THE STORY CONTINUED BY WALTER HARTRIGHT

I

My first impulse, after reading Mrs. Catherick's extraordinary narrative, was to destroy it. The hardened shameless depravity of the whole composition, from beginning to end--the atrocious perversity of mind which persistently associated me with a calamity for which I was in no sense answerable, and with a death which I had risked my life in trying to avert--so disgusted me, that I was on the point of tearing the letter, when a consideration suggested itself which warned me to wait a little before I destroyed it.

This consideration was entirely unconnected with Sir Percival. The information communicated to me, so far as it concerned him, did little more than confirm the conclusions at which I had already arrived.

He had committed his offence, as I had supposed him to have committed it, and the absence of all reference, on Mrs. Catherick's part, to the duplicate register at Knowlesbury, strengthened my previous conviction that the existence of the book, and the risk of detection which it implied, must have been necessarily unknown to Sir Percival. My interest in the question of the forgery was now at an end, and my only object in keeping the letter was to make it of some future service in clearing up the last mystery that still remained to baffle me--the parentage of Anne Catherick on the father's side. There were one or two sentences dropped in her mother's narrative, which it might be useful to refer to again, when matters of more immediate importance allowed me leisure to search for the missing evidence. I did not despair of still finding that evidence, and I had lost none of my anxiety to discover it, for I had lost none of my interest in tracing the father of the poor creature who now lay at rest in Mrs. Fairlie's grave.

Accordingly, I sealed up the letter and put it away carefully in my pocket-book, to be referred to again when the time came.

The next day was my last in Hampshire. When I had appeared again before the magistrate at Knowlesbury, and when I had attended at the adjourned inquest, I should be free to return to London by the afternoon or the evening train.

My first errand in the morning was, as usual, to the post-office. The letter from Marian was there, but I thought when it was handed to me that it felt unusually light. I anxiously opened the envelope. There was nothing inside but a small strip of paper folded in two. The few blotted hurriedly-written lines which were traced on it contained these words:

"Come back as soon as you can. I have been obliged to move. Come to Gower's Walk, Fulham (number five). I will be on the look-out for you. Don't be alarmed about us, we are both safe and well. But come back.--Marian."

The news which those lines contained--news which I instantly associated with some attempted treachery on the part of Count Fosco--fairly overwhelmed me. I stood breathless with the paper crumpled up in my hand. What had happened? What subtle wickedness had the Count planned and executed in my absence? A night had passed since Marian's note was written--hours must elapse still before I could get back to them--some new disaster might have happened already of which I was ignorant. And here, miles and miles away from them, here I must remain--held, doubly held, at the disposal of the law!

I hardly know to what forgetfulness of my obligations anxiety and alarm might not have tempted me, but for the quieting influence of my faith in Marian. My absolute reliance on her was the one earthly consideration which helped me to restrain myself, and gave me courage to wait. The inquest was the first of the impediments in the way of my freedom of action. I attended it at the appointed time, the legal formalities requiring my presence in the room, but as it turned out, not calling on me to repeat my evidence. This useless delay was a hard trial, although I did my best to quiet my impatience by following the course of the proceedings as closely as I could.

The London solicitor of the deceased (Mr. Merriman) was among the persons present. But he was quite unable to assist the objects of the inquiry. He could only say that he was inexpressibly shocked and astonished, and that he could throw no light whatever on the mysterious circumstances of the case. At intervals during the adjourned investigation, he suggested questions which the Coroner put, but which led to no results. After a patient inquiry, which lasted nearly three hours, and which exhausted every available source of information, the jury pronounced the customary verdict in cases of sudden death by accident. They added to the formal decision a statement, that there had been no evidence to show how the keys had been abstracted, how the fire had been caused, or what the purpose was for

which the deceased had entered the vestry. This act closed the proceedings. The legal representative of the dead man was left to provide for the necessities of the interment, and the witnesses were free to retire.

Resolved not to lose a minute in getting to Knowlesbury, I paid my bill at the hotel, and hired a fly to take me to the town. A gentleman who heard me give the order, and who saw that I was going alone, informed me that he lived in the neighbourhood of Knowlesbury, and asked if I would have any objection to his getting home by sharing the fly with me. I accepted his proposal as a matter of course.

Our conversation during the drive was naturally occupied by the one absorbing subject of local interest.

My new acquaintance had some knowledge of the late Sir Percival's solicitor, and he and Mr. Merriman had been discussing the state of the deceased gentleman's affairs and the succession to the property. Sir Percival's embarrassments were so well known all over the county that his solicitor could only make a virtue of necessity and plainly acknowledge them. He had died without leaving a will, and he had no personal property to bequeath, even if he had made one, the whole fortune which he had derived from his wife having been swallowed up by his creditors. The heir to the estate (Sir Percival having left no issue) was a son of Sir Felix Glyde's first cousin, an officer in command of an East Indiaman. He would find his unexpected inheritance sadly encumbered, but the property would recover with time, and, if "the captain" was careful, he might be a rich man yet before he died.

Absorbed as I was in the one idea of getting to London, this information (which events proved to be perfectly correct) had an interest of its own to attract my attention. I thought it justified me in keeping secret my discovery of Sir Percival's fraud. The heir, whose rights he had usurped, was the heir who would now have the estate. The income from it, for the last three-and-twenty years, which should properly have been his, and which the dead man had squandered to the last farthing, was gone beyond recall. If I spoke, my speaking would confer advantage on no one. If I kept the secret, my silence concealed the character of the man who had cheated Laura into marrying him. For her sake, I wished to conceal it--for her sake, still, I tell this story under feigned names.

I parted with my chance companion at Knowlesbury, and went at once to the town-hall. As I had anticipated, no one was present to prosecute the case against me--the necessary formalities were observed, and I was

discharged. On leaving the court a letter from Mr. Dawson was put into my hand. It informed me that he was absent on professional duty, and it reiterated the offer I had already received from him of any assistance which I might require at his hands. I wrote back, warmly acknowledging my obligations to his kindness, and apologising for not expressing my thanks personally, in consequence of my immediate recall on pressing business to town.

Half an hour later I was speeding back to London by the express train.

II

It was between nine and ten o'clock before I reached Fulham, and found my way to Gower's Walk.

Both Laura and Marian came to the door to let me in. I think we had hardly known how close the tie was which bound us three together, until the evening came which united us again. We met as if we had been parted for months instead of for a few days only. Marian's face was sadly worn and anxious. I saw who had known all the danger and borne all the trouble in my absence the moment I looked at her. Laura's brighter looks and better spirits told me how carefully she had been spared all knowledge of the dreadful death at Welmingham, and of the true reason of our change of abode.

The stir of the removal seemed to have cheered and interested her. She only spoke of it as a happy thought of Marian's to surprise me on my return with a change from the close, noisy street to the pleasant neighbourhood of trees and fields and the river. She was full of projects for the future--of the drawings she was to finish--of the purchasers I had found in the country who were to buy them--of the shillings and sixpences she had saved, till her purse was so heavy that she proudly asked me to weigh it in my own hand. The change for the better which had been wrought in her during the few days of my absence was a surprise to me for which I was quite unprepared--and for all the unspeakable happiness of seeing it, I was indebted to Marian's courage and to Marian's love.

When Laura had left us, and when we could speak to one another without restraint, I tried to give some expression to the gratitude and the admiration which filled my heart. But the generous creature would not wait to hear me. That sublime self-forgetfulness of women, which yields so much and asks so little, turned all her thoughts from herself to me.

"I had only a moment left before post-time," she said, "or I should have written less abruptly. You look worn and weary, Walter. I am afraid my letter must have seriously alarmed you?"

"Only at first," I replied. "My mind was quieted, Marian, by my trust in you. Was I right in attributing this sudden change of place to some threatened annoyance on the part of Count Fosco?"

"Perfectly right," she said. "I saw him yesterday, and worse than that, Walter--I spoke to him."

"Spoke to him? Did he know where we lived? Did he come to the house?"

"He did. To the house--but not upstairs. Laura never saw him--Laura suspects nothing. I will tell you how it happened: the danger, I believe and hope, is over now. Yesterday, I was in the sitting-room, at our old lodgings. Laura was drawing at the table, and I was walking about and setting things to rights. I passed the window, and as I passed it, looked out into the street. There, on the opposite side of the way, I saw the Count, with a man talking to him----"

"Did he notice you at the window?"

"No--at least, I thought not. I was too violently startled to be quite sure."

"Who was the other man? A stranger?"

"Not a stranger, Walter. As soon as I could draw my breath again, I recognised him. He was the owner of the Lunatic Asylum."

"Was the Count pointing out the house to him?"

"No, they were talking together as if they had accidentally met in the street. I remained at the window looking at them from behind the curtain. If I had turned round, and if Laura had seen my face at that moment----Thank God, she was absorbed over her drawing! They soon parted. The man from the Asylum went one way, and the Count the other. I began to hope they were in the street by chance, till I saw the Count come back, stop opposite to us again, take out his card-case and pencil, write something, and then cross the road to the shop below us. I ran past Laura before she could see me, and said I had forgotten something upstairs. As soon as I was out of the room I went down to the first landing and waited--I was determined to stop him if he tried to come upstairs. He made no such attempt. The girl from the shop came through the door into the passage, with his card in her hand--a large gilt card with his name, and a coronet above it, and these lines underneath in pencil: 'Dear lady' (yes! the villain could address me in that way still)--'dear lady, one word, I implore you, on a matter serious to us both.' If one can think at all, in serious difficulties, one thinks quick. I felt directly that it might be a fatal mistake to leave myself and to leave you in the dark, where such a man as the Count was concerned. I felt that the doubt of what he might do, in your absence, would be ten times more trying

to me if I declined to see him than if I consented. 'Ask the gentleman to wait in the shop,' I said. 'I will be with him in a moment.' I ran upstairs for my bonnet, being determined not to let him speak to me indoors. I knew his deep ringing voice, and I was afraid Laura might hear it, even in the shop. In less than a minute I was down again in the passage, and had opened the door into the street. He came round to meet me from the shop. There he was in deep mourning, with his smooth bow and his deadly smile, and some idle boys and women near him, staring at his great size, his fine black clothes, and his large cane with the gold knob to it. All the horrible time at Blackwater came back to me the moment I set eyes on him. All the old loathing crept and crawled through me, when he took off his hat with a flourish and spoke to me, as if we had parted on the friendliest terms hardly a day since."

"You remember what he said?"

"I can't repeat it, Walter. You shall know directly what he said about you---but I can't repeat what he said to me. It was worse than the polite insolence of his letter. My hands tingled to strike him, as if I had been a man! I only kept them quiet by tearing his card to pieces under my shawl. Without saying a word on my side, I walked away from the house (for fear of Laura seeing us), and he followed, protesting softly all the way. In the first by-street I turned, and asked him what he wanted with me. He wanted two things. First, if I had no objection, to express his sentiments. I declined to hear them. Secondly, to repeat the warning in his letter. I asked, what occasion there was for repeating it. He bowed and smiled, and said he would explain. The explanation exactly confirmed the fears I expressed before you left us. I told you, if you remember, that Sir Percival would be too headstrong to take his friend's advice where you were concerned, and that there was no danger to be dreaded from the Count till his own interests were threatened, and he was roused into acting for himself?"

"I recollect, Marian."

