the child or palming off a substitute; and that the Madame Maspero who will soon enter that door upon this errand is none other than the Lucia Esteva of the Paris boarding-school."

"Do you think, Mr. Denfield, that there is any prospect of recovering the child?"

"A very great prospect. It is altogether improbable that the child was murdered. Those who know what became of the father know what became of the child. They no doubt put it off into other hands, but it is very likely that the woman kept trace of it and knows where to find it.

"It is all-important, however," added the l "that they get no wind of our suspicions. The derer would disappear in a flash, and the child be lost forever."

A gentle rap or tap at the door, such as no mas hand would give, warned the gentlemen that visitor demanded admission. In reply to Den stentorian invitation to "Come in," a slender l black slowly opened the door, closed it behind h cast a quick, shy glance about the apartment.

"Which of you gentlemen is Mr. Denfield said, with a captivating smile, displaying a fine teeth guarded by exquisite lips.

"I am Mr. Denfield," said that gentleman, and offering her a chair.

She took her seat gracefully, and laid a little l and her rose-red, gold-tipped parasol on the table her. After a moment's hesitation, she spoke, i cidedly cultivated manner and with a little trepi in her very sweet voice which added to its charm

"I am Madame Lucia Maspero, and I come, instance of my friend Mr. Pierre Gentilly, to with you on a little matter of business."

Here she looked a moment at Mr. Stanfor then turned inquiringly to Mr. Denfield.

"You can speak out freely before this gentl said Denfield. "He is the party most deeply int in this matter."

She lifted her soft brown eyes to Stanford's fa turned her whole park of artillery upon that gentleman; thinking to herself, "I wonder if l relative of Gordon Clarke?" He must have r a profound impression, for his own reflection was this: "What an astonishingly fine-looking woman she is!"

"My friend Mr. Gentilly," she said, quietly, "called my attention to an advertisement offering a very large reward for the production of Mary Gilford Clarke, who was lost in this city in June, 1865, at the age of two years. As I happened to pick up a little girl of that name and of that age on Chartres Street exactly at that time, I thought it might be to our mutual interests if I called upon you and told my story."

She here paused, and, whether from natural modesty or timidity, seemed a little disconcerted at the four masculine eyes fixedly bent upon her.

Mr. Denfield hastened to her rescue by saying, in a quiet, lawyer-like way,—

"I am truly glad you have called, madame, and I sincerely hope you will be able to substantiate a claim to this immense reward. Now, please begin at the beginning, and tell us coolly, in your own time and your own way, just what happened, how and where you found the child, what you did with it, and anything you may know about her."

Stanford edged his chair a little nearer, as one does when about to hear a story in which he is deeply interested. Denfield reached out for a tablet and pencil, and sat like a reporter about to take notes.

Putting her left elbow upon the table, and shading her eyes with the taper fingers of a very pretty hand, not destitute of rings, she cleared her voice with a little delicate hem, and began.

"Late in the evening of the 20th of June, 1865, I visited a friend boarding at the Hôtel des Étrangers.

I did not start to return home until it was very dark and the gas was lit. The streets were quite crowded, as there were a great many strangers and returning soldiers in the city. I hurried along Chartres Street afraid to be out so late, although my residence was only a few squares away.

"As I was passing a milliner's store a little above the cathedral, I heard a child crying piteously, and saw two ladies of the establishment and an old gentleman attempting to console her.

"'What is the matter?' I inquired.

"'This little one is lost,' said one of the ladies, 'and we can get nothing out of her except that her name is Mary.'

"'It would be best,' said the old gentleman, 'to take her to the nearest station-house. Her parents can easily find her there. Indeed, the station-house is the first place to inquire for a lost child.'

"I looked down at the frightened creature, the blue eyes and the little face full of tears. I was touched with pity. I offered to take charge of the child, gave them my husband's address, and asked them to send any one inquiring for the child to my residence. I also promised to leave word at a station-house which I passed on the way home where the child could be found, and to advertise for her friends in the morning papers. All this I did: no response was ever received, no friends ever called, and so I kept the child."

"A truly sweet and charitable deed," said Stanford. The lady smiled upon him in grateful appreciation of the compliment.

"Did you preserve a copy of your advertisement in the morning papers?" inquired the lawyer, without looking up from his writing.

"Oh, no! I never thought of such a thing."

"It doesn't matter," he said, quietly. "The proprietors always keep files of their papers for every year, and, as you have given us the exact date, we can find it in a few minutes. It will prove that you did not steal the child."

Madame Maspero gave a little start in her seat, and the lawyer looked up to her face in time to observe the fact that a gentle shade of pallor had whitened its rich brunette. She felt that she had made a mistake, and was likely to be caught in a falsehood, and she hastened to say,—

"I do not know positively, sir, that the advertisement was ever printed. I sent it to the papers that night by a little servant-girl, and thought no more about it."

Mr. Denfield kindly respected the little loop-hole which madame had extemporized for her escape, and did not press the matter. He looked, with a bland, inquiring smile, at the little bundle on the table, and remarked,—

"Perhaps you have preserved some little relics of the child which will assist in verifying your statements. Individually, madame, I would accept your own words without question, but legally I represent persons who will require ample proof before they part with such a great sum of money, or receive a stranger into their circle as a lost relative."

"The parties you represent, sir, are unquestionably right in the requirements they make. In affairs of th[illegible] magnitude the most thorough examinations and cros[illegible] examinations are necessary."

She looked as if she would have been a Portia [illegible] the bar.

She then slowly opened her little bundle and di[illegible]played a child's white dress, old and faded, a litt[illegible] coral necklace with a gold clasp, a small pair of shoe[illegible] and a little, red-bound, gilt-edged prayer-book in th[illegible] Spanish language.

Madame Maspero called attention to the letters M[illegible] G. C. worked into the waistband of the dress an[illegible] engraved upon the gold part of the necklace.

"These articles," she said, "were on the person of the child when I took her to my house. I have al[illegible] the other articles of her dress, but thought it sufficient to bring these as samples. Fifty more pieces could prove no more than is proved by these two little articles with the child's initials worked upon them."

The gentlemen nodded assent to the reasonableness of that proposition.

"It seemed strange to me," continued the brunette beauty, "that a little lost child should hold clasped in her hand a prayer-book in the Spanish language. I presumed that she had accompanied her mother to church, had begged to hold the volume, as children often do, and then got separated in the crowd from the mother or was abandoned by her.

"Of course I thought the owner of the book was a Spanish lady, and was surprised, on opening it, to find upon the blank leaf a very common American name. It established, however, the identity of the child."

She passed the little volume, opened at the blank leaf in front, to Mr. Denfield, who read aloud,—

"Ellen Gilford Clarke,
San José, Costa Rica, May 2, 1864.
"Bought on the first birthday of our dear little Mary."

Stanford examined the articles carefully, especially the pale writing upon the faded blank leaf of the book. He seemed profoundly and painfully impressed.

"These," he said, "are truly relics of the little family which lived in San José, Costa Rica, in 1864. Mary, the daughter, was born there in May, 1863. Mrs. Clarke, the mother, was named Ellen Gilford. The child was named Mary Gilford. The family moved from Central America to Jamaica in the fall of that year, and thence to Havana. These articles prove, madame, beyond doubt, that the child you so kindly sheltered was the daughter of Gordon Clarke."

Madame Maspero rewarded this declaration of opinion with an approving nod and a smile of singular beauty. That smile is indescribable. It was the smile of fascination which few women can manufacture. Stanford took it all to himself, and could not imagine that any part of the brilliant favor was designed for Denfield. That gentleman's face was as impassive as an Indian's. He took no notice of Madame Lucia's smile (he had a beautiful wife at home) and made no comments on the proofs, but said, quietly,—

"Now, go on, if you please, and tell us the fate of the child."

"In that regard," she answered, in a deprecating tone, "I hold myself much to blame. I confess that

I grew weary of the child. She was self-willed and unmanageable, or at least I had not the tact to manage her. My husband was impatient with her and became anxious to get rid of her. We finally gave her in the charge of a respectable colored family in the neighborhood. I did not lose sight of her, however, and frequently dropped in to see her. After a while she went to the public schools and received quite a good primary education. She was then apprenticed to a milliner, and grew up to be a handsome, stylish, dressy young woman."

"Handsome, stylish, and dressy!" exclaimed Stanford, in a startled kind of way, as if he scented danger in the air.

"Most milliners are stylish and dressy. It is their business. Why should that alarm you, sir?"

Stanford subsided, feeling that he had made a *faux pas.*

"Madame Maspero," said Denfield, very seriously, "can you bring the colored woman to whom you first intrusted her, and the milliner to whom she was afterwards apprenticed, to confirm your words, so as to make a perfect chain of evidence from the child's infancy to her womanhood, and can you produce that identical person?"

"All this I can do," said the woman, firmly and positively, "and will do on the day you appoint."

"Then your fifty-thousand-dollar check is in sight."

The lady smiled sweetly and her brown eyes sparkled brightly.

"Where at present," said Stanford, "is this child of misfortune, so soon to become a child of fortune,—this Mary Gilford Clarke?"

"She grew tired of the milliner's," said the madame, "and, after a brief period of honest struggle, she found an adequate field for her talents upon the stage."

"The stage?" cried Stanford, in genuine dismay.

"Why not the stage, sir? Is it necessary to suppose, sir, that every theatrical life is one of questionable propriety?"

"By no means, madame, by no means," he hastened to declare; "but you must confess it is a very trying situation to a handsome, young woman who has no family associations to enfold and protect her."

"Lilly Montrose, I assure you, sir, has proved herself quite equal to the occasion."

"And who," said Denfield, naïvely, "is Lilly Montrose?"

"Clarke, you know," said the lady in black, "is too ordinary a name to put upon the handbills. Mary Clarke never could have attracted. Fancy names are all the style, and this young lady is so pleased with Lilly Montrose that she has adopted it altogether."

"Where is she playing now?" inquired Stanford.

"At the Oriental Varieties," said the Maspero, with a little lowering of her voice.

"Oriental Varieties!" said Denfield, looking gravely at Stanford; "quite an unpleasant revelation for her uncle, the Chicago millionaire."

"On reflection," said Stanford, "what more could have been expected? A child abandoned in the streets of a great city! Much worse might have happened. Careful cultivation in some first-class eastern school will bring the young woman out amazingly. Any unpleasant portions of her career may be effectually concealed."

"Unpleasant portions of many a woman's career have been effectually concealed," said the madame, in a tone almost suggestive of a personal experience.

Then she added, in a very firm and decided manner,—

"But, concealed or not, liked or not, acceptable or not, it does not matter. The facts remain the same Mary Gilford Clarke can be restored to her friends, if they really want to get possession of her."

She rose to her feet, as much as to say, "My part of the conference is ended, and you can do as you please."

"You have made out a very strong case so far," said Denfield. "I would like to keep those little articles until we meet again in a few days."

The madame expressed a little surprise at that request, but, after a moment's reflection, gave her bundle into Denfield's hands.

"May I beg you," said Stanford, in his polites manner, "to secure me a lock of Miss Montrose's hair I wish to compare it microscopically with some of the little Clarke girl's hair which I have in my possession."

His real intention was to submit it to Cora Morette's psychometrical analysis.

"Certainly," said the lady, smiling; "and if this young woman is the great heiress I suppose her to be you will soon be wanting another lock of her hair for a different purpose."

Stanford merely smiled, and said, "Send it to this office in a sealed envelope, care of Mr. Denfield."

"Now," said the lawyer, "I wish to make an appointment. This day week, at this hour, I shall expect you here, bringing with you Miss Lilly Montrose, the colored woman, the milliner, Mr. Pierre Gentilly, and any other persons you may find who can corroborate the evidence you adduce."

"Can't Mr. Pierre Gentilly be left out of that list?" said the woman, a little anxiously. "The old man is infirm, and doesn't like such errands."

"No," said Denfield, positively, "I was very much struck by the old gentleman's appearance. I need a man of his age and respectability to substantiate your character, as well as to witness your receipt of the immense sum which will be paid you. Then we will take Miss Lilly Montrose under our protection, to prepare her for the brilliant career which will open before her."

Mrs. Lucia Maspero bowed gracefully and retired, discharging a farewell salute from her sparkling brown eyes upon Mr. Hugh Stanford. That young gentleman, drawn by the unconscious fascination of her presence, escorted her to the door and accompanied her along the hall to the elevator, where she parted from him with a charming *au revoir*. Returning to the office he found Denfield carefully examining the soles of the little shoes with a magnifying-glass.

"Well, I declare!" he said, "what do you expect to find there? Names are never stamped upon soles!"

"It is sometimes necessary," said Denfield, solemnly, as he returned the little shoes to the bundle, "for lawyers to institute very minute inspections."

"These relics," said Stanford, "may be of great service at Cora Morette's."

"By the by," said Denfield, smiling, "has your witch of Endor called up any more spirits for you?"

"I am prosecuting my affair through my clairvoyant," said Stanford, sturdily, "in the most scientific manner, and the results are becoming more and more valuable."

"Starkie on Evidence," said the lawyer, "is my text-book on proof, but I really would like to know something of the nature of the proof you get by hypnotic procedures."

"You believe in thought-reading, do you not?"

"I have read or heard enough about it to believe in its possibility."

"Well, if you could read the thoughts of a thief or a murderer, would you not get the facts of the case much more perfectly than you ever could from human or circumstantial evidence?"

"Of course," said the lawyer; "but are you not verging upon the impossible, the incredible?"

"You just admitted that thought-reading was possible. Now you fall back upon the old superstition that none can read thoughts but God. Science has developed thought-reading as a fact. Bishop's wonderful performances were only the first letter of a new alphabet. The time is coming when the question will be, can any thought be concealed?"

"You astonish me, you confound me. I don't believe it."

"Very well. Cora Morette is a powerful clairvoyant, thought- or mind-reader. She has been brought, through the agency of certain relics, into rapport with the mind of Gordon Clarke, not as it now is, somewhere in the spiritual world, but as it was at the time he wrote that letter. We expect no revelation from Gordon Clarke's ghost as to what became of him. The ghost of Hamlet's father was a superstition. All ghosts are superstitions!"

"How can Cora Morette get what became of Gordon Clarke out of his mind as it was before his sudden disappearance, unless he foresaw what was going to happen to him?"

"She does not get it out of his own mind, but from the registered images in the minds of those about him. Studying the pictured ideas in Gordon Clarke's mind, she sees a man and a woman, whom we now believe to be Dr. Meissonier and his wife, who are thinking about Gordon Clarke, plotting against him, especially how to get possession of valuables contained in his baggage, two trunks, which she sees and describes perfectly."

"How can she read the thoughts of one mind in and through another mind? That seems to me doubly miraculous."

"And it is very simple. Thought is just as substantial as light. It is just as real as color, and far more durable. There are laws of spiritual optics precisely corresponding to the laws of physical optics. How does a lady dressing her own hair see the back of her head? She cannot see it in the mirror in front of her. She holds a second mirror behind her at a certain angle, and the back of the head is reflected from it, so that, looking only into the first mirror, she sees also the second mirror and its contained image. This process of what may be called thought-reading by reflection might be extended, through a chain of properly adjusted mental mirrors or human back for a hundred years."

"You take away my breath with these psycho surprises. You unsettle my practical beliefs, my time-honored opinions, distract my legal You will give me headache, indigestion, it n delirium," said Denfield, laughing.

"I offer you the antidote to all the miseries o rance and superstition,—the Light of Truth."

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE IN THE CATHEDRAL.

ONE cannot paint a map of Louisiana on his fingernail. Neither can one in a single volume do justice to the charms and graces of Ninette Du Valcourt, moving in her sweet round of womanly duties and pleasures. The reader will get only a bird's-eye view, and he must apply the microscope of his own imagination for the minute beauties of detail.

Hugh Stanford, having obtained Colonel Du Valcourt's formal permission, had paid more assiduous attentions to the lovely object of his affections. They had enjoyed some pleasant conferences without the presence of that third element which is so pitiably *de trop* in love-making. Jackson Square, the place of their first meeting, was a favorite resort. Stanford would sit in the shade on the benches and read his papers, or watch the pretty babies, somebody's darlings, pushed along in their little carriages by their white-capped nurses, while Ninette paid a visit to old Lethe in the Pontalba Buildings. Old "Mammy" received a good deal of attention about that time, especially as she had been quite melancholy ever since her painful interview with Rose Villemaine, of which Ninette knew nothing.

One morning Ninette, having made a lengthier call than usual on her colored *protégée*, apologized to her suitor for having detained him so long.

"I found dear old Lethe in a great state of excitement. She had just received a letter from her only child, a daughter who went away north nearly twenty years ago, and whom she supposed to be dead. The joy that she is living is dashed by the sad news that she is in a rapid consumption. She wishes to come home to die in our great Charity Hospital, but there is fortunately a vacant room next to Lethe's. I have engaged it for her, and the poor creature shall receive every attention and consolation to the end."

Little did Ninette dream of the shadow which was waiting for her in that very room!

The happy couple walked about the beautiful grounds, admiring the great variety of flowers and discussing the light questions of the day. The grim old hero of New Orleans, personification of invincible resolve, sat immovable upon his rearing charger, military cap in hand. The high uplifted cross upon the grand cathedral looked down upon the scene with silent benediction. Steamers and sloops and tugs and ferry-boats swarmed up and down and across the great river in sight. Innumerable noises vibrated around them, but, absorbed in each other, the lovers exchanged thoughts as quietly and dreamily as if they were rambling side by side in the depths of the green forest.

Presently Stanford led his companion through the iron gate of the square, and, crossing Chartres Street, they passed down the wide paved alley which runs between the cathedral and the old court-rooms of Spanish construction.

"He goes safely," said Stanford, "who walks obediently, as we are now doing, between the two great unprogressives, the Church and the Law."

"Unprogressive," said Ninette, quickly, "only because they are founded upon fixed and unchangeable principles of truth and justice. The perfect is always unprogressive. It is we who progress by coming into clearer knowledge of it and more vital relations to it."

"That sounds Bostonian," said Stanford, smiling.

"It is Catholic," rejoined Ninette.

They had arrived at a side door of the cathedral.

"Let us go in," said Stanford.

It is a beautiful custom of the Catholic church to keep some door always open and some light always burning, so that the stranger or the wayfarer may pass suddenly from the noise and tumult of the world into the nearer presence of God, where he may listen to the still, small voice, which is forever speaking, even when unheard, within us all.

Ninette bowed and made the sign of the cross as she entered the sacred edifice. All the other doors were closed, and the lofty, deeply-stained windows cast the traditional "dim, religious light" over the place. Two or three penitents were kneeling with bowed heads near the altar, but all the rest of the solemn and shadowy area was deserted. The silent couple trod reverently up the side aisle to the marble pavement which runs across the front of the church. When she reached the central aisle leading down towards the grand altar, Ninette kneeled in prayer.

Stanford waited silently behind her with fold[illegible]

When she arose, he conducted her to the head of the other side aisle which leads down to the altar of the Blessed Virgin. A profound twilight pervaded the spot, deepened by the gallery above them and the immense pillars which supported it. No one was near. No sound was audible save the noises of the street, sounding like the far-off roar of the sea. Immediately behind them was the sombre confessional of Father Mignot, with its dark-brown curtains, where perhaps Ninette had often confessed the peccadillos which her tender conscience had magnified into sin.

The priestess herself of another shrine, she stood there in her chaste and modest beauty, not knowing that she was about to receive the confessions of a devoted heart, and to listen to a few words which would change the whole current of her life.

"Miss Du Valcourt," began Stanford, in an earnest tone, which startled her maidenly instincts at once, "Miss Du Valcourt, on the day I first saw you in Jackson Square and followed you into this building, and, standing on this precise spot, watched your figure kneeling at that altar, a sentiment took root in my heart which has been growing more and more vigorous, until I can no longer suppress or conceal it."

He had drawn nearer to her in the shadow of the pillar, and was speaking in a low, tender, almost trembling tone. She interrupted him in a subdued but agitated voice.

"Oh, please, Mr. Stanford, do not mention these personal matters here in the house of God."

"Where could I speak of them more appropriately?" he fervently exclaimed. "The sentiments I avow may declare themselves unabashed in the presence of the Blessed Virgin, or at the foot of the grand altar, or in the holy shadow of the mother church."

He took her hand in his; she did not withdraw it. She lowered her head and turned her face away, tremulous and blushing. He continued, in a gentle, impressive manner:

"The genuine love of an honest heart for a pure and noble woman deserves especially the consecration of the spiritual powers."

"Oh, my dear sir," she said, faintly, "this is so sudden—in such a strange place—please let us go!"

"No," he said, firmly; "this is the best of all places. Marriage is a holy sacrament of your church. It is customary and proper to celebrate it there at the altar of Christ. How can it be wrong for two souls to avow their love and pledge their fidelity to one another in the presence of these heavenly, invisible witnesses?"

"Your words overcome me," she said, gently: "your sentiments are so beautiful, but——"

"Your father," said Stanford, earnestly, "has approved in advance the declaration I now make you. Do you acquiesce in your father's sentiments?"

"I have ever been obedient to his wishes."

"Then seal the union of our hearts with a kiss."

"Oh, no!" she sighed, rather than said, "no, no!—not here—not now—let us go."

"At least," he said, persuasively, detaining her gently, "give me a warm pressure of your hand as an affirmative sign."

She clasped his hand firmly, and looked bravely and fondly into his eyes. He drew her close to him. Her head fell softly against his left shoulder, and he imprinted a fervent kiss upon her lips.

"Let us go!" she said, starting away; and they passed behind the pews and down the aisle as they came, and then out into the unsympathetic glare of the world.

"Do not accompany me home now," she said, tremulously.

"May I call you Ninette," he whispered.

"Certainly," was the faint response.

"Farewell, Ninette, for a few hours." They parted, but each turned again instinctively towards the other. Therewith they pledged and spoke to each other with their eyes.

"My own Ninette!" said Hugh's.

"Hugh! *au revoir*," said Ninette's.

What a happy parting! Under what changed conditions was the next meeting!

On his way up town, it suddenly occurred to Stanford that he would interview Miss Lilly Montrose before she appeared at the lawyer's office as claimant of Gordon Clarke's estate. He found the Oriental Varieties (it might as well have been called the Occidental) an immense bar-room, full of chairs and tables, with a little stage at one end. The drop-curtain, bearing a rude picture of Venus rising from the sea, was down, and a noisy rehearsal seemed about winding up behind it.

In the daytime this place is comparatively dark and deserted, only a few tippling *habitués* dropping in; but in the evening it becomes resplendent with electric lights. The tables are crowded with young men and old men, detained down town by business, you know;

aited upon by young ladies gaudily dressed, per-
umed, and rouged, cunning adepts in all the arts of
ticement.

Amid the hubbub of clinking glasses, rushing feet,
d merry voices, the music of a small orchestra rises
d falls, and, observed or unobserved, a little drama,
iced always with dancing, is enacted on the stage,
hich is provided with foot-lights, trap-doors, shifting
enes, and all the machinery for startling effects. To
is humble theatrical world Miss Lilly Montrose was
ading *tragédienne, comédienne,* and *première danseuse*
l in one.

Stanford obtained the actress's address from a fat,
alky-faced young gentleman standing behind the
unter, arrayed in spotless linen and a red neck-tie.
efore they had finished speaking, a large, gray parrot
ith a red tail, the best species for talking, called out
ilariously from his gilded cage, "What'll you drink?
hat'll you drink?"—a phrase which he had acquired
om the vivacious young ladies who nightly beautified
e establishment. Without responding to the question
f the bird, Stanford passed out of the door, very much
fraid that some friend passing by might see him
nerging from this combination show-room of Venus
nd Bacchus.

The house on Bienville Street illuminated by the pres-
nce of Miss Lilly Montrose had "Furnished Rooms"
mblazoned on the front door. A tidy, good-looking,
oung quadroon woman ushered him, not without a
ttle curious inspection, into a medium-sized parlor,
audily furnished, and superabundantly supplied with
heap bric-à-brac. Bouquets of flowers shone forth

here and there in the room, floral offerings, no doubt, at the shrine of Miss Lilly's dramatic genius.

The visitor had seated himself reflectively on a red plush sofa only a few minutes, when the young actress glided rustling in, her auburn hair bewitchingly dishevelled down her back, her full lips smiling, and her large blue eyes sparkling with health and pleasure. She wore a crimson skirt and a loose white sack much embroidered, and very open at the neck to display a white throat and a brilliant circlet of mock diamonds. Her presence was captivating, and her handsome face had but one defect,—a slightly turned-up nose gave more piquancy than beauty to her facial expression.

Extending her left hand, positively radiant with rings, in a friendly manner to Stanford, who had risen and bowed with the utmost dignity, she said,—

"Pray be seated, sir; and excuse my deshabille. I have just come in from rehearsal, and would not detain you for special elaboration. I am accustomed to the free and easy ways of you gentlemen of the press."

"I am not connected with the press," said Stanford, gravely.

"No? How singular! I expected to be interviewed."

"You are accustomed to interviews?"

"Oh, yes; viewed, reviewed, and interviewed, that's my life!" said the lady, archly.

"I beg the liberty, Miss Montrose, of asking you a few questions, and hope you will believe I am not prompted by idle curiosity."

Her face was now thoroughly sobered by the seriousness of Stanford's manner, and, assuming the attitude of a young lady about to have her photograph taken, she said, "Certainly, sir; I am all attention."

"Do you know where you were born?" he asked.

"What an extraordinary question!" she said, bursting out into little ripples of laughter; but she suddenly checked herself, as if something very serious had occurred to her mind, and, looking intently at Stanford, she continued, gravely, "And my answer to it is still more extraordinary. I do *not* know where I was born. Few people can say that?"

"Who were your parents?"

"I have no knowledge of my parentage. I was a waif, sir."

"What are your first recollections? or, rather, what are your earliest reminiscences?"

"My earliest recollections, sir, are of living with some colored folks, who did not treat me very well, and who transferred me to a milliner's shop, where I was treated worse. I have had a hard life of it, sir."

"It seems to have a good deal of the *couleur de rose* in it at present," suggested the gentleman.

"The rose is a fading flower, sir," said Lilly, with more feeling in the tone of her voice than he had believed her capable of exhibiting.

"Were you always called Lilly Montrose?"

"Oh, no, sir. That is only my stage name. The negroes called me Mary Clarke,—why, I don't know. It was a poor name for stage effect, and so I changed it to Lilly Montrose. Don't you think it pretty?"

Stanford nodded to her question, and inquired, "Are you acquainted with Madame Maspero?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. That woman has always professed to know all about my origin, and to have proofs of it in her possession. I don't know what to think of it."

"Have you seen her lately?"

"Not for many weeks, sir."

This conversation was carried on with such apparent *naïveté* and truthfulness on Lilly's part that Stanford could not bring himself to suspect that the young girl had entered into collusion with Madame Maspero. He gave it up in his own mind that the daughter of poor Gordon Clarke had been discovered in this indiscreet and uncultivated genius.

He suddenly looked her full in the face and said,—

"Miss Montrose, if you should come unexpectedly into a great fortune, what would you do with it?"

"La! what a supposition!" she said, laughing and looking up at the ceiling. "How preposterous!"

"That does not answer my question."

"Well, let me see;" and she proceeded to count her intentions upon her fingers: "I would buy me a lot of real diamonds; I would take lessons in acting of the best performers; I would out-dress Langtry; I would out-play Mary Anderson; I would board at the Hôtel Royal; I would spend my summers at Long Branch——"

"You would be exceedingly happy, no doubt," said Stanford, interrupting this catalogue of her prospective felicities.

"You bet!" she cried, snapping her fingers.

He rose to take his leave.

"Oh, do not go so soon!" said the young actress, effusively, throwing back her dishevelled hair with a graceful movement. "I am quite at leisure this morning."

Stanford pleaded the conventional excuse, important business.

"Then, good-by," she said, squeezing his hand. "Come and see me again. You can view me, whether you interview me or not. And, if you have a chance, drop into the Oriental this evening, and see me dance the Cracovienne. It is perfectly splendid!"

He hastened out of the house. When he got into the street, he muttered, "O the irony of fate! When Gordon Clarke was murdered, why did they spare his child?"

The "child" had run to the window, and was looking after Stanford through the slats of the shutter.

"The minute that fellow asked me where I was born, I guessed he had come to pump me on that Maspero business. Well, I was cute: he made nothing out of me."

Stanford walked leisurely upon Royal and St. Charles Streets, diverting his mind from its strong emotions by observing everything as he went along. He noted the number of saloons and eating-houses and the well-dressed people who seeemed to patronize them. He observed the bronze statue of Henry Clay, darkened still further by time and exposure, which made the little girl inquire of her mother, "Was Henry Clay a black man?" He passed the massive St. Charles Hotel, haunted by so many social, political, and military memories. He passed the theatres,—the Academy of Music, redolent of Lydia Thompson and her blondes, and the St. Charles, where Charlotte Cushman scored her very first triumph as Lady Macbeth, at the early age of nineteen, for she had measured her own powers, and said to the manager, "Lady Macbeth or nothing."

When he reached the City Hall, he turned into Lafayette Square, that beautiful, breathing lung for this crowded part of the city. He saw the artesian well spouting out its delicate stream of clear water from a thousand feet below the surface. He noted the exquisite green of the lawns, and the many happy children at play. He took a seat near the statue of Franklin which adorns the centre of the square.

This fine work of art was executed by Hiram Powers, the creator of the Greek Slave, and a disciple of Swedenborg, whose idealism is so attractive to poets, painters, and sculptors. It cost ten thousand dollars, and should not be thus left exposed in the open air. It is a perfect representation of the distinguished gentleman, whom Elizabeth Cady Stanton calls "the miserable old kite-flyer," because he strongly recommended obedience and silence to women. A certain soothing, cooling effect was produced upon Stanford by contemplating the benevolent face of that sage collector of politic maxims.

Stanford had forgotten all these things, and was thinking of his lovely Ninette, when he saw Dr. Holden get out of his buggy at the sidewalk and advance towards him. He met the old gentleman half-way, and they sat down upon one of the benches together, while Stanford told him what further progress had been made in his researches for the murderer and the lost child.

The doctor expressed his regret that the great estate of Gordon Clarke was about to fall into such incapable hands, and his positive conviction that Hypolite Meissonier was the criminal Stanford was seeking.

"Beware of that fellow!" he said. "He is cunning and reckless, and possessed of agencies for harm quite beyond our present powers of comprehension."

Presently the doctor rose from his seat, and, looking frankly into Stanford's face, he inquired,—

"Will you permit an old man who is your friend to give a suggestion to a young man and a stranger here?"

"Certainly," said Stanford, a little astonished.

"Well, then, I have been told that you are paying special attentions to Miss Du Valcourt. Do not be hasty in that direction. If you have not already committed yourself, keep quiet for a few days."

Stanford flushed up to the roots of his hair. "May I ask you, sir, to explain yourself fully?"

"Doctors," said the old man, rather sadly, "often learn secrets sooner than other people, but they never should be the first to divulge them."

"Then what do you advise?"

"Just what I have said,—to stop, stand still, do nothing, say nothing, until the *dénouement* is made. Then act as you please."

"You are very mysterious, sir," said Stanford, with some vexation. "I have a right in the premises to know something definite in this matter."

"I can give you warning," said the doctor, "but not information. There's a lion in your path."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Stanford, impatiently. "One of Bunyan's lions, sleeping or held by an invisible chain."

"No, sir," said the doctor, "a real African lion, broken loose and rampant. I can say no more."

And, in spite of Stanford's almost impetuous demand for further explanation, he hurried to his buggy.

"At the worst," he said to himself, "it will prepare the young fellow's mind for something serious, and thus mitigate the blow."

"What does he mean?" said Stanford, returning to his seat. "What does he mean by that strange metaphor? 'An African lion, broken loose and rampant!'" He sat a long time in puzzled reflection. He felt that some vast but vague evil was impending over him. The calm face of Benjamin Franklin brought him no comfort. The immense spire of Dr. Palmer's church opposite pointed to no available source of consolation. He looked forward to the evening, when a visit to Ninette would banish every shadow and explain all.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DYNAMITE EXPLODES.

NINETTE DU VALCOURT tripped homeward from the cathedral-door with as happy a heart as ever beat in the bosom of a beautiful woman. Her feeling was by no means gay and demonstrative, but a serene, high-pitched buoyancy and radiance of spirit, quite indescribable to others, and perhaps unthinkable to some people. It was soon to undergo a terrible revulsion, for, by one of those wild contrasts of which nature is sometimes guilty, while the greatest and sweetest light of her life had risen upon one side of her horizon, the darkest cloud imaginable was rolling swiftly up on the other.

Rose Villemaine had struck her dynamite, and the mine had exploded!

Ninette had noticed for several days a decided coolness on the part of Rose towards her, in which Mrs. Du Valcourt seemed also in some degree to participate. That morning those ladies had been so silent and uncommunicative that even the joyous spirit of the old colonel was suppressed. He hastened away to his office, and Ninette made an early exit from the house to escape its melancholy atmosphere.

The first intimation of the trouble in store for her was received accidentally, as on her way home she passed the ladies' entrance of the Hôtel Royal. She saw two ladies standing in the door-way, and, just as she approached, she heard one of them say excitedly to the other,—

"Here she comes now!"

The other exclaimed, "Poor, poor thing!"

She looked quickly up and caught their eyes, recognizing two fashionable women, intimate friends of the first Mrs. Du Valcourt, and frequent visitors at the house. She was about to speak to them, but they stepped suddenly back into the hall and looked away. Astonished at their conduct, she glanced hastily about her, to see if there was any other woman in sight to whom their words could possibly have applied. She was alone, and it was impossible to evade the conclusion that the affront was intentional. Her heart thumped forcibly and her face reddened. Then she trembled all over and grew as pale as white wax.

"What can it mean?" she muttered to herself.

Reverting rapidly to the events of the last few days, with a mind stung into suspicion, she remembered that three ladies, on whom she had called, had been reported as "not at home," when she had every reason to believe they were, and that two others had received her with a certain embarrassment which she considered as very peculiar.

Hurrying along homeward, she met a gentleman of her acquaintance, an occasional visitor at the house. He was a clubman whose name was odiously connected with the sad story of a poor German bookseller's daughter. She really disliked him, but he always doffed his hat in the most deferential manner to Miss

Du Valcourt. This morning he merely waved his hand in a familiar manner, and called out, cheerily, "Good-morning, Miss Ninette." There was something vaguely impertinent in his salutation, and the young woman, now thoroughly alarmed, reddened and trembled again.

On entering her father's house, she met Mrs. Singwell coming through the hall, Rose Villemaine and her step-mother just bidding her adieu. Ninette's ear caught the single expression, sternly uttered, "Yes, dear Rose, our traditions must be respected."

Mrs. Singwell was a very wealthy lady and superbly dressed. Her grand carriage stood at the door, with its shining pair of bob-tailed blacks and its driver and footman in livery. She ranked herself with the *crême de la crême*, and was a stickler for social traditions, as most people never knew, or had forgotten, that her grandmother sold cakes and oranges at the corner of Bourbon and Canal.

Ninette, with a faint smile, approached to salute her, but the portly woman of fashion threw up her gloved hand, elevated her chin, and stared at her. Deeply humiliated, the poor girl rushed by them and hurried up the stairs, hearing behind her a half-suppressed titter from Rose Villemaine.

Ninette entered her room, locked the door behind her, and, dropping her bonnet heedlessly upon the floor, threw herself upon her bed in a paroxysm of tears.

"What does it mean? What does all this mean?" she exclaimed, bitterly. "Oh, Hugh Stanford, what evil thing has befallen me?"

Rose Villemaine and her mother sat afterwards in the reception-room, silent for some time. Both seemed anxious and worried, as if some serious struggle was impending. When they spoke, it was in a low voice, as if they were conspirators afraid of being heard even in their own home. They had evidently had some disagreement. Mrs. Du Valcourt at length said,—

"I suffer much for that unfortunate young woman up-stairs. Your laugh in the hall at Mrs. Singwell's rude conduct was very heartless."

"Why," said the daughter, coolly,—"why should you expend so much sympathy upon a person who has occupied a false position for so many years? This woman is no relative of ours, no relative of Mr. Du Valcourt. She is the daughter of a disreputable colored woman, the grand-daughter of an old octoroon living on charity in the Pontalba Buildings. Think of the infamy we have endured all this time by the imposition of such a character upon our social life! It is we who are to be pitied!"

"Oh, but it is dreadful, dreadful for the poor creature, reared and educated and petted and admired as she has been!" The maternal instinct preserves a perennial fount of tenderness somewhere in the female heart.

"You were so precipitate in this matter," complained Mrs. Du Valcourt, "so rash, so reckless of results! We should have held a family council over this affair, and discussed it with closed doors. You have rushed around to all our acquaintances, and blurted out this awful secret into everybody's ear. It is scandalous! What can the world say but 'Jealousy'? Think how innocent and blameless Ninette herself is! You should have prepared her for this terrible revelation. You should have prepared Mr. Du Valcourt for it."

"I have prepared him for it," said Rose. "I wrote him a note this morning, and sent it to his office, detailing the facts and proofs; and I requested him to visit the asylum and inspect the records for himself, and to verify the evidence there obtained by an interview with old Lethe in the Pontalba Buildings."

"And he will come home presently in a terrible state of excitement," said his wife, apprehensively.

"We cannot pass through a great domestic crisis like this," said the daughter, "without considerable excitement. Some people will be very angry. Some will have hysterics. Some will blame us, some will approve. In nine days the storm will blow over. We will be rid of Miss Mary Emily Gordon, for that is her real name, and everything will roll on smoothly and happily."

At that moment the front door was opened, and Colonel Du Valcourt's hurried step was heard in the hall. He entered the room, pale and gasping for breath, and sank into the first chair. His wife, apprehending heart-trouble, with which he had been threatened, rushed out into the dining-room, and returned in a moment with a glass of brandy-and-water. Miss Villemaine merely stared at him with her great black eyes. He drank off the stimulant, and looked at the placid face of the young woman before him.

"What infernal curiosity," he exclaimed, striking a table near by violently with his fist, "induced you to pry into matters that did not concern you, and fish up this sulphureous secret from the Dead Sea of human memory?"

"No curiosity at all, sir," said Rose, firmly, "but a laudable sense of duty to myself and the family."

"The family could have spared your exertions in its behalf. You have blasted the life of one of the loveliest creatures in the world. You have brought disgrace and misery upon my household."

"The truth, sir, never brings disgrace and misery. Let them fall where they are deserved. Our skirts are free."

Du Valcourt sat silent for some minutes gazing upon the floor. The room was so still that the French clock was heard ticking on the mantel. He slowly muttered to himself,—

"The records of the asylum proved it. Oh, fatal mistake, to have ignored the antecedents! Yet my wife and I thought it the very best way to secure the peace and happiness of all parties. I thought old Lethe was keeping one secret, and I now find that she was harboring an entirely different and more terrible one. She is now fairly cornered and driven to confession. She is willing to swear in a court of justice that, to her own positive knowledge, Ninette is her grand-daughter. Think of it! her grand-daughter! What a hideous discovery!"

"The discovery has been made," said Rose, with a lawyer-like coolness and precision, "no matter who made it. The facts have been circulated throughout society, no matter who did it. It is *un fait accompli:* why discuss it? The only question now before us, sir, is, what is to be done with Miss Mary Emily

Gordon, the daughter of a disreputable colored woman, and therefore not a fit associate for the ladies of your family."

The old man groaned deeply, and stared at the black-eyed, black-haired, yellow-skinned young woman.

"By the Eternal!" he exclaimed, with old General Jackson's favorite oath; "with what odious self-possession you speak of these heart-rending things! If you were judged by appearances, one would say that you had ten times more African taint in your blood than Ninette."

"Oh, Du Valcourt! Du Valcourt!" remonstrated his wife.

"My fatherless and brotherless position, sir, should protect me from insult," almost shouted Miss Rose.

The colonel paid no attention to either complaint. He covered his face with his hands and murmured,—

"Ah, you did not know her, so sweet, so gentle, so joyous, so obedient. You were not reared with her. She was the idol of all her young companions. If you had known her, you would never, never have done this cruel thing."

"Colonel Du Valcourt," said Rose, coming forward and placing her hand on the shoulder of that gentleman as she stood by his side, "emotions are transitory; they contribute nothing to the solution of the problem before us. We are brought face to face with a question of the deepest significance. Is the black race to live socially with the white race?—not in political or legal equality,—but are the social barriers to be broken down and the races to intermarry and amalgamate, or are they to be kept separate and distinct forever? The nation has this difficult problem ahead of it. The issue is forced upon this little household now. We, we three white people against one person of African descent, must decide it at once for ourselves. No delay is admissible. Recover your self-possession, and act with the dignity and decision worthy of your name and your race."

"Why," said the unhappy man,—"why should I turn my adopted child out of my house to gratify your whims and prejudices?"

"Because her adoption was a *faux pas* made in ignorance of her real character; because there are other people in the house whose sacred, social rights must be respected; and because we have neither whims nor prejudices, but rational opinions and settled convictions."

As Du Valcourt remained silent, she went on, in a calm and positive tone, all the coldness and hardness of her nature coming to the front.

"If the facts were known, this young woman would not be received into any first-class hotel or boarding-house in the city. The facts being known in our circle of acquaintance, we may expect similar results. The majority of our best visitors will not accept Miss Mary Emily Gordon on an equal footing. The issue is inevitable. Either she, or my mother and myself, must leave the house."

"We never know the inherent baseness of our boasted civilization," groaned Du Valcourt, "until personal experience brings us face to face with some of its enormities."

"You, sir, may indulge your fancy with philanthropic theories, and take the *rôle* of martyr as much as you please. We women propose to consult our own individual interests and happiness."

Mrs. Du Valcourt had been silent all this time, as she generally was when any serious subject was under consideration. Her daughter was so much more intelligent and fluent that she always accepted her as a mouth-piece, and rarely attempted to strengthen the force of her arguments.

Colonel Du Valcourt turned to his wife:

"Do you agree with your daughter, madame, in the views she has presented, and in the determination she has taken?"

"I do," replied the lady, with a little nod of the head, as quietly and briefly as if she were answering a question in the marriage ceremony.

"Has Ninette been apprised of her misfortune?—of this damnable discovery?"

"She must imagine that something strange has happened, for Mrs. Singwell cut her point-blank at the door just now, and she ran up-stairs weeping."

The old gentleman groaned deeply,—

"My child! my child!"

"Colonel Du Valcourt," said Rose, "why do you persist in calling this unfortunate creature your child?"

"Look here, miss," he said, fiercely, "if you expect to cut away the love which has entwined itself about my heart-strings for twenty years with your little penknife of discovery, you are mistaken. Ninette Du Valcourt is my daughter by adoption, my legal heir, the child of my affections, and so will remain, in spite of all your cunning and selfish plotting."

The two women were silent. Du Valcourt walked about the room a few moments in silent and painfu reflection. He was evidently bracing himself up fo some great trial. He then rang for the housemaid, an told her to go up to Miss Du Valcourt's chamber, an request that young lady to meet the family at once in the reception-room on important business.

Rose attempted several times to renew the conversation, but a peremptory wave of the hand enjoined her silence.

After a while Ninette walked, or rather staggered, slowly into the room, still wearing her street-dress, her eyes red and swollen from weeping, and a deathly pallor on her cheeks. Du Valcourt hastened towards her and kissed her. She threw her arms about his neck, and exclaimed, between her sobs,—

"Oh, papa, papa, what is the matter? What have I done? What does it all mean?"

Miss Rose looked on in serene silence. The mother raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

Du Valcourt kissed his daughter tenderly again, led her to a chair, took a seat beside her, and held one of her hands in both of his own.

"Now listen, my child," he said, "I have something very distressing to tell you. It grieves my soul, but it is my duty, for I can do it better than anybody else. I can break it to you in a manner least offensive, least painful to you."

Ninette lifted her splendid gray eyes to his face in a bewildered and frightened way.

"You always knew, Ninette, that you were an adopted child?"

"Yes," she answered, tremulously, "the orphan, only child of some of your distant relatives."

"Such was the statement made to the world and accepted by it?"

"And it was not true?"

She read in his sorrowful face that it was not true.

"And I am no kin to you at all?" she said, with the tears trickling down her face.

"You are no relative. You were taken from an orphan asylum."

The young woman shuddered and seemed about to faint. The old man hastened to say,—

"But I adopted you as my child, and my child you are, and ever shall be, my sweet Ninette."

"An orphan asylum!" she muttered; "that explains my earliest recollection of being in a great house with many little children. Then I am a waif!"

"Now, Ninette, my child, nerve yourself bravely to hear what else I have to say."

"Can you say anything more dreadful than you have already said?—that I am no kin to you?"

"Yes, my dear, something still more dreadful. But listen, Ninette. I tell you beforehand that you will always be the same to me. I will never desert you. I will divide my fortune with you. I shall always love you as I do now."

This effort to administer consolation before he struck the blow was very touching. It was like giving an anodyne to one about to undergo a surgical operation.

"I cannot bear this suspense," she said, suddenly rousing herself and looking him in the face; "let me know all at once. Do not hesitate."

"Your parentage has been discovered; your rela-ives——"

"And are they such dreadful people?" she said, in a hoarse whisper, with a look of terror.

"Oh, no; they are not dreadful—not at all; they are good enough people in their way, but—but——"

"But what?"

"They are socially banned!"

"Socially banned?" she murmured, almost inaudibly, and as if she did not exactly comprehend.

"They are persons of African descent!"

Du Valcourt knew by the movement of her lips that she exclaimed, "My God!" and her body tilted gently over to one side of the chair, and she would have fallen to the floor had he not caught her in his arms and borne her to a sofa, on which she lay like a corpse.

"Quick!" he shouted, "water! brandy! hartshorn! She has fainted!

"Oh, my God!" he continued, pressing his hand upon his heart, where he felt an intense pain, "it may be the shock has killed her!"

They all busied themselves, even Rose Villemaine, in unbuttoning her collar, loosening her dress, fanning her, and applying restoratives.

"Fainting," said Rose, with the coolness of a surgeon, "is a happy provision of nature. It is a lapse of consciousness, a Lethean bath, during which the nervous system recovers from its shock."

Rose's hypothesis, however unfeelingly stated, was correct. After some minutes, which seemed interminable to poor Du Valcourt, the object of their solicitude revived, opened her eyes, and said, feebly,—

"Thank you! thank you! I am sorry to give you all this trouble."

"Lie quiet, my child," said the tender-hearted old man, "until you are fully restored;" and he proceeded to feed her with successive teaspoonfuls of an iced sangaree he had hastily prepared.

Presently she said, "There, thank you! I am all right now." She sat up on the sofa, rearranged her dress, looked at the two ladies, and said, in a subdued tone,—

"I now comprehend the situation perfectly. What am I expected to do under these extraordinary circumstances?"

"In the first place," said Rose, quietly, "you will resume your own name, which is Mary Emily Gordon."

"For shame! Miss Villemaine," said Du Valcourt, sternly.

"What else should she do?" persisted Rose. "And, in the second place, her common sense will tell her that her separation from this household is necessary."

"Leave this house, where I have lived all my life?" said Ninette, anxiously, showing that she had not yet really comprehended the situation.

"How can it be otherwise?" said Rose. "Think of it! The blood of barbarians and slaves flows in your veins. How can we live together as equals? Be reasonable, Miss Gordon."

"Be silent, Rose Villemaine," said Du Valcourt. "You cannot explain without wounding."

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Du Valcourt, timidly; "leave it all to your father. He can pacify the young lady more readily than you. I know he will provide liberally for her, and we will make no objection. I am sure I hope she will be happy."

"You said just now," exclaimed Ninette, "that my real name is Gordon. Have you ever heard of an Emily Gordon, daughter of old Lethe Maxwell, who is on her way home dying of consumption?"

"She is your mother," said Rose, with an ill-concealed exultation in her tone.

"Have you any more cruel stabs to make?" growled Du Valcourt to his step-daughter, who had become loathsome in his sight.

"They are the simple facts of the case," replied the inexorable woman.

Ninette had been turning her eyes vacantly from one face to another. She did not faint, but she sank back on the sofa, with her head against the wall, and covered her face with her handkerchief. She did not weep: the fountain of tears was dry; excitability in that direction was exhausted for the present.

"Now, my dear Ninette," said Du Valcourt, in a more cheerful tone,—"my dear Ninette,—for never, never will I call you by any other name,—listen to me. You now know all. I only consent to your separation from this household because I know that these two women and their associates would make you miserably unhappy in it. I will provide for you elsewhere in handsome style. You shall not have a wish ungratified. We will be the same to each other that we have always been."

Then, turning to Rose and his wife, he said, "Let this house be closed as if a death had happened in it, for this is worse than death. No visiting, no company, until I make a proper disposition of this case. Do not await me at dinner."

He then lifted the handkerchief from Ninette's face, kissed her several times, and replaced it as before. She gave no response but a tender pressure of the hand. He left the room without looking behind him.

After a while Ninette rose slowly to her feet and, without speaking a word, retired to her chamber. The mother and daughter, left behind, discussed the situation for a long time, the former endeavoring in vain to soften the asperity of the latter. The bell sounded for dinner and the two ladies took their seats at the table. Suddenly Ninette appeared in the door-way attired for the street.

"Are you going out?" asked Mrs. Du Valcourt, in astonishment.

"I am going out," answered the fearfully pallid girl.

"Why do you leave so suddenly?"

"If I am a negress, I must live with negroes."

"You should not go without Colonel Du Valcourt's knowledge. He has gone to make his own arrangements for you."

"I have left a letter for him up-stairs," said Ninette, turning into the hall. The ladies rose and followed her.

"He will be greatly dissatisfied," exclaimed Mrs. Du Valcourt.

Ninette merely said, "I will send a porter for my trunk. My address will be No. 7 Pontalba Buildings."

She had her hand upon the door-knob.

"Thank you," she said, faintly, "for all your previous kindness to me."

She bowed gracefully. Rose bowed stiffly in return. It was too much for the mother. As Ninette opened the door, Mrs. Du Valcourt sprang forward and kissed her, and, as it closed upon the form of the voluntary outcast, she sank into a chair and burst into tears.

The letter which Ninette had left upon her table ran as follows:

DEAR COLONEL DU VALCOURT,—

Thanks, a thousand thanks, for all the love and blessings you have showered upon me, and especially for the kind words you have spoken to me to-day. I have been imposed long enough upon your family, and it is now proper for me to withdraw myself from your household and leave it in peace. A negress must live with negroes. The good education you have given me will secure my support, and I shall devote myself to the elevation of my race. Do not endeavor to change my determination, but leave me to my destiny. It is best for us all. Accept my inexpressible gratitude and affection.

MARY EMILY GORDON.

That evening Rose Villemaine and her mother sat silently in the grand parlor. The door-bell rang. The young lady called out to the servant in the hall:

"Remember, Lisetta, that we are 'at home' to nobody but Mr. Hugh Stanford."

"And why to Mr. Hugh Stanford?" said the mother, surprised.

"Because I wish to enjoy the pleasure of breaking the news to him," said Rose, slowly and bitterly.

The mother had barely time to say, "Rose! Rose!" in a reproachful tone, when Stanford entered the door.

Rose advanced smilingly to meet him, but he saw by Mrs. Du Valcourt's face that something was wrong.

"Are you all well?" he said, anxiously, without taking a seat.

"Certainly, every member of the family is well."

"Miss Du Valcourt?"

"No person of that name resides here."

"Will you please explain your meaning, Miss Villemaine," said Stanford, with a startled, half-indignant expression.

"It was recently discovered, sir," answered Rose, as coolly as if she was alluding to a fact in science, "that the young person who bore that name for so long a time was not entitled to it."

"Not entitled to it?" exclaimed Stanford, with a stupefied air.

"Yes, not entitled to it. Her true name is Mary Emily Gordon. She has gone to live with her relatives."

"Gone?—where?"

"To No 7 Pontalba Buildings."

"To her old nurse?"

"That old negress is her own grandmother."

"My God!" exclaimed Stanford, rushing out into the hall, without noticing Rose or her mother, "I must go to her at once. I understand the metaphor."

"Go to her at once!" said Rose, lifting both hands in amazement; "Go to her at once!"

Mr. Stanford slammed the front door behind him.

Turning to her mother, Rose remarked, with enforced self-possession, "The news must have excited Mr. Stanford. It made him quite forget his politeness."

But the mental strain proved too much for even

Miss Villemaine's powerful nerves. She hurried to her chamber, locked the door behind her, and burst into a paroxysm of indignant tears. Her dynamite had exploded, but she was not happy.

Like Homer's horses that were said to have swallowed the ground, Hugh Stanford swallowed the space between Du Valcourt's and the Pontalba Buildings. Kate, the chambermaid, took up his message to Ninette that he begged an immediate interview, but returned saying that the lady was too ill to receive any one at present. He now felt that his own emotions had made him too precipitate, and that it was indelicate to obtrude upon her privacy in the fresh agony of her deep and strange humiliation.

He put a silver dollar into the girl's hand, and said to her, "Tell the young lady that I know all, and that I love her still." The sympathetic female, glad to be the conveyer of a real love-message, pocketed the money, and repeated the words to Ninette without a mistake.

Great was old Lethe's astonishment when Ninette Du Valcourt entered her room, pale as death, trembling with emotion, and kissed her on the forehead several times, a thing she had never done before. To her eager questioning Ninette only replied, "I am too much exhausted now: I will tell you all to-morrow."

She retired into the furnished room which she had engaged that very morning for the sick woman whom she now knew to be her mother. What a revolution of circumstances in a single day! Emily Gordon had just telegraphed from Cincinnati that she was too weak to start home,—that she must wait and gather a little more strength for the journey. Delusive hope! which the consumptive often retains up to the day of dissolution.

The tender-hearted servant was overwhelmed with mingled curiosity and pity at the sight of this beautiful and fashionable lady, seeking this humble retreat at such a late hour in the evening and evidently under circumstances of deep distress. "What a mystery! what sorrow!" she kept saying to herself; but she dared not question a woman so dignified, so abstracted, and so far above her in social relations. She contented herself with making the little room as tidy and comfortable as possible, and with pressing upon its new occupant a hot cup of tea and some little refreshment.

Ninette was too much crushed and stunned by the terrible blow she had received to take that evening any clear view of her situation and surroundings. She had a vague idea that it was her duty to accept the situation and accommodate herself to circumstances. She did not regret leaving her old home, with all its comforts and rich and happy associations; for what high-spirited woman could remain under the same roof a single night with Rose Villemaine after what had been done and said? The sweet and fatherly conduct of Colonel Du Valcourt impressed her deeply, and gave a silver lining to the cloud. But the thought that she had lost Hugh Stanford intensified the horror of the abyss into which she had fallen, for what white man with a particle of self-respect would marry a woman tainted with African blood?

Stanford's tender message to her, "I know all, but I love you still," fell upon her soul like water on a

burning tongue. It was so strange and so sweet
could scarcely credit it. She made Kate repeat it o
to her and swear that she had not fabricated it.
would say it over to herself, with a little hyster
laugh and renewed tears. It was late at night be
she fell asleep in those strange and humble quart
under the shadow of the great cloud which had l
waited for her. It was a troubled, restless, unrefr
ing sleep, but occasionally a faint smile, with its
sweetness, would break out around her lips, and
would murmur, "He knows all, but he loves
still!"

CHAPTER XIII.

STANFORD STANDS FIRM.

WHAT we pronounce plausible and feasible in the shades of the evening and night is often found to be doubtful and difficult, or even impossible, when morning appears. The soul creates its shadows also, in correspondence with those of nature, and takes them for realities; but, when the sunlight of truth is poured upon them, they are found to be mere hopes and imaginations.

So was it with Ninette Du Valcourt's happy dream that Stanford knew all but loved her still. When the white sunshine of the next morning illumined her surroundings, she saw and felt clearly that her union with Hugh Stanford was impossible. He had evidently been thinking of her as a beautiful white woman, torn suddenly and violently from her charming environment and plunged into a state of darkness and despair. It was like the descent of Marie Antoinette from the palace to the dungeon. His chivalric spirit impelled him to pity and comfort her. He had sent words of consolation which must not be literally interpreted. When he realized all,—the actual descent into negrodom, the curse of heredity, the inflexible prejudices of society,—he would be compelled to pause, to reflect, to abandon his position. And even if he persisted in his mad course, blinded by love, it was clearly her own duty to reject his offers, and not permit him to precipitate himself into the gulf into which she had fallen.