"Well, so it has really turned out. The Count offered his advice, but it was refused. Sir Percival would only take counsel of his own violence, his own obstinacy, and his own hatred of you. The Count let him have his way, first privately ascertaining, in case of his own interests being threatened next, where we lived. You were followed, Walter, on returning here, after your first journey to Hampshire, by the lawyer's men for some distance from the railway, and by the Count himself to the door of the house. How he contrived to escape being seen by you he did not tell me, but he found us out on that occasion, and in that way. Having made the discovery, he took

no advantage of it till the news reached him of Sir Percival's death, and then, as I told you, he acted for himself, because he believed you would next proceed against the dead man's partner in the conspiracy. He at once made his arrangements to meet the owner of the Asylum in London, and to take him to the place where his runaway patient was hidden, believing that the results, whichever way they ended, would be to involve you in interminable legal disputes and difficulties, and to tie your hands for all purposes of offence, so far as he was concerned. That was his purpose, on his own confession to me. The only consideration which made him hesitate, at the last moment----"

"Yes?"

"It is hard to acknowledge it, Walter, and yet I must. I was the only consideration. No words can say how degraded I feel in my own estimation when I think of it, but the one weak point in that man's iron character is the horrible admiration he feels for me. I have tried, for the sake of my own self-respect, to disbelieve it as long as I could; but his looks, his actions, force on me the shameful conviction of the truth. The eyes of that monster of wickedness moistened while he was speaking to me--they did, Walter! He declared that at the moment of pointing out the house to the doctor, he thought of my misery if I was separated from Laura, of my responsibility if I was called on to answer for effecting her escape, and he risked the worst that you could do to him, the second time, for my sake. All he asked was that I would remember the sacrifice, and restrain your rashness, in my own interests--interests which he might never be able to consult again. I made no such bargain with him--I would have died first. But believe him or not, whether it is true or false that he sent the doctor away with an excuse, one thing is certain, I saw the man leave him without so much as a glance at our window, or even at our side of the way."

"I believe it, Marian. The best men are not consistent in good--why should the worst men be consistent in evil? At the same time, I suspect him of merely attempting to frighten you, by threatening what he cannot really do. I doubt his power of annoying us, by means of the owner of the Asylum, now that Sir Percival is dead, and Mrs. Catherick is free from all control. But let me hear more. What did the Count say of me?"

"He spoke last of you. His eyes brightened and hardened, and his manner changed to what I remember it in past times--to that mixture of pitiless resolution and mountebank mockery which makes it so impossible to fathom him. 'Warn Mr. Hartright!' he said in his loftiest manner. 'He has a man of brains to deal with, a man who snaps his big fingers at the laws and

conventions of society, when he measures himself with ME. If my lamented friend had taken my advice, the business of the inquest would have been with the body of Mr. Hartright. But my lamented friend was obstinate. See! I mourn his loss--inwardly in my soul, outwardly on my hat. This trivial crape expresses sensibilities which I summon Mr. Hartright to respect. They may be transformed to immeasurable enmities if he ventures to disturb them. Let him be content with what he has got--with what I leave unmolested, for your sake, to him and to you. Say to him (with my compliments), if he stirs me, he has Fosco to deal with. In the English of the Popular Tongue, I inform him--Fosco sticks at nothing. Dear lady, good morning.' His cold grey eyes settled on my face--he took off his hat solemnly--bowed, bare-headed--and left me."

"Without returning? without saying more last words?"

"He turned at the corner of the street, and waved his hand, and then struck it theatrically on his breast. I lost sight of him after that. He disappeared in the opposite direction to our house, and I ran back to Laura. Before I was indoors again, I had made up my mind that we must go. The house (especially in your absence) was a place of danger instead of a place of safety, now that the Count had discovered it. If I could have felt certain of your return, I should have risked waiting till you came back. But I was certain of nothing, and I acted at once on my own impulse. You had spoken, before leaving us, of moving into a quieter neighbourhood and purer air, for the sake of Laura's health. I had only to remind her of that, and to suggest surprising you and saving you trouble by managing the move in your absence, to make her quite as anxious for the change as I was. She helped me to pack up your things, and she has arranged them all for you in your new working-room here."

"What made you think of coming to this place?"

"My ignorance of other localities in the neighbourhood of London. I felt the necessity of getting as far away as possible from our old lodgings, and I knew something of Fulham, because I had once been at school there. I despatched a messenger with a note, on the chance that the school might still be in existence. It was in existence--the daughters of my old mistress were carrying it on for her, and they engaged this place from the instructions I had sent. It was just post-time when the messenger returned to me with the address of the house. We moved after dark--we came here quite unobserved. Have I done right, Walter? Have I justified your trust in me?"

I answered her warmly and gratefully, as I really felt. But the anxious look still remained on her face while I was speaking, and the first question she asked, when I had done, related to Count Fosco.

I saw that she was thinking of him now with a changed mind. No fresh outbreak of anger against him, no new appeal to me to hasten the day of reckoning escaped her. Her conviction that the man's hateful admiration of herself was really sincere, seemed to have increased a hundredfold her distrust of his unfathomable cunning, her inborn dread of the wicked energy and vigilance of all his faculties. Her voice fell low, her manner was hesitating, her eyes searched into mine with an eager fear when she asked me what I thought of his message, and what I meant to do next after hearing it.

"Not many weeks have passed, Marian," I answered, "since my interview with Mr. Kyrle. When he and I parted, the last words I said to him about Laura were these: 'Her uncle's house shall open to receive her, in the presence of every soul who followed the false funeral to the grave; the lie that records her death shall be publicly erased from the tombstone by the authority of the head of the family, and the two men who have wronged her shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them.' One of those men is beyond mortal reach. The other remains, and my resolution remains."

Her eyes lit up--her colour rose. She said nothing, but I saw all her sympathies gathering to mine in her face.

"I don't disguise from myself, or from you," I went on, "that the prospect before us is more than doubtful. The risks we have run already are, it may be, trifles compared with the risks that threaten us in the future, but the venture shall be tried, Marian, for all that. I am not rash enough to measure myself against such a man as the Count before I am well prepared for him. I have learnt patience--I can wait my time. Let him believe that his message has produced its effect--let him know nothing of us, and hear nothing of us--let us give him full time to feel secure--his own boastful nature, unless I seriously mistake him, will hasten that result. This is one reason for waiting, but there is another more important still. My position, Marian, towards you and towards Laura ought to be a stronger one than it is now before I try our last chance."

She leaned near to me, with a look of surprise.

"How can it be stronger?" she asked.

"I will tell you," I replied, "when the time comes. It has not come yet--it may never come at all. I may be silent about it to Laura for ever--I must be silent now, even to YOU, till I see for myself that I can harmlessly and honourably speak. Let us leave that subject. There is another which has more pressing claims on our attention. You have kept Laura, mercifully kept her, in ignorance of her husband's death----"

"Oh, Walter, surely it must be long yet before we tell her of it?"

"No, Marian. Better that you should reveal it to her now, than that accident, which no one can guard against, should reveal it to her at some future time. Spare her all the details--break it to her very tenderly, but tell her that he is dead."

"You have a reason, Walter, for wishing her to know of her husband's death besides the reason you have just mentioned?"

"I have."

"A reason connected with that subject which must not be mentioned between us yet?--which may never be mentioned to Laura at all?"

She dwelt on the last words meaningly. When I answered her in the affirmative, I dwelt on them too.

Her face grew pale. For a while she looked at me with a sad, hesitating interest. An unaccustomed tenderness trembled in her dark eyes and softened her firm lips, as she glanced aside at the empty chair in which the dear companion of all our joys and sorrows had been sitting.

"I think I understand," she said. "I think I owe it to her and to you, Walter, to tell her of her husband's death."

She sighed, and held my hand fast for a moment--then dropped it abruptly, and left the room. On the next day Laura knew that his death had released her, and that the error and the calamity of her life lay buried in his tomb.

His name was mentioned among us no more. Thenceforward, we shrank from the slightest approach to the subject of his death, and in the same scrupulous manner, Marian and I avoided all further reference to that other subject, which, by her consent and mine, was not to be mentioned between us yet. It was not the less present in our minds--it was rather kept alive in

them by the restraint which we had imposed on ourselves. We both watched Laura more anxiously than ever, sometimes waiting and hoping, sometimes waiting and fearing, till the time came.

By degrees we returned to our accustomed way of life. I resumed the daily work, which had been suspended during my absence in Hampshire. Our new lodgings cost us more than the smaller and less convenient rooms which we had left, and the claim thus implied on my increased exertions was strengthened by the doubtfulness of our future prospects. Emergencies might yet happen which would exhaust our little fund at the banker's, and the work of my hands might be, ultimately, all we had to look to for support. More permanent and more lucrative employment than had yet been offered to me was a necessity of our position--a necessity for which I now diligently set myself to provide.

It must not be supposed that the interval of rest and seclusion of which I am now writing, entirely suspended, on my part, all pursuit of the one absorbing purpose with which my thoughts and actions are associated in these pages. That purpose was, for months and months yet, never to relax its claims on me. The slow ripening of it still left me a measure of precaution to take, an obligation of gratitude to perform, and a doubtful question to solve.

The measure of precaution related, necessarily, to the Count. It was of the last importance to ascertain, if possible, whether his plans committed him to remaining in England--or, in other words, to remaining within my reach. I contrived to set this doubt at rest by very simple means. His address in St. John's Wood being known to me, I inquired in the neighbourhood, and having found out the agent who had the disposal of the furnished house in which he lived, I asked if number five, Forest Road, was likely to be let within a reasonable time. The reply was in the negative. I was informed that the foreign gentleman then residing in the house had renewed his term of occupation for another six months, and would remain in possession until the end of June in the following year. We were then at the beginning of December only. I left the agent with my mind relieved from all present fear of the Count's escaping me.

The obligation I had to perform took me once more into the presence of Mrs. Clements. I had promised to return, and to confide to her those particulars relating to the death and burial of Anne Catherick which I had been obliged to withhold at our first interview. Changed as circumstances now were, there was no hindrance to my trusting the good woman with as much of the story of the conspiracy as it was necessary to tell. I had every reason that

sympathy and friendly feeling could suggest to urge on me the speedy performance of my promise, and I did conscientiously and carefully perform it. There is no need to burden these pages with any statement of what passed at the interview. It will be more to the purpose to say, that the interview itself necessarily brought to my mind the one doubtful question still remaining to be solved--the question of Anne Catherick's parentage on the father's side.

A multitude of small considerations in connection with this subject--trifling enough in themselves, but strikingly important when massed together--had latterly led my mind to a conclusion which I resolved to verify. I obtained Marian's permission to write to Major Donthorne, of Varneck Hall (where Mrs. Catherick had lived in service for some years previous to her marriage), to ask him certain questions. I made the inquiries in Marian's name, and described them as relating to matters of personal history in her family, which might explain and excuse my application. When I wrote the letter I had no certain knowledge that Major Donthorne was still alive--I despatched it on the chance that he might be living, and able and willing to reply.

After a lapse of two days proof came, in the shape of a letter, that the Major was living, and that he was ready to help us.

The idea in my mind when I wrote to him, and the nature of my inquiries will be easily inferred from his reply. His letter answered my questions by communicating these important facts--

In the first place, "the late Sir Percival Glyde, of Blackwater Park," had never set foot in Varneck Hall. The deceased gentleman was a total stranger to Major Donthorne, and to all his family.

In the second place, "the late Mr. Philip Fairlie, of Limmeridge House," had been, in his younger days, the intimate friend and constant guest of Major Donthorne. Having refreshed his memory by looking back to old letters and other papers, the Major was in a position to say positively that Mr. Philip Fairlie was staying at Varneck Hall in the month of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that he remained there for the shooting during the month of September and part of October following. He then left, to the best of the Major's belief, for Scotland, and did not return to Varneck Hall till after a lapse of time, when he reappeared in the character of a newly-married man.

Taken by itself, this statement was, perhaps, of little positive value, but taken in connection with certain facts, every one of which either Marian or I

knew to be true, it suggested one plain conclusion that was, to our minds, irresistible.