These were Ninette's thoughts when she called for writing materials and sat down at a little pine table to compose a letter to Hugh Stanford. She made several efforts, which seemed unsatisfactory, for she tore the sheets of paper into pieces. At last the following note was written, sealed, and directed:

DEAR MR. STANFORD,—

The very great change in my circumstances since yesterday morning, of which you are aware, dissolves of necessity the relationship which had been established between us. An impassable gulf separates us from each other. I entreat you not to see me, as it is useless to discuss the painful question. Let us submit at once to the inflexible decree of destiny. For your friendly sentiments and good wishes in my case, I return you my humble gratitude.

MARY EMILY GORDON.

Kate, the chambermaid, was charged to deliver this letter to the office-clerk at the Hôtel Royal with her own hands. As she was leaving the room on this errand, Ninette suddenly sprang towards her, with a motion as if she would recall the message, but stopped, pressing her two hands against her heart, while Kate regarded her with amazement, and then faintly murmured, "Go on! Go on!" Throwing herself into the chair, with face and arms prone upon the little table, she exclaimed, "Oh, Hugh, Hugh! I love you still, and shall love you forever!"

Hugh Stanford looked ten years older than he did the day before, such had been the harrowing effect of the night's experiences and reflections upon him. He had just finished a light breakfast when Colonel Du Valcourt's card was sent up to him, marked "for private interview." He received the old gentleman in his room. He saw at once the unmistakable traces of mental suffering on the face which was usually so ruddy and joyous.

"I come, sir," he began, in a quiet, dignified manner, "to give you a true statement of the events which have occurred in my family, to forestall the incorrect versions which will probably be circulated in the community. I desire especially to assure you that I never had the least suspicion that my adopted child was a person of tainted blood, for I would have been guilty of a great crime had I concealed that fact from you. I wish to justify you beforehand, and to declare that I cannot blame you if you at once abandon a suit the conditions of which have undergone so serious a change. And I must also say that poor, dear Ninette has been entirely blameless and ignorant of the true state of the case. The discovery has fallen upon us all like a thunderbolt in a clear sky."

The stately, punctilious, and yet tremulous manner in which Du Valcourt uttered these words, pregnant with his high sense of duty and honor, was very touching to Hugh Stanford, who saw that, beneath the plain, business-like surface of the speech, the old man's heart was breaking for Ninette.

Du Valcourt then proceeded to tell the whole story: how he and his wife came to New Orleans two years after the war, without children; how they determined to adopt a child, and went to the asylum for that purpose; how they selected the most intelligent and beautiful little girl of them all; and how they resolved, after due reflection, to take the child without inquiry into its antecedents, in spite of the almost solemn advice and warning of the mother superior against such an unusual proceeding.

Knowledge of its antecedents might disturb the serenity of their thoughts about it, or even prejudice them against it. They had rather take it as if it came to them fresh from heaven, so they could have more powerful parental feelings towards it. The perfect purity and whiteness of the child's skin and the delicacy of her hair were such as to preclude the faintest suspicion of her being of mixed origin.

"The evidence against her," continued Du Valcourt, "rests upon the records of the asylum, which are clear and explicit, and upon the statement of old Lethe Maxwell that to her positive knowledge Ninette is the daughter of her own child Emily Gordon. This woman, she says, is now on her way to New Orleans, and will undoubtedly acknowledge and claim her child."

"Colonel Du Valcourt," said Stanford, "premising that you have my profound sympathy in what must be to you a very great affliction, I would like to know why your adopted child left your house so suddenly and took refuge with a colored relative."

"Ah, sir, I assure you, without my knowledge or consent." And the old gentleman proceeded to detail the sorrowful incidents of the day before.

"After all my offers and promises," he continued, "when I return at night, having already secured a happy home for her with excellent white people, I find the bird flown and this note left upon her table. Read it, sir."

Stanford read, with manifest emotion, Ninette's beautiful letter to her adopted father, in which she accepts her changed situation with dignified humility, declines his offers for the future while gratefully acknowledging the past, and declares her intention of maintaining herself, and devoting her powers to the elevation of her race.

"Magnificent woman!" cried Stanford, with enthusiasm. "Magnificent woman! This is the true heroine! I am unworthy of her, sir. None but a hero should aspire to her love."

Du Valcourt was surprised and secretly delighted at Stanford's high estimate of Ninette, which corresponded exactly with his own. His eyes filled with tears and his voice trembled. He who had come to apologize for having encouraged the attention of a stranger to a negress in the disguise of a white lady, now stayed to launch forth in her praises like an old gossip, while Stanford listened with the joy that lovers feel when the adored one is greatly applauded by others.

Du Valcourt had scarcely taken his leave when Ninette's letter was delivered to Stanford. He was a man of liberal opinions and tender sensibilities, and, when his mind was made up as to the righteousness of a certain course, his will was absolutely inflexible. Whether he had deliberately counted the cost during the painful watches of the preceding night, or whether his great love for Ninette impelled him to a rapid decision, he sat quietly down and penned her the following singular letter:

MY OWN LOVELY NINETTE,—

If you will open your New Testament at Romans, 8th chapter, 38th verse, you will find these words:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us," etc., etc., etc.

Behold there a true and perfect picture of our relations to each other, and the strength of the bonds which hold us together. In the presence of realized facts, discussion is idle and delay is useless.

It will be full moon to-night. I will be standing at the door of No. 7 at nine o'clock precisely. You are your own mistress, and I am your rightful protector. Come down at that hour, and we will take a stroll in Jackson Square and arrange the details of our marriage.

Your devoted

HUGH.

After despatching this decisive communication to Ninette, the author of it walked to Dr. Holden's office, where he found Denfield in consultation with the doctor.

"Respect the laws of nature," the latter was saying. "An overworked life is not worth living. Play lazy."

"Well met," said Stanford, after a cordial greeting, "for I want a word with both of you."

"Mr. Denfield," he continued, "do the laws of Louisiana prohibit marriages between white people and those of African descent?"

"No," said the lawyer; "there were such prohibitory statutes on our books, but the Republicans repealed them, on the ground that the races should be equal in the eye of the law. The Democrats have let the matter stand, leaving the whole question to private taste and choice. Some States have enacted stringent laws against such intermarriages, but it seems to be useless, for there is no more amalgamation here where everything is optional."

"Very satisfactory," said Stanford. Then, turning to the doctor, he asked,—

"Do the children of such marriages have a tendency to revert to the lower or darker type?"

"There is some doubt and contradictory evidence on that point. Mulattoes are undoubtedly feebler and less prolific than either of the two races from which they spring. If left alone they would probably become extinct or revert to the black type. Their children are frequently darker than themselves. Even the children of octoroons or those of still lighter shades, sometimes betray physical characteristics of the negro when first born or in the second childhood of old age. But with the successive addition of the pure white element with each generation, the dark element rapidly disappears and is at last obliterated."

Stanford looked the doctor full in the face and remarked,—

"I have met your African lion whom you described as 'loose and rampant,' and his ferocity has not frightened me out of my wits. I shall feel still less afraid when I am assured that there is no scientific basis for the supposition that the product of a union of myself with Miss Ninette Du Valcourt will result in any deterioration of my race."

The two gentlemen were so well bred that they expressed no astonishment at this remark.

"I think you may feel perfectly secure on that point," said the doctor.

"It will take impregnable evidence," said Denfield, "to make me believe that Miss Du Valcourt has any African blood in her veins."

"Ah," remarked the doctor, "appearances are very deceptive. I bought a young slave-woman before the war, who had red hair, blue eyes, and a skin as fair as Miss Du Valcourt's. I took her out of a slave-pen in sheer pity at the utter incongruity between her appearance and her surroundings. But, white as she was, she was a genuine negro in all her tastes and habits. Her freedom, which came soon after, proved a curse and not a blessing."

"She was born," replied Stanford, "a slave among slaves. If she had been reared from infancy in the North by intelligent and refined white people, do you not suppose her character would have been entirely different?"

"Undoubtedly," said the doctor, "for she would have enjoyed the advantages of education and culture, which antidote a vicious heredity. Civilization is the product of the change imposed upon heredity by education and culture."

There was silence for a few moments. It was evident that the Southern gentlemen either had nothing more to say, or felt a certain embarrassment or delicacy in continuing the subject. But Stanford seemed inclined to press the consideration of it to a practical issue.

"In spite," he said, "of the teachings of priests, poets, philosophers, and statesmen, the ideas involved in the words equality and fraternity are almost as little realized as if they were expressed in unknown tongues. To illustrate my meaning. You are both intelligent, liberal, broad-minded men. You know that Miss Du Valcourt is a highly-educated, refined, and cultivated woman, entirely undistinguishable in mental or physical traits from the white race. If I had told you a week ago that I was going to marry Miss Du Valcourt, you would have congratulated me cordially upon my great good fortune. Now that you have learned that Miss Du Valcourt's veins contain some one-thirty-second part of African blood, all is changed. You now revolt at the marriage. Her personal worth goes for nothing. Instead of congratulating, you pity me. Can you explain it?"

"If you do not feel instinctively as we do," said Denfield, "our arguments will probably fail to convince you."

"Human instincts should be based upon reason," said Stanford. "Prejudices are false and vicious instincts. All mere prejudices are ignoble: race prejudices form no exception."

"Our antipathy to the marriage," said the lawyer, "is not an unreasoning instinct, but has a strong philosophical basis."

Denfield hesitated, as if he did not care to discuss the matter, but Stanford eagerly invited him to go on.

"Well," continued the lawyer, "you must permit me to be perfectly candid, and you must not be offended at what I have to say, however deeply it may wound you.

"Ignoring the very important question of race-inferiority and other serious objections, I would call your attention to one fact,—that four or five gen tions of illicit unions on the part both of the gra fathers and the grandmothers must, by the laws heredity, produce a type in which the animal or se ous nature largely predominates. This is the rea why women of African descent who are nearly w are such alluring and dangerous centres of attrac to the white man, and such objects of antipathy dislike to the white woman. I do not care to enl upon this idea, but you will see at once its great nificance."

Stanford looked a little disconcerted. He had dently never surveyed the subject from the stand-p suggested. It was a new thought to him, and a p ful one. Still, he soon rallied, with a display of siderable philosophical *sang-froid*.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we have over- mated or greatly misunderstood the quality and power of heredity. It is seldom that any spe faculty descends in a right line increasing in force descends. Soldiers, poets, statesmen, musicians, ar tects, scientists, rarely or never beget their like. children of the very pious are seldom pious. The of a miser is a spendthrift. Why should the chil of sensualists be sensual? It would require a w established series of facts to prove the truth of an assertion.

"Then, moreover, how can we presume to si judgment on these people? What do we know their conditions, motives, circumstances, characters, permanent states of life? How many white marria do you suppose, would be unobjectionable, if we c trace the secret history of all the parties back for five generations?

"I am aware that this is special pleading, but I insist that our knowledge of evolution and heredity is too limited and imperfect for us to make sweeping generalizations as to the transmission of moral or immoral qualities."

The lawyer and the doctor both nodded acquiescence. There was another silent pause. All seemed to feel that the subject had not been properly presented, or perhaps that it was unpresentable.

"It is curious," the doctor at length remarked, "how the race-antipathy of the white man starts up like an alarmed sentinel at the mention of marriage. He will gratify his social appetites with inferior races, displaying a low degree of affection for his temporary mates and his children. The same man will exhibit an intense racial jealousy when it comes to the question of marriage; and within the bonds of marriage his paternal and marital instincts will unfold in a rapid and durable manner."

"What do you infer from those facts?" said Stanford.

"They speak volumes," replied the doctor, "for the organic necessity and sanctity of marriage, as an institution founded in natural law. With legal and spiritual endorsement, it is the basis of all true civilization. Without that endorsement, we are adrift on a sea of spiritual affinities and natural passions. Our civilization is even now in danger, mainly, I believe, on account of the imperfections of marriage among us."

"The general mind of the white race," said Denfield, "unquestionably revolts at the idea of marriage with an inferior species, either from the pride of selfhood or from an innate sense of propriety. There is, indeed, a small but growing class of enthusiasts, 'higher-law people,' John Browns, Tolstois, socialists, anarchists, who would abandon the old usages, break down the ancient barriers, and reconstruct society on the model of absolute and perfect equality and fraternity."

"I must have been born in that class," said Stanford, resolutely, "for my sympathies run strongly with some of them. They may err in the steps they take, in the measures they recommend, like John Brown, Tolstoi, or Henry George; but their faces are inflexibly turned in the right direction, and the world will follow them at last. I believe, gentlemen, in the spiritual solidarity of the human race, and in the final composite union of all the races. I believe religiously in equality and fraternity. I despise everything which alienates and separates man from man. I admire and encourage everything which tends to draw God's creatures nearer together."

"We may pursue ideals as ardently as we please," said the doctor, "but the mills of God grind slowly, and we shall be compelled to wait the gradual, imperceptible, but invincible forces of social evolution."

"Conceded," said Stanford; "but every advanced thinker is an evolutionary worker in his own time and place."

"And a modifier of public opinion," added Denfield, "that tremendous power which is so slowly generated, so slowly changed."

"If public opinion," said Stanford, "be false and evil on the race-question, as I believe it to be, then work, work, agitate for its amendment. Public opinion is only the concrete expression of the thought of the majority. The noblest work of thinking men is to create a new public opinion.

"But, gentlemen," continued the enthusiast, after a brief pause, "there is still higher ground to take. Do not look for truth in any public opinion. Look for it in the depths of your own heart, in the secret recesses of your nature where God is present. When you not only see the truth but feel it, stand loyally by it, whether the issue be martyrdom or coronation."

"You are drunk with conviction," said Denfield, rising and laying his hand on his friend's arm: "Stanford, you were born to be a martyr."

"If it be in the cause of human liberty and progress, I accept my destiny," said the Northerner; and the three friends parted in good humor.

When Ninette Du Valcourt received and read and re-read Stanford's letter, it had a very singular effect upon her. She had believed that she was right in her convictions and strong in her resolutions. She had imagined that nothing could change her mind. In a few moments her position was reversed: from positive she had become negative. Stanford's strong words had magnetized her. She found it impossible to struggle or resist. She knew she was passive in his hands, and that it could not and ought not to be otherwise. She felt that she had a powerful masculine spirit, as beautiful and wise as it was strong and brave, to think and act for her. She simply acquiesced in his decision, and awaited with tremulous expectation the interview, in which she was sure that she would never have the sense or the courage to express properly the gratitude and love he had inspired.

Lethe Maxwell had been greatly distressed at Ninette's miserable condition the evening before, and when she learned the whole story in the morning, she avowed with many tears and protestations that she had taken no hand in the exposure.

"I was too happy, my child, in seeing you happy. I would have carried that secret to my grave. They might have cut my heart out, but I never would have told it."

Ignorant of the contents or even of the reception of Stanford's letter, she supposed that Ninette's quiet and apparently contented manner in the afternoon was the result of her own attempts at consolation. For the poor old woman had deepened the wounds she attempted to heal, by assuring Ninette, over and over again, that it wouldn't be half so bad as she anticipated; that there were many good and intelligent colored people to associate with; that, although she could not go to the opera at night in full-dress, she could attend all the *matinées*, to which every one was admitted; that she would be sure to find many admirers and lovers; and that even some white gentlemen would take her on moonlight rides to the lake. All this would have been insufferable to the poor creature, had her mind not been preoccupied with Stanford's letter, which offered a speedy and honorable escape from the whole atmosphere of Lethe's well-intentioned but horrible consolations.

When Stanford rang the door-bell of No. 7 at nine o'clock, Ninette was already listening at the head of the stairs, and eagerly ran down to meet him. The sprightly chambermaid, with ears alert, heard only two words as they met and immediately turned away from her. The words were, "Ninette!" "Hugh!"

It may be safely asserted that Jackson Square seemed more entrancingly beautiful on that moonlit night to our young couple than it ever did before, or ever will again. The first blush of the young rose, the spotless white of the magnolia, the delicate perfume of the violet,—what poor emblems are they all! of the tender witchery of charm that interplays between two loving souls in the golden dawn of the sacred passion!

Why should any one desire to play eavesdropper and report what they said? What they said would be an altogether different and incalculably poorer thing when passed through the minds and mouths of others. The celestial language is untranslatable into mortal speech. They breathe an air we do not breathe. They see a light we cannot see. Let the curtain fall upon "love's young dream."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GRIEVOUS INSULT.

STANFORD easily prevailed upon Ninette to accept Colonel Du Valcourt's offer to place her temporarily in charge of Mrs. Octavia Marcelle, the estimable widow of a gallant officer, who lived in comparative seclusion in a neat little cottage near Washington Square. Ninette went every day to see her grandmother in the Pontalba Buildings, and Stanford turned his attention with renewed energy to the elucidation of the mystery which had brought him to New Orleans.

He had proved the value of Dr. Holden's advice to keep the relics of Gordon Clarke frequently before Cora Morette in the hypnotic condition. She had advanced step by step into a clearer conception of the surroundings of that unfortunate man before his disappearance. She read from his mind the very sum of money which he had about him, even the forms—gold, notes, or checks—in which it was held. She perceived the plottings of the Meissoniers against him, and detected and described their characters. She still affirmed that the doctor was cunning, sensual, and cruel, and that Madame Lucia was "*coquette, toujours coquette;*" and no cross-examination could make her modify her statements.

The young druggist who conducted her hypnotization protested against the deep trances—the trance within a trance—into which Stanford desired to have her thrown. She seemed deeply distressed in the midst of her trance, and always arrived at a point where she became absolutely silent. She was very much exhausted after following Gordon Clarke's trunks from the hotel to some point away in the suburbs. She finally discovered them stored away in an old garret room containing various other abandoned and useless articles. She described the house so clearly that Stanford concluded it must be old Madame Fortier's residence on Esplanade Street, of which Denfield had given him an account.

When he produced the articles which had been borrowed from Madame Maspero, Cora recognized at once the little dress and the coral necklace, as belonging to the same child from whom the lock of hair had been taken. She repudiated the little shoes, however, and could tell nothing about them, which struck Stanford as being very singular. The Spanish prayer-book she held in her hand a long time, and described a lady, whom Stanford of course could not verify, as Mrs. Gordon Clarke; but contemplation of the woman led the seeress to the same scene of death by yellow fever which she had described on a former occasion.

Stanford then gave her the lock of hair which Madame Maspero had obtained from the charming head of Miss Lilly Montrose. She proceeded to give a very good psychometric analysis of that young lady's character, which might have been recognized by every intelligent *habitué*, if such existed, of the Oriental

Varieties. She summed up her description with emphatic shrugs of the shoulder and the words, "*frivole, coquette, insensée.*"

Stanford compared the two locks of hair, and insisted that they came from the head of the same person at two different ages of life.

"No, no, no!" said Cora, with impetuosity and earnest gesticulation.

"How do you know?" said Stanford.

"Know? When I see an acorn, I know that an oak-tree comes from it. Show me a hen's egg, I foresee a chicken. Every hair, every nail, every line in the hand tells something of the character, bears some imprint of the personality. No! no! These persons are very, very different."

Stanford reported these interviews to Denfield, and they discussed them together.

"Cora Morette's evidence," said Stanford, "would lead us to infer that Miss Lillie Montrose is a fraud."

"Montrose is a fraud," said the lawyer, "and she and Maspero are conspirators to obtain money under false pretensions. Cora Morette's evidence may impress you, but I have stronger reasons for my opinion."

"Please state them."

"I detected our pretty widow in a falsehood about advertising for the child she pretends to have picked up. A lie in the beginning predicts a lie at the end. Then she produces a pair of shoes which she says were worn by a little child lost and wandering about the streets. I examine those shoes carefully with a strong magnifier. I do not find the slightest abrasion on the soles, no stain or mark made by dust, or dirt, or gravel. No, sir! Maspero has not produced the clothing the child wore when it disappeared. Those articles were taken from Mrs. Gordon Clarke's trunk. She knows what became of the trunk, of the child, and of Gordon Clarke."

"The shoes," said Stanford, "were useless to Cora, because the child had never worn them! Maspero lied, and we are close upon her trail. Will you not get out a search-warrant at once, and see if those trunks are not in old Madame Fortier's garret?"

"Not so hastily," said the lawyer. "If those trunks have been there for twenty years, they will lie there quietly a little longer. Any move in that direction would excite the suspicions of the old fox, and all the game would escape us."

"See what a blunder I would have made, and how wise it was to secure a good lawyer!"

"For that compliment you deserve a lunch at the Pickwick Club," said Denfield, smiling; "pompano, woodcock, champagne frappé! Come!"

They repaired to the magnificent club-house indicated, which has forty rooms handsomely furnished, every one in a different style. Denfield ordered his lunch, and they passed into the grand reception-rooms and parlors. Gentlemen were standing or sitting about in groups discussing private affairs or the questions of the day. Any one strolling around but listening intently would soon have discovered that the chief topic of these little conversations was the terrible discovery that Ninette Du Valcourt was of African descent. Such sentences as these would have met his ear from different sources:

"Sorry for Du Valcourt. He is a splendid old fellow, proud, high-spirited, sensitive."

"Miss Villemaine will profit by this."

"She might have kept the villanous secret to herself."

"I don't believe a word of it, I tell you. She hasn't even the violet tint in the crescent of the finger-nail, which reveals so little as the one hundred and twenty-eighth part of African blood."

"It was a terrible *faux-pas* to leave her father's house: the matter could have been hushed up."

"The women drove her out, you may be sure."

"She will find consolation: the tears of pretty women are soon dried."

"I bet her northern lover will desert her now; they hate negroes worse than we do." (From a dude.)

Denfield and Stanford drew near to a group of five or six young gentlemen, seated around a middle-aged man of fine, soldierly appearance, who seemed to be an oracle with them. He had a frank, handsome face, kept smoothly shaven, large, bright hazel eyes, and a voice singularly musical and persuasive. This person was Colonel Chester McLean, a distinguished lawyer, and a welcome guest in the highest social circles.

Chester McLean was a Virginian of a fine old family, who recognized the value of a pure ancestral current. "It's all in the blood" was his expression, indicating a profound faith in the laws of heredity. He was barely twenty years old when he left the Virginia Military Institute at the first tap of the confederate drum to engage in the war. He was known as "the boy-captain," and he handled his company in veral of the great battles with the skill and courage a veteran. He was one of Pickett's men in that perb charge on the third day at Gettysburg. He as left for dead on the field, close to the federal can- on, grasping in his right hand a pearl-handled sword, e gift of his mother. He recovered, was promoted, d fought it out, until his shattered regiment stacked ms at Appomattox, many of its wounded heroes edding angry tears at the necessity of surrender.

McLean was not a dissipated man, but he was a high ver, a boon companion, and so frank and lovable in s ways that he was a favorite with man and woman. e was a bachelor, and so very hasty was he and im- etuous in the expression of his opinions, that he had metimes to apologize for their utterance. This he ways did in the most graceful manner, and, as no man ad ever doubted his courage, a readiness to apologize as added to the list of his virtues.

McLean, either thoughtless or careless of the presence f Stanford, whom he knew to be a northern man and frequent visitor at Du Valcourt's, exclaimed aloud to ne of his party,—

“Yes, Charlie, you are right. When a woman falls hair's-breadth below the white line, like Miss Du Valcourt, she becomes the legitimate prey of any club- nan who can meet the expenses.”

Several murmurs of dissent were heard, and Denfield alled out, reproachfully,—

“You are wrong, McLean: you are too rash, too positive: you are unjust.”

But it was upon Stanford that the words made the leepest impression. At first he turned deadly pale, as if he had received a shock which had driven all the blood in his body back upon the heart. When that organ reacted, his face reddened with anger to the roots of his hair. His eyes glistened, his hand was raised, and his looks and attitude were such, that McLean and his friends sprang to their feet before a word was uttered.

"Your language, sir," he exclaimed, "is that of *roués* and blacklegs."

McLean flushed in his turn, without the preceding pallor, and said, quickly and sternly,—

"If you have a drop of gentlemanly blood in your veins, sir, you will give me the satisfaction I have a right to demand of you, for classifying me with infamous characters."

Stanford's muscles grew rigid; his face lit up with scorn; he looked fixedly at McLean as one gladiator of old might have looked into the eyes of another, and exclaimed,—

"You can obtain your satisfaction, sir, here and now."

McLean stepped back, with a graceful wave of the hand: his self-possession was complete.

"We are not *canaille*. My friends will wait upon you, sir." And he turned away.

Stanford was about to follow and speak, but Denfield seized his arm and drew him away.

"Come," he said, "our lunch is ready."

This scene, witnessed by all, created considerable excitement in the room, and various were the comments made upon it.

"That's a plucky fellow, I'll wager."

"He must have been deeply attached to that young girl to run such risks for her."

"There'll be one seat permanently vacant at some Chicago table. McLean is a dead shot."

"He was ready enough for a fisticuff; I wonder how he'll stand fire."

"McLean was very much in the wrong. This thing must be settled amicably, for the credit of the club."

The young dude, who had ventured the idea that "Northerners hate negroes worse than we do," now shifted his opinion through the quicksands of his mind to the other side, and exclaimed,—

"Those northern fellows always take up for negroes, anyhow."

Stanford must have had a wonderful power of self-control, if that is evinced by a rapid transition from a state of the highest excitement to one of perfect calm. He conversed with his usual quiet affability on indifferent matters. Not once during the lunch did either gentleman allude to the quarrel or its probable results.

When they parted, however, Denfield took his friend's hand and said, gently,—

"You will be challenged to fight a duel. Promise me that you will not accept it until Dr. Holden and myself have conversed with you on the subject. I will bring him to your room at the Hôtel Royal soon after three o'clock, when court adjourns."

Stanford thanked the lawyer for the friendly interest he took in the affairs of a comparative stranger, and promised to comply with his wishes. He had very soon another occasion to express his gratitude. He had scarcely parted with Denfield, when two handsome, stylish, young Creole gentlemen approached him, Mr. Mercier Legendre and Mr. Arthur De Poincy, both of whom he had met, frequently at the clubs and occasionally at Du Valcourt's.

"We were present," said Mr. Legendre, "at the unfortunate collision which took place between yourself and Colonel McLean. Without endorsing what you said to that gentleman, we admire your courage and spirit in resenting his unnecessary and ungenerous language. A challenge will be made. You are a stranger in this city, ignorant probably of these matters and how to conduct them. Besides, we know you will feel a natural delicacy about asking any one to assist you in so grave a matter. We are *au fait* in everything relating to the code, and we beg you not to hesitate a moment to command our services, if you feel inclined to accept this challenge. Our friend Dr. Mireaux will gladly accompany us in the capacity of surgeon. A call by letter or telephone to the Pickwick Club will receive our immediate attention."

Stanford, touched by the considerate politeness and friendliness of these gentlemen, thanked them cordially, and assured them he would accept their services if they should be needed.

Our hero then retired to his room, and proceeded to contemplate in solitude the unexpected and serious contingency which had arisen in his life. He had been educated in a part of the country where no such event as a duel had ever occurred, and where that mode of combat was regarded with proper disgust as a relic of barbarism. His instincts, his training, his personal convictions, were all against it. But the direct insult to Ninette was so unspeakable, and the sweeping assertion by McLean of the unchastity of all women a hair's-breadth below the white line was so outrageous, that it took him a good while to quiet down from a state of suppressed indignation.

At length he succeeded in facing the whole problem fairly and deliberately. He considered it from every point of view, individual, social, and general. He finally made up his mind what course to adopt, and, without imposing an oath upon the recording angel to carry,—for he never swore,—he struck his hand forcibly upon the table before him, and exclaimed,—

"I will accept the challenge!"

He occupied an hour or two of the time left him in writing, as all duellists do, letters of business or of adieu to friends and relations, not to be delivered unless he perished in the combat. The most important letters were directed to Ninette and to Mr. Ephraim Clarke. To the latter he wrote, in extenuation of his course, "Could the North have declined to accept the challenge of the South when she fired upon Fort Sumter?" To Ninette he said, "Your fair fame is infinitely precious to me." And yet this young gentleman had actually persuaded himself that his decision had been dictated by reason unbiassed by affection!

Denfield and Dr. Holden entered the room just after the appointed time. Their faces were as grave as if they came to take part in a funeral ceremony. Stanford's manner was bright and cheerful.

"Dear Stanford," said the sympathetic doctor, grasping his hand warmly, "I would express my profound regret at finding you in this painful position, and from no misconduct of your own."

"It is less painful," said Stanford, "because I am not in fault."

"True, true," said the doctor; "but I am shocked that a blameless, amiable fellow like you, and a stranger here besides, should have become embroiled with these Southern hot-bloods in such a manner. We have called to see if we cannot suggest, or negotiate, or invent some peaceful solution of the difficulty."

"The peaceful solution of the difficulty," he replied, "rests entirely with Colonel McLean. He can stay the proceedings, as the lawyers say, by full retraction and apology."

"And that seems out of the question," said the doctor, sadly. "With two of his most intimate friends, I called upon McLean, but we found him inflexible. He has always been so amiable, so accommodative, so manageable, I may say, that we anticipated no difficulty in getting him to make a proper apology for his violent and unjust expressions. He is acting in a very singular manner. He is not only obstinate, but—so utterly unlike himself—he is reticent and uncommunicative. He does not defend his own conduct; he does not blame you; he simply says, in the most emphatic manner, that the duel must take place."

"If such be the mood of my opponent," said Stanford, quietly, "my declination of his challenge would not terminate the difficulty."

"No," said Denfield, gravely. "He would post you as a liar and a coward, or he would make a street-fight of it."

"All fighting is diabolical," said the doctor, earntly; "prize-fights, duels, battles,—the whole arena d spirit of contention are essentially devilish. The el has been chased by legal enactments from almost ery civilized country. It originated in the Middle ges with the French aristocracy, but even here in ouisiana, where that spirit still largely prevails, duelng is a penal offence. It is, indeed, a punishable ime in every Southern State. The duellists must ave home and invade another territory to fight in, d they must immediately fly its jurisdiction when e fight is over, to escape arrest. The best sentiment f the world is against duelling, and nothing can be id in its vindication."

"I believe, said Denfield, "that struggle, combat, ar, are necessary elements in the evolution and final levation of the human race. Men will fight, must ght, and ought to fight, until they attain that stage f evolution when it will be unnecessary or even inurious and retardative. Many individuals and even ommunities have already attained that stage, but they hould not wish, like the doctor, to impose their higher-law' principles upon the masses who are creepng up slowly behind them. I condone all the fightng of past ages and that which still exists among emi-civilized peoples, but I insist that right here, o-day, in the United States, duelling is an extinct olcano, from which no more eruption is to be expected, or at most a little puff of smoke and ashes."

"What do you suggest, then," said Stanford, "since Colonel McLean insists upon the combat?"

"To insist upon arbitration," said Denfield. "All those difficulties should be settled by arbitration, and a vigorous public opinion should be cultivated which will tolerate no other solution. When McLean's challenge comes, decline it, on the ground that a duel would do nothing to settle the question at issue. Offer to submit the case, and the points as to who should apologize and how it should be done, to three honorable gentlemen. This community will approve and sustain you, and there will be no question of your courage or honor."

"There is higher ground to take, Mr. Stanford," said the doctor, appealingly. "Rise to the level of your own spiritual convictions. Forgive the insulter and forget the insult. Set a superb example to these young gentlemen by ignoring the whole matter. Courage is a poor, barbaric virtue in comparison with that brotherly love which takes no offence and thinks no evil."

"The kingdom of heaven is not yet inaugurated upon earth," suggested Mr. Denfield.

"The church," said the doctor, "is the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and woe to it! if it obeys not the plainest commands of the Master: forgive your enemies, love those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you."

"I would willingly submit," said Stanford, "to the arbitration which Mr. Denfield proposes, but Colonel McLean has already blocked the way to any compromise or conciliation. I am profoundly touched by Dr. Holden's words. He expresses my own real sentiments: he holds before me my own long-cherished ideal. The Scripture says, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' I have not heeded the warning. I thought I was secure in my position. Under the pressure of circumstances I have fallen. My resolution was unstable as water. I cannot rise above the level of my surroundings. In Rome I am merely Roman."

There was such genuine humility in Stanford's tone that Holden gently remarked,—

"Your provocation was very great."

"Think of it!" said Stanford, with flashing eyes, as the miserable scene burst again upon his mental vision. "The woman to whom I have pledged my life and love has been grievously insulted in a manner which admits of no extenuation. If I had just risen, sir, from reading the Sermon on the Mount, and had just sworn to live according to its heavenly precepts, and the next moment should discover a tramp attacking my mother, I should knock the villain down and kick him out of doors. Blood is thicker than water, gentlemen! and God will pardon something to the righteous impetuosities of human nature.

"I know, Dr. Holden, what you would say,—that God forgives all things, and we must do the same. There are two degrees in the evolution of the spiritual life. That highest and holiest degree, in which the other cheek is turned to the smiter, has been seldom unfolded in the human race. In the lower degree in which we live at present, resistance to evil is a virtue, and it cannot be made without difficulty, danger, and sacrifice.

"I protest against McLean's position, that every woman a hair's-breadth below the white line is an unchaste and purchasable creature, as a base falsehood, founded upon a baser theory and philosophy of life. I have branded his assertion with its true name and character, and I cannot change it in the face of death. Nor am I, gentlemen, a self-constituted, quixotic champion of the colored race. This issue has been suddenly, violently forced upon me. I am simply true to the voice of my own heart. It is the manhood within me that speaks. If the Christhood, which is latent in us all, does not approve, it will forgive."

The friends were deeply impressed by the lofty yet quiet enthusiasm which pervaded Stanford's words and manner, and the almost spiritual light which shone in his face.

"All of which means," said the doctor, with a sigh, as he rose to his feet, "that you will accept McLean's challenge."

"It is my painful duty under the circumstances to accept the challenge."

"And become the martyr that I predicted," said Denfield.

"Man proposes, God disposes," said Stanford; and the friends sadly bade him adieu.

"That young man," said Holden to Denfield, "is capable of rising to the highest height on any other question; but love is blind."

Soon afterwards Mr. Ferdinand Canova and Mr. Alexis Du Pré appeared as bearers of Colonel McLean's challenge. They were referred to Stanford's young friends at the Pickwick Club. In an hour more the whole affair was arranged. Place, mouth of Pearl River, Mississippi side; time, next morning at 8.30; weapons, duelling pistols; distance, twenty steps.

Stanford of course spent that evening with Ninette Du Valcourt. It was her reception-day at the home she had abandoned, and she was deeply gratified at the visits she had received from two very dear friends, who found out where she was located and sent in their cards.

The first who called was an impetuous, gushing, lovely girl, who threw herself upon Ninette's neck, and vowed that she never would believe a word of that silly story, and that if forty lawyers were to prove it true she would snap her fingers at them all,—for nothing, nothing in the world should ever separate her from her own, sweet, abused, darling, lovely Ninette!

From the other visitor she received a profounder satisfaction. She was a married lady of the highest standing and culture, and possessed those fascinating manners of the best Creole society which are rarely equalled and never surpassed anywhere in the world. She did not make the least allusion to Ninette's changed condition or the causes of it, but engaged her in pleasant conversation on passing matters, so that when she took her leave, which she did in her usual charming way and without effusiveness, Ninette felt as quiet and happy as if she had never left the Du Valcourt mansion, and as if all the recent disturbing events had been a dream.

Stanford heard these incidents with pleasure, for they convinced him of what he was already disposed to believe, that Rose Villemaine, Mrs. Singwell, and the dude at the Pickwick Club did not represent the best elements of New Orleans society.

It is difficult for a candid, sincere man like Stanford to wear two faces; to maintain a happy, smiling, love-making exterior, and to conceal an aching, apprehensive heart in his bosom. The thought that his death might leave Ninette permanently in her present painful condition was torture to him. If he killed McLean, the outlook was desolate. Yet Ninette must not get the least hint of the impending duel.

For some unexplained reason, perhaps the secret sympathy of true lovers, Ninette was not as bright and cheerful as usual. Stanford rallied her from her apparent dejection by classing her with the romantic young ladies who sigh yet feel no pain, who weep and know not why. He made his own conversation as brilliant and interesting as possible. Her vague apprehensions were dissipated, and, when he kissed her good-night with more than usual fervor, she recognized only the warmth of his affection, while in his own thought, the ardor of love was mingled with the impressiveness of a possibly last adieu.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUEL.

The outward-bound morning mail train on the Mobile road carried ten persons in the smoking-car, who excited the curiosity of the officials and the other passengers.

They were not smoking nor playing cards, so they must have selected that part of the train for comparative privacy. They were divided into two parties, five in each, occupying seats far apart. They must have been strangers to each other, or they were unfriendly. Each group had a well-known surgeon with it, and each surgeon had with him a box, about eighteen by twelve inches and four deep. Then, again, one of the gentlemen in each group had a box not quite so large and covered with green baize. The parties in each group conversed together in low tones, and paid no attention either to the scenery or to the other passengers.

These things were noted one by one by the porter, the conductor, the brakesman, the newsboy, and a few early smoking travellers. Put together and discussed on the platform in whispered conversations, they led at last to the conclusion that these gentlemen were bound for the Mississippi coast to fight a duel. There was the regulation number of the Code of Honor, five persons, in each group,—the principal, the two seconds, the surgeon, and the referee. One set of cases contained pistols for the bloody work, and the other set of cases contained surgical appliances for such repairs as might be possible after the fight was over. All of which was true.

This solution of the mystery passed rapidly from mouth to mouth, and soon everybody on the train, the ladies especially, seemed deeply interested in the affair. Every man seemed to have occasion to pass through the smoking-car, or to peer into it from the platform. Every woman was broiling on the gridiron of curiosity to know what it was about, who were the parties, where they were going, and how they all looked. As no true knowledge of the facts could be obtained, imagination ran riot as usual and invented what it pleased.

One of the inspecting gentlemen said,—

"I know none of the parties but Colonel McLean. If he does any of the shooting, the other man is going to be killed."

Another gentleman entertained a large hearing by telling how he went out one morning several years before on this same train, with Colonel Rhett and Judge Cooley and their assistants; how bravely and gayly the judge conducted himself, while Rhett was grave and silent; how they got out just beyond Pearl River, and fought under the lofty pine-trees on the grass still wet with dew; how Cooley fell at the first fire, with a bullet in his heart; and how all the others shook friendly hands over the dead body: all for a few words in a newspaper!

The train rattled through the swamps which lie in the rear of New Orleans, and on over that wonderful *prairie tremblante*, growing harder and firmer each successive century, that stretches many miles, a sea of weed and grass, between Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne. Passing the long, curved bridge over the deep strait known as the Rigolets, it whistled away like some wild, scared creature racing for life, until it crossed Pearl River, and stood smoking and wheezing among the pines and live-oaks of the Mississippi beach.

Ten of the passengers, with heavy hearts no doubt, rapidly descended from the train. All the others crowded to the platforms and windows, ladies and gentlemen, and the silent waving of hats and handkerchiefs showed that the terrible business of these early travellers had been detected. The locomotive screamed its adieu, and one party moved off on their rounds of business or pleasure, while the other party, lifting their hats to their late fellow-passengers, as the train passed by, turned into the woods for the trial of life or death.

The Mississippi beach early on a bright spring morning is sometimes as still and silent as a picture. Away off through the tall and scattered pines, there being no undergrowth, you see the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, calm and unbroken as a mirror in motionless splendor. Perhaps a single sail is in sight, like the white wing of some great bird poised just above the waves. You can hear the insects in the grass, the squirrel scrambling up a tree, the faint song of some hidden bird, or the lowing of cattle in some remote pasture.

The quietude of early morning is different from that of evening. One is an expectant hush of nature before it breaks joyously out into life and sound and beauty. The other is a dreamy stillness, passing into deeper and still deeper shadow and silence.

Just such a peaceful morning scene and expectant hush of nature was now invaded by our duelling parties. There was no demonstration nor bravado. They moved quietly through the woods, as if they were a party of surveyors or of students in geology or botany. Their low conversation was entirely commonplace. They approached two great wide-spreading live-oaks, so near together that their branches almost touched.

"Here, gentlemen," said Du Pré, "nature has prepared for us a dense and beautiful shade."

"Yes," answered Legendre, "this is charming. We can all keep out of the sunlight and there is no need to cast lots for choice of position."

One principal with his surgeon stood under each of the trees, while the seconds and referees retired to a little distance to hold the conventional conference, to ascertain whether any reconciliation could be effected or at least some peaceable adjustment of the difficulty.

The conference was short and ineffectual. Mr. Stanford's friends were willing to withdraw his violent and offensive language if Colonel McLean would retract and apologize, or they were willing to submit to an arbitration. Colonel McLean's friends, under instructions from their principal, declined to retract or apologize, or to accept any retraction or apology, and would not submit to arbitration. They politely expressed their own very great surprise and profound regret at the obstinate and apparently vindictive position of their principal. The parley ended with Mr. Legendre's remark,—

"Let us proceed to business."

The order agreed upon was this: the principals to stand facing each other, twenty steps apart, with loaded pistols held perpendicularly down at the side. But one word was to be spoken, the word "Fire!" and that was to be given by the senior of the four seconds, Mr. Canova. After the word "Fire!" they were to shoot at pleasure, but not to advance a step towards each other. These were the conditions of the great duel in which General Andrew Jackson killed Mr. Dickinson of Nashville.

The twenty steps were now measured off, which brought Stanford into the shade of one oak and McLean into the shade of the other. There was a little patch of sunshine on the ground about half-way between them. On that little shining space fluttered invisible the Angel of Peace, with a warning hand uplifted each way.

The principals took the position and attitude assigned them in silence. The groups of men bowed to each other respectfully, and then became erect and ready for the ordeal. Stanford's conduct during the whole morning had been quiet and natural. His face was now a trifle pale, but his handsome and intelligent features indicated inflexible resolution. It was clear that the Northerner who had never seen a battle was as brave and self-possessed as the Southerner who had been "one of Pickett's men." The group of Louisianians regarded him with silent admiration, for they recognized that his physical and his moral courage were equally great.

The minds of men in moments of great peril or just preceding death are often occupied with the most trivial things. Memory especially is exceedingly active. In the minute or two occupied in getting into position, Stanford recalled with inconceivable velocity many things he had seen and heard in New Orleans. Madame Caprell's words flashed upon his mind, "Two great dangers are ahead of you: one you will bring rashly upon yourself; the other will befall you from secret enemies." This is the first danger, he reasoned; if I am to meet with another, I cannot perish in this. In a moment he felt perfectly confident of a prolonged life. Did he believe Madame Caprell's apparently ridiculous prophecy? Perhaps so; there is a vein of credulity on some subject in us all, and many of our so-called superstitions are indestructible, because some latent truth is concealed within them.

At last Mr. Canova called out the fatal word "Fire!" in a loud, quick voice. There were two flashes of light and apparently but one report, for both gentlemen fired in precisely the same instant, and both fired into the air. Before the assistants could recover from their astonishment, Colonel McLean dashed his pistol upon the ground and advanced towards Stanford.

"The code requires," shouted Du Pré, intending to go on and say that all communications between the principals must be made through the medium of the seconds; but McLean interrupted him.

"Damn the code!" he exclaimed, and advanced, proffering his hand to Stanford, while all the other gentlemen crowded around the principals.

"Mr. Stanford," said he, in a voice full of emotion, "I retract every word I uttered yesterday at the club; and I desire to make you and all whom I insulted by my remarks a sincere apology."

"It is accepted without hesitation, sir," said Stanford, extending his hand, "and my own offensive language is gladly withdrawn."

"You are a thousand times better man than I am," McLean continued. "I did not intend to hurt a hair of your head. I beg the honor of your friendship."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the eight other men, swinging their hats over their heads.

"This termination of our difficulty," said Stanford, "surprises as much as it pleases me. But pray tell me, if you held such sentiments all the time, why did you allow the matter to proceed to such extremities?"

"You see," said McLean, "as soon as I uttered the hateful words which have caused our trouble, I felt that I had said a very false and preposterous thing. If you had charged me with wrong to that extent, I would probably have retracted at once. But your very violent language and manner, perfectly justifiable as they were, roused the old fighting quality in me, and I challenged. But I have been on the stool of repentance ever since. The more I thought of the ugly and slanderous spirit implied in my words, the more I regretted having uttered them. The more I thought of your spirited defence of the meek and helpless from the arrogance of a superior race, the more I admired you. I now love you."

"*Par nobile fratrum*," suggested Dr. Vernon, who had come out as McLean's surgeon. At which there were renewed bravos and swinging of hats.

"If you did not intend to kill me," said Stanford, "why did you run the risk of being killed?"

"As a matter of expiation, sir! I ought to have been killed, and I never, never could have been satisfied until I had given you the chance to shoot me. Now I am happy."

"But now, Mr. Stanford," said Legendre, "explain to us why you came out to fire in the air."

"I did not come out to fire in the air. I came out to fight. I never thought of firing into the air until the moment before I did so. And now, gentlemen, I must tell you the truth, in the face of your opinions and prejudices. Just before the word 'Fire!' was uttered, at that supreme moment, my mind was visited by a rush of ideas, a tornado of thoughts, instincts, intuitions, teachings, reasons, sentiments. It seems impossible that so much mental action could be crowded into a moment of time. The concentrated spirit of Christian civilization was breathed upon me. I remembered Holden's words of yesterday, 'Forgive the insulter and forget the insult.' I exclaimed to myself, 'This is barbaric! this is damnable! I had rather be killed than to kill a man under these circumstances.' And I fired into the air, without the least suspicion that Colonel McLean was going to do the same thing."

McLean had received a religious education in his old Virginia home, and he was tender-hearted and impressible as he was brave. He seized Stanford by the hand, and, with tears in his eyes, he exclaimed,—

"This duelling-ground, sir, has been a church to me to-day, and the sermon you have preached in it has touched me to the heart. I vow never, never to fight a duel again."

At that moment the whistle of the ingoing accommodation train, which had been engaged by telegraph to stop for them, was heard in the distance.

"Come, gentlemen," said McLean, "let us hasten home. You are all to lunch with me at the West End Hotel. At the next station we will telegraph Du Valcourt, Holden, and Denfield to join us, and we will make as happy and lucky a party of thirteen as ever sat down to a table, in the face of superstition."

"Let us all be thankful," said De Poincy, "that a duel instigated by such uncommon motives has terminated in such a remarkable manner."

The passengers on the accomodation train had learned that a duel was progressing near the mouth of Pearl River, and that the party, or what remained of it, would be taken aboard. The engine had no sooner come to a halt than a crowd of men and boys poured out of the cars and rushed towards the party, expecting to see a bloody corpse, or perhaps two of them, lying upon the ground. The windows were crowded with female faces. The gentlemen who excited such interest seemed all in a jolly good humor, and they boarded the cars so quickly that the crowd had to scamper back in great haste and confusion. As the new-comers were reticent and said nothing about the late unpleasantness, the curiosity of the passengers subsided into disgust, and most of them, feeling that they had been cheated out of an expected sensation, agreed with the newsboy, who remarked, with a sneer,—

"It's a hunky-dory! Ten stout fellows a-fightin', and not a scratch atween 'em!"

So soon as the train reached the city, however, the reporters, who had got wind of the matter, proceeded to pick up every floating rumor they could hear. The unveracity of first reports is proverbial, and the statements of evening editions have often to be corrected in the issues of the next morning.

Extras were soon flying all over the city, shot forth by those winged Mercuries of the press, the newsboys, always exultant and exaggerative over every new sensation. This was the tenor of their cries:

"Extra *Times!* Extra *Times!*

"Great duel near Pearl River!

"Chicago swell and New Orleans swell!

"All about a colored girl!

"Chicago first! Orleans pinked in the head!

"Extra *Times!* Extra *Times!*"

One of the street gamins yelled those ominous words immediately under Mrs. Marcelle's window. Ninette heard them, and started up, frightened and bewildered.

"Duel! Chicago! colored girl! O mercy! Can that have any reference to Hugh Stanford?"

She sprang to the door, but the winged Mercury had darted across the street, in obedience to a signal from that direction, and could not be recalled. Ere long, however, another specimen of the species came along with the same cry. She was waiting at the door, and, seizing the miserable little slip which was causing her so much anxiety, she hurried back into the house, without waiting for her change.

"Golly!" said the newsboy, staring at the quarter of a dollar in his hand; "if she wasn't so white I'd think she was the colored girl they fought about."

She ascertained, from the extra, that Mr. Stanford, of Chicago, having been insulted by Colonel McLean, on account of his approaching marriage with a beautiful woman of African descent, had challenged that distinguished gentleman to mortal combat; that a duel had taken place on Mississippi soil near the mouth of Pearl River; that both parties had behaved with conspicuous gallantry; that Colonel McLean had been slightly wounded in the head; and that a Mississippi sheriff armed with a requisition was in pursuit of the offenders.

This story, adorned with imaginative flourishes, came about as near to the truth as what is called history generally comes. It inflicted great and unnecessary pain upon the innocent and charming cause of all the trouble.

She walked her little room weeping and occasionally wringing her hands.

"He not only insists upon marrying me, knowing my descent, but he challenges, fights, and wounds one of the bravest of the confederate veterans for some real or supposed insult to me. O the folly, the madness of men! O my precious, incomparable Hugh!"

Her innate delicacy restrained her from rushing, as her impulses dictated, to get news of her lover from mutual friends. She despatched Madame Marcelle, however, to Colonel Du Valcourt's office, with the extra in her hand, to beg him to obtain all the information he could about the affair and relieve her tormenting anxiety.

O men! men! If you only knew how often women watch and wait for you, pray for you, weep for you, condoning your follies, your thoughtlessness, your neglect! and how they welcome your late return with beaming smiles, concealing the pain in their own hearts, hiding everything from you that would vex you, how sweetly and tenderly you would deal with them!

Hugh Stanford's earnest desire on reaching the city was to slip away from the lunch-party, and hurry off to Ninette and give her his own version of the affair. Indeed, he was caught in the very act, and brought back amid the shouts of his persecutors, who suspected his intentions. They could not and would not put up with the absence or even the late appearance of the hero of the day at the festive board.

While the lunch was being prepared (what New Orleans society people call lunch is a magnificent dinner), the thirteen gentlemen sat upon the great platform in front of the hotel, underneath which the waters of Lake Pontchartrain perpetually roll, and discussed the various topics of the day. The white sails of the lumber and charcoal schooners and sloops gleamed afar out on the waters. The steamer "Camelia" on her daily trip across the lake was creeping along the horizon, scarcely visible herself, but emitting a tremendous trail of black smoke behind her. A few fishermen in skiffs near the shore were playing the usual game of enticement with the finny tribes. The Rowing Club Houses, deserted of oarsmen, gleamed in the sunshine. The labyrinth was empty. The flying-horses were resting in the merry-go-round. The little confectioneries and beer-saloons were idle, waiting for the advent of the crowd and the evening orchestra. All was lovely and serene.

"Dr. Holden," said McLean, in the course of a discussion of the race-problem, "what do you think of the claim made in certain quarters, that the negro population is increasing relatively so much faster than the white that in a hundred years the negro will dominate the whole country?"

"There is no truth in the assertion, sir. We have not had an honest negro census since the war, nor are we likely to have one under political auspices. The death-rate among negroes is invariably greater than among the whites in every town and county in the South. The negro is more prolific, because he marries early, and often regardless of circumstances and ignoring the moral checks to population which prevail with the white man. With increased education and moral growth he will become less prolific. Even now his greater birth-rate is overbalanced by a greater death-rate.

"Then, we must remember there is no black immigration into this country. The white immigration into the South, both from Europe and the Northern States and Canada, is constantly increasing. Instead of the black race exceeding the white race in numbers and controlling the land, the pressure of white population will inevitably drive the surplus of negroes over our industrial demands into Mexico, and into the West India Islands, or even over into Africa, the natural habitat of the black man."

"Then the dream of Henry Clay and the colonizationists will be realized," said Stanford.

"Not for a long, long time," answered the doctor. "Africa is not yet sufficiently prepared by civilizing influences for the American negro; and the American negro has as yet no strong hereditary conception of liberty and Christianity which would prevent him from being sucked back into the whirlpool of barbarism in two or three generations."

"In the mean time," said Denfield, "we are compelled to face the race-problem."

"The race-problem will solve itself," said Du Valcourt, "when both races are imbued with the principles of liberty and Christianity."

"When will that be?" said Denfield. "Not till the slums of London and Paris and New York have become centres of righteousness and peace. Do you see any signs of it? any hope for it? any way to it?"

"Our present troubles," said McLean, "come from the coarser, more lawless, and ignorant elements on both sides."

"True," said the doctor, "but the obstructive class in both races, and especially in the white race, is so numerous and powerful that the voices and wishes of the better element are practically suppressed."

"Truth is the saviour of the world," said Stanford. "Education is a series of approximations towards truth. The most important step towards the pacification of this country is the education of the illiterate whites of the South, who despise the negro church, the negro school-house, and the negro voter."

The negro question is an inflammable subject, for beneath the merely industrial and political surface of it there lie social and moral issues of tremendous importance. The conversation grew more and more animated, and was even becoming acrimonious, when the head-waiter announced that lunch was ready.

As the gentlemen rose to their feet, Mr. Canova exclaimed,—

"Let us be thankful for this escape from a political discussion, which resembles that labyrinth out in the grounds. You travel and travel round and round, never know where you are, make no progress, and end where you began, if you ever end at all."

The table was supplied and served in the best style of the French cuisine. The traditional "feast and flow" went on in the happiest manner. The anxieties of the day were dissipated. The spirit of friendship was in the ascendant. Toasts were drunk, and many wise and witty things were said. Are they not all recorded imperishably in the spiritual phonograph of memory, from which they can be unrolled and made vocal again a thousand years hence under proper conditions?

When the affair was over and the party ready to leave their seats, Colonel McLean arose and said,—

"I reckon, gentlemen, that I have made more mistakes and more apologies than any man of my age in the country. Nature gave me a hasty temper——"

"And," interrupted Stanford, "a generous heart, so that the intuitive wisdom of the one might correct the errors of the other."

All the guests applauded.

"Thank you! thank you," said McLean, "for your very kind estimate. I was going to say that we have all committed, Mr. Stanford excepted, a grievous mistake, for which we should make a graceful apology."

"What was the mistake?" cried several voices at once.

"The war of the Confederacy against the Union of the States."

"And the apology?"

"Devotion to the Union, and justice and humanity to the negro. The North asks no more: the South should offer no less."

There was a confused murmur of assent and dissent.

"I am confident," said Stanford, "that in this and in all things the noble heart of the South will finally correct all the errors of its hasty temper."

"I endorse your sentiment," said Colonel Du Valcourt, in his polished and courtly manner,—"'devotion to the Union: justice and humanity to the negro.' But I wish it to be clearly understood, that we owe no apology to the party which obtained temporary possession of the United States government in 1861, and waged war upon the southern people. I will render it no apology for the insignificant part I took in the struggle. Under the same circumstances I would do the same thing, and repeat it to eternity.

"We are devoted to the Union, sir, because it is still the freest and best government on the earth. We are just and humane to the negro, because we have been made so by Christian culture. But apology to the Republican party, sir? Never, never! We fought for the rights of the States, without which no just union of the States is possible. We southern soldiers were neither rebels nor traitors. We were the defenders of the old Constitution and the true representatives of the Revolutionary fathers."

The spirit of the Army of Northern Virginia flashed in the old man's eyes. The Southerners about him caught the contagion. He expressed the doctrines for which a young nation had perished unborn in the womb of time.

"Concede," said the doctor, anxious to avert a political discussion and to save Stanford's feelings,—"concede that the northern people have proved themselves generous conquerors; that the great leaders of Republican thought—Lincoln, Sumner, Beecher, Greeley, and others—displayed a superb magnanimity; that Grant's treatment of Lee was one of the noblest spectacles in history——"

"I concede it all," said Du Valcourt, in a softened tone. "They are a great, brave, civilized, Christian people. If it were otherwise, we could not live with them in peace."

Canova sprang to his feet, and the rest followed him. "No more wars! no more duels! no more politics!" he shouted. Bravos indicated their acquiescence in this peaceful sentiment.

"There's a good time coming, boys! a good time coming!" chanted a young Creole voice, in which the vibratory effects of champagne upon the system were slightly manifested.

A rousing cheer was given for the good times, past, present, and coming; and the party moved out to take the train.