Knowing, now, that Mr. Philip Fairlie had been at Varneck Hall in the autumn of eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that Mrs. Catherick had been living there in service at the same time, we knew also--first, that Anne had been born in June, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven; secondly, that she had always presented an extraordinary personal resemblance to Laura; and, thirdly, that Laura herself was strikingly like her father. Mr. Philip Fairlie had been one of the notoriously handsome men of his time. In disposition entirely unlike his brother Frederick, he was the spoilt darling of society, especially of the women--an easy, light-hearted, impulsive, affectionate man--generous to a fault--constitutionally lax in his principles, and notoriously thoughtless of moral obligations where women were concerned. Such were the facts we knew--such was the character of the man. Surely the plain inference that follows needs no pointing out?

Read by the new light which had now broken upon me, even Mrs. Catherick's letter, in despite of herself, rendered its mite of assistance towards strengthening the conclusion at which I had arrived. She had described Mrs. Fairlie (in writing to me) as "plain-looking," and as having "entrapped the handsomest man in England into marrying her." Both assertions were gratuitously made, and both were false. Jealous dislike (which, in such a woman as Mrs. Catherick, would express itself in petty malice rather than not express itself at all) appeared to me to be the only assignable cause for the peculiar insolence of her reference to Mrs. Fairlie, under circumstances which did not necessitate any reference at all.

The mention here of Mrs. Fairlie's name naturally suggests one other question. Did she ever suspect whose child the little girl brought to her at Limmeridge might be?

Marian's testimony was positive on this point. Mrs. Fairlie's letter to her husband, which had been read to me in former days--the letter describing Anne's resemblance to Laura, and acknowledging her affectionate interest in the little stranger--had been written, beyond all question, in perfect innocence of heart. It even seemed doubtful, on consideration, whether Mr. Philip Fairlie himself had been nearer than his wife to any suspicion of the truth. The disgracefully deceitful circumstances under which Mrs. Catherick had married, the purpose of concealment which the marriage was intended to answer, might well keep her silent for caution's sake, perhaps for her own pride's sake also, even assuming that she had the means, in his absence, of communicating with the father of her unborn child.

As this surmise floated through my mind, there rose on my memory the remembrance of the Scripture denunciation which we have all thought of in our time with wonder and with awe: "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children." But for the fatal resemblance between the two daughters of one father, the conspiracy of which Anne had been the innocent instrument and Laura the innocent victim could never have been planned. With what unerring and terrible directness the long chain of circumstances led down from the thoughtless wrong committed by the father to the heartless injury inflicted on the child!

These thoughts came to me, and others with them, which drew my mind away to the little Cumberland churchyard where Anne Catherick now lay buried. I thought of the bygone days when I had met her by Mrs. Fairlie's grave, and met her for the last time. I thought of her poor helpless hands beating on the tombstone, and her weary, yearning words, murmured to the dead remains of her protectress and her friend: "Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with YOU!" Little more than a year had passed since she breathed that wish; and how inscrutably, how awfully, it had been fulfilled! The words she had spoken to Laura by the shores of the lake, the very words had now come true. "Oh, if I could only be buried with your mother! If I could only wake at her side when the angel's trumpet sounds and the graves give up their dead at the resurrection!" Through what mortal crime and horror, through what darkest windings of the way down to death--the lost creature had wandered in God's leading to the last home that, living, she never hoped to reach! In that sacred rest I leave her--in that dread companionship let her remain undisturbed.

So the ghostly figure which has haunted these pages, as it haunted my life, goes down into the impenetrable gloom. Like a shadow she first came to me in the loneliness of the night. Like a shadow she passes away in the loneliness of the dead.

III

Four months elapsed. April came--the month of spring--the month of change.

The course of time had flowed through the interval since the winter peacefully and happily in our new home. I had turned my long leisure to good account, had largely increased my sources of employment, and had placed our means of subsistence on surer grounds. Freed from the suspense and the anxiety which had tried her so sorely and hung over her so long, Marian's spirits rallied, and her natural energy of character began to assert itself again, with something, if not all, of the freedom and the vigour of former times.

More pliable under change than her sister, Laura showed more plainly the progress made by the healing influences of her new life. The worn and wasted look which had prematurely aged her face was fast leaving it, and the expression which had been the first of its charms in past days was the first of its beauties that now returned. My closest observations of her detected but one serious result of the conspiracy which had once threatened her reason and her life. Her memory of events, from the period of her leaving Blackwater Park to the period of our meeting in the burial-ground of Limmeridge Church, was lost beyond all hope of recovery. At the slightest reference to that time she changed and trembled still, her words became confused, her memory wandered and lost itself as helplessly as ever. Here, and here only, the traces of the past lay deep--too deep to be effaced.

In all else she was now so far on the way to recovery that, on her best and brightest days, she sometimes looked and spoke like the Laura of old times. The happy change wrought its natural result in us both. From their long slumber, on her side and on mine, those imperishable memories of our past life in Cumberland now awoke, which were one and all alike, the memories of our love.

Gradually and insensibly our daily relations towards each other became constrained. The fond words which I had spoken to her so naturally, in the days of her sorrow and her suffering, faltered strangely on my lips. In the time when my dread of losing her was most present to my mind, I had always kissed her when she left me at night and when she met me in the morning. The kiss seemed now to have dropped between us--to be lost out of our lives. Our hands began to tremble again when they met. We hardly

ever looked long at one another out of Marian's presence. The talk often flagged between us when we were alone. When I touched her by accident I felt my heart beating fast, as it used to beat at Limmeridge House--I saw the lovely answering flush glowing again in her cheeks, as if we were back among the Cumberland Hills in our past characters of master and pupil once more. She had long intervals of silence and thoughtfulness, and denied she had been thinking when Marian asked her the question. I surprised myself one day neglecting my work to dream over the little water-colour portrait of her which I had taken in the summer-house where we first met--just as I used to neglect Mr. Fairlie's drawings to dream over the same likeness when it was newly finished in the bygone time. Changed as all the circumstances now were, our position towards each other in the golden days of our first companionship seemed to be revived with the revival of our love. It was as if Time had drifted us back on the wreck of our early hopes to the old familiar shore!

To any other woman I could have spoken the decisive words which I still hesitated to speak to HER. The utter helplessness of her position--her friendless dependence on all the forbearing gentleness that I could show her--my fear of touching too soon some secret sensitiveness in her which my instinct as a man might not have been fine enough to discover--these considerations, and others like them, kept me self-distrustfully silent. And yet I knew that the restraint on both sides must be ended, that the relations in which we stood towards one another must be altered in some settled manner for the future, and that it rested with me, in the first instance, to recognise the necessity for a change.

The more I thought of our position, the harder the attempt to alter it appeared, while the domestic conditions on which we three had been living together since the winter remained undisturbed. I cannot account for the capricious state of mind in which this feeling originated, but the idea nevertheless possessed me that some previous change of place and circumstances, some sudden break in the quiet monotony of our lives, so managed as to vary the home aspect under which we had been accustomed to see each other, might prepare the way for me to speak, and might make it easier and less embarrassing for Laura and Marian to hear.

With this purpose in view, I said, one morning, that I thought we had all earned a little holiday and a change of scene. After some consideration, it was decided that we should go for a fortnight to the sea-side.

On the next day we left Fulham for a quiet town on the south coast. At that early season of the year we were the only visitors in the place. The cliffs, the

beach, and the walks inland were all in the solitary condition which was most welcome to us. The air was mild--the prospects over hill and wood and down were beautifully varied by the shifting April light and shade, and the restless sea leapt under our windows, as if it felt, like the land, the glow and freshness of spring.

I owed it to Marian to consult her before I spoke to Laura, and to be guided afterwards by her advice.

On the third day from our arrival I found a fit opportunity of speaking to her alone. The moment we looked at one another, her quick instinct detected the thought in my mind before I could give it expression. With her customary energy and directness she spoke at once, and spoke first.

"You are thinking of that subject which was mentioned between us on the evening of your return from Hampshire," she said. "I have been expecting you to allude to it for some time past. There must be a change in our little household, Walter, we cannot go on much longer as we are now. I see it as plainly as you do--as plainly as Laura sees it, though she says nothing. How strangely the old times in Cumberland seem to have come back! You and I are together again, and the one subject of interest between us is Laura once more. I could almost fancy that this room is the summer-house at Limmeridge, and that those waves beyond us are beating on our sea-shore."

"I was guided by your advice in those past days," I said, "and now, Marian, with reliance tenfold greater I will be guided by it again."

She answered by pressing my hand. I saw that she was deeply touched by my reference to the past. We sat together near the window, and while I spoke and she listened, we looked at the glory of the sunlight shining on the majesty of the sea.

"Whatever comes of this confidence between us," I said, "whether it ends happily or sorrowfully for ME, Laura's interests will still be the interests of my life. When we leave this place, on whatever terms we leave it, my determination to wrest from Count Fosco the confession which I failed to obtain from his accomplice, goes back with me to London, as certainly as I go back myself. Neither you nor I can tell how that man may turn on me, if I bring him to bay; we only know, by his own words and actions, that he is capable of striking at me through Laura, without a moment's hesitation, or a moment's remorse. In our present position I have no claim on her which society sanctions, which the law allows, to strengthen me in resisting him, and in protecting HER. This places me at a serious disadvantage. If I am to

fight our cause with the Count, strong in the consciousness of Laura's safety, I must fight it for my Wife. Do you agree to that, Marian, so far?"

"To every word of it," she answered.

"I will not plead out of my own heart," I went on; "I will not appeal to the love which has survived all changes and all shocks--I will rest my only vindication of myself for thinking of her, and speaking of her as my wife, on what I have just said. If the chance of forcing a confession from the Count is, as I believe it to be, the last chance left of publicly establishing the fact of Laura's existence, the least selfish reason that I can advance for our marriage is recognised by us both. But I may be wrong in my conviction--other means of achieving our purpose may be in our power, which are less uncertain and less dangerous. I have searched anxiously, in my own mind, for those means, and I have not found them. Have you?"

"No. I have thought about it too, and thought in vain."

"In all likelihood," I continued, "the same questions have occurred to you, in considering this difficult subject, which have occurred to me. Ought we to return with her to Limmeridge, now that she is like herself again, and trust to the recognition of her by the people of the village, or by the children at the school? Ought we to appeal to the practical test of her handwriting? Suppose we did so. Suppose the recognition of her obtained, and the identity of the handwriting established. Would success in both those cases do more than supply an excellent foundation for a trial in a court of law? Would the recognition and the handwriting prove her identity to Mr. Fairlie and take her back to Limmeridge House, against the evidence of her aunt, against the evidence of the medical certificate, against the fact of the funeral and the fact of the inscription on the tomb? No! We could only hope to succeed in throwing a serious doubt on the assertion of her death, a doubt which nothing short of a legal inquiry can settle. I will assume that we possess (what we have certainly not got) money enough to carry this inquiry on through all its stages. I will assume that Mr. Fairlie's prejudices might be reasoned away--that the false testimony of the Count and his wife, and all the rest of the false testimony, might be confuted--that the recognition could not possibly be ascribed to a mistake between Laura and Anne Catherick, or the handwriting be declared by our enemies to be a clever fraud--all these are assumptions which, more or less, set plain probabilities at defiance; but let them pass--and let us ask ourselves what would be the first consequence or the first questions put to Laura herself on the subject of the conspiracy. We know only too well what the consequence would be, for we know that she has never recovered her memory of what happened to her

in London. Examine her privately, or examine her publicly, she is utterly incapable of assisting the assertion of her own case. If you don't see this, Marian, as plainly as I see it, we will go to Limmeridge and try the experiment to-morrow."

"I DO see it, Walter. Even if we had the means of paying all the law expenses, even if we succeeded in the end, the delays would be unendurable, the perpetual suspense, after what we have suffered already, would be heartbreaking. You are right about the hopelessness of going to Limmeridge. I wish I could feel sure that you are right also in determining to try that last chance with the Count. IS it a chance at all?"

"Beyond a doubt, Yes. It is the chance of recovering the lost date of Laura's journey to London. Without returning to the reasons I gave you some time since, I am still as firmly persuaded as ever that there is a discrepancy between the date of that journey and the date on the certificate of death. There lies the weak point of the whole conspiracy--it crumbles to pieces if we attack it in that way, and the means of attacking it are in possession of the Count. If I succeed in wresting them from him, the object of your life and mine is fulfilled. If I fail, the wrong that Laura has suffered will, in this world, never be redressed."

"Do you fear failure yourself, Walter?"

"I dare not anticipate success, and for that very reason, Marian, I speak openly and plainly as I have spoken now. In my heart and my conscience I can say it, Laura's hopes for the future are at their lowest ebb. I know that her fortune is gone--I know that the last chance of restoring her to her place in the world lies at the mercy of her worst enemy, of a man who is now absolutely unassailable, and who may remain unassailable to the end. With every worldly advantage gone from her, with all prospect of recovering her rank and station more than doubtful, with no clearer future before her than the future which her husband can provide, the poor drawing-master may harmlessly open his heart at last. In the days of her prosperity, Marian, I was only the teacher who guided her hand--I ask for it, in her adversity, as the hand of my wife!"

Marian's eyes met mine affectionately--I could say no more. My heart was full, my lips were trembling. In spite of myself I was in danger of appealing to her pity. I got up to leave the room. She rose at the same moment, laid her hand gently on my shoulder, and stopped me.

"Walter!" she said, "I once parted you both, for your good and for hers. Wait

here, my brother!--wait, my dearest, best friend, till Laura comes, and tells you what I have done now!"

For the first time since the farewell morning at Limmeridge she touched my forehead with her lips. A tear dropped on my face as she kissed me. She turned quickly, pointed to the chair from which I had risen, and left the room.

I sat down alone at the window to wait through the crisis of my life. My mind in that breathless interval felt like a total blank. I was conscious of nothing but a painful intensity of all familiar perceptions. The sun grew blinding bright, the white sea birds chasing each other far beyond me seemed to be flitting before my face, the mellow murmur of the waves on the beach was like thunder in my ears.

The door opened, and Laura came in alone. So she had entered the breakfast-room at Limmeridge House on the morning when we parted. Slowly and falteringly, in sorrow and in hesitation, she had once approached me. Now she came with the haste of happiness in her feet, with the light of happiness radiant in her face. Of their own accord those dear arms clasped themselves round me, of their own accord the sweet lips came to meet mine. "My darling!" she whispered, "we may own we love each other now?" Her head nestled with a tender contentedness on my bosom. "Oh," she said innocently, "I am so happy at last!"

Ten days later we were happier still. We were married.

IV

The course of this narrative, steadily flowing on, bears me away from the morning-time of our married life, and carries me forward to the end.

In a fortnight more we three were back in London, and the shadow was stealing over us of the struggle to come.

Marian and I were careful to keep Laura in ignorance of the cause that had hurried us back--the necessity of making sure of the Count. It was now the beginning of May, and his term of occupation at the house in Forest Road expired in June. If he renewed it (and I had reasons, shortly to be mentioned, for anticipating that he would), I might be certain of his not escaping me. But if by any chance he disappointed my expectations and left the country, then I had no time to lose in arming myself to meet him as I best might.

In the first fulness of my new happiness, there had been moments when my resolution faltered--moments when I was tempted to be safely content, now that the dearest aspiration of my life was fulfilled in the possession of Laura's love. For the first time I thought faint-heartedly of the greatness of the risk, of the adverse chances arrayed against me, of the fair promise of our new life, and of the peril in which I might place the happiness which we had so hardly earned. Yes! let me own it honestly. For a brief time I wandered, in the sweet guiding of love, far from the purpose to which I had been true under sterner discipline and in darker days. Innocently Laura had tempted me aside from the hard path--innocently she was destined to lead me back again.

At times, dreams of the terrible past still disconnectedly recalled to her, in the mystery of sleep, the events of which her waking memory had lost all trace. One night (barely two weeks after our marriage), when I was watching her at rest, I saw the tears come slowly through her closed eyelids, I heard the faint murmuring words escape her which told me that her spirit was back again on the fatal journey from Blackwater Park. That unconscious appeal, so touching and so awful in the sacredness of her sleep, ran through me like fire. The next day was the day we came back to London--the day when my resolution returned to me with tenfold strength.

The first necessity was to know something of the man. Thus far, the true story of his life was an impenetrable mystery to me.

I began with such scanty sources of information as were at my own disposal. The important narrative written by Mr. Frederick Fairlie (which Marian had obtained by following the directions I had given to her in the winter) proved to be of no service to the special object with which I now looked at it. While reading it I reconsidered the disclosure revealed to me by Mrs. Clements of the series of deceptions which had brought Anne Catherick to London, and which had there devoted her to the interests of the conspiracy. Here, again, the Count had not openly committed himself--here, again, he was, to all practical purpose, out of my reach.

I next returned to Marian's journal at Blackwater Park. At my request she read to me again a passage which referred to her past curiosity about the Count, and to the few particulars which she had discovered relating to him.

The passage to which I allude occurs in that part of her journal which delineates his character and his personal appearance. She describes him as "not having crossed the frontiers of his native country for years past"--as "anxious to know if any Italian gentlemen were settled in the nearest town to Blackwater Park"--as "receiving letters with all sorts of odd stamps on them, and one with a large official-looking seal on it." She is inclined to consider that his long absence from his native country may be accounted for by assuming that he is a political exile. But she is, on the other hand, unable to reconcile this idea with the reception of the letter from abroad bearing "the large official-looking seal"--letters from the Continent addressed to political exiles being usually the last to court attention from foreign post-offices in that way.

The considerations thus presented to me in the diary, joined to certain surmises of my own that grew out of them, suggested a conclusion which I wondered I had not arrived at before. I now said to myself--what Laura had once said to Marian at Blackwater Park, what Madame Fosco had overheard by listening at the door--the Count is a spy!

Laura had applied the word to him at hazard, in natural anger at his proceedings towards herself. I applied it to him with the deliberate conviction that his vocation in life was the vocation of a spy. On this assumption, the reason for his extraordinary stay in England so long after the objects of the conspiracy had been gained, became, to my mind, quite intelligible.

The year of which I am now writing was the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park. Foreigners in unusually large numbers had

arrived already, and were still arriving in England. Men were among us by hundreds whom the ceaseless distrustfulness of their governments had followed privately, by means of appointed agents, to our shores. My surmises did not for a moment class a man of the Count's abilities and social position with the ordinary rank and file of foreign spies. I suspected him of holding a position of authority, of being entrusted by the government which he secretly served with the organisation and management of agents specially employed in this country, both men and women, and I believed Mrs. Rubelle, who had been so opportunely found to act as nurse at Blackwater Park, to be, in all probability, one of the number.

Assuming that this idea of mine had a foundation in truth, the position of the Count might prove to be more assailable than I had hitherto ventured to hope. To whom could I apply to know something more of the man's history and of the man himself than I knew now?

In this emergency it naturally occurred to my mind that a countryman of his own, on whom I could rely, might be the fittest person to help me. The first man whom I thought of under these circumstances was also the only Italian with whom I was intimately acquainted--my quaint little friend, Professor Pesca.

The professor has been so long absent from these pages that he has run some risk of being forgotten altogether.

It is the necessary law of such a story as mine that the persons concerned in it only appear when the course of events takes them up--they come and go, not by favour of my personal partiality, but by right of their direct connection with the circumstances to be detailed. For this reason, not Pesca alone, but my mother and sister as well, have been left far in the background of the narrative. My visits to the Hampstead cottage, my mother's belief in the denial of Laura's identity which the conspiracy had accomplished, my vain efforts to overcome the prejudice on her part and on my sister's to which, in their jealous affection for me, they both continued to adhere, the painful necessity which that prejudice imposed on me of concealing my marriage from them till they had learnt to do justice to my wife--all these little domestic occurrences have been left unrecorded because they were not essential to the main interest of the story. It is nothing that they added to my anxieties and embittered my disappointments--the steady march of events has inexorably passed them by.

For the same reason I have said nothing here of the consolation that I found in Pesca's brotherly affection for me, when I saw him again after the sudden

cessation of my residence at Limmeridge House. I have not recorded the fidelity with which my warm-hearted little friend followed me to the place of embarkation when I sailed for Central America, or the noisy transport of joy with which he received me when we next met in London. If I had felt justified in accepting the offers of service which he made to me on my return, he would have appeared again long ere this. But, though I knew that his honour and his courage were to be implicitly relied on, I was not so sure that his discretion was to be trusted, and, for that reason only, I followed the course of all my inquiries alone. It will now be sufficiently understood that Pesca was not separated from all connection with me and my interests, although he has hitherto been separated from all connection with the progress of this narrative. He was as true and as ready a friend of mine still as ever he had been in his life.

Before I summoned Pesca to my assistance it was necessary to see for myself what sort of man I had to deal with. Up to this time I had never once set eyes on Count Fosco.

Three days after my return with Laura and Marian to London, I set forth alone for Forest Road, St. John's Wood, between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning. It was a fine day--I had some hours to spare--and I thought it likely, if I waited a little for him, that the Count might be tempted out. I had no great reason to fear the chance of his recognising me in the daytime, for the only occasion when I had been seen by him was the occasion on which he had followed me home at night.

No one appeared at the windows in the front of the house. I walked down a turning which ran past the side of it, and looked over the low garden wall. One of the back windows on the lower floor was thrown up and a net was stretched across the opening. I saw nobody, but I heard, in the room, first a shrill whistling and singing of birds, then the deep ringing voice which Marian's description had made familiar to me. "Come out on my little finger, my pret-pret-pretties!" cried the voice. "Come out and hop upstairs! One, two, three--and up! Three, two, one--and down! One, two, three--twit-twit-twit-tweet!" The Count was exercising his canaries as he used to exercise them in Marian's time at Blackwater Park.

I waited a little while, and the singing and the whistling ceased. "Come, kiss me, my pretties!" said the deep voice. There was a responsive twittering and chirping--a low, oily laugh--a silence of a minute or so, and then I heard the opening of the house door. I turned and retraced my steps. The magnificent melody of the Prayer in Rossini's Moses, sung in a sonorous bass voice, rose grandly through the suburban silence of the place. The front garden gate

opened and closed. The Count had come out.

He crossed the road and walked towards the western boundary of the Regent's Park. I kept on my own side of the way, a little behind him, and walked in that direction also.

Marian had prepared me for his high stature, his monstrous corpulence, and his ostentatious mourning garments, but not for the horrible freshness and cheerfulness and vitality of the man. He carried his sixty years as if they had been fewer than forty. He sauntered along, wearing his hat a little on one side, with a light jaunty step, swinging his big stick, humming to himself, looking up from time to time at the houses and gardens on either side of him with superb, smiling patronage. If a stranger had been told that the whole neighbourhood belonged to him, that stranger would not have been surprised to hear it. He never looked back, he paid no apparent attention to me, no apparent attention to any one who passed him on his own side of the road, except now and then, when he smiled and smirked, with an easy paternal good humour, at the nursery-maids and the children whom he met. In this way he led me on, till we reached a colony of shops outside the western terraces of the Park.