When they reached the terminus of the West End road upon Canal Street, the company separated in high spirits. Stanford hurried at once to Washington Square, where he found Ninette, still trembling with anxiety, for of course Madame Marcelle had not found Du Valcourt and could learn nothing of the affair which afford her consolation. He soon kissed away her or rather changed them into tears of joy. He tol the whole story, and had to repeat it again, whil happy heart fluctuated rapidly between admirati her lover for risking his life and gratitude to Co McLean for sparing it. The loving council then into secret session, and politeness requires that we draw from the scene.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EXPOSURE.

Miss Lilly Montrose awoke from her little dreams of the night to her day-dream of magnificent proportions. This was the morning when the enterprising Madame Maspero was to conduct the heiress of Gordon Clarke's estate to the lawyer's office, to establish her claims, to pass the young lady over to her wealthy and fashionable friends, and to pocket her own little reward.

Lilly had been thoroughly drilled in her part, which she would have acted to perfection had the issue been different. She did not have a doubt of the strength of the evidence to be presented, or of the certainty of her splendid change of fortune. She had been building castles in the air innumerable, and found it a very entrancing occupation. She felt as happy as the simpleton who carries a whole lottery-ticket in his pocket, and is absolutely sure of drawing the capital prize.

One would naturally suppose that this handsome and vivacious young woman would have experienced some qualms of conscience at the thought of personating a lost child and imposing herself upon a distant family as a near relative. But Miss Montrose had either never reached that stage of ethical evolution, or she had reverted to a lower type of morals under the influences of the peculiar life she had been leading.

"I don't rob anybody," she said. "That child's dead long ago, of course. Few children escape through teething, and the measles, and the scarlet fever, and the whooping-cough, and the yellow fever, and all that. Then, she didn't have any mother to take care of her, and was likely to come to grief anyway. Those Chicago people are willing to go fifty thousand dollars on finding that relative. Well, Madame Maspero has found her. I didn't find myself. I ain't to blame. The little dress and the shoes and the coral necklace will prove what Madame Maspero says. And as to personating somebody else, I can do it, you bet! as well as any woman on or off the stage."

At least an hour before the time arrived, Miss Lilly had finished the most elaborate toilet she had ever made in her life. She put on more laces, more jewelry, more perfumery, more powder, and more fascinations generally than had ever adorned her lovely person even on a benefit-night. For she had said to herself, repeatedly,—

"An heiress must look *distingué*."

After contemplating herself in a large mirror with profound satisfaction, she sallied forth to meet Madame Maspero; and her general appearance and stately manner made more than one passer-by turn and look after her with astonishment.

A far less positive and hopeful feeling prevailed that morning in the Meissonier mansion. Dr. Hypolite's apprehensions about the meeting had been growing stronger and stronger. Stanford had called several times, and, although he had always been refused admittance, each visit struck a new chord of fear in the soul of the mesmerizer. He would have made Hilary Dupont play his little game of assassination by proxy upon his pursuer, had he not known that the fifty-thousand-dollar check could only come through Stanford's hands. "After we get it," he would mutter vindictively, "after we get it!"

He was too intelligent to be thoroughly satisfied with the nature of the evidence. It might be sufficient to impress and convince an unprofessional mind like Stanford's, but he contemplated with vague apprehension the cross-examination of that keen young lawyer with the black eyes and the broad forehead. The mystery of the child and the murder of the father were so closely woven together that he trembled for himself at the thought that the attempted production of the one might furnish some clue towards the discovery of the other. Nothing encouraged him but the idea that he was wrapped in an impenetrable disguise.

"I am positively afraid to go," he said to his wife. "I have grown terribly nervous about it. Let us abandon the scheme."

"Afraid to go?" said Mrs. Meissonier, smiling contemptuously upon him. "You were formerly very cool and courageous, as brave as my good father, the matador, in the bull-ring. What has revolutionized your character? You were once eating ice-cream in a saloon with a gentleman. 'Here, Clarke,' you said, taking a little vial from your pocket, 'I have discovered the most delicious flavoring for ice-cream in the world. Taste it.' The unsuspicious fellow opened his mouth wide, and you poured into it a teaspoonful of pure prussic acid. He fell back dead against the wall."

“Do you remind me of that horrible incident,” Hypolite, shuddering, “in order to revive my courag

“No,” said his Lady Macbeth, “but to conv you of your possibilities, to shame you out of present cowardice by pointing to your former intre ity. We obtained a hundred thousand dollars onc dash and ingenuity.”

“It was your own suggestion, Lucia, and your dash and ingenuity that carried us through.”

“I have the same qualities now,” she said, prou “and I shall get you this fifty thousand, while yo main safe behind your gray beard and green gog We will fly to Europe as soon as we get the mo and escape any possible *exposé* in Chicago.”

So she gradually screwed his courage up to sticking-point, and they parted to don their diffe disguises, she as Madame Maspero, he as old Pierre Gentilly. For this purpose he went a down to his mother's, on Esplanade Street.

Hilary Dupont sat in his office, thinking of different chains that bound him, and despairing escape from either, when Lilly Montrose in her cumulated splendors was announced. The sm glances, airs, and posings of the young actress v all wasted upon the young doctor. He quickly t her card up to Mrs. Meissonier's chamber door. He quently relieved the arduous duties of the house- by rendering little services to her mistress. The b tiful Lucia was not yet dressed, and she only ope the door wide enough to take the card and to give a glimpse of the tapering shaft of a golden arm.

“*Ah, mon pauvre enfant!*” she said, tenderly.

"*Ah, ma grande consolation!*" he cried.

He seized the knob of the door, and the door was shut in his face.

Denfield was sitting in his office discussing the legal situation with Stanford, when Dr. Holden entered.

"Ah, doctor," said the lawyer, gleefully, "you come to witness the slaughter of the innocents. The trap is well set and baited, the cats are all out of sight, and the mice are coming."

The old mouse, however, did not enter the trap precipitately. He carefully explored all the entrances and exits of the Denegre Building, and especially the alley in the rear, upon which the windows of Denfield's office looked out. There he seemed to discover something which satisfied his protective instincts, for he re-entered the house and knocked at the lawyer's door.

When the stoop-shouldered old fellow, with his long, gray beard and his green goggles, appeared, Denfield took him politely by the hand and introduced him to the doctor and Stanford.

"Mr. Pierre Gentilly, gentlemen; not directly concerned in the case, but a friend and witness for Madame Maspero."

Mr. Gentilly bowed, and walked across the room to take a seat between the lawyer's table and one of the back windows.

"Excuse me," he said, "I am quite asthmatic to-day, and would like to be as near the outside air as possible."

With that he gave a very good imitation of an asthmatic wheeze. Denfield threw up the sash, as the weather was very mild, and gave the infirm old gentleman a fan, which was gratefully accepted.

Soon afterwards the voices of the other mice were heard at the door, Miss Lilly laughing in a rich soprano key, and Madame Maspero in a soft contralto. Something amusing must have occurred.

Hilary Dupont had accompanied them into the building, but professed to be very nervous about it. When he reached the door of the office, he was apparently overwhelmed with sudden terror, broke away from them, and fled down the hall. Lilly entered the law-office still laughing, but Madame Maspero, remembering Hilary's singular nervous condition and how often his strange presentiments had been realized, took her seat with a grave countenance.

Miss Montrose nodded familiarly to Stanford, and proceeded to scrutinize the other gentlemen, to whom Madame Maspero had quite gracefully presented her. She then turned her attention to Denfield's immense law-library, which filled nearly three sides of the large room, and exclaimed aloud,—

"La! what a lot o' books! Does it take all those books to make a lawyer?"

"No," said Denfield, smiling at her simplicity, "but it takes lawyers to make all those books."

Two more witnesses in the case were now introduced. One was a middle-aged lady of color, fat and gaudily dressed, who gazed about her with unabashed countenance. The other was a white woman, whose thin, pale face, haggard expression, nervous manner, not daring to lift her eyes from the floor, betrayed hard work and mental suffering.

"This," said Madame Maspero to Denfield, pointing to the feminine African, "is the person to whom I intrusted the child of Gordon Clarke. She will testify that she kept her ten years and sent her to the public schools. Also, that she bound her over as an apprentice to the milliner business in charge of this lady, Mrs. Austin. The manager of the Oriental Varieties will testify that he received Miss Montrose into his employ from Mrs. Austin, and that her name at that time was Mary Clarke. This will make the chain of evidence complete, from my own statement, with the child's articles of wear in my hand, down to the present moment, when the child herself is produced before you."

The pretty brunette delivered this little speech in a very engaging manner, and with a positive air which seemed to affirm that nothing more need be said on the subject. Pierre Gentilly gave a hem of satisfaction; Lilly Montrose's face burst out into smiles and dimples; the two other witnesses nodded and nodded approval; and to the claiming party the case seemed about settled. Only the formality of taking and recording the evidence was necessary.

There was a dead silence when Denfield spread out the relics of little Mary Clarke before him and looked around upon his attentive audience.

"These articles, Madame Maspero," he began, in a solemn tone, "upon which you rely so confidently as mute witnesses to the truth of your story, are not so eloquent in your behalf as you have imagined."

The claimants and witnesses moved uneasily in their seats, and, as we say of listening animals, pricked up their ears towards the young lawyer.

"These little shoes, which you say Mary Clarke wore at the time you picked her up wandering in the streets, have never been worn at all. They are old and rusty now, but a careful examination of the soles with a powerful magnifying-glass proves beyond a doubt that they have never touched the ground. The fair inference is that the child had none of these articles on, nor was this little prayer-book in her hands when she was lost. The next inference is that they were all taken out of her mother's trunk; and a very serious question for you to answer now is, how did they come into your possession?"

During the utterance of these words, Miss Montrose's face assumed an expression of deep vexation, for she saw her little palace of cards tottering in the wind. Madame Maspero's countenance blanched to a color as nearly white as a brunette complexion can ever wear, and her graceful form sank back in the seat. Pierre Gentilly involuntarily threw up his hands and uttered a half-suppressed groan, which he tried to make the others believe was of asthmatic origin.

"Now," said Denfield, in a severe, judicial tone, "before we proceed to the separate examination of these witnesses, I will state in a connected manner the result of our own investigations, including the reports of our detectives."

At the word "detectives" the parties in pursuit of the fifty-thousand-dollar check were visibly affected.

Pierre Gentilly wriggled in his chair, and blew his nose so vehemently that he nearly displaced his green goggles and his gray beard.

Madame Maspero sighed audibly and hid her face in her handkerchief.

Lilly Montrose fired in, snappishly,—

"And you had to get those mean, sneaking dogs to help you!"

Without noticing this discharge of small shot from Miss Lilly's gun, Denfield went on to say,—

"In June, 1865, Mr. Gordon Clarke and his little girl, to whom these articles unquestionably belonged, sailed from Havana for New Orleans. There were two persons on the vessel who became deeply interested in the Clarkes and paid them the most devoted attention,—Dr. Hypolite Meissonier and his wife."

At these words Madame Maspero lowered her handkerchief and looked at Denfield intently.

"And his wife," the lawyer continued, "said by Gordon Clarke, in a letter which we hold in possession, to be a very beautiful woman."

At this compliment to Mrs. Meissonier, Madame Maspero evaded Denfield's gaze and lowered her brilliant brown eyes to the table.

"Clarke and his daughter put up at the Hôtel des Étrangers, and were visited frequently by Meissonier and his wife. The night that the child was lost in the street, Gordon Clarke was murdered in a saloon close by the hotel. Meissonier made way with the father, and his wife made way with the child."

Lilly Montrose displayed unmistakable interest in this dramatic evolution of the case. Madame looked down into her lap and twisted her handkerchief into a knot. Pierre Gentilly growled out, in a sneering and yet slightly tremulous tone,—

"Why do you entertain us, sir, with this little romance? It is not at all amusing, and seems very far away from the business in hand."

"This is one of the romances of real life," said the lawyer, "and it will have a deeply interesting and very unexpected *dénouement*. So, listen to the rest of it. Meissonier possessed himself of Clarke's trunks and papers,—papers of great value. He took them to New York, personated Clarke, forged his name, obtained his money, and fled with his beautiful wife to Europe."

Madame Maspero and Pierre Gentilly were greatly excited, but they showed it in different ways. The lady sank lower down in her seat, her eyes still fixed upon her lap, like one half paralyzed with fear. Gentilly sprang from his chair and paced the room, looking first at one window and then at the other.

"Keep your seat," said Denfield, quietly. "I do not see why a Gentilly should worry himself over the crimes of the Meissoniers."

"You are trifling with us, sir," said Gentilly, fiercely. "We come here, sir, voluntarily, on business of great importance to your client, and you entertain us with a long story of robbery and murder, which has no bearing upon the case. What does it mean?"

"Softly, softly!" said the lawyer. "I am running a train of thought which will soon make connection with yours, and all will be explained."

Pierre Gentilly continued to pace the floor from window to window. Maspero continued silent and downcast. The white and black witnesses looked at each other in a frightened, bewildered way, but dared not move. Holden and Stanford watched "the slaughter of the innocents" with increasing interest.

"This is getting to be almost as good as a play," cried Lilly Montrose, with a little hysterical laugh.

"Now," said Denfield, "we approach the supreme point at issue. I expect now to show you where Madame Maspero obtained the articles which belonged to the Clarkes."

The guilty parties looked at the lawyer and then at each other in evident trepidation and amazement. "What upon earth does he mean?" was their silent thought.

Denfield opened a door leading into another room and spoke to some one within.

Two men in police uniform appeared, lugging in two large, very old empty trunks, covered with canvas, which had recently been ripped open for inspection. All eyes were riveted upon these dilapidated articles.

"See," said Denfield, "the names upon these old trunks, barely visible, 'Gordon Clarke, San José, C. R.,' and here, 'Mrs. M. G. Clarke, San José, C. R.' These old trunks, mute evidences of murder and robbery, were found in a deserted attic, used only as a lumber-room, in the house of Madame Fortier, the mother of Dr. Meissonier. The neglect of criminals to do some one little thing often leads to their detection and punishment. Why did they not destroy these trunks?"

Gentilly now bristled up with bravado, the last card in his hand, and always a weak one.

"Come, ladies," he said, in a loud, angry voice, "let us retire. We need not listen to the base insinuations which are couched under the language of this man."

"You cannot leave this room at present," said Denfield, firmly, placing himself between the prisoner and the door.

"Not leave this room, sir!" blustered Gentilly, with a threatening swagger. "You just said, sir, that Meissonier's affairs were nothing to me. Nor are they, sir. How dare you threaten my personal liberty?"

"Because, sir," said Denfield, coolly, "these officers of the law have a warrant for your arrest. You are Dr. Meissonier, and this woman is your wife."

All rose to their feet, except Madame Maspero, who gave a faint shriek, reeled from her chair, and fell to the floor.

Lilly Montrose knelt beside her and loosened her dress. "My God!" she cried out, "you have killed this woman. This is not fainting, but death."

"Water! water!" cried some in the confusion. Denfield rushed to his cooler and drew a tumberful.

Dr. Holden examined her pulse. Everybody crowded around.

"Quite a serious shock," said the doctor. "Heart-failure: she needs brandy."

Stanford darted to the door to seek the stimulus in the saloon on the lower floor. Suddenly the policemen sprang forward and ran around the great table towards the window, for; lifting up their eyes from the prostrate woman, they saw the gray beard and green goggles of Pierre Gentilly sinking down on the outside of the house. The fire-escape with its iron ladder had proved the means of his own escape.

"Run out in front," said one policeman to the other, while, shouting "Stop thief!" at the window, he rushed down the fire-escape in pursuit. The naturally agile Gentilly, now fairly winged by fear, darted into a beer-saloon at the corner of the alley, threw his disguises unobserved behind a door, and emerged into Common Street as Dr. Meissonier. This worthy gentleman rapidly disappeared in a crowd which was witnessing an immense procession of some benevolent society pass by.

Madame Meissonier was recovered from her deadly prostration with considerable difficulty. Lilly Montrose aided her in readjusting her bonnet and dress.

"What a wretched, wretched fizzle!" she exclaimed, contemptuously, to her discomfited confederate.

"Get out, with your companion fraud, Mary Crawford, of Natchez!" said the lawyer, shaking his forefinger at her.

With a startled look of alarm, the actress hurried her friend to the door. Neither turned around to give word or sign of adieu.

"Come, gentlemen!" said Denfield gayly. "Lunch at the Pickwick!"

CHAPTER XVII.

OCCULT FORCES.

Miss Rose Villemaine has long disappeared from sight, to the probable satisfaction of the reader. But that black-eyed, black-browed, sallow-faced young lady had no intention of remaining out of sight, notwithstanding Colonel Du Valcourt's injunction to keep as retired and quiet "as if there had been a death in the house." She visited and received visits, being intensely anxious to know how society regarded the sudden withdrawal of Ninette Du Valcourt from its ranks.

She was perfectly satisfied with her own character and conduct. Proud of her opinions and of her loyalty to her convictions, she congratulated herself on her firmness and consistency. She asserted in her conversations the supremacy of the white race, and the necessity of maintaining the absolute purity of social life. No democratic editor on the eve of an election could have been better supplied with arguments or more vehement in their expression.

This line of extenuation was successful with many persons, who took the color of their opinions from the average sentiment of people around them. But Rose Villemaine was secretly chagrined to find that some of the noblest and best, even in her own circle, put a different estimate upon her little affair. They expressed undisguised admiration of Ninette's beauty, dignity, and courage, and profound pity for her changed conditions. Some of them did not hesitate to give Miss Villemaine the cold shoulder. One lady, whose opinion she greatly valued, had the courage to say to her, "Rose, if I had been living in the house with Ninette and Colonel Du Valcourt, I would have died rather than have taken a part in such an *exposé.*"

Rose Villemaine's black eyes glowed with indignation at every expression of opinion contrary to her own. She treasured these adverse utterances in the spirit of revenge. Revenge is secretive: the stiletto is its weapon, the stiletto sheathed in roses. Miss Villemaine flattered the very persons whom she regarded with indifference or contempt, or against whom she meditated some deadly injury.

The duel had brought Ninette into painful but favorable prominence. It was the nine-days' wonder of the town. Stanford's gallant defence of her and McLean's generous apology elicited universal admiration. The case of Ninette was discussed in all circles with great animation. There was a debased colored element which rejoiced that a nearly white woman had been dragged down to its own level. "Let niggers be niggers," it said, "and white folks be white folks." A correspondingly coarse white element openly and ostentatiously congratulated itself that social justice had been rendered, and the line of demarcation between the superior and the inferior race rigidly and righteously maintained.

Higher up on the social scale intellectually and morally, among the *crême de la crême* of thought and feeling, the matter was invested with profound interest.

It was a test-question of the race-problem, which involved the most serious social and moral issues. It had been sprung upon the community under circumstances which had never before existed. There was no time for discussion, consultation, or elaborate consideration. The reserve force of intellect and good feeling in the best society was called forth at once for the solution.

The question was this: Shall we permit a beautiful, educated, refined, virtuous young woman, so far white as to be indistinguishable from ourselves in physical or mental qualities, to be stricken from our ranks, which she has so charmingly adorned and can still adorn, and to be consigned irrevocably to the degraded social conditions of the inferior race?

The answer of the large majority in the best society was, No!

There was a growl of dissent from a few old petrified spirits, and a gentler protest from certain unprogressives. Some timid people declined to express an opinion; some halting souls asked a little more time to form one; a few wanted the decision of the question relegated to the social circle in Chicago, into which the young lady when married would seek admittance. But the majority determined upon the immediate and full recognition of Ninette Du Valcourt as a member of the social *élite.*

"Take it all in all," said one lady of the pure patrician blood, "she's white enough for me."

"If a line must be drawn somewhere," said another, "let it be drawn a generation or two back of Ninette Du Valcourt."

A distinguished scientist boldly proclaimed: "The soul of the child is derived exclusively from his father: the mother furnishes only the environment. The hereditary forces are transmitted directly in the male line. Every person more than half white is a white person, and should be so considered."

This statement, which would have excited applause in London or Boston, was received with a significant "Hush! Hush!"

Society, having decided to be just, proceeded to be generous. It did not wait for Ninette to return to her father's house, but sought her in the humble cottage of Madame Marcelle. On the old reception-day she had a regular levee. The neighborhood was crowded with carriages. All sent in their cards in good form, and everybody called her Ninette or Miss Du Valcourt. For the dear old colonel had said, "Keep my name, my darling! It is yours by law. You will never disgrace it."

At last, Madame Du Valcourt, under the pressure of higher examples, began to recognize the fact that it was her social duty to call upon Ninette. Her husband, moreover, had insisted upon it, in rather impetuous language. Accordingly, she nerved herself up for an interview, and, under the protecting wing of an elderly friend, she presented herself in Mrs. Marcelle's little parlor. She was received with that quiet and genial civility which we extend to well-introduced strangers, and which leaves a friendly margin for better acquaintance.

Rose Villemaine was exceedingly disgusted with this blocking of her game, and this emphatic reversal of her own decisions. She wrongly attributed the spontaneous outburst of good will and liberal sentiment, which already existed in the heart of society, to a radical change of opinion on a vital subject. At first she bitterly opposed what she called her mother's weakness, in yielding to a popular pressure which she declared would be evanescent. But as the days rolled by and the pressure increased, and she saw the star of Ninette in the ascendant and herself left almost alone in her own circle, her selfish instincts took the alarm, and her politic mind suggested that it would be wise and useful for her also, at this juncture, to exhibit a generous and forgiving spirit towards the young negress! Certainly, she said, she could lose nothing by it.

Rose, however, determined to go alone, and to select a day and an hour of the day when she would be least likely to meet any of her society friends. She entered the little hall with some trepidation, and requested Madame Marcelle, who came forward to meet her, to say to Miss Gordon that Miss Villemaine had called. Ninette heard the remark from the back room, and a clear, sweet voice, speaking to Madame Marcelle, reached the ear of Rose. "Tell Miss Villemaine that when she presents her card on my reception-day, Miss Du Valcourt will be glad to see her."

In dealing with some people it is necessary to exact the proprieties.

Rose Villemaine flirted her skirts indignantly out of the door-way.

"What an impertinent young negress!" she exclaimed. "This comes of that Boston education."

The disappearance of Dr. Hypolite Meissonier from the busy scenes of life was as sudden and perfect as if his bodily frame had instantaneously melted away into its original gases. Not the slightest trace of the man could be found in any direction. Unremitting search was made for him day and night in all quarters and by every avenue, regardless of expense. Gaster and Pecora, the best detectives that ever were put upon the track of a criminal, after ten days' indefatigable work gave up the pursuit.

"Let him alone for the present," they said. "He has not left New Orleans. He will come out of his hole after a while."

Denfield and Stanford were much chagrined at the escape of their prey. They could do nothing but fall back upon the immense resources of Mr. Ephraim Clarke, and offer ten thousand dollars for information which would lead to the arrest, alive or dead, of the concealed murderer.

The recent developments in psychology show that living men may be the sources and fountain-heads of good or evil without being seen, known, or recognized in any manner whatever. Thoughts are things as really as heat or light. They are absorbed, transmitted, radiated, reflected, according to eternal spiritual laws. Every good or evil desire, winged with thought, goes forth on its mission of good or evil. Good thoughts concentred and fixed upon another redound in some way or other to his benefit; evil thoughts are as poisonous as foul atmospheres. The old superstition of the evil eye had some scientific foundation. Mesmerism or hypnotism has stranger stories to tell.

Various persons in New Orleans soon had reason to know that Hypolite Meissonier was living and present, although he was unseen, unheard, and undiscoverable. From his hiding-place, wherever that was, this prince of mesmerists projected his subtle and vigorous thought into every avenue of communication he had ever once opened. He illustrated the long-established fact that the hypnotic power operates at a distance, and exercises a tyrannic control over those unfortunate persons who have willingly and fully submitted themselves to its influence.

It soon happened that three or four persons fell asleep standing on the street, and could not be awakened for hours. One gentleman remained on his knees after family prayers, to the amazement and distress of his relatives. He had to be taken up by force, and, as that caused him great pain, he was put to bed. A young girl entertaining company fled in terror from her own parlor, declaring that her clothes were falling from her, and, as no arguments could persuade her to the contrary, her friends thought she was insane. Miss Lilly Montrose, during the beautiful pirouettes of the Cracovienne, was suddenly held stationary upon the toes of one foot, while the other foot was extended in the air. The prolonged position was immensely applauded by the audience, as an exhibition of extraordinary muscular power; but after a while the poor woman fell over upon one side like an inanimate object, and was revived with much difficulty by hartshorn, brandy, and continuous frictions.

These commonplace experiments of the mesmeric platform became exceedingly annoying and mysterious, when no operator was visible and the controlling forces could not be counteracted. One family called in physicians for diagnosis; another called in policemen for protection; a third called in priests for the exorcism of evil spirits. A few persons, who suspected that Meissonier was perpetrating these outrages out of pure mischief or bravado, renewed the abandoned effort for his discovery.

These stabs in the dark, these thrusts from the night side of nature, were directed with special atrocity towards his wife and Hilary Dupont. Whether he suspected that the pretty coquette was too sweet upon his young partner, as he had once intimated, or whether it proceeded from pure malice, he kept them in perpetual trouble. He inflicted severe pains upon their bodies, made them see frightful visions though wide awake, and compelled them to commit such foolish actions that those who witnessed them began to doubt their sanity.

At last one morning, without knowing why or how or being able to resist it, Madame Lucia visited Holmes's great dry-goods store, and, while concentrating all her charms upon the waiting clerk, managed to steal a valuable piece of lace. On going home the nature of the deed and the appalling risk she had encountered burst upon her mind, and bedewed her body with a cold perspiration. Afraid to return the lace, feeling that no one would believe her story, she destroyed it. For Hilary there awaited a sterner trial.

It is not difficult to understand the motives which actuated Meissonier in these strange proceedings. He was in a state not only of solitude but of mortal apprehension and anxiety. He had little confidence in the virtue or the integrity of Madame Lucia and

Hilary, and he trembled lest the reward of ten thousand dollars might move them to his betrayal. True, he held them at present under such mesmeric control that it was impossible, but circumstances might arise which would alter the case. With Stanford removed by Hilary, Hilary brought to the gallows, and Lucia safe in the penitentiary, he saw the coast would be clear for his happy escape by certain means which he still held in reserve. He had been practising or rehearsing all his powers for these grand achievements.

Returning late one evening from the charming rendezvous of engaged lovers, Hugh Stanford went into the ladies' entrance of the Hôtel Royal. An immense spiral staircase stands in the centre of the little marble-paved hall and runs all the way from the bottom to the top of the building. Behind the staircase, from the door, is the elevator of the hotel. As Stanford entered he noticed a young gentleman with very long black hair standing upon the steps of the stair with his back towards him. As he moved around the spiral to reach the elevator, he might have seen the face of this person, had he not turned his body so as to keep the back towards him.

"Who is that young gentleman?" he said to the man who worked the elevator, in which he was the only passenger.

"Don't know him," was the reply. "He's been loafing around here for the last hour. He won't answer any questions. Too much hair for my taste!"

A second or two afterwards, Stanford, glancing through the glass door of the elevator as it passed the floor above, saw the same young man rushing up the staircase at full speed, his long black hair floating behind him, and his handsome face rigid with some stern excitement. It was a momentary flash, but he recognized the young doctor whom he had seen in Dr. Meissonier's electrical room. When he reached his landing and passed along the side of the spiral stairway, he observed the young man dashing up at the same speed and now only some fifteen or twenty steps below him.

Stanford entered a little hall which runs parallel with Royal Street, and terminates at right angles in a larger passage that runs parallel with St. Louis Street, on which the windows of his own room looked out. This little area was quite dark, and it was a late hour. The whole house was quiet, and this immediate locality was silent as the grave. Just as he entered this sombre place, an impression forced itself upon Stanford's mind that the young fellow hurrying up behind was in pursuit of him. That feeling that somebody is following us is not uncommon in the dark. He suddenly recalled Meissonier's boast as to what he could make Hilary do. He also remembered Madame Caprell's "second danger, from secret enemies." These mental processes, which it takes minutes to record, were executed in a few seconds. Stanford instinctively turned himself to face his pursuer, and that movement saved his life.