Here he stopped at a pastrycook's, went in (probably to give an order), and came out again immediately with a tart in his hand. An Italian was grinding an organ before the shop, and a miserable little shrivelled monkey was sitting on the instrument. The Count stopped, bit a piece for himself out of the tart, and gravely handed the rest to the monkey. "My poor little man!" he said, with grotesque tenderness, "you look hungry. In the sacred name of humanity, I offer you some lunch!" The organ-grinder piteously put in his claim to a penny from the benevolent stranger. The Count shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and passed on.

We reached the streets and the better class of shops between the New Road and Oxford Street. The Count stopped again and entered a small optician's shop, with an inscription in the window announcing that repairs were neatly executed inside. He came out again with an opera-glass in his hand, walked a few paces on, and stopped to look at a bill of the opera placed outside a music-seller's shop. He read the bill attentively, considered a moment, and then hailed an empty cab as it passed him. "Opera Box-office," he said to the man, and was driven away.

I crossed the road, and looked at the bill in my turn. The performance announced was Lucrezia Borgia, and it was to take place that evening. The opera-glass in the Count's hand, his careful reading of the bill, and his

direction to the cabman, all suggested that he proposed making one of the audience. I had the means of getting an admission for myself and a friend to the pit by applying to one of the scene-painters attached to the theatre, with whom I had been well acquainted in past times. There was a chance at least that the Count might be easily visible among the audience to me and to any one with me, and in this case I had the means of ascertaining whether Pesca knew his countryman or not that very night.

This consideration at once decided the disposal of my evening. I procured the tickets, leaving a note at the Professor's lodgings on the way. At a quarter to eight I called to take him with me to the theatre. My little friend was in a state of the highest excitement, with a festive flower in his button-hole, and the largest opera-glass I ever saw hugged up under his arm.

"Are you ready?" I asked.

"Right-all-right," said Pesca.

We started for the theatre.

V

The last notes of the introduction to the opera were being played, and the seats in the pit were all filled, when Pesca and I reached the theatre.

There was plenty of room, however, in the passage that ran round the pit--precisely the position best calculated to answer the purpose for which I was attending the performance. I went first to the barrier separating us from the stalls, and looked for the Count in that part of the theatre. He was not there. Returning along the passage, on the left-hand side from the stage, and looking about me attentively, I discovered him in the pit. He occupied an excellent place, some twelve or fourteen seats from the end of a bench, within three rows of the stalls. I placed myself exactly on a line with him. Pesca standing by my side. The Professor was not yet aware of the purpose for which I had brought him to the theatre, and he was rather surprised that we did not move nearer to the stage.

The curtain rose, and the opera began.

Throughout the whole of the first act we remained in our position--the Count, absorbed by the orchestra and the stage, never casting so much as a chance glance at us. Not a note of Donizetti's delicious music was lost on him. There he sat, high above his neighbours, smiling, and nodding his great head enjoyingly from time to time. When the people near him applauded the close of an air (as an English audience in such circumstances always WILL applaud), without the least consideration for the orchestral movement which immediately followed it, he looked round at them with an expression of compassionate remonstrance, and held up one hand with a gesture of polite entreaty. At the more refined passages of the singing, at the more delicate phases of the music, which passed unapplauded by others, his fat hands, adorned with perfectly-fitting black kid gloves, softly patted each other, in token of the cultivated appreciation of a musical man. At such times, his oily murmur of approval, "Bravo! Bra-a-a-a!" hummed through the silence, like the purring of a great cat. His immediate neighbours on either side--hearty, ruddy-faced people from the country, basking amazedly in the sunshine of fashionable London--seeing and hearing him, began to follow his lead. Many a burst of applause from the pit that night started from the soft, comfortable patting of the black-gloved hands. The man's voracious vanity devoured this implied tribute to his local and critical supremacy with an appearance of the highest relish. Smiles rippled continuously over his fat face. He looked about him, at the pauses

in the music, serenely satisfied with himself and his fellow-creatures. "Yes! yes! these barbarous English people are learning something from ME. Here, there, and everywhere, I--Fosco--am an influence that is felt, a man who sits supreme!" If ever face spoke, his face spoke then, and that was its language.

The curtain fell on the first act, and the audience rose to look about them. This was the time I had waited for--the time to try if Pesca knew him.

He rose with the rest, and surveyed the occupants of the boxes grandly with his opera-glass. At first his back was towards us, but he turned round in time, to our side of the theatre, and looked at the boxes above us, using his glass for a few minutes--then removing it, but still continuing to look up. This was the moment I chose, when his full face was in view, for directing Pesca's attention to him.

"Do you know that man?" I asked.

"Which man, my friend?"

"The tall, fat man, standing there, with his face towards us."

Pesca raised himself on tiptoe, and looked at the Count.

"No," said the Professor. "The big fat man is a stranger to me. Is he famous? Why do you point him out?"

"Because I have particular reasons for wishing to know something of him. He is a countryman of yours--his name is Count Fosco. Do you know that name?"

"Not I, Walter. Neither the name nor the man is known to me."

"Are you quite sure you don't recognise him? Look again--look carefully. I will tell you why I am so anxious about it when we leave the theatre. Stop! let me help you up here, where you can see him better."

I helped the little man to perch himself on the edge of the raised dais upon which the pit-seats were all placed. His small stature was no hindrance to him--here he could see over the heads of the ladies who were seated near the outermost part of the bench.

A slim, light-haired man standing by us, whom I had not noticed before--a man with a scar on his left cheek--looked attentively at Pesca as I helped

him up, and then looked still more attentively, following the direction of Pesca's eyes, at the Count. Our conversation might have reached his ears, and might, as it struck me, have roused his curiosity.

Meanwhile, Pesca fixed his eyes earnestly on the broad, full, smiling face turned a little upward, exactly opposite to him.

"No," he said, "I have never set my two eyes on that big fat man before in all my life."

As he spoke the Count looked downwards towards the boxes behind us on the pit tier.

The eyes of the two Italians met.

The instant before I had been perfectly satisfied, from his own reiterated assertion, that Pesca did not know the Count. The instant afterwards I was equally certain that the Count knew Pesca!

Knew him, and--more surprising still--FEARED him as well! There was no mistaking the change that passed over the villain's face. The leaden hue that altered his yellow complexion in a moment, the sudden rigidity of all his features, the furtive scrutiny of his cold grey eyes, the motionless stillness of him from head to foot told their own tale. A mortal dread had mastered him body and soul--and his own recognition of Pesca was the cause of it!

The slim man with the scar on his cheek was still close by us. He had apparently drawn his inference from the effect produced on the Count by the sight of Pesca as I had drawn mine. He was a mild, gentlemanlike man, looking like a foreigner, and his interest in our proceedings was not expressed in anything approaching to an offensive manner.

For my own part I was so startled by the change in the Count's face, so astounded at the entirely unexpected turn which events had taken, that I knew neither what to say or do next. Pesca roused me by stepping back to his former place at my side and speaking first.

"How the fat man stares!" he exclaimed. "Is it at ME? Am I famous? How can he know me when I don't know him?"

I kept my eye still on the Count. I saw him move for the first time when Pesca moved, so as not to lose sight of the little man in the lower position in which he now stood. I was curious to see what would happen if Pesca's

attention under these circumstances was withdrawn from him, and I accordingly asked the Professor if he recognised any of his pupils that evening among the ladies in the boxes. Pesca immediately raised the large opera-glass to his eyes, and moved it slowly all round the upper part of the theatre, searching for his pupils with the most conscientious scrutiny.

The moment he showed himself to be thus engaged the Count turned round, slipped past the persons who occupied seats on the farther side of him from where we stood, and disappeared in the middle passage down the centre of the pit. I caught Pesca by the arm, and to his inexpressible astonishment, hurried him round with me to the back of the pit to intercept the Count before he could get to the door. Somewhat to my surprise, the slim man hastened out before us, avoiding a stoppage caused by some people on our side of the pit leaving their places, by which Pesca and myself were delayed. When we reached the lobby the Count had disappeared, and the foreigner with the scar was gone too.

"Come home," I said; "come home, Pesca to your lodgings. I must speak to you in private--I must speak directly."

"My-soul-bless-my-soul!" cried the Professor, in a state of the extremest bewilderment. "What on earth is the matter?"

I walked on rapidly without answering. The circumstances under which the Count had left the theatre suggested to me that his extraordinary anxiety to escape Pesca might carry him to further extremities still. He might escape me, too, by leaving London. I doubted the future if I allowed him so much as a day's freedom to act as he pleased. And I doubted that foreign stranger, who had got the start of us, and whom I suspected of intentionally following him out.

With this double distrust in my mind, I was not long in making Pesca understand what I wanted. As soon as we two were alone in his room, I increased his confusion and amazement a hundredfold by telling him what my purpose was as plainly and unreservedly as I have acknowledged it here.

"My friend, what can I do?" cried the Professor, piteously appealing to me with both hands. "Deuce-what-the-deuce! how can I help you, Walter, when I don't know the man?"

"HE knows YOU--he is afraid of you--he has left the theatre to escape you. Pesca! there must be a reason for this. Look back into your own life before you came to England. You left Italy, as you have told me yourself, for

political reasons. You have never mentioned those reasons to me, and I don't inquire into them now. I only ask you to consult your own recollections, and to say if they suggest no past cause for the terror which the first sight of you produced in that man."

To my unutterable surprise, these words, harmless as they appeared to ME, produced the same astounding effect on Pesca which the sight of Pesca had produced on the Count. The rosy face of my little friend whitened in an instant, and he drew back from me slowly, trembling from head to foot.

"Walter!" he said. "You don't know what you ask."

He spoke in a whisper--he looked at me as if I had suddenly revealed to him some hidden danger to both of us. In less than one minute of time he was so altered from the easy, lively, quaint little man of all my past experience, that if I had met him in the street, changed as I saw him now, I should most certainly not have known him again.

"Forgive me, if I have unintentionally pained and shocked you," I replied. "Remember the cruel wrong my wife has suffered at Count Fosco's hands. Remember that the wrong can never be redressed, unless the means are in my power of forcing him to do her justice. I spoke in HER interests, Pesca--I ask you again to forgive me--I can say no more."

I rose to go. He stopped me before I reached the door.

"Wait," he said. "You have shaken me from head to foot. You don't know how I left my country, and why I left my country. Let me compose myself, let me think, if I can."

I returned to my chair. He walked up and down the room, talking to himself incoherently in his own language. After several turns backwards and forwards, he suddenly came up to me, and laid his little hands with a strange tenderness and solemnity on my breast.

"On your heart and soul, Walter," he said, "is there no other way to get to that man but the chance-way through ME?"

"There is no other way," I answered.

He left me again, opened the door of the room and looked out cautiously into the passage, closed it once more, and came back.

"You won your right over me, Walter," he said, "on the day when you saved my life. It was yours from that moment, when you pleased to take it. Take it now. Yes! I mean what I say. My next words, as true as the good God is above us, will put my life into your hands."

The trembling earnestness with which he uttered this extraordinary warning, carried with it, to my mind, the conviction that he spoke the truth.

"Mind this!" he went on, shaking his hands at me in the vehemence of his agitation. "I hold no thread, in my own mind, between that man Fosco, and the past time which I call back to me for your sake. If you find the thread, keep it to yourself--tell me nothing--on my knees I beg and pray, let me be ignorant, let me be innocent, let me be blind to all the future as I am now!"

He said a few words more, hesitatingly and disconnectedly, then stopped again.

I saw that the effort of expressing himself in English, on an occasion too serious to permit him the use of the quaint turns and phrases of his ordinary vocabulary, was painfully increasing the difficulty he had felt from the first in speaking to me at all. Having learnt to read and understand his native language (though not to speak it), in the earlier days of our intimate companionship, I now suggested to him that he should express himself in Italian, while I used English in putting any questions which might be necessary to my enlightenment. He accepted the proposal. In his smooth-flowing language, spoken with a vehement agitation which betrayed itself in the perpetual working of his features, in the wildness and the suddenness of his foreign gesticulations, but never in the raising of his voice, I now heard the words which armed me to meet the last struggle, that is left for this story to record.[3]

[3] It is only right to mention here, that I repeat Pesco's statement to me with the careful suppressions and alterations which the serious nature of the subject and my own sense of duty to my friend demand. My first and last concealments from the reader are those which caution renders absolutely necessary in this portion of the narrative.

"You know nothing of my motive for leaving Italy," he began, "except that it was for political reasons. If I had been driven to this country by the persecution of my government, I should not have kept those reasons a secret from you or from any one. I have concealed them because no government authority has pronounced the sentence of my exile. You have heard, Walter, of the political societies that are hidden in every great city on the continent

of Europe? To one of those societies I belonged in Italy--and belong still in England. When I came to this country, I came by the direction of my chief. I was over-zealous in my younger time--I ran the risk of compromising myself and others. For those reasons I was ordered to emigrate to England and to wait. I emigrated--I have waited--I wait still. To-morrow I may be called away--ten years hence I may be called away. It is all one to me--I am here, I support myself by teaching, and I wait. I violate no oath (you shall hear why presently) in making my confidence complete by telling you the name of the society to which I belong. All I do is to put my life in your hands. If what I say to you now is ever known by others to have passed my lips, as certainly as we two sit here, I am a dead man."

He whispered the next words in my ear. I keep the secret which he thus communicated. The society to which he belonged will be sufficiently individualised for the purpose of these pages, if I call it "The Brotherhood," on the few occasions when any reference to the subject will be needed in this place.

"The object of the Brotherhood," Pesca went on, "is, briefly, the object of other political societies of the same sort--the destruction of tyranny and the assertion of the rights of the people. The principles of the Brotherhood are two. So long as a man's life is useful, or even harmless only, he has the right to enjoy it. But, if his life inflicts injury on the well-being of his fellow-men, from that moment he forfeits the right, and it is not only no crime, but a positive merit, to deprive him of it. It is not for me to say in what frightful circumstances of oppression and suffering this society took its rise. It is not for you to say--you Englishmen, who have conquered your freedom so long ago, that you have conveniently forgotten what blood you shed, and what extremities you proceeded to in the conquering--it is not for you to say how far the worst of all exasperations may, or may not, carry the maddened men of an enslaved nation. The iron that has entered into our souls has gone too deep for you to find it. Leave the refugee alone! Laugh at him, distrust him, open your eyes in wonder at that secret self which smoulders in him, sometimes under the everyday respectability and tranquillity of a man like me--sometimes under the grinding poverty, the fierce squalor, of men less lucky, less pliable, less patient than I am--but judge us not! In the time of your first Charles you might have done us justice--the long luxury of your own freedom has made you incapable of doing us justice now."

All the deepest feelings of his nature seemed to force themselves to the surface in those words--all his heart was poured out to me for the first time in our lives--but still his voice never rose, still his dread of the terrible revelation he was making to me never left him.

"So far," he resumed, "you think the society like other societies. Its object (in your English opinion) is anarchy and revolution. It takes the life of a bad king or a bad minister, as if the one and the other were dangerous wild beasts to be shot at the first opportunity. I grant you this. But the laws of the Brotherhood are the laws of no other political society on the face of the earth. The members are not known to one another. There is a president in Italy; there are presidents abroad. Each of these has his secretary. The presidents and the secretaries know the members, but the members, among themselves, are all strangers, until their chiefs see fit, in the political necessity of the time, or in the private necessity of the society, to make them known to each other. With such a safeguard as this there is no oath among us on admittance. We are identified with the Brotherhood by a secret mark, which we all bear, which lasts while our lives last. We are told to go about our ordinary business, and to report ourselves to the president, or the secretary, four times a year, in the event of our services being required. We are warned, if we betray the Brotherhood, or if we injure it by serving other interests, that we die by the principles of the Brotherhood--die by the hand of a stranger who may be sent from the other end of the world to strike the blow--or by the hand of our own bosom-friend, who may have been a member unknown to us through all the years of our intimacy. Sometimes the death is delayed--sometimes it follows close on the treachery. It is our first business to know how to wait--our second business to know how to obey when the word is spoken. Some of us may wait our lives through, and may not be wanted. Some of us may be called to the work, or to the preparation for the work, the very day of our admission. I myself--the little, easy, cheerful man you know, who, of his own accord, would hardly lift up his handkerchief to strike down the fly that buzzes about his face--I, in my younger time, under provocation so dreadful that I will not tell you of it, entered the Brotherhood by an impulse, as I might have killed myself by an impulse. I must remain in it now--it has got me, whatever I may think of it in my better circumstances and my cooler manhood, to my dying day. While I was still in Italy I was chosen secretary, and all the members of that time, who were brought face to face with my president, were brought face to face also with me."

I began to understand him--I saw the end towards which his extraordinary disclosure was now tending. He waited a moment, watching me earnestly--watching till he had evidently guessed what was passing in my mind before he resumed.

"You have drawn your own conclusion already," he said. "I see it in your face. Tell me nothing--keep me out of the secret of your thoughts. Let me

make my one last sacrifice of myself, for your sake, and then have done with this subject, never to return to it again."

He signed to me not to answer him--rose--removed his coat--and rolled up the shirt-sleeve on his left arm.

"I promised you that this confidence should be complete," he whispered, speaking close at my ear, with his eyes looking watchfully at the door. "Whatever comes of it you shall not reproach me with having hidden anything from you which it was necessary to your interests to know. I have said that the Brotherhood identifies its members by a mark that lasts for life. See the place, and the mark on it for yourself."

He raised his bare arm, and showed me, high on the upper part of it and in the inner side, a brand deeply burnt in the flesh and stained of a bright blood-red colour. I abstain from describing the device which the brand represented. It will be sufficient to say that it was circular in form, and so small that it would have been completely covered by a shilling coin.

"A man who has this mark, branded in this place," he said, covering his arm again, "is a member of the Brotherhood. A man who has been false to the Brotherhood is discovered sooner or later by the chiefs who know him--presidents or secretaries, as the case may be. And a man discovered by the chiefs is dead. NO HUMAN LAWS CAN PROTECT HIM. Remember what you have seen and heard--draw what conclusions YOU like--act as you please. But, in the name of God, whatever you discover, whatever you do, tell me nothing! Let me remain free from a responsibility which it horrifies me to think of--which I know, in my conscience, is not my responsibility now. For the last time I say it--on my honour as a gentleman, on my oath as a Christian, if the man you pointed out at the Opera knows ME, he is so altered, or so disguised, that I do not know him. I am ignorant of his proceedings or his purposes in England. I never saw him, I never heard the name he goes by, to my knowledge, before to-night. I say no more. Leave me a little, Walter. I am overpowered by what has happened--I am shaken by what I have said. Let me try to be like myself again when we meet next."

He dropped into a chair, and turning away from me, hid his face in his hands. I gently opened the door so as not to disturb him, and spoke my few parting words in low tones, which he might hear or not, as he pleased.

"I will keep the memory of to-night in my heart of hearts," I said. "You shall never repent the trust you have reposed in me. May I come to you to-morrow? May I come as early as nine o'clock?"

"Yes, Walter," he replied, looking up at me kindly, and speaking in English once more, as if his one anxiety now was to get back to our former relations towards each other. "Come to my little bit of breakfast before I go my ways among the pupils that I teach."

"Good-night, Pesca."

"Good-night, my friend."

VI

MY first conviction as soon as I found myself outside the house, was that no alternative was left me but to act at once on the information I had received--to make sure of the Count that night, or to risk the loss, if I only delayed till the morning, of Laura's last chance. I looked at my watch--it was ten o'clock.

Not the shadow of a doubt crossed my mind of the purpose for which the Count had left the theatre. His escape from us, that evening, was beyond all question the preliminary only to his escape from London. The mark of the Brotherhood was on his arm--I felt as certain of it as if he had shown me the brand; and the betrayal of the Brotherhood was on his conscience--I had seen it in his recognition of Pesca.

It was easy to understand why that recognition had not been mutual. A man of the Count's character would never risk the terrible consequences of turning spy without looking to his personal security quite as carefully as he looked to his golden reward. The shaven face, which I had pointed out at the Opera, might have been covered by a beard in Pesca's time--his dark brown hair might be a wig--his name was evidently a false one. The accident of time might have helped him as well--his immense corpulence might have come with his later years. There was every reason why Pesca should not have known him again--every reason also why he should have known Pesca, whose singular personal appearance made a marked man of him, go where he might.

I have said that I felt certain of the purpose in the Count's mind when he escaped us at the theatre. How could I doubt it, when I saw, with my own eyes, that he believed himself, in spite of the change in his appearance, to have been recognised by Pesca, and to be therefore in danger of his life? If I could get speech of him that night, if I could show him that I, too knew of the mortal peril in which he stood, what result would follow? Plainly this. One of us must be master of the situation--one of us must inevitably be at the mercy of the other.

I owed it to myself to consider the chances against me before I confronted them. I owed it to my wife to do all that lay in my power to lessen the risk.

The chances against me wanted no reckoning up--they were all merged in one. If the Count discovered, by my own avowal, that the direct way to his

safety lay through my life, he was probably the last man in existence who would shrink from throwing me off my guard and taking that way, when he had me alone within his reach. The only means of defence against him on which I could at all rely to lessen the risk, presented themselves, after a little careful thinking, clearly enough. Before I made any personal acknowledgment of my discovery in his presence, I must place the discovery itself where it would be ready for instant use against him, and safe from any attempt at suppression on his part. If I laid the mine under his feet before I approached him, and if I left instructions with a third person to fire it on the expiration of a certain time, unless directions to the contrary were previously received under my own hand, or from my own lips--in that event the Count's security was absolutely dependent upon mine, and I might hold the vantage ground over him securely, even in his own house.

This idea occurred to me when I was close to the new lodgings which we had taken on returning from the sea-side. I went in without disturbing any one, by the help of my key. A light was in the hall, and I stole up with it to my workroom to make my preparations, and absolutely to commit myself to an interview with the Count, before either Laura or Marian could have the slightest suspicion of what I intended to do.

A letter addressed to Pesca represented the surest measure of precaution which it was now possible for me to take. I wrote as follows--

"The man whom I pointed out to you at the Opera is a member of the Brotherhood, and has been false to his trust. Put both these assertions to the test instantly. You know the name he goes by in England. His address is No. 5 Forest Road, St. John's Wood. On the love you once bore me, use the power entrusted to you without mercy and without delay against that man. I have risked all and lost all--and the forfeit of my failure has been paid with my life."

I signed and dated these lines, enclosed them in an envelope, and sealed it up. On the outside I wrote this direction: "Keep the enclosure unopened until nine o'clock to-morrow morning. If you do not hear from me, or see me, before that time, break the seal when the clock strikes, and read the contents." I added my initials, and protected the whole by enclosing it in a second sealed envelope, addressed to Pesca at his lodgings.

Nothing remained to be done after this but to find the means of sending my letter to its destination immediately. I should then have accomplished all that lay in my power. If anything happened to me in the Count's house, I had now provided for his answering it with his life.