He was scarcely turned when a long-bladed dagger, with which Hilary would have penetrated his chest near the left shoulder-blade, struck upon his double-cased gold watch, glanced off, and passed through his vest and coat. The young man's momentum was so great that he staggered up against Stanford, near knocking him over, and then fell to the floor at h side. Stanford was upon him in a second, disarm him, and held him by the throat until he was lim and helpless.

"What do you mean, sir, by this attack?" he e claimed, fiercely, to the young man.

There was no reply. Released from Stanford grasp, the victim of Meissonier's infernal suggestio staggered against the wall and stared vacantly befo him. Stanford understood the situation; his ang was turned to pity. He led the poor fellow unresis ingly to his room, seated him in a chair, lit the ga and examined him carefully.

Dupont was clearly in a semi-hypnotic conditio His painful stupor was probably caused by the sudde shock and the failure to execute the command whi had been impressed upon his mind. Stanford, famili with the mesmeric processes, made strong upwa passes, blew forcibly upon his eyeballs, saying, in loud tone, "It's all right! all right! you are yourse again!"

Hilary at last drew a long breath, looked at Sta ford with a faint smile, and gazed about him wi astonishment.

"Where am I, sir?" he said. "How did I get in this room?"

"Do you not remember, sir, what has just ha pened?"

"Happened?" said Hilary, pressing his hands his forehead. "I left home about nine o'clock to ca upon a friend."

He paused, rubbed his temples, looked up at the ceiling, and said,—

"Then all is a blank until I find myself here. I must have been asleep.

"Whose dagger is this?" said Stanford, showing him the weapon.

"Mine," he answered, without hesitation; "where did you get it?"

"Do you see these cuts in my vest and coat? They were made by that dagger."

"Well, who did it?"

"Do you not remember, sir, that you have just attempted to murder me, and came very near doing it?"

Hilary did not betray the least trepidation.

"Monstrous!" he exclaimed, in the clear tone of injured innocence. "Why should I attack a stranger? What motive have I for such a crime? You jest——"

"And you positively do not remember the apparently conscious and intelligent manœuvres you made to accomplish my murder?"

"Not a particle of them. I would say the whole charge against me was a cruel and malicious fabrication."

"Then my only solution of the problem," said Stanford, earnestly, "is that you have been acting this horrible and dangerous part under the hypnotic suggestion of Dr. Meissonier."

At these words Hilary Dupont was visibly affected. "My God! my God!" he exclaimed. "I see it all. That wicked doctor will bring me to the gallows at last."

"Why do you not break his chain? cast off his infamous control?"

"Ah, my dear sir!" said the poor fellow, with tears in his eyes. "Tell me how to do it, and I will worship you. He is a monster, and yet he is my master. His voice strikes me with terror; I have no power to disobey. As he thinks, I think. He wills, I move. He commands, I obey. I am his slave—his automaton. Ah, it is terrible! I am helpless—helpless."

"Where is this arch-mesmerizer?" said Stanford.

"How do I know?" answered the miserable victim, whose freedom of will was lost. "He conceals everything from me. He erases everything from my memory. I remember only what he chooses I shall remember.

"Do you believe in mysteries?" he continued, looking earnestly at Stanford. "I have a strong suspicion or sentiment that I am leading a double life. There is an hour or two lost out of every day which I cannot account for. It may seem incredible to you, but it is true. I do not know where I have been, what I have heard or seen or done, or what has happened. I suspect that I have been with Meissonier, and that he is using me to perfect his concealment and to carry out his plan."

"And you cannot possibly remember where you have been?"

"Indeed I cannot. I sometimes try and try, and think and think, until my head aches violently and I tremble all over; but nothing comes back to me. I cannot even remember how I came here."

"This rascally mesmerizer is preying upon you," said Stanford; "he is a vampire sucking your blood."

"The very word for it, sir, the very word,—vampire," said Hilary, shuddering.

"If you do not escape him, he will destroy you."

"Yes, I am failing mentally and physically. I shall soon be hopeless." And he burst into tears.

After his agitation had subsided, he was still so weak and nervous that Stanford insisted upon accompanying him to his room on Dauphine Street. He returned home, deploring the development of an art which teaches one man how to destroy the free agency and rationality of another.

Conferring with Dr. Holden the next day on the subject, Stanford received a more encouraging view of the recent discoveries in psychology.

"Hypnotism," said the doctor, "like everything else, may be put to good or bad use. When it is employed to destroy free-agency and control the human spirit, or to commit evil deeds, it is an infernal power, the exercise of which should meet with condign punishment. But hypnotism has unquestionably a just and useful place in the hands of the honest and benevolent physician and surgeon, and they should not be deterred from its use because wicked men have perverted it to vicious ends. We had as well drop arsenic and opium from the materia medica because some people have poisoned others with those excellent remedies.

"I confess, however," he continued, "that the scientific relations of hypnotism do not interest me so much as its metaphysical bearing. The age of barren speculation is gone. The age of observation and experiment has come, and those great instruments of discovery are now being for the first time rationally applied to mental and spiritual things. The practica fruitage from Swedenborg and Mesmer to Charcot immensely greater than most people imagine."

"Then you believe these wonderful things said abou Meissonier are credible?"

"I do. It was once said, that which happens is th unexpected. Henceforth it will be said, the incred ble is what may be expected to happen."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEMESIS.

HILARY DUPONT was nearly made ill by the abrupt change of mental state produced by his collision with Stanford. He had not recovered from the shock the next day, and, when Stanford proposed to accompany him, everywhere he went, so as to discover the place of Meissonier's concealment, he became at once tremulous and apprehensive, and begged him not to subject his nervous system to such a violent strain so soon, but to wait a few days. He was evidently still under the magnetic influence of the undiscoverable doctor.

Affairs went on smoothly and happily in the Meissonier mansion after the disappearance of its formidable master. Madame Lucia did the honors of the house in the most graceful manner, considerably gayer than she ever had been in the dark shadow of her husband's life. Many husbands and wives rebound from the chrysalis to the butterfly state on the removal of the matrimonial yoke. Young Dr. Dupont continued the business in a quiet and successful manner, many people consulting him out of mere curiosity to visit the domicile of a mysterious character now charged with murder, and for whose discovery so large a reward was offered.

One morning, when Hilary was in the office repair-ing some little electrical machine, the brunette beauty glided softly into the room in her usual cat-like manner, and greeted him with her stereotyped tender expression, "*Ah, mon pauvre enfant!*" and received the uniform response, "*Ah, ma grande consolation!*"

She seated herself close to him at the table. Her graceful figure, bearing with it a sweet suggestion of violets; her full, golden neck, rising above her rose-colored morning wrapper; her wavy black hair, knotted behind *à la Grecque;* her soft brown eyes; her cheeks, like Marshal Niel rose-leaves; and her engaging smile, in which her whole face participated,—all combined to make her mere presence enchanting to the captive at her side.

"Hilary," she said, "I have something very important to say to you to-day; and you must meet my proposition in the most agreeable manner. I will take no refusal."

He fixed his fine eyes inquiringly upon her, but seemed too indifferent or too languid to speak.

"We are getting along here very cosily and happily without that lean wolf of a doctor. Don't you think so, Hilary?"

He nodded assent with a faint smile.

"He was so hard and cruel to both of us. Think of it! He has made me a thief and he almost succeeded in making you a murderer. Don't you wish, Hilary, that he would never, never come back?"

"I do, from the bottom of my heart," he answered.

"Then why should he ever come back?" said the woman, with sudden energy, looking boldly into his face.

"Because," said Hilary, quietly, "we cannot control his movements, and he exerts a positive command over ours. Do you not feel his overshadowing presence constantly with you?"

"In a vague manner—yes; and it is hateful to me."

"Hateful or not," said Hilary, "it is overpowering. He saddens me, he restrains me, he paralyzes me. Do you suppose, Lucia, that if I were a free man I would not return the love you are making me with tenfold impetuosity?"

"Be free and return it," cried the woman, in a bold, exultant manner.

Hilary gently repulsed her advances, and said, with a deep sigh, "I see no way out of it."

"See no way out of it? Nonsense! Now listen to me. Obey me, and we will both be free to do just as we please henceforth and forever."

He looked at her incredulously and shook his head.

"There is a reward of ten thousand dollars offered for information which will lead to Meissonier's arrest. Give the information; procure his arrest; obtain the reward. I will turn State's evidence about the Clarke murder. He will be executed, or imprisoned for life; and we will be freed from him and happy."

As the daughter of the bull-fighter uttered these words, her soft brown eyes glared up into a sudden panther-like ferocity. Hilary was astonished and even shocked; and said, with as much energy as his feeble will-power could generate,—

"Are you really capable of these things?"

"I am capable of anything and everything for you," said the daughter of the ballet-dancer, while her eyes softened into the tenderness of the dove.

Hilary's moral sense had been long paralyzed by her coquetries and her more serious magnetizations. But he remained silent.

"Think of the inducements offered you," she exclaimed, rapidly and earnestly. "Ten thousand dollars in cash, deliverance from Meissonier's control, succession to his business, and full possession of the woman you love. You are under no obligations to Meissonier. You have every reason to despise him. You act the part of a good citizen in giving him over to the hands of the law. You strike for justice, for freedom, and for love. What greater motives can appeal to a brave and true man?"

"I will do as you wish," said the young man, slowly and sadly, gazing into the radiant face of the siren. Suddenly, as if he had just remembered some insuperable obstacle, he exclaimed,—

"It is impossible! I do not know where Meissonier is concealed."

"Do not know?" said Lucia, in great surprise. "Do not know? Then you have merely forgotten; he has erased it from your memory."

"I suppose so," he said, drearily; "but I have no recollection of having seen the man since the morning we all went to the lawyer's office, and I ran away because I thought I saw Meissonier lying dead and black in the face on the floor."

"That is easily rectified," said Lucia, brightly. "Meissonier has told me of the experiments made by Bernheim to restore the memory of events which had been erased by another magnetizer. I know a process which will lead us out of the difficulty."

"What is it?" said Dupont, eagerly, for he was a victim and not a student of hypnotism, being, as his card announced, physician and electrician.

"I will show you," she said, archly. "Follow me to the séance-room. We must not be interrupted."

He submitted quietly. Lucia shaded the chamber to a proper degree.

"Don't make it too dark," he said; "and let me sit in this chair. When you hypnotized me on that sofa, I woke up so exhausted."

"Just as you please," said Lucia, gayly. "Now, sir, shut your eyes, vacate your mind as far as possible, and surrender yourself soul and body to my will."

Hilary was so impressible, had been so often hypnotized, and was, moreover, so thoroughly captive to the operator, that he passed rapidly into a profound mesmeric sleep.

When this condition was fully established, Madame Lucia said to him, energetically, sometimes repeating her words with great decision, and emphasizing them by clapping her hands forcibly together,—

"You will soon be hypnotized by Dr. Meissonier. He will tell you that you must not remember anything which has been said or done, or which has occurred between you. You must resist his suggestions. You must not obey him. You must remember everything. I forewarn you, I forearm you, I dissolve his power over you. I restore you your memory. You will remember everything which has happened since Meissonier disappeared. You will forget nothing at all."

Then, commanding him to sleep fifteen minutes longer easily and naturally, and to wake up greatly refreshed and invigorated, she left the room.

Such is the process described by Bernheim and others for the restoration of the lost or erased memory of the hypnotized subject. Meissonier could have recalled everything to Hilary's waking mind by a command, even by a silent, unspoken command, so great and positive was his influence over him. But for another person to restore his memory, it was necessary to bring him to the point of resistance against Meissonier's suggestions. This he could never reach by his own efforts waking or asleep. Here Lucia thinks and wills for him. She forestalls and counteracts Meissonier's movements by an anterior and more positive command. He will resist Meissonier's suggestions at their next meeting, and awake free.

Hilary Dupont awoke at the specified time and with the expected invigoration. He remembered nothing, of course, about Lucia's impressive lecture. He went out into the city as usual. In the afternoon he returned in the most exuberant spirits. Her experiment had succeeded as well as if Charcot or Bernheim had been the operator.

"We are free!" he shouted; "we are free! I remember every minute incident which has occurred for weeks past. I will visit Denfield to-morrow."

The conspirators spent the evening together, relating their experiences and discussing their present plans and their future prospects. The interview was not unenlivened by love-passages, needless to record.

The next day the young doctor presented himself at

Mr. Denfield's office. He was bright and cheerful, and spoke with more spirit and intelligence than he had manifested for a long time.

"I come to claim the reward of ten thousand dollars offered for information which will lead to the arrest of Dr. Meissonier."

"Indeed?" said Denfield. "I am delighted to hear it."

"Yes, I have seen the fox in his hole, and I can give him over to the police. On one condition, however,—that no charge be made against Mrs. Meissonier for conspiracy to defraud, or as accessory in the murder of Gordon Clarke."

"The former charge," said the lawyer, "having never been referred to the grand jury, can be quietly dropped. The charge as accessory she can only escape by turning State's evidence."

"That she is ready and willing to do."

"Bravo! bravo!" said Denfield; "this is glorious news for Stanford. Well, sir, where is Meissonier?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," said the young doctor. "Are you ready to hear a curious, almost incredible story?"

"Yes, if it is in logical connection with our business in hand. Everything about this Meissonier seems to be of the incredible order."

"Well," said Dupont, stroking back his long black hair, "on the same evening that Meissonier disappeared, I was called very late to see a patient in consultation with Dr. Delrose, an estimable physician in the lower part of the city. He desired a visit from Dr. Meissonier, but, as Meissonier could not be found, I was invited to take his place and represent him.

"I found the house in a lonely suburb, quite concealed from the street by a high fence, and surrounded by large magnolias in full bloom. It had evidently belonged to the old aristocracy, for it was large and roomy although dilapidated, and the carved panels and frescoed ceilings displayed traces of ancient splendor. There was a carriage-way overgrown with grass leading from the street along the side of the front yard to the rear of the house.

"A quadroon woman of genteel appearance, and quiet, dignified manners, ushered me into a spacious, handsomely-furnished bedroom. Dr. Delrose came forward and introduced me to Madame Millington. Then, turning to an old gentleman seated in a large arm-chair, who took no notice of any of us, he went on to say,—

"'This is our patient, doctor,—Mr. Alphonse Lagarde, of Opelousas. He has been long afflicted with brain-trouble, probably softening. You see the unmistakable signs of dementia about him,—the vacant, almost immovable look, the muscular dejection, the fallen lower lip, the dribbling from the corners of the mouth, all make up a pitiable picture of organic brain-disease easily recognized.'

"I bowed approval of his diagnosis.

"'Incurable, of course, incurable, sir; but the question is, what to do with these unfortunates, where to place them.'

"'Why do they bring him away from his home in the country?' I asked.

"'He has lately had some little intercurrent attacks of acute excitement, which have frightened his relatives. They are as much afraid of him as if he were a lunatic. Then, they have no physician in the country familiar with these rarer forms of disease. His son brought him from Opelousas yesterday, to consult Dr. Meissonier, who has great reputation in nervous affections. He is in this house because Madame Millington is a born servant of the old family of Lagardes, who owned this property before the war, and she is still devotedly attached to their interests. His son has provided her amply with money, but was compelled to go back to his sugar-plantation on urgent business. He will return in a few days to learn the result of the consultations.

"'Last evening,' Dr. Delrose continued, 'he had a paroxysm of violence which alarmed Madame Millington quite seriously. I quieted the old man's agitation with bromides, but the attack may return at any moment. The lady, with only female servants in the house, feels incapable of taking charge of such a patient. What shall we do? What do you advise?'

"'Really,' said I, with some little diffidence, 'it seems to me that the best place for him, at least temporarily, is the Louisiana Retreat, where the good Sisters of Charity and the distinguished Dr. Shepard will give him all the assistance which benevolence or science can bestow.'

"'An excellent suggestion,' said Dr. Delrose; and it was accepted by Madame Millington, with graceful smiles and nods of approval.

"Two medical certificates are required for the admission of a patient into the Louisiana Retreat. These were furnished by Dr. Delrose and myself. A closed carriage was brought through the grass-grown way around to the back gallery of the house, and the old helpless patient was deposited in it. I accompanied him as in duty bound, and we were overtaken on the way by one of those deluges of rain, which sometimes put half of New Orleans a few inches under water for an hour or two.

"The Sisters received him at that late hour—nearly midnight—with some hesitation, as against the rules. The flooded streets, his age and debility, and perhaps a month's payment in advance, worked in his favor; and the next morning Dr. Shepard approved the admission, confirmed the diagnosis, and took him under treatment."

Denfield had been growing restive for several minutes, and he now called out a little impatiently,—

"Well, sir, what is it to us that Mr. Alphonse Lagarde is housed in the Louisiana Retreat?"

"Mr. Alphonse Lagarde," said young Dupont, "and Dr. Meissonier are the same person!"

"Great heavens!" said Denfield, leaping to his feet. "Why didn't you tell me so without all this circumlocution? I will get out a warrant for his arrest immediately."

"Softly!" said Hilary; "not so fast. The invasion of their domicile by armed policemen without previous notification would be improper and unjust to the Sisters. I must inform them that, instead of nursing an invalid, they have been concealing a criminal. Send your force out to-morrow at twelve o'clock. I shall be there, and will prevent Monsieur Alphonse Lagarde from turning into somebody else."

"Agreed," said the lawyer, extending his hand in a cordial manner, not knowing to what depths of degradation his visitor had descended.

The Louisiana Retreat is in the upper part of the city, near Audubon Park, an immense brick building several stories high, erected as an asylum for the treatment of the insane and of obscure nervous diseases, on a graded pay-principle. It is considered a first-class institution in that part of our country, which yet lingers behind the rest in many points of social, sanitary, and public improvement. Individualism still retards the development of the co-operative spirit.

In a third-story room fronting St. Charles Avenue, which was still several blocks away across a green common, sat Dr. Hypolite Meissonier in the venerable but pitiable disguise of Mons. Alphonse Lagarde. He only assumed the attitude of dementia when his keen ear detected the approach of some one to his door.

Meissonier was indebted for his escape and his concealment to the kindness and ingenuity of Madame Millington, one of his early hypnotic conquests. That interesting lady had enjoyed a good deal of his presence and a great deal of his money in her remote and handsomely-furnished rooms. To her he had fled in his extremity. She had received him with open arms, had pitied his distress, and assisted in his disguise, so that neither Delrose nor Dupont suspected the deception. Persons of her class and color are sometimes singularly discreet, and secrets of name and conduct are generally safe in their keeping.

Meissonier was very, very wretched that morning, in contemplation of his dangerous and precarious position. He was indignant that Madame Lucia had escaped his snare for her imprisonment. His assassination by proxy had also failed, and the thought that Stanford was living and exercising all the power of money for his detection filled him with apprehension.

Hilary Dupont now entered the room in high spirits, but had the tact, on observing Meissonier's gloomy countenance, to charge his own buoyancy to the fine weather and a very good night's rest. The doctor regarded him with a look of cold disdain.

"Hilary," he said, "there's something wrong going on around me. I scent danger in the air. I am growing desperate with this confinement. I must escape it. Something whispers in my ear, 'Now or never!' These people have searched everything again, and came near finding the prussic acid you brought me the other day."

"That means nothing," said Dupont; "they make periodical visits for inspection and search in every institution of this kind."

"I dreamed a villanous dream last night," the doctor proceeded to say: "I was in a beautiful room all safe and happy. A kind of wagonette with two splendid gray horses drove up to the door. Two gayly-dressed, fine-looking ladies were coming to see me. It was singular that, instead of entering through the hall, they ascended through a trap-door into my room. I was delighted to see them, when, presto! they proved to be two burly, terrible policemen. One of them had a pair of iron handcuffs in his hand. My dreams sometimes come true."

Hilary said nothing to relieve his despondency, for he knew that his dream was prophetic.

"Take that chair, Hilary," said the magnetizer, "and give me the best feat of clairvoyance you ever made in your life. If danger approaches, as I feel it does, I want to know all beforehand. I have resolutely determined to die rather than submit to arrest, imprisonment, and trial. No gallows for me, sir! Death is but a sleep, anyhow."

Hilary took the chair; the doctor hypnotized him rapidly; and the victim sank into utter oblivion of external things, and had his internal sight opened around him.

This clairvoyance is a very old condition, proved and verified a thousand times, and still discredited and derided by those who profess most and know least of the true science of nature. A priest of Apollo at Rome saw every incident of the battle of Pharsalia while it was going on hundreds of miles away. Swedenborg saw the great fire in Stockholm and described its locality and progress with correctness two whole days' journey away from the scene. The Societies for Psychical Research have collected and verified many similar cases.

"Now, Hilary," said the doctor, "look first into my own house, and tell me what Madame Lucia is doing."

After a few moments Hilary spoke,—"She is standing in the hall, quarrelling with Lilly Montrose, who is trying to blackmail her on account of that attempt to extort money from the Clarke estate. I hear their voices as plainly as through a good telephone."

"Glad of it!" said the doctor, fiercely. "May all the human bees, hornets, and yellow-jackets sting her!

That woman has given me a world of trouble. On the vessel coming over from France, when she was a young bride, I caught a Spaniard making love to her. I pitched him over the railing into the sea. No one saw it; but his shriek was heard, and a cry arose, 'Man overboard!' I was first in the life-boat, and played the rescuing hero to perfection. I reached away over the side of the boat and grasped my victim by the neck. He was alive when I took hold of him, but I squeezed his windpipe so tightly with my big hand that when we stretched him out in the bottom of the boat, he was dead! The secret was my own.

"Ah, well! Come, now, Hilary, tell me what they are doing and saying at the central police-station. It is astonishing how my thoughts keep turning and turning to that detestable place."

Hilary suddenly gave a half-suppressed cry of alarm. "What is it?" said the doctor, anxiously.

"I see the chief of police standing behind his desk. He is speaking to Mr. Denfield. I hear him distinctly. He says, 'The police-force with warrant of arrest started twenty minutes ago. Your prisoner will be here by one o'clock.'"

Meissonier seemed struck with a sudden terror not to have been expected of him. He rushed to the door and tried the handle. Bolted or locked from the outside! He ran to first one window and then another and looked out: a clear fall of sixty feet! Escape was impossible. He took a seat, and wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead.

"Bah!" he said, in a few minutes, during which he had recovered his composure. "This is not myself. I am made of sterner stuff. This horror was sprung upon me too suddenly. It was a momentary cowardice. I am myself again, prepared for either fortune, either fate.

"Hilary," he said presently, in a tone of sad resignation, "can you trace the movements of the police-force coming for me?"

"I lost them just now," said Hilary, "about Napoleon Avenue, but I have caught sight of them again. They are just above the Jewish Home."

"How much force is it?"

"I see a wagon drawn by two spirited gray horses, a driver, and two very large, powerful policemen in blue coats and blue caps. One of them holds a pair of handcuffs in his hand."

"I told you so, Hilary; I told you so. My dream! Are they moving very fast?"

"Yes, they are coming very rapidly; the driver is whipping up his horses; the policemen are laughing."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the wretched man. He then sank into a revery for some minutes. It was a kind of philosophic contemplation. He had no religion and no faith in prayer.

"There is an old Scotch lullaby," he said, "which rings in my ear,—

'Hush ye, hush! ye little pet, ye;
Sleep ye, sleep ye! never fret ye;
Old black Douglas shall not get ye!'

Dame nature sings all her children to sleep. Black Douglas is the devil invented by the priests. Yes, death is a sleep,—and I am going to it."

"Hilary," he suddenly called out, "where are the blue-caps now?"

"At the door, doctor," answered Hilary in a hoarse, frightened voice; "at the door, parleying with the Sisters."

Meissonier rushed to the window and looked down.

"The infamous, open police-wagon!" he exclaimed, vehemently, "which drags even the innocent through the streets exposed like wild beasts to the gaze of the people. Never for me! My liquid electricity first."

He drew from his pocket a small vial containing about two teaspoonfuls of prussic acid. He was lifting it to his mouth, when his eye fell upon Hilary Dupont, struggling to awake from his hypnotic sleep.

He approached him.

"In this supreme moment," he said, gently, "I am capable of a great forgiveness. I believe this man has robbed me of my wife, and has now betrayed me to my death. I pardon him. Sleep, Hilary, five minutes longer, and awake in peace!"

There are unsuspected depths of goodness in the wicked, and unsuspected depths of evil in the good. Therefore, "judge not, lest ye be judged."

Voices were heard in the hall; footsteps were at the door. Meissonier lifted the vial to his mouth. "To the memory of Gordon Clarke!" he exclaimed, firmly, and swallowed the contents.

As the policemen quietly entered the room, he reeled from his chair and fell upon the floor, with glistening eyes, foaming mouth, and rapidly blackening face.

"By heaven!" exclaimed the officers, with uplifted hands, "he has committed suicide!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CONTRADICTIONS.

NINETTE DU VALCOURT had been all along very much interested in the main object of Stanford's visit to New Orleans. Meissonier's strange murder of Gordon Clarke, his wonderful mesmeric powers, and his late terrible death made a profound impression upon her. Abhorring capital punishment, she was satisfied with his own expiation of his crime, and even with the mode of it, remembering the words of Scripture, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Her tender sympathies had run out after the little lost girl. Was she now a cherub in heaven? or a pilgrim upon earth? If the latter, what had been her fate? Who was she? Where was she? Was she an outcast? or had she drawn some prize in the lottery of life? Could the broken link of the family chain be ever restored? These speculations were fruitless, but they were absorbing. She rejoiced at least in the discomfiture of Miss Lilly Montrose, and that the vacant seat was still preserved for the rightful heir.

Stanford had been surprised that Cora Morette could give him no clue, not even the faintest, to the discovery of little Mary Clarke. In her profoundest conditions she had said, "She is living; she is somewhere about us, nearer than we think; her image is growing upon me, she is coming;" but she gave no specific descriptions or directions or suggestions.

The thousand-pound-note which lies in the Bank of England to the credit of any clairvoyant who can read its number and the name written on it has never been claimed. The repeated efforts of clairvoyants to discover little Charlie Ross have been fruitless, and the parental sorrow with which the heart of the world has throbbed in sympathy remains unhealed. Does it follow that clairvoyance does not exist? Preposterous! It only proves that we know very little of the phenomena of clairvoyance, and nothing at all of the physical or spiritual laws which govern it. It is a continent newly discovered: its exploration is the work of the future. As a state of the human spirit, capable of both good and evil, we may be sure that it has its limitations, personal, social, moral, and providential.

Catholic as she was, and afraid of all spiritual influences not specially sanctioned by the church (a church saturated with spiritualism), Ninette Du Valcourt became very anxious to see Cora Morette. So Stanford invited her one day to accompany him to the rooms of that remarkable thought-reader and clairvoyant.

Cora Morette's health had been long failing, and, soon after the events recorded in this volume had transpired, she passed away from this little world of shadows into the vast universe of realities. Her gentle, modest, and truthful character came out in stronger, sweeter light as she approached the border-line which separates the invisible from the visible. Her more strictly external psychometric powers, as in the detection of disease or outward phenomena, had grown weaker; but her interior perceptions, her spiritual insight, her faculty of grasping the relations between the past, the present, and the future, had correspondingly increased.

Ninette surveyed with surprise the humble apartments and their occupant, the quiet, diffident little mulatto woman of whom such wonderful things were told. The languid eyes of the seeress brightened up a little at the vision of loveliness which presented itself before her, but she evidently had no external recognition of her visitor.

When, however, she passed into the hypnotic state and took into her own the delicate hand of Ninette, her homely features brightened into smiles, and she exclaimed, with genial fervor,—

"Ah, my dear child! I am so glad to feel you thus near to me! I knew you were coming."

"Knew I was coming?" said Ninette, while her fine gray eyes dilated with surprise.

"Yes, my dear. Have you never sat in a room and heard somebody come down the stairs or walk through the hall, and have you not known, without seeing them at all, from their footsteps or from some sound they made, that such a person was coming, and no other."

"But you have never seen me and do not know me."

"On the contrary, I have known you what seems to me a very long time. I have watched you and studied you over and over again. How lovely and beautiful you have grown!"

Ninette and Stanford exchanged wondering and inquiring glances with each other.

Suddenly Hugh Stanford rose from his seat and paced the room in evident agitation. Cora's strange words and manner affected him deeply, for his knowledge of spiritual phenomena gave him some clue to their meaning. The light of a great and sudden thought had risen upon him, a thought almost too overwhelming for expression. He merely said, with suppressed emotion,—

"Thank God, Ninette, that I brought you here this morning! Why did I not think of it before?"