That the means of preventing his escape, under any circumstances whatever, were at Pesca's disposal, if he chose to exert them, I did not for an instant doubt. The extraordinary anxiety which he had expressed to remain unenlightened as to the Count's identity--or, in other words, to be left uncertain enough about facts to justify him to his own conscience in remaining passive--betrayed plainly that the means of exercising the terrible justice of the Brotherhood were ready to his hand, although, as a naturally humane man, he had shrunk from plainly saying as much in my presence. The deadly certainty with which the vengeance of foreign political societies can hunt down a traitor to the cause, hide himself where he may, had been too often exemplified, even in my superficial experience, to allow of any doubt. Considering the subject only as a reader of newspapers, cases recurred to my memory, both in London and in Paris, of foreigners found stabbed in the streets, whose assassins could never be traced--of bodies and parts of bodies thrown into the Thames and the Seine, by hands that could never be discovered--of deaths by secret violence which could only be accounted for in one way. I have disguised nothing relating to myself in these pages, and I do not disguise here that I believed I had written Count Fosco's death-warrant, if the fatal emergency happened which authorised Pesca to open my enclosure.

I left my room to go down to the ground floor of the house, and speak to the landlord about finding me a messenger. He happened to be ascending the stairs at the time, and we met on the landing. His son, a quick lad, was the messenger he proposed to me on hearing what I wanted. We had the boy upstairs, and I gave him his directions. He was to take the letter in a cab, to put it into Professor Pesca's own hands, and to bring me back a line of acknowledgment from that gentleman--returning in the cab, and keeping it at the door for my use. It was then nearly half-past ten. I calculated that the boy might be back in twenty minutes, and that I might drive to St. John's Wood, on his return, in twenty minutes more.

When the lad had departed on his errand I returned to my own room for a little while, to put certain papers in order, so that they might be easily found in case of the worst. The key of the old-fashioned bureau in which the papers were kept I sealed up, and left it on my table, with Marian's name written on the outside of the little packet. This done, I went downstairs to the sitting-room, in which I expected to find Laura and Marian awaiting my return from the Opera. I felt my hand trembling for the first time when I laid it on the lock of the door.

No one was in the room but Marian. She was reading, and she looked at her

watch, in surprise, when I came in.

"How early you are back!" she said. "You must have come away before the Opera was over."

"Yes," I replied, "neither Pesca nor I waited for the end. Where is Laura?"

"She had one of her bad headaches this evening, and I advised her to go to bed when we had done tea."

I left the room again on the pretext of wishing to see whether Laura was asleep. Marian's quick eyes were beginning to look inquiringly at my face--Marian's quick instinct was beginning to discover that I had something weighing on my mind.

When I entered the bedchamber, and softly approached the bedside by the dim flicker of the night-lamp, my wife was asleep.

We had not been married quite a month yet. If my heart was heavy, if my resolution for a moment faltered again, when I looked at her face turned faithfully to my pillow in her sleep--when I saw her hand resting open on the coverlid, as if it was waiting unconsciously for mine--surely there was some excuse for me? I only allowed myself a few minutes to kneel down at the bedside, and to look close at her--so close that her breath, as it came and went, fluttered on my face. I only touched her hand and her cheek with my lips at parting. She stirred in her sleep and murmured my name, but without waking. I lingered for an instant at the door to look at her again. "God bless and keep you, my darling!" I whispered, and left her.

Marian was at the stairhead waiting for me. She had a folded slip of paper in her hand.

"The landlord's son has brought this for you," she said. "He has got a cab at the door--he says you ordered him to keep it at your disposal."

"Quite right, Marian. I want the cab--I am going out again."

I descended the stairs as I spoke, and looked into the sitting-room to read the slip of paper by the light on the table. It contained these two sentences in Pesca's handwriting--

"Your letter is received. If I don't see you before the time you mention, I will break the seal when the clock strikes."

I placed the paper in my pocket-book, and made for the door. Marian met me on the threshold, and pushed me back into the room, where the candle-light fell full on my face. She held me by both hands, and her eyes fastened searchingly on mine.

"I see!" she said, in a low eager whisper. "You are trying the last chance to-night."

"Yes, the last chance and the best," I whispered back.

"Not alone! Oh, Walter, for God's sake, not alone! Let me go with you. Don't refuse me because I'm only a woman. I must go! I will go! I'll wait outside in the cab!"

It was my turn now to hold HER. She tried to break away from me and get down first to the door.

"If you want to help me," I said, "stop here and sleep in my wife's room to-night. Only let me go away with my mind easy about Laura, and I answer for everything else. Come, Marian, give me a kiss, and show that you have the courage to wait till I come back."

I dared not allow her time to say a word more. She tried to hold me again. I unclasped her hands, and was out of the room in a moment. The boy below heard me on the stairs, and opened the hall-door. I jumped into the cab before the driver could get off the box. "Forest Road, St. John's Wood," I called to him through the front window. "Double fare if you get there in a quarter of an hour." "I'll do it, sir." I looked at my watch. Eleven o'clock. Not a minute to lose.

The rapid motion of the cab, the sense that every instant now was bringing me nearer to the Count, the conviction that I was embarked at last, without let or hindrance, on my hazardous enterprise, heated me into such a fever of excitement that I shouted to the man to go faster and faster. As we left the streets, and crossed St. John's Wood Road, my impatience so completely overpowered me that I stood up in the cab and stretched my head out of the window, to see the end of the journey before we reached it. Just as a church clock in the distance struck the quarter past, we turned into the Forest Road. I stopped the driver a little away from the Count's house, paid and dismissed him, and walked on to the door.

As I approached the garden gate, I saw another person advancing towards it

also from the direction opposite to mine. We met under the gas lamp in the road, and looked at each other. I instantly recognised the light-haired foreigner with the scar on his cheek, and I thought he recognised me. He said nothing, and instead of stopping at the house, as I did, he slowly walked on. Was he in the Forest Road by accident? Or had he followed the Count home from the Opera?

I did not pursue those questions. After waiting a little till the foreigner had slowly passed out of sight, I rang the gate bell. It was then twenty minutes past eleven--late enough to make it quite easy for the Count to get rid of me by the excuse that he was in bed.

The only way of providing against this contingency was to send in my name without asking any preliminary questions, and to let him know, at the same time, that I had a serious motive for wishing to see him at that late hour. Accordingly, while I was waiting, I took out my card and wrote under my name "On important business." The maid-servant answered the door while I was writing the last word in pencil, and asked me distrustfully what I "pleased to want."

"Be so good as to take that to your master," I replied, giving her the card.

I saw, by the girl's hesitation of manner, that if I had asked for the Count in the first instance she would only have followed her instructions by telling me he was not at home. She was staggered by the confidence with which I gave her the card. After staring at me, in great perturbation, she went back into the house with my message, closing the door, and leaving me to wait in the garden.

In a minute or so she reappeared. "Her master's compliments, and would I be so obliging as to say what my business was?" "Take my compliments back," I replied, "and say that the business cannot be mentioned to any one but your master." She left me again, again returned, and this time asked me to walk in.

I followed her at once. In another moment I was inside the Count's house.

VII

There was no lamp in the hall, but by the dim light of the kitchen candle, which the girl had brought upstairs with her, I saw an elderly lady steal noiselessly out of a back room on the ground floor. She cast one viperish look at me as I entered the hall, but said nothing, and went slowly upstairs without returning my bow. My familiarity with Marian's journal sufficiently assured me that the elderly lady was Madame Fosco.

The servant led me to the room which the Countess had just left. I entered it, and found myself face to face with the Count.

He was still in his evening dress, except his coat, which he had thrown across a chair. His shirt-sleeves were turned up at the wrists, but no higher. A carpet-bag was on one side of him, and a box on the other. Books, papers, and articles of wearing apparel were scattered about the room. On a table, at one side of the door, stood the cage, so well known to me by description, which contained his white mice. The canaries and the cockatoo were probably in some other room. He was seated before the box, packing it, when I went in, and rose with some papers in his hand to receive me. His face still betrayed plain traces of the shock that had overwhelmed him at the Opera. His fat cheeks hung loose, his cold grey eyes were furtively vigilant, his voice, look, and manner were all sharply suspicious alike, as he advanced a step to meet me, and requested, with distant civility, that I would take a chair.

"You come here on business, sir?" he said. "I am at a loss to know what that business can possibly be."

The unconcealed curiosity, with which he looked hard in my face while he spoke, convinced me that I had passed unnoticed by him at the Opera. He had seen Pesca first, and from that moment till he left the theatre he had evidently seen nothing else. My name would necessarily suggest to him that I had not come into his house with other than a hostile purpose towards himself, but he appeared to be utterly ignorant thus far of the real nature of my errand.

"I am fortunate in finding you here to-night," I said. "You seem to be on the point of taking a journey?"

"Is your business connected with my journey?"

"In some degree."

"In what degree? Do you know where I am going to?"

"No. I only know why you are leaving London."

He slipped by me with the quickness of thought, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"You and I, Mr. Hartright, are excellently well acquainted with one another by reputation," he said. "Did it, by any chance, occur to you when you came to this house that I was not the sort of man you could trifle with?"

"It did occur to me," I replied. "And I have not come to trifle with you. I am here on a matter of life and death, and if that door which you have locked was open at this moment, nothing you could say or do would induce me to pass through it."

I walked farther into the room, and stood opposite to him on the rug before the fireplace. He drew a chair in front of the door, and sat down on it, with his left arm resting on the table. The cage with the white mice was close to him, and the little creatures scampered out of their sleeping-place as his heavy arm shook the table, and peered at him through the gaps in the smartly painted wires.

"On a matter of life and death," he repeated to himself. "Those words are more serious, perhaps, than you think. What do you mean?"

"What I say."

The perspiration broke out thickly on his broad forehead. His left hand stole over the edge of the table. There was a drawer in it, with a lock, and the key was in the lock. His finger and thumb closed over the key, but did not turn it.

"So you know why I am leaving London?" he went on. "Tell me the reason, if you please." He turned the key, and unlocked the drawer as he spoke.

"I can do better than that," I replied. "I can SHOW you the reason, if you like."

"How can you show it?"

"You have got your coat off," I said. "Roll up the shirt-sleeve on your left arm, and you will see it there."

The same livid leaden change passed over his face which I had seen pass over it at the theatre. The deadly glitter in his eyes shone steady and straight into mine. He said nothing. But his left hand slowly opened the table-drawer, and softly slipped into it. The harsh grating noise of something heavy that he was moving unseen to me sounded for a moment, then ceased. The silence that followed was so intense that the faint ticking nibble of the white mice at their wires was distinctly audible where I stood.

My life hung by a thread, and I knew it. At that final moment I thought with HIS mind, I felt with HIS fingers--I was as certain as if I had seen it of what he kept hidden from me in the drawer.

"Wait a little," I said. "You have got the door locked--you see I don't move--you see my hands are empty. Wait a little. I have something more to say."

"You have said enough," he replied, with a sudden composure so unnatural and so ghastly that it tried my nerves as no outbreak of violence could have tried them. "I want one moment for my own thoughts, if you please. Do you guess what I am thinking about?"

"Perhaps I do."

"I am thinking," he remarked quietly, "whether I shall add to the disorder in this room by scattering your brains about the fireplace."

If I had moved at that moment, I saw in his face that he would have done it.

"I advise you to read two lines of writing which I have about me," I rejoined, "before you finally decide that question."

The proposal appeared to excite his curiosity. He nodded his head. I took Pesca's acknowledgment of the receipt of my letter out of my pocket-book, handed it to him at arm's length, and returned to my former position in front of the fireplace.

He read the lines aloud: "Your letter is received. If I don't hear from you before the time you mention, I will break the seal when the clock strikes."

Another man in his position would have needed some explanation of those

words--the Count felt no such necessity. One reading of the note showed him the precaution that I had taken as plainly as if he had been present at the time when I adopted it. The expression of his face changed on the instant, and his hand came out of the drawer empty.

"I don't lock up my drawer, Mr. Hartright," he said, "and I don't say that I may not scatter your brains about the fireplace yet. But I am a just man even to my enemy, and I will acknowledge beforehand that they are cleverer brains than I thought them. Come to the point, sir! You want something of me?"