Ninette regarded him with a bewildered surprise. Cora Morette still held her hand, smiling, and said nothing.

Stanford took Gordon Clarke's letter and his child's lock of hair from his pocket. He had often shown them to Ninette, who had taken great interest in the relics. He now placed them in Cora's hand, and said, solemnly,—

"Come now, Cora, we have discovered the murderer of Gordon Clarke through your help, and have brought him to self-inflicted punishment. See if you cannot make a little more progress towards the discovery of the child."

Cora Morette shrugged her shoulders and threw up her hands, with an expression of extreme astonishment and impatience. Her pantomime was so expressive that Ninette's heart throbbed with a strange sensation of mingled joy and fear. Stanford hung breathless on the approaching words of the woman.

"Why should I look for her?" she said, a little sharply. "Have you not brought her to me yourself to-day?"

Ninette fell back into her chair, with a faint cry.

Stanford spoke out, rapidly and almost sternly,—

"Cora Morette, do you mean to say that this young lady at my side is the lost daughter of Gordon Clarke?"

"I say it, and I say it positively," said the seeress, without hesitation, "because I feel it and know it."

"An altogether different parentage has been discovered for her," said Stanford, "the evidences of which are overwhelming and complete."

"It is nothing to me," said Cora, shrugging her shoulders, "what people say or think they know. I do not reason about things. I feel, and therefore I know. The child whose hair you gave me to examine and this young lady are the same person."

To say Ninette and Stanford were profoundly impressed would be tame language indeed. They were lost in an ecstasy of wonder and joy, checked, however, by sudden questionings and doubts.

"O that I could believe," said Ninette, "that this letter was written by my own father!" and she kissed the faded scroll as tenderly as if she did believe it.

"O that I could believe," said Stanford, "that this little golden lock once grew on your precious head!" and he kissed the relic as passionately as if he did believe it.

"Oh, Hugh!" said Ninette, after a short silence, "this is too wonderful, too beautiful to be true. It is fancy or dream-work, some kind of illusion. Do not let us deceive ourselves and indulge in romantic expectations which can never be realized."

Ninette's warning brought Stanford's mind down to the practical plane of thought.

"You are right, Ninette," he said. "This evidence, so satisfactory to us, would weigh positively nothing in a court of justice. It would make no impression upon a blind, matter-of-fact world. We would even be mocked and laughed at for believing it.

"And yet," he added, almost fiercely, "I believe what Cora says is true,—every word of it.

"Come!" he said, suddenly. "I have a new idea. Let us bid Cora adieu, God bless her! and visit old Lethe Maxwell in the Pontalba Buildings. I will not be satisfied until I have questioned that old mammy myself, for the good, credulous old colonel may have been imposed upon by a fabricated story."

The question still rises, why did not the lock of hair lead Cora Morette to discover Ninette Du Valcourt? Gordon Clarke's letter brought her into rapport with Gordon Clarke's mind, of which it was a direct emanation, and thence she was led to Meissonier's mind, through whom she saw the old saloon-keeper, Madame Fortier's, and the trunks. The lock of hair, however, gave only some vague impression of the child's person, but led nowhere. She could see nothing of the child beyond what Clarke and Meissonier knew of her. But when Ninette grew more and more into Stanford's life, every interview with Stanford brought Ninette more and more into the range of Cora's spiritual perceptions, and she felt the growing image of the child forming in her, so that, when she met Ninette personally, she recognized her at once in the hypnotic state as the lovely and beautiful form which she knew was surely coming.

Lethe Maxwell was surprised and a little overawed at the entrance of the elegant and dignified gentleman who accompanied Ninette. She surmised immediately that he was the northern lover who had fought the duel for her, and still clung to her notwithstanding her African descent. The old woman had grown so familiar with Ninette's changed conditions that she did not hesitate to allude to her as her grand-daughter. Ninette did not resent nor repudiate the title, deeming it best to submit at once and gracefully to the inevitable.

"Mrs. Maxwell," said Stanford, after having been duly presented to the grandmother by the granddaughter, "I am anxious to learn from your own mouth your own story of the birth and early life of Miss Du Valcourt."

Startled by the question and the earnest tone of the speaker's voice, Lethe Maxwell looked, in a kind of bewildered, inquiring way, to Ninette.

"Don't be nervous, mammy!" said Ninette, in her sweet, gentle manner. "Answer the gentleman's questions freely and fully. Conceal nothing. He has a right to know the truth and the whole truth."

"God knows, sir," said Lethe, reassured and looking intently at Stanford, "I wish I could tell you, what I suppose you are anxious to believe, that this young lady is the daughter of Colonel Du Valcourt, or of some of his relatives, or at least of some white man and white woman; but it wouldn't be true."

"What is the truth about it?" said Stanford.

"What I told Colonel Du Valcourt is true. She is the daughter of my child Emily Maxwell and of Colonel John Gordon of the Union army. That I can swear to before God, to the best of my knowledge."

"Now begin at the beginning and tell us all about it," said Stanford, kindly.

"You see," said the old woman, "it was this way. "I had but one child, Emily Maxwell, as pretty a piece of flesh as you ever looked upon, but a wild and headstrong girl. We lived in Biloxi, Mississippi, close to the light-house. There were many soldiers and sailors coming and going there during the war. Emily, only fifteen years old, ran away with a Yankee officer called Colonel Gordon. It was said that they went first to Havana, where the colonel had some transport business for the government. I never knew. That war broke up families as well as fortunes. Ah, sir, those Yankees, who lit down in the South like a flock of wild geese, ruined all the young girls of the color of mine."

Mrs. Maxwell wiped a tear from the corner of her eye, and continued:

"I did not see my child again until the fall of 1866. Then Emily Gordon came out to Biloxi on the morning train, bringing a little girl with her, this very Miss Ninette, and she went back on the evening train by herself, for she left the child with me. She came for that purpose exclusively. She took her dinner with me, sir, and I have never laid eyes on her from that day to this. She was finely dressed and shining with jewelry, and looked well and happy. She cried bitterly when she parted from the child. She is now sick of consumption, in the Cincinnati hospital, and is waiting to get a little stronger, when she expects to come down and see her mother and her child before she dies."

Here the old woman wept, and Ninette and Stanford paid a tribute of respect to the mother's grief by a few minutes of silence.

"What did your daughter say about the child?" inquired Stanford.

"She said this, sir: 'Mother,' she said, 'this little girl is my own child. Her name is Mary Emily Gordon. Her father is Colonel John Gordon. He has abandoned us both, as they all do, and I have fallen into the hands of another gentleman, who is going to take me to Europe. He insists on getting rid of the child, but he has respected my feelings enough to let me come all the way down here and deposit my darling with you. Besides, you know, mother,' the poor thing said, 'after a while the child will be older, and I shall not be fit to keep it. Take it, mother, and raise it in the fear of God. I will send you money for it whenever I can. If anything happens to me, and you should not be able to provide for it, place it with the good Sisters in some asylum.' That's exactly what she said, sir."

"Well, what did you do with the child?" asked Stanford.

"I came to New Orleans with it, sir. The money left me by Emily Gordon soon gave out, and I never heard from her again. I was so often sick and so often out of work, the times were so hard and the people were so wicked, that I was afraid that the dear little thing would suffer in my keeping; so I placed her in the New Orleans Female Orphan Asylum.

"It nearly broke my heart to leave the precious child in that great, dark, cold, lonesome place. They let me see her once a week, in the down-stairs hall and in the presence of one of the Sisters. I brought her little knick-knacks and gum-drops and cream-chocolates, but I suspect that woman took them away from her. There's no true child's life there, sir,—they are so awful precise and orderly. I went by many times, but I could never see her dear little face on the big galleries or at any of the windows. They keep 'em all inside, sir. They never see the street-cars or the carriages or the fine ladies or the processions go by. They try to make saints of little bits o' children! to my mind a great piece of foolishness."

"Now, Lethe, said Stanford, "how do you know that this young lady is the very same person you put into the asylum? We must have positive proof on that point."

"I'll tell you, sir. One day when I went to see the child, she was gone: they had taken her away. They told me that a rich gentleman and his lady had adopted her and changed her name, but they would not tell me who they were nor where they lived. Indeed, the Lady Superior charged me solemnly never to make the least inquiry after the child, and to keep my mouth shut forever on the subject.

"I told her that slavery was abolished, and that nobody could take my own grandchild away from me without my knowledge and consent, that her conduct was little less than kidnapping. She answered me that I had voluntarily made the child over to the church; that the church had consulted wisely for its temporal and spiritual welfare; and that for the child's sake I should rejoice at her great good fortune, and sacrifice my own feelings like a good Christian: all of which was true."

"How did you find her at last?"

"I grieved powerfully after that child, sir. I looked for her in a hundred places, in spite of the command of the Lady Superior. Indeed, I was always looking and looking for her whenever I was out of doors. About six months after I lost her, I was walking late one afternoon up Bourbon Street, which was very, very far away from where I lived. Passing a fine house, with vines all over it and a long iron railing in front of the yard, I saw my little Mary Emily, beautifully dressed, with curled hair, a blue sash, and little gold shoes, playing on the grass with a lovely Maltese kitten. Oh, how my heart leaped up into my mouth! how I longed to hug and kiss that darling of mine! I called her, as softly as I could, not to scare her; but she jumped up and ran into the house, with her kitten in her arms. I waited at the railing until long after dark, for I couldn't go away, but she did not come out again."

"How did you manage at last?" said Stanford, quite interested in the *naïve* and pathetic way in which the old grandmother told her story, while the bright tears were gathering in Ninette's eyes.

"Well, I went back and back, evening after evening. Sometimes I saw her, and sometimes I didn't. Sometimes she was just going to ride with Mrs. Du Valcourt in her splendid carriage. Sometimes other little girls, beautifully dressed, but not one of them as pretty as she was, came to play with her. I would stand and watch her, saying 'birdie, lovie, dearie!' at her, all to myself. One day, when I was leaning against the iron railing gazing into the yard, one of the older girls said to Mary Emily, in a rude manner, 'I wish you would drive that ugly old woman away from the railing.' Mary Emily came forward a few steps, looked at me timidly, and said, in her sweet little voice, 'Go away, old woman!' and I went home, and nearly cried my eyes out.

"At last I got acquainted with her nurse, a nice, sweet-tempered young girl. She helped me in the matter. I used to meet them in Jackson Square. I gave the child little toys, ribbons, and playthings of all sorts. I spent all my spare money upon her. She got to like me very much. I told her to call me mammy, and I was happy at last.

"Well, sir, Colonel Du Valcourt found it all out, and asked me roughly why I was so intimate with his child. I knew very well that it was not his child, and so I had the better of him. I put a bold face upon it. I deceived him, sir, as flatly as Moses's sister deceived the king's daughter. I told him that I knew all about that child, was with her mother when she was born, and had nursed the baby for a long time. I told him that she had always called me mammy, and that he would break my heart and hers too if he separated us.

"Colonel Du Valcourt seemed worried and nervous about it, but he asked me no questions, at which I rejoiced. He said that I might meet the child in Jackson Square, and even visit it occasionally at his house, on one condition,—that I never told a human being who she was or that she was not his own flesh and blood.

"And now you ask me," she said, triumphantly, "how I know that this young lady is the same person. Hav'n't I watched her grow up from year to year? Didn't I see her coming and going to school? Didn't I weep and wring my hands when she went off to Boston? Didn't she write to me once a month all the time she was away? Ask her and she will tell you. Wasn't I in the kitchen, the happiest and proudest of all the darkies, when the grand party was given which brought her out into society? Then I was paralyzed; and hasn't she been as kind and as bountiful to me as an own daughter ever since, not even knowing by what ties of blood we were bound together?

"Oh, sir, I was proud of my beautiful grandchild! I remember standing one night on the pavement in front of the French Opera to see the Du Valcourt carriage drive up and the family get out. Ninette was about sixteen, blooming like a red, red rose. When I saw her heavenly face, her splendid opera-dress, and her glittering diamonds, I clutched hold of the pillar from behind which I was peeping, for I nearly fainted for joy as I whispered to myself, 'That is Emily's child!'

"Hav'n't I trembled a thousand times for fear that Emily Gordon would come home and spoil it all? Ah! my God, I used to pray, let my dear grandchild enjoy her white folks, and her riches, and her beautiful things, and never, never know or even dream where she came from. And if the whole secret has come out now, it was never done with my help, or my consent, or my knowledge. That's the whole truth, sir, and nothing but the truth."

Overcome with emotion, old Lethe burst into tears.

"I thank you, Mrs. Maxwell," said Stanford, rising and offering his hand, "for your kindness in telling us this painful story."

Ninette kissed her tenderly on the cheek, and they left the room with heavy hearts.

Out of the building Stanford remarked,—

"This interview surprises and discourages me."

"It saddens me inexpressibly," interposed Ninette.

"I am surprised at the woman," continued Stanford. "There is cultivated as well as natural sentiment in her narrative, and through all her garrulity the throb of the motherly heart is unmistakable. I am discouraged because there is a great semblance of truth in this woman's story, and it stands in such contradiction to the impressions of Cora Morette."

As they moved along the street, Stanford suddenly exclaimed, in a gayer tone,—

"Our resources are not exhausted. There is one more hope left. Emily Gordon may have told her mother a falsehood, which the old lady stoutly and honestly believes, and the mystery may have an altogether different solution. Ninette, I tell you, solemnly, Cora Morette has told the truth. I shall start for Cincinnati on the evening train."

"What for?" said Ninette, in amazement.

"To see Emily Gordon before she dies, and get the truth from her in a death-bed statement."

He hurried to the Hôtel Royal to make arrangements for his departure, and Ninette returned to Madame Marcelle's. She threw herself upon her bed, weeping, "O the cruel suspense! to stand hoping and despairing between such contradictions!"

Stanford had just finished his light dinner and the preparations for his journey, when a new and great excitement awaited him. A messenger of the City Express Company appeared before him with a letter in his hand. It was from Ninette.

Laconic as Cæsar's despatch from Gaul, or as Commodore Perry's announcement of his victory, it ran thus:

"Emily Gordon heard from. All right. Come quickly."

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHILD DISCOVERED.

THE great city of Cincinnati sits like a queen upon her verdant hills crowned with palaces, laving her feet in the bright Ohio, and stretching forth her two long suspension bridges like mighty arms reached out towards Kentucky and the South. Between this city and New Orleans an exceedingly slender and invisible thread of communication is about to be established in the interest of this story. On slender threads many great issues of life and death have hung suspended.

Cincinnati has one of the finest, best-equipped, and best-managed hospitals in the Union. If the reader had visited this institution three days before Cora Morette had excited our lovers' hopes and Lethe Maxwell had blasted them, and if he had entered ward No. 3 and walked the whole length of the scrupulously-clean, well-ventilated, well-lighted room to the end of it fronting the Ohio River, he would have found bed No. 34, and at the head of it on a little porcelain slate these words:

MRS. EMILY GORDON,
AGED 38.
Pulmonary Consumption.

There, propped up on pillows, breathing with difficulty, lay the emaciated wreck of a once graceful and beautiful woman. None but a connoisseur could have detected the slightest trace of African descent. She was very, very ill. Yet there was a lingering grace in the movements of her shapely head and of her delicate hands. There was a lingering tenderness in her voice, a lingering sweetness upon her lips. In her eyes, once brilliant with pleasure and passion, now languid with suffering, there still lingered the unfading light of love.

A little package, carefully wrapped and securely tied, lay on the bed beside her. She held tightly in her hands several letters, which she now and then lifted to her lips. They were letters received from Ninette Du Valcourt. They had enclosed money for her necessities and comforts, and, what was to the dying woman a thousand times more precious than money, they were full of tender expressions of human love and sympathy, assurances that her own sadly-changed fortunes would make no difference in her filial devotion, and they were all signed, "Your affectionate daughter."

"My God! my God!" exclaimed the poor woman, lifting her eyes to heaven. The very, very ill can scarcely ever weep, for emotions are feebly manifested and tears are not secreted.

Presently the doctor on his morning round appeared at the far door-way, and came down the ward, turning to the right and the left, to examine and prescribe for this and that patient. It was Dr. Charlie Judkins, a large, handsome, middle-aged gentleman, whose genial spirit, cordial manners, and well-deserved success had made him the idol of his patients and a distinguished ornament of his profession.

He had been very much interested in the case of Emily Gordon, and it was his lovely wife who had placed that basket of delicious fruit and beautiful flowers on the table near her.

The good doctor, with intuitive tact, was troubled at the unusual gravity of his patient's countenance, but he greeted her in his usual cheery, hope-inspiring manner.

"Now, doctor," she said, holding his proffered hand in hers and pressing it tightly, "you must be serious with me to-day. You must not flatter, you must not prevaricate. You must tell me the whole truth."

She paused to take breath, while the doctor kindly assured her that he would respect her wishes.

"I cannot stand it any longer," she said. "I have been waiting and waiting to get strong enough to go back to New Orleans, and, although I am better and stronger to-day than I was yesterday, still I keep dropping back and back, somehow, so that I am ready to despair."

"No, Emily," said the doctor. "Don't talk that way. So long as there is life there is hope."

"Doctor," she said, with strange earnestness, "doctor, you don't know what depends upon it: happiness or misery, fortune or poverty, life or death to some folks. If I am ever to return to New Orleans, let me go now. If I am to die here, tell me, tell me candidly, doctor. Don't deceive me, for (laying her hand upon the bundle at her side), if I am to die here, I have business of extreme importance to transact before I die."

Emotion and effort had exhausted her so much that the doctor administered a portion of the stimulus which was always kept upon the table.

"Well, Emily," he said, gently and reluctantly, as if knowing that he was pronouncing an opinion which would hasten her death, "I would certainly advise you to attend to the business matter at once."

At these words Emily's countenance fell, as the Orientals say, and any one could see that the last flicker of hope expired in her breast. When a man is hanging by the ledge from the roof of a house, so long as the crowd below encourage him he holds on, but if he hears them say, "No ropes or ladders can be procured," his strength gives way at once, and he lets go and falls.

"Doctor," said Emily, gravely, after a moment's silence, "you have been very kind to me. I have one more favor to ask of you. Please bring, as soon as you can, a lawyer or notary to take my deposition, or affidavit, or whatever they call it, and have it written, signed, and sealed according to law."

The doctor promised compliance, and retired. In two or three hours he returned, with two gentlemen, one of them carrying books and papers under his arm. Poor Emily had been waiting with extreme impatience. She had begged the nurse to give her extra food and even extra medicine, in her simple faith that such measures would lengthen out the little thread of life for her last effort.

She greeted her visitors with a feeble smile. They wrote out all she had to say, and read it over to her for approval. She signed the paper with great difficulty, and it was witnessed by the doctor and several others.

Then they all bowed respectfully and departed, except the doctor.

"Now, doctor," said Emily, with reviving cheerfulness, "thank you for all this kindness and for one more favor. Please deliver this bundle at the express office with your own hands, and mail this legal document to the same address,—Miss Ninette Du Valcourt, care of Mrs. Octavia Marcelle, 390 Royal Street, New Orleans. Now my poor life's work is done."

"No, Emily," said the doctor, accepting the articles intrusted to his care, "you are very much fatigued. You must take a good, long rest."

"There is no more rest for me," she said, solemnly, with finger pointed upward,—"no more rest for me except in the green pastures yonder."

"Emily," said the doctor, suddenly and gently, "would you like me to send a priest or a minister to converse with you on the subject of religion?"

"Oh, no," she said, faintly, "that is unnecessary. I have found Jesus upon this sick-bed, without the help of other people. He does not come to us from without. He descends into our hearts, like a man coming down from the upper story into the basement of a house. Those good people might not understand this matter as I do, and discussion of the subject would be painful. I need nobody's prayers, for God has given me light and peace."

The doctor rose to retire.

"Do you see these letters, doctor?" said the earnest woman. "I must hold them in my hand until I die; but, when they put me in my coffin, please, doctor, lay them upon my bosom. They must be buried with me."

The doctor nodded assent. Emily took his hand and kissed it, saying, "Doctor, good-by! you will never see me again."

"Oh, yes, I will," said the doctor, huskily. "I will begin at this end of the ward in the morning, and prescribe for you first of all."

He passed down the room. She kissed her hand repeatedly after his receding form, and then turned her face to the window.

Night descended with its shadows and silence. Everything was so still that the vast building seemed deserted. The lights were lowered to mere tapers. Those who could sleep slept; those who were wakeful from pain remained in silent thought. The nurses moved softly about, only when necessary. The watchman, felt-shod like a cat, peeped in at stated intervals.

Emily lay very quiet, but breathed more and more rapidly and heavily. She made no moan, she asked no assistance. Long after midnight she looked peacefully at the window, and saw a great star shining over the Kentucky hills. Not knowing where she was, or what was happening, the receding spirit muttered to itself, "I will follow that star. It will show me where Jesus is!"

The morning nurse entered to relieve the night nurse of her watch. The great star had set and the gray dawn was peeping in. Coming up to Emily, the new nurse exclaimed to the other, "Why, this woman is dead!"

Yes, she was dead among strangers, without mother or child or lover or friend to close her eyes.

Yes, dead! and the hungry soul of the prodigal daughter rose from the dust of the earth where it had been feeding with swine, and hastened away to our Father's house, where there is "bread enough and to spare."

When Hugh Stanford hurriedly entered Mrs. Marcelle's little parlor, Ninette's face was radiant with the joyful news she had to tell, but she threw herself into his arms and burst into a paroxysm of tears. This outbreak of sorrow ended in a merry laugh, which the ignorant might have called hysterical, but which occurs sometimes in the gravest, calmest natures in high states of excitement.

In answer to Hugh's urgent inquiries, Ninette brought forth the little package which came by express, and a pleasant letter of explanation from Dr. Charlie Judkins, which enclosed poor Emily Gordon's deposition, or affidavit, duly signed, witnessed, and stamped with the seal of the great State of Ohio.

Stanford read it aloud, with devouring interest:

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I, Emily Gordon, baptized Emily Maxwell, being about to die, but in full possession of my mental faculties, do make, of my own free will and accord, the following solemn and true statement.

In June, 1865, I came over on a steamer from Havana to New Orleans in company with a Mr. Gordon Clarke and his little child. Dr. Meissonier and his wife were passengers on the vessel. The Meissoniers, Colonel Gordon, and myself paid a great deal of attention to the motherless little girl, who was as good as she was beautiful.

About ten days after reaching New Orleans, I was walking, about nine o'clock at night, along Chartres Street, when I met Mrs. Meissonier, with Gordon Clarke's child sound asleep in her arms.

She said to me, "Gordon Clarke has gone off and deserted his child. I am taking it to the nearest station-house to be sent to some asylum."

"Oh, Mrs. Meissonier," I said, "how strange that is! How can it be true?"

"It is true," she said. "He has either run off or committed suicide. He left a card pinned to the child's dress, 'Mrs. Meissonier will take care of this child.' Now, we can do no such thing. We do not know where his relatives are to be found, and the orphan asylum is the only place for her."

"Mrs. Meissonier," I said, "give her to me. We have no children, and I am exceedingly fond of them. We will take the best care of her in the world."

She gave me the child, and I took her to our room. Colonel Gordon at first resisted what he called an absurd burden, but finally yielded to my wishes. We started for Chicago the next day.

Eighteen months afterwards circumstances arose which compelled me to part with the child. I had become greatly attached to it, and determined that I would trust it to no one but my own mother. To secure her lasting affection and guidance, I swore that the child was my own. She has never known the truth from that day to this.

I now solemnly declare that the young lady known in New Orleans as Miss Ninette Du Valcourt is not my child nor Colonel Gordon's child, but is, to my certain knowledge, the child of Mr. Gordon Clarke.

Madame Meissonier, if living, will testify to the truth of this.

I declare also that the little package which accompanies this affidavit contains the very articles of clothing the child had on when I received her, and a little gold ring which she wore upon her finger and bearing her name, Mary Gilford Clarke.

The above statement is the truth: so help me God.

EMILY GORDON.

Witnesses:

C. P. JUDKINS, M.D.,
JNO. H. SHERMAN, M.D.,
S. S. CARPENTER,
HENRY FROST.

The little faded dress was produced, the little shoes, well worn and cracked, the little ring, dim with age, but bearing the delicately-engraved letters of inestimable value as proof of Ninette's identity. The lovers regarded these precious relics with profound emotion, and embraced each other with a joy too deep for words.

"Come," said Hugh, rising, "this news is too good, this happiness is too great, to keep it all to ourselves." And he hurried away to see Du Valcourt, Denfield, and Holden.

Emile Du Valcourt was the happiest man in New Orleans that evening. He had just finished a rather spare and silent dinner, when Stanford and Denfield came in and explained the whole matter to him from beginning to end. The old man's dancing days were long past, but he bounded from his chair and executed some remarkable pirouettes which might possibly be called a dance *à la Kangaroo.* He kissed Stanford and Denfield, French fashion, upon their cheeks; he kissed Madame Du Valcourt and Rose Villemaine; and was about to kiss a servant-girl passing through the room, when Rose, deprecating such extravagance, seized him by the arm.

The joyous old gentleman then rushed out to all the clubs, one after another, and communicated the good news to his friends, capping each repetition of the story with bottles of champagne. His effervescent hilarity continued to increase until psychometry, millionaires, African descent, and Cora Morette became so strangely mixed in his conversation that his friends considerately took him home in a carriage, for which he paid quadruple fare to the driver. They got him to bed at last, and left him in a glorious state of uncertainty, not whether the moon had three horns or four, but whether he or Stanford was engaged to Ninette.

It is needless to describe Ninette's triumphant return to her father's house.

Rose Villemaine congratulated Ninette coldly upon her restoration to the rights and privileges of the white race. She offered no apology for her own conduct, but acted as if she had been the injured party, and had kindly taken Ninette into her favor again on trial. Ninette sweetly ignored this preposterous attitude of her chagrined step-sister and treated her exactly as if nothing disagreeable had ever happened.

"There is one link missing in the chain of evidence," said Denfield to Stanford, "and that we must procure from Madame Meissonier."

Their appearance at first seemed to trouble the spirit of the gay widow.

"Do not be uneasy, madame," said Denfield, in the most courteous manner. "Now that you are free and happy, being delivered from all apprehensions, you will be pleased to know that you can contribute greatly to the happiness of others, by telling us the simple truth of what became of Gordon Clarke's child."

"With the greatest pleasure, gentlemen," said the lady, suddenly radiant with smiles.

"On the night when Meissonier poisoned Gordon Clarke in the saloon, I took the child in my arms to drop her somewhere in the street. I chanced to meet a woman named Emily Gordon, who came over on the steamer with us from Havana, and who had manifested great affection for the child. On the strength of a fabricated story that Gordon Clarke had deserted it, she begged me to give it to her. I did so, with a great sense of relief; and I have never seen nor heard of either of them since."

"That is the truth, as we know from other sources," said the lawyer. "You have no objection to sign a written statement of it?"

"None whatever," said the amiable Circe.

Having secured that affidavit, our business relations with Dr. Hilary Dupont and his "*grande consolation*" terminate forever. They continue their favorite pursuits, he his mesmerism, and she her coquetries, with variable success. If one imagines that these wretched creatures are left to enjoy too much of the sunshine of life, let him remember that our heavenly Father showers his blessings without discrimination upon the good and the evil; but let him also not forget that the relations between cause and effect are indestructible, and that "what a man soweth, that also shall he reap."

"Thus," said Stanford, exultingly, to Denfield, "has my singular mission to New Orleans been brilliantly accomplished. The murderer of Gordon Clarke has been discovered, and brought to the same kind of death he inflicted upon his victim. The child has been found, and is herself the incalculable reward of all my labors. My own strong faith in the possibilities of spiritual methods of research led me to the undertaking. The occult sciences, to which Meissonier had applied himself for gain, proved the means of his exposure and destruction. Cora Morette's subtle thought-reading and psychometric powers pointed to Meissonier as the criminal, his wife as an accomplice, the saloon-keeper and the parrot as living witnesses, and the old trunks forgotten as lumber in Madame Fortier's garret as circumstantial proof of the robbery and murder. Cora Morette also rejected Lilly Montrose's claims and recognized those of Ninette by instantaneous perception."

"I confess," said Denfield, "that you have staggered and confounded me."

"And that spiritual methods of research," interposed Stanford, "will become legitimate in future."

"By no means, by no means!" exclaimed the lawyer. "I am not at all convinced of that. I must make out a bill of exceptions and demand a new hearing of the case."

"Which means," said Stanford, laughing, "that 'a man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still.'"

He then added, gravely, "Denfield, if you had been one of the ten lepers cured by Christ, you would not have returned to thank him."

"Why do you think I would have proved so ungrateful?"

"Because you would have said to yourself, 'It is true, my leprosy has vanished, but I do not comprehend, and therefore I do not believe that the words of that man had anything to do with it.'"

Dr. Holden's mind was of a very different order. Precedents, authorities, usages, customs, majorities, weighed little in his estimation. He had become disgusted early in life with the credulities and incredulities of the material philosophy. He had found in the spiritual teachings of Swedenborg the answers to the children's questions and to the philosopher's objections and doubts. He belonged to that increasing number of advanced minds struggling for light, who recognize the fact that the old order of things is passing away, that a new age is upon us, with new issues, new methods, new revelations, and an altogether new solution of the problem of life. He cordially agreed with Stanford.

"Dr. Holden," said Stanford to him one day before his wedding, "you puzzle me. Over sixty years of age, having toiled mentally and physically forty years in this semi-tropical, enervating climate, you have no gray hairs in your head, very few wrinkles on your face, and your manner is as bright and buoyant as a boy's. How have you managed to keep so young?"

"By constantly feeding my mind," answered the doctor, "as I do my stomach, with fresh and good food. By keeping in the front line with the progression, evolution, and inspiration of the age. By recognizing the supremacy of mind over matter and all external conditions. By casting away doubts and fears, and meeting everything with a believing, sanguine, enthusiastic spirit.

"What the world needs, sir, is change of thought,—a radical revolution of opinion on almost every conceivable question. Men will be sickly and feeble and wicked and unhappy so long as they cling to their old idols. A change of belief is more health-giving than changes of climate. 'As a man thinketh, so is he.' As the world thinks, so is it and so will it ever be.

The miserableness of old age is due to the want of new, fresh thought, and to the fact that it is constantly trying to reanimate and glorify the dead past."

The momentous hour, which the reader has anticipated, arrived. The chime of silver bells was upon the air. The great doors of the cathedral were open wide. The grand altar was ablaze with lights and flowers. The priests were seated in their rich canonicals. A dozen young gentlemen ushers, the flower of southern society, in their white gloves, white neckties, and matchless tailoring, darted hither and thither to seat the rapidly-arriving guests. Carriage after carriage, with liveried servants, rolled up. Policemen kept back the curious crowd. The tides of beauty, wealth, and fashion, which had astonished the plebeian mass outside, poured into the sacred edifice, and crammed it in every nook and corner. Sometimes a profound hush and sometimes a buzz of expectancy filled the whole house.

Punctually, as true gentility requires, the bridal party arrives. As they enter the middle aisle, the great organ bursts forth with the marriage march from "Lohengrin." It trembles through the whole building, and throbs every heart with those ineffable, uninterpretable sensations of joy which divine music inspires.

A beautiful child of ten years, dressed as an angel and carrying an immense *corbeille* of flowers, precedes the party, gazing with unconscious self-possession at the beautiful scene before her. Then comes Colonel Du Valcourt, with the bride, clad in superb white silks and enveloped with the rarest laces, leaning upon his arm. Mrs. Du Valcourt, supported by the handsome bridegroom, follows next. Then Colonel McLean, the brave apologist of the duel, leading Miss Villemaine. Afterwards the four seconds in the famous fight, each bearing upon his arm some brilliant and graceful beauty of the Du Valcourt circle of friends.

They are all arranged about the altar in precise form. A silence, like that of the green forest, overshadows the assembly. The stately priest makes his low and gentle exhortation. He eulogizes in set terms the good old Catholic family of Du Valcourts. He expatiates upon marriage as a blessed sacrament. He proceeds with the ceremony. He extracts from each party the sacred vows. He imposes upon them the sublime obligations. He sprinkles them with holy water. The ring is given; the kisses are exchanged. Hugh and Ninette are man and wife! The eyes of every married woman are filled with tears. The heart of every single woman is thrilling with tender and unformulated hopes. The crowd disperses.

The reception at the Du Valcourt mansion, announced for from 3 to 4 P.M., was an elaborate and beautiful affair. It is astonishing what a realm of illusions can be made, with some taste and a good deal of money, out of the halls, bay-windows, verandas, staircases, and green lawn of a fine mansion. The materials are awning, boarding, evergreen, tinsel, vases, tropical plants, and a wealth of leaves and flowers: the result is fairy-land!

Stanford and his bride stood under an immense globe of compact delicate white flowers, on the top of which were fluttering two beautiful white doves in the act of kissing each other. Here they stood, side by side, and gracefully received their friends, the rich and fragrant tide of humanity constantly flowing past them. An invisible band from some aerial perch discoursed the sweetest love-music of the operas, falling like showers of white and red rose-leaves upon the crowd. How Stanford rejoiced in his beautiful and brilliant wife! How Ninette adored her brave and handsome husband!

Here in the old parlors, the scene of her childish joys and her social pleasures, amid friends and schoolmates and admirers, amid the blaze of lights, the perfume of flowers, the tremors of music, the sparkling of wines, and the sound of merry voices, the bride of an hour feels the life of her happy girlhood slipping away from her forever, fading like a gleam of sunset, dying like the breath of a rose. Shall she lose it? shall she cling to it? shall she recall it?

There is no bridge of return to the irrecoverable past. She has intrusted her honor, her happiness, her life into the hands of one man, who bears her away from all that she has known and loved, into a new world, to a new life, with its new joys and sorrows. And yet with tears and blushes she abandons her old world and faces her destiny. She lays down one life and takes up the other. And the exultant spirit of love within her cries out, "I die that I may live."

As Ninette stood under the fluttering doves that kissed each other, and read the admiring eyes with which men and women regarded Hugh Stanford, she thought in her heart, "This is the man who fell in love with me at first sight; who declared his passion for me in the sacred shadows of the cathedral in which we were just married; who stood faithfully and fearlessly by me when he and all others believed I was of African descent; who resented an insult to my honor, and gallantly risked his life in defence of it; and who is the handsomest, dearest, sweetest, bravest fellow in the world."

And that was the secret of the whole matter!

There are few scenes more saddening than a group of loving friends gathered on the platform of a railroad-dépôt to bid a bridal party good-by. When the bell rings, and the incessant chattering ceases, and the train moves, what waving of hats and handkerchiefs, what kissing of hands, what tears, and smiles which were only tears in disguise!

The Du Valcourts were there, and McLean and all the groomsmen and the bridesmaids, Holden and Denfield, and many others. How bravely and merrily in appearance they made their adieus! How their voluble tongues in the returning carriages attempted to conceal the silence of their hearts!

Stanford stood on the platform of the sleeper and watched the receding city. These were his thoughts:

"Farewell, New Orleans! City of brave men and beautiful women, farewell!

"City of the Mardi-gras and the French Opera, where the Ideal is still cherished, and where virtue, honor, and duty are more prized than money, farewell!"

When he returned to his seat, Ninette was in tears.

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It is now considered artistic to trust a great deal to the reader's imagination, and to leave a story unfinished like the broken shaft of a monument in a church-yard. This writer disapproves of such a course. He is thoroughly realistic and gossiping. He would like to tell his readers what became of every individual alluded to in the book up to the present moment. And he is actually pained in heart that his want of space does not permit him to describe the splendid reception which the bridal couple met with in Chicago; the immense joy with which Mr. Ephraim Clarke put Ninette's half million dollars in her hand; the superb residence on Drexel Avenue in which the happy pair and their two babies are now living; and the wonder of all the world at the audacity and success of Hugh Stanford's mission to New Orleans.

NOTE ON VIVISECTION.

In the chapter on "Modern Magic," Meissonier confesses that the practice of vivisection had utterly hardened his nature. In this connection, Colonel Robert Ingersoll's opinion on the subject is interesting:

> Vivisection is the inquisition—the hell of science. All the cruelty which the human—or rather the inhuman—heart is capable of inflicting is in the one word. The wretches who commit these infamous crimes pretend that they are working for the good of man, but those who are incapable of pitying animals are incapable of pitying men. A physician who would cut a living rabbit in pieces would not hesitate to try experiments with men and women for the gratification of his curiosity. To settle some theory he would trifle with the life of any patient in his power. I know that good for the human race can never be accomplished by torture. I know that all torture has ever been useless. All the agony inflicted has simply hardened the hearts of the criminals without enlightening their minds. Never can I be a friend of one who vivisects his fellow-creatures.

SYMPOSIUM

ON THE

RACE-PROBLEM

BETWEEN

STANFORD, DENFIELD, AND HOLDEN.

[During Stanford's visit to New Orleans he had various conversations with Holden and Denfield on the race-problem. They were too heavily weighted with ethnical, sociological, and semi-political considerations for the light pages of a romance. The question, however, is growing so rapidly in importance, and light upon its dark places is so eagerly demanded, that one of their interviews may possibly prove entertaining to the reflective reader.]

Stanford.—Circumstances, gentlemen, of which you are aware, have awakened in me a profound interest in the negro-question or race-problem. I am familiar with the best northern sentiment, and you are fairly representative of the best southern thought upon the subject. An interchange of ideas might prove useful to us all. As you nod approval, I will lay down these separate but correlated points for our consideration:

Who is the negro?
What are our relations to him?
What are our duties towards him?
What probable future awaits him?

Denfield.—Premising, sir, that the answers to these questions clearly involve the vital issues of political and social equality or inequality, we desire you first to state freely and frankly your own opinions; which, we presume, may be accepted as expressing the sentiments of the best and purest elements of the Republican party.

Stanford.—The so-called races are not different orders of men, but variations of one genus, the human. They are intermiscible and fertile. Originating from one stock, they will probably by amalgamations be resolved into one composite race. They all possess, but in various degrees, similar moral, intellectual, and spiritual capacities and tendencies, and are all separated from the apes and lower animals by an impassable gulf. The races have been differentiated from each other by external conditions and circumstances, and by different degrees of evolution and development. In spite of all external appearances, the internal or spiritual solidarity of the human race is perfect.

The negro is therefore a man in every sense of the word. He is of one blood, or life, with all other men; gifted with all human faculties, capable of progressive culture, and destined like all the races to spiritual redemption and immortality. Being virtually and radically one of ourselves, he is entitled, just as much as we are, to all the privileges of humanity, and is included in the great social bonds of equality, liberty, and fraternity.

Our duty to the negro is, then, exactly the same as our duty to all other human beings. He should be accorded the same protection by law, the same rights and privileges of citizenship, the same facilities of education, and the same opportunities for moral, intellectual, and social advancement. No public avenues should be closed to him, no discriminations made against him. Every commercial, political, and social triumph should be placed within the reach of his industry, his talent, and his culture. If he fails in anything, let the fault be his own, and let it not be due to unrighteous restrictions and obstructions laid in his way by ourselves.

If these principles are true, and a policy founded upon them is practicable, the future of the negro will be identical with our own. He will be gradually assimilated, on terms of perfect equality, into the body of the republic, and form a healthful and necessary component part of its structure.

Denfield.—To the political and social idealism of our northern friend, I must oppose the positive data of science and the inflexible laws of sociology. Religious intuitions and philanthropic wishes belong to the domain of poetry, and throw no light upon the character of individuals or the fate of nations. Our house of life must be founded upon the solid rock of truth, and the bottom rock of truth is science.

No variations of climate or external conditions can ever explain the physical, mental, and spiritual dissimilarities which exist between the white and the black races. The natural history of the races proves that they originated from distinct centres and are destined for different evolutions. Unlike in the beginning, these races will be unlike in the end.

Who is the negro? you ask. On the oldest Egyptian monuments, thousands of years old, he is represented as being a black man and a slave. The negro as a race is slothful, savage, improvident, debased, and unprogressive. Originating nothing, he has owed every upward or onward impulsion to his Egyptian or Arab conquerors, or to his white masters. Slaves to each other, to their senses, to their passions, to their superstitions, the Africans of the western coast, from whom our negroes were derived, have not made a single advance in thousands of years.

The sentimentalism of the Declaration of Independence, all men created free and equal, is folly in the eyes of science. On the contrary, inequality, struggle for existence, war, and slavery are the primal conditions of human life and the great educators of the human race. Freedom and equality come last, as the fruitage of ages of evolution, and have been only partially realized by the very highest reaches of the white race.

The enforced servitude of the Congo negroes to the white race has been of incalculable benefit to them. Snatched away from his old terrible and paralyzing environment, and compelled to useful labors and civilized habits, until the customs of savage life were destroyed and the trains of savage thought were permanently eradicated, the American negro has emerged from the apathy and degradation of barbarism into the light of civilization, for which he may thank his two hundred years of bondage to the Anglo-Saxon.

Without the constant presence, stimulus, and aid of the white race, the negro cannot retain his acquisitions or hold the little advance he has made. Left alone, he tends always to recede back into barbaric conditions. Hayti, Jamaica, Liberia, where progress has been arrested, are silent but eloquent objective lessons in sociology. The reason why the negro is still incapable of government or self-government is, that his recent development has not been a spontaneous, evolutionary growth of his mind, but a hot-house culture forced upon him by special conditions. Remove the pressure and he rebounds back to his former status.

Stanford.—You do not believe, then, that Christianity can promptly redeem a semi-barbaric race, and lift it into the higher walks of civilization?

Denfield.—The spiritual and elevating power of Christianity is very great, but Christianity itself was the product of evolution, and is specially, and perhaps only, adapted to those races and nations who are sufficiently progressed to receive and comprehend it. The races below that line of development have never accepted it nor understood it, and are as incapable of conceiving its spiritual ideals as a savage is of realizing what a poet sees and feels in a beautiful sunset. Therefore the Christian missionary has never yet penetrated even the rind of heathendom,—and the conceptions of Christianity held by any other than the white race scarcely rise above the level of superstitions.

Remember how many centuries it took the Christian religion to imbue our own Scandinavian and Saxon ancestors with its humanizing influences. And yet, at the time they burst forth from their northern homes and hurled their rude strength against the Roman empire, they were already a brave, hardy, industrious, intelligent, self-reliant, aggressive, and progressive people, and, as Tacitus describes them, "impatient of rule and of rulers." How can the poor, feeble negro be expected to progress more rapidly than we have done?

Stanford.—What do you think of a statement said to have been made by Professor Agassiz, after a careful comparative examination of an immense number of human skulls, that the average negro brain does not exceed in size and quality that of the white child from twelve to fourteen years of age?

Denfield.—I have no doubt that it is true, whether Agassiz made the measurements and the statement or not. Every white man with a large experience of negroes knows it to be true. Young negroes acquire knowledge with even more facility than white children of the same age. This is because of their superior imitativeness, which is a monkey attribute. But as they grow older the power of acquisition diminishes, and the calibre and the corresponding capacity of the negro mind seldom surpass those of well-trained and well-taught white boys of fifteen. No matter how much dignity, suavity, and apparent mental culture the negro may exhibit, there remains about him an ineradicable childishness, an immaturity of reason, an incapacity of abstract conceptions, a feebleness of grasp, and a lack of the philosophic and inductive spirit, of which he, poor fellow, is of course unconscious, but which is very obvious to the white man.

I tell you, Mr. Stanford, the laws of heredity stand like a wall of iron against the advance of your fanciful and radical theories concerning the negro. The negro is not a white man with a black skin, but an altogether different kind of a man. Some modern philosopher has said that every man's mind is the sum-total and complex result of the memories of his ancestors. Think of the labors, struggles, triumphs, achievements, histories, and memories of the white race during the last two thousand years! and compare them with the savage, sensual, beastly stagnation of the whole negro life during the same period. You will then understand the paradox that every white man is thousands of years older and a thousand times richer in possibilities than any negro born on the same day. From the loins of any white man, however poor and ignorant, may possibly spring, by an unfolding atavism, children possessed of the splendid and perfect characters of Washington, or Lincoln, or Lee. Such things will be impossible to the negro race, destitute of great and glorious inherited memories, for hundreds of years.

Our estimate of the negro having been thus placed on a scientific foundation, our relations towards him are plain. Our relations are those of superiors to inferiors, of adults to children, of teachers to pupils, of guardians to wards. Our duties arise logically from our relations, and they are not the duties which equals owe to equals.

Stanford.—Is not this the spirit of slavery with the institution left out? And would it not reproduce the institution if that were practicable?

Denfield.—By no means. The institution and the abolition of slaveries of all sorts are equally matters of historical evolution. The negro is no longer a slave, a chattel, a piece of property. At that let us rejoice. But it does not at all follow that the negro can skip over all the gradual steps which other races have been obliged to take, and become at once a citizen, a patriot, a poet, an artist, a philosopher.

Stanford.—Let him be a citizen and a patriot, and all the other degrees will follow in order.

Denfield.—Again you are mistaken. True citizenship comes last of all. The power of self-government, as we see it in the citizens of the United States, is the crowning result of many centuries of struggle and of progress through struggle. Constitutional liberty is the supreme flower of civilization. The negro has no true conception of what it means, and would sell it any time for a mess of pottage. Therefore it is a fixed fact that neither his antecedents nor his organic capacities entitle him to any share in the law-making and governing powers of this country. He should be strictly classed with Indians and Chinese, and excluded from the political arena. There will be no secure or permanent peace until the Fifteenth Amendment is expunged from the Constitution. This must be a white man's government.

It is frequently asserted, by those who know very little about the matter, that the negroes will make just as good citizens as the illiterate whites, known as "white trash," who abound in so many of the poorest counties of the South. It is not true. The poorest of these counties are governed by the whites more wisely, justly, humanely, and economically than any negro government on the face of the earth has ever been administered.

It is our duty to treat the negro with impartial justice and humanity, to protect him by law, to afford him all the means of education, and to do all in our power to prepare him for his higher possibilities. His danger lies in his political aspirations, dangerous alike to himself and to us. His worst enemies are those who point this grown-up child to the ballot-box. No Anglo-Saxon minority will ever submit to the rule of a negro majority. The effort of government to maintain that rule will lead to resistance, revolt, and revolution.

Stanford.—Under this system of repression and pupilage, what do you suppose will be the future of the negro?

Denfield.—He will develop his material, industrial, social, and spiritual interests according to the light that is in him and the accumulating forces of improved heredity. He will be immensely aided by the influences of the white civilization surrounding him, as he will be unable to impair it either by amalgamation or by his inferior and corrupt legislation. He will thus live in peace and friendship with the whites, and be prevented from reverting to a semi-barbaric life. He will be comfortable, prosperous, and happy.

Stanford.—You think amalgamation impossible?

Denfield.—I do. When slavery was destroyed, antagonism was immediately established, and race-prejudices, hitherto dormant, sprang into activity. Amalgamation has virtually ceased. The thin border of very white negroes will be absorbed into the white race. The darker mixtures will revert to the African type, and in a century the two races, the all white and the all black, will confront each other.

If the negro is eliminated from politics, there will be no collision. The industrial pressure of the growing white race, constantly and immensely reinforced from Europe, will crowd the blacks down into the tropics, or even compel their return to Africa. Nothing can precipitate a conflict but some unwise legislation by fanatics or reckless politicians, the supreme curse of the nation. In that event the American negro would probably be exterminated, and our own great constitutional inheritance endangered. We might have cause to remember the epitaph which Ellwood Fisher wrote for the United States: "Here lies a nation which liberated the negro and lost its own freedom."

Stanford.—Truly, Mr. Denfield, your view of the problem from a southern stand-point is dark and discouraging to one who is enamoured of the words "equality" and "fraternity." Perhaps Dr. Holden can give a silver lining to the cloud, as I know he takes an optimistic view of the universe.

Dr. Holden.—Both of you, gentlemen, have uttered partial truths of great importance, but your conception of the problem will be incomplete, and therefore erroneous, without the addition of some new elements of thought which I shall present for your consideration.

It is commonly supposed that the various tribes and nations of the earth, savage, semi-civilized, and civilized, represent the different stages of the evolution of the human race; the lowest now occupying stages through which all have passed, and the highest occupying stages to which all may attain in the course of centuries. The theory is not supported by facts.

The aborigines of Australia, southern India, and Ceylon, the Bushmen of Africa, the Terra del Fuegans, the Eskimos, the American Indians, and the west-coast Africans, from whom our negroes are descended, are effete races, *débris* of ancient and perished civilizations; peoples who were driven to the wall by stronger populations, proving the weakest, the most unfit, surviving with difficulty: in no process whatever of evolution or development, but in various stages of decay and dissolution.

Taking a wider range of view, we may assert that neither Africans nor Asiatics are men on the ascending scale of evolution from animal to spiritual life. Of no nation or race upon the earth can we say, these people are descended from the primeval men whose remains and rude implements are sometimes found in deep geological strata. Between these buried races and the oldest historic people no link of connection has ever been discovered. Africans and Asiatics alike are cases of deterioration, degradation, dissolution of forms from higher to lower types. Never will they progress upward by any evolutionary force inherent in themselves. They await in utter stagnation the advent of new causes and the introduction of new life from outside sources.

The first civilizations probably existed on continents now sunk under oceans by catastrophes which originated the story of the deluge in all the ancient nations. Escaped fragments of the degenerated races involved in the disaster were the starting-points of our present generations of men. The black races were probably the oldest of all. Their lost continent lies between Africa and South America. The other lost continent lies under the Indian Ocean between Australia and the Asiatic mainland.

The original men were whites. How and why certain white races became yellow, brown, red, and black, and descended into their present states of mental and physical degradation, are questions which are fully answered by a complex spiritual philosophy of history, which it is not necessary here to explain.

It surprises one to be told that the negroes were once white and will be white again in the course of centuries. Negroes now sometimes lose the black pigment of the skin and become white in patches, sometimes almost altogether. This has been considered a disease, but such people enjoy perfect health. White children, albinos, are frequently born of black parents. One king of Dahomy collected over one hundred of these white children from his subjects, who were all genuine blacks. These are cases of physical atavism, vestiges of an ancient, white heredity, and prophecies of a future reversion of the whole race to the white type.

Mr. Stanford's error is that he imagines that results can be brought about by legislation which must be the outcome of gradual evolution. Mr. Denfield's error is that of the scientist. He cannot imagine that any causes ever existed other than those which are now seen in operation, or that any new causes could be possibly introduced among the formative forces of the world. He thinks the negro has been developed from the ape, and can only reach the white standard by a long series of evolutionary processes. His premises being conceded, his opinions on the subject are perfectly logical.

But his premises are false. To judge by external appearances and from scientific data alone, as he does, is not to know the negro at all. The African is vastly more and greater and wiser than he seems to be. This is true of all men, but especially of the negro. Behind and within the savage heredity of several thousand years, there lies a magnificent heredity of primeval conditions, nearer to God. They are the buried possibilities of the Golden Age, awaiting resurrection. Within that coarse, black rind there lies a possible fruitage of character, gentle, beautiful, musical, grateful, humble, teachable, the consummation not of white civilization, but of Christ's sermon on the mount.

Denfield.—You are making statements which are not only romantic but incredible.

Dr. Holden.—They seem romantic and incredible only because you have not yet obtained the key to the mystery. The darker races of the earth are in states not of undeveloped, but of suppressed civilization. They contain deeply hidden within them the tendencies and capacities of their most remote ancestors. A later, baser heredity has been superimposed upon them, and the problem now is how to break through it, how to get rid of it, so that the interior nature, long hidden, may blossom forth. There is a vast spiritual life and power concealed in the bosoms of these people like the water in the rock until it was struck by the rod of Moses.

The rock of human life is even now being struck by a greater than Moses, and the living waters of truth are gushing forth for the healing of the nations. The seals of the great Book have been opened. That which was concealed will be brought to light; that which was deeply hidden will now be unfolded. This is the day of judgment and of revelation: the dissolution of old things and the manifestation of the new. The celestial genius of the African, the spiritual genius of the Asiatic, the political and scientific genius of the European and his American offshoots, will be evolved and perfected, and will all march together to the music of a common humanity.

Stanford.—These are new and strange doctrines: few people will accept them as true.

Dr. Holden.—Truth has never been accepted by the many. It remains always with the few.

Denfield.—Your ideas have, no doubt, been derived from the teachings of your great oracle, Emanuel Swedenborg.

Dr. Holden.—Yes, from Swedenborg; ignored as a mystic in the last century, recognized as a great philosopher in this, and destined in the next to be the supreme authority upon spiritual subjects.

Stanford.—However that may be, I would like to know what your peculiar estimate of the negro has led you to believe are our relations to him and our duties towards him.

Dr. Holden.—Our relation to him is that of brother: our duties spring from our relation. We should rejoice that he is free, and stand ready to protect him in his liberty. We should pity his ignorance and strive earnestly and generously to enlighten him. We should give him the helping hand and the friendly word on all occasions. We should overlook his imperfections, condone his faults, and pardon his evil doings, pretty much as we deal with children. He is teachable, affectionate, and grateful. He is not intellectual in the ordinary meaning of the word, but he is eminently emotional and responsive to kindness. Let us show him that we respect him, trust him, and love him just as we do our fellow white men under the same conditions, and we shall not long have occasion to complain of him as a dangerous citizen.

Stanford.—With your favorable estimate of the negro, and your generous conception of our relations and duties towards him, you ought to be in favor of political and social equality.

Dr. Holden.—By no means. I am in favor of nothing which requires force. Every effort to establish such results by legislation, in the immature state of public opinion, will widen and deepen and darken the gulf between the two races. Social equality depends upon spiritual affinities and similar surroundings, and it must wait upon the steady march of evolution. Political equality is resisted only because the negroes in partnership with political bandits have so terribly abused it. As they improve in intelligence, character, honesty, and material prosperity, they will rid themselves of the abject slavery in which the Republican party has held them, assert their independence, and co-operate with the white men of the South for their mutual interests. That is their only road to political equality.

But, my dear sir, I am greatly saddened by all this contention. Regarding the negro from a spiritual stand-point and from a knowledge of his real capabilities, I foresee not only that his struggle for political and social equality will endanger his very existence, but also that his success in all his present aims and desires would be the most disastrous blow his true spiritual life could receive. He is so different from the white man that he requires entirely different conditions and influences for his development. The boundless organic faith, the submissive patience, the sweet humility, the intuitive wisdom which lie within him, if now prematurely unfolded, would be trampled under foot by the proud, cruel, and selfish civilization which surrounds him but which is not his birthright nor his abiding-place.

Why speak of these wonderful things to an unprepared and incredulous world? A thousand obstructions of false religion, false philosophy, false science, must be removed from the human mind before it can comprehend the light which is again shining in darkness. The white man in his arrogant self-assertiveness will deny and mock. The negro in his present state can neither understand nor believe. He must share the fate of the white man, which already trembles in the balance. He must pass through the fierce ordeal of competition and conflict, meet the dangers and trials of our impending social chaos, and await his true evolution upon the reconstruction of all things upon new foundations.

Stanford.—I feel intuitively that there is some great truth, perhaps a whole series of truths, underlying what you have said; but you put the solution of our problem so far off, and surround it with such terrors, that your silver lining to the cloud only reveals the darkness of the cloud in deeper shades.

Dr. Holden.—All the clouds will disappear. The divine order of a new life will be established. The federation of the world will cease to be a dream. All nations and races will work harmoniously and peacefully together, like the separate organs of the human body combining to one end. The African will find his true place, as at once the least and the greatest, the last and the first.

Denfield.—See how he shoots over our heads with his paradoxes! He paints some golden sunrise which shines only for his own vision.

Dr. Holden.—No, my friends. I only see from the heights what you cannot discern in the valley. Ascend the Mount Pisgah upon which I stand, and you may look away over the mists and shadows of our transition state, and behold afar off the light of the new heaven and the new earth.

Denfield.—What forces do you suppose are at work to produce these stupendous revolutions?

Dr. Holden.—The one force which includes all other forces,—the Spirit of Christ!

Stanford.—One Force—one Life—one Law: that sounds very much like pantheism.

Dr. Holden.—Yes, but it is the pantheism of Christ. "*That they may all be one: as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee: that they also may be one in us.*"

In this high sense all the races are of one blood, and evolution is the unfolding or manifestation of the life already existing within us. From this stand-point alone can we comprehend the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man. The solidarity of the human race can only be realized in the faith and practice of the Christian religion.

THE END.

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19