"I do, and I mean to have it."

"On conditions?"

"On no conditions."

His hand dropped into the drawer again.

"Bah! we are travelling in a circle," he said, "and those clever brains of yours are in danger again. Your tone is deplorably imprudent, sir--moderate it on the spot! The risk of shooting you on the place where you stand is less to me than the risk of letting you out of this house, except on conditions that I dictate and approve. You have not got my lamented friend to deal with now--you are face to face with Fosco! If the lives of twenty Mr. Hartrights were the stepping-stones to my safety, over all those stones I would go, sustained by my sublime indifference, self-balanced by my impenetrable calm. Respect me, if you love your own life! I summon you to answer three questions before you open your lips again. Hear them--they are necessary to this interview. Answer them--they are necessary to ME." He held up one finger of his right hand. "First question!" he said. "You come here possessed of information which may be true or may be false--where did you get it?"

"I decline to tell you."

"No matter--I shall find out. If that information is true--mind I say, with the whole force of my resolution, if--you are making your market of it here by treachery of your own or by treachery of some other man. I note that circumstance for future use in my memory, which forgets nothing, and proceed." He held up another finger. "Second question! Those lines you invited me to read are without signature. Who wrote them?"

"A man whom I have every reason to depend on, and whom you have every reason to fear."

My answer reached him to some purpose. His left hand trembled audibly in the drawer.

"How long do you give me," he asked, putting his third question in a quieter tone, "before the clock strikes and the seal is broken?"

"Time enough for you to come to my terms," I replied.

"Give me a plainer answer, Mr. Hartright. What hour is the clock to strike?"

"Nine, to-morrow morning."

"Nine, to-morrow morning? Yes, yes--your trap is laid for me before I can get my passport regulated and leave London. It is not earlier, I suppose? We will see about that presently--I can keep you hostage here, and bargain with you to send for your letter before I let you go. In the meantime, be so good next as to mention your terms."

"You shall hear them. They are simple, and soon stated. You know whose interests I represent in coming here?"

He smiled with the most supreme composure, and carelessly waved his right hand.

"I consent to hazard a guess," he said jeeringly. "A lady's interests, of course!"

"My Wife's interests."

He looked at me with the first honest expression that had crossed his face in my presence--an expression of blank amazement. I could see that I sank in his estimation as a dangerous man from that moment. He shut up the drawer at once, folded his arms over his breast, and listened to me with a smile of satirical attention.

"You are well enough aware," I went on, "of the course which my inquiries have taken for many months past, to know that any attempted denial of plain facts will be quite useless in my presence. You are guilty of an infamous conspiracy! And the gain of a fortune of ten thousand pounds was your motive for it."

He said nothing. But his face became overclouded suddenly by a lowering anxiety.

"Keep your gain," I said. (His face lightened again immediately, and his eyes opened on me in wider and wider astonishment.) "I am not here to disgrace myself by bargaining for money which has passed through your hands, and which has been the price of a vile crime.

"Gently, Mr. Hartright. Your moral clap-traps have an excellent effect in England--keep them for yourself and your own countrymen, if you please. The ten thousand pounds was a legacy left to my excellent wife by the late Mr. Fairlie. Place the affair on those grounds, and I will discuss it if you like. To a man of my sentiments, however, the subject is deplorably sordid. I prefer to pass it over. I invite you to resume the discussion of your terms. What do you demand?"

"In the first place, I demand a full confession of the conspiracy, written and signed in my presence by yourself."

He raised his finger again. "One!" he said, checking me off with the steady attention of a practical man.

"In the second place, I demand a plain proof, which does not depend on your personal asseveration, of the date at which my wife left Blackwater Park and travelled to London."

"So! so! you can lay your finger, I see, on the weak place," he remarked composedly. "Any more?"

"At present, no more."

"Good! you have mentioned your terms, now listen to mine. The responsibility to myself of admitting what you are pleased to call the 'conspiracy' is less, perhaps, upon the whole, than the responsibility of laying you dead on that hearthrug. Let us say that I meet your proposal--on my own conditions. The statement you demand of me shall be written, and the plain proof shall be produced. You call a letter from my late lamented friend informing me of the day and hour of his wife's arrival in London, written, signed, and dated by himself, a proof, I suppose? I can give you this. I can also send you to the man of whom I hired the carriage to fetch my visitor from the railway, on the day when she arrived--his order-book may help you to your date, even if his coachman who drove me proves to be

of no use. These things I can do, and will do, on conditions. I recite them. First condition! Madame Fosco and I leave this house when and how we please, without interference of any kind on your part. Second condition! You wait here, in company with me, to see my agent, who is coming at seven o'clock in the morning to regulate my affairs. You give my agent a written order to the man who has got your sealed letter to resign his possession of it. You wait here till my agent places that letter unopened in my hands, and you then allow me one clear half-hour to leave the house--after which you resume your own freedom of action and go where you please. Third condition! You give me the satisfaction of a gentleman for your intrusion into my private affairs, and for the language you have allowed yourself to use to me at this conference. The time and place, abroad, to be fixed in a letter from my hand when I am safe on the Continent, and that letter to contain a strip of paper measuring accurately the length of my sword. Those are my terms. Inform me if you accept them--Yes or No."

The extraordinary mixture of prompt decision, far-sighted cunning, and mountebank bravado in this speech, staggered me for a moment--and only for a moment. The one question to consider was, whether I was justified or not in possessing myself of the means of establishing Laura's identity at the cost of allowing the scoundrel who had robbed her of it to escape me with impunity. I knew that the motive of securing the just recognition of my wife in the birthplace from which she had been driven out as an impostor, and of publicly erasing the lie that still profaned her mother's tombstone, was far purer, in its freedom from all taint of evil passion, than the vindictive motive which had mingled itself with my purpose from the first. And yet I cannot honestly say that my own moral convictions were strong enough to decide the struggle in me by themselves. They were helped by my remembrance of Sir Percival's death. How awfully, at the last moment, had the working of the retribution THERE been snatched from my feeble hands! What right had I to decide, in my poor mortal ignorance of the future, that this man, too, must escape with impunity because he escaped ME? I thought of these things--perhaps with the superstition inherent in my nature, perhaps with a sense worthier of me than superstition. It was hard, when I had fastened my hold on him at last, to loosen it again of my own accord--but I forced myself to make the sacrifice. In plainer words, I determined to be guided by the one higher motive of which I was certain, the motive of serving the cause of Laura and the cause of Truth.

"I accept your conditions," I said. "With one reservation on my part."

"What reservation may that be?" he asked.

"It refers to the sealed letter," I answered. "I require you to destroy it unopened in my presence as soon as it is placed in your hands."

My object in making this stipulation was simply to prevent him from carrying away written evidence of the nature of my communication with Pesca. The fact of my communication he would necessarily discover, when I gave the address to his agent in the morning. But he could make no use of it on his own unsupported testimony--even if he really ventured to try the experiment--which need excite in me the slightest apprehension on Pesca's account.

"I grant your reservation," he replied, after considering the question gravely for a minute or two. "It is not worth dispute--the letter shall be destroyed when it comes into my hands."

He rose, as he spoke, from the chair in which he had been sitting opposite to me up to this time. With one effort he appeared to free his mind from the whole pressure on it of the interview between us thus far. "Ouf!" he cried, stretching his arms luxuriously, "the skirmish was hot while it lasted. Take a seat, Mr. Hartright. We meet as mortal enemies hereafter--let us, like gallant gentlemen, exchange polite attentions in the meantime. Permit me to take the liberty of calling for my wife."

He unlocked and opened the door. "Eleanor!" he called out in his deep voice. The lady of the viperish face came in "Madame Fosco--Mr. Hartright," said the Count, introducing us with easy dignity. "My angel," he went on, addressing his wife, "will your labours of packing up allow you time to make me some nice strong coffee? I have writing business to transact with Mr. Hartright--and I require the full possession of my intelligence to do justice to myself."

Madame Fosco bowed her head twice--once sternly to me, once submissively to her husband, and glided out of the room.

The Count walked to a writing-table near the window, opened his desk, and took from it several quires of paper and a bundle of quill pens. He scattered the pens about the table, so that they might lie ready in all directions to be taken up when wanted, and then cut the paper into a heap of narrow slips, of the form used by professional writers for the press. "I shall make this a remarkable document," he said, looking at me over his shoulder. "Habits of literary composition are perfectly familiar to me. One of the rarest of all the intellectual accomplishments that a man can possess is the grand faculty of arranging his ideas. Immense privilege! I possess it. Do you?"

He marched backwards and forwards in the room, until the coffee appeared, humming to himself, and marking the places at which obstacles occurred in the arrangement of his ideas, by striking his forehead from time to time with the palm of his hand. The enormous audacity with which he seized on the situation in which I placed him, and made it the pedestal on which his vanity mounted for the one cherished purpose of self-display, mastered my astonishment by main force. Sincerely as I loathed the man, the prodigious strength of his character, even in its most trivial aspects, impressed me in spite of myself.

The coffee was brought in by Madame Fosco. He kissed her hand in grateful acknowledgment, and escorted her to the door; returned, poured out a cup of coffee for himself, and took it to the writing-table.

"May I offer you some coffee, Mr. Hartright?" he said, before he sat down.

I declined.

"What! you think I shall poison you?" he said gaily. "The English intellect is sound, so far as it goes," he continued, seating himself at the table; "but it has one grave defect--it is always cautious in the wrong place."

He dipped his pen in the ink, placed the first slip of paper before him with a thump of his hand on the desk, cleared his throat, and began. He wrote with great noise and rapidity, in so large and bold a hand, and with such wide spaces between the lines, that he reached the bottom of the slip in not more than two minutes certainly from the time when he started at the top. Each slip as he finished it was paged, and tossed over his shoulder out of his way on the floor. When his first pen was worn out, THAT went over his shoulder too, and he pounced on a second from the supply scattered about the table. Slip after slip, by dozens, by fifties, by hundreds, flew over his shoulders on either side of him till he had snowed himself up in paper all round his chair. Hour after hour passed--and there I sat watching, there he sat writing. He never stopped, except to sip his coffee, and when that was exhausted, to smack his forehead from time to time. One o'clock struck, two, three, four--and still the slips flew about all round him; still the untiring pen scraped its way ceaselessly from top to bottom of the page, still the white chaos of paper rose higher and higher all round his chair. At four o'clock I heard a sudden splutter of the pen, indicative of the flourish with which he signed his name. "Bravo!" he cried, springing to his feet with the activity of a young man, and looking me straight in the face with a smile of superb triumph.

"Done, Mr. Hartright!" he announced with a self-renovating thump of his fist on his broad breast. "Done, to my own profound satisfaction--to YOUR profound astonishment, when you read what I have written. The subject is exhausted: the man--Fosco--is not. I proceed to the arrangement of my slips--to the revision of my slips--to the reading of my slips--addressed emphatically to your private ear. Four o'clock has just struck. Good! Arrangement, revision, reading, from four to five. Short snooze of restoration for myself from five to six. Final preparations from six to seven. Affair of agent and sealed letter from seven to eight. At eight, en route. Behold the programme!"

He sat down cross-legged on the floor among his papers, strung them together with a bodkin and a piece of string--revised them, wrote all the titles and honours by which he was personally distinguished at the head of the first page, and then read the manuscript to me with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation. The reader will have an opportunity, ere long, of forming his own opinion of the document. It will be sufficient to mention here that it answered my purpose.

He next wrote me the address of the person from whom he had hired the fly, and handed me Sir Percival's letter. It was dated from Hampshire on the 25th of July, and it announced the journey of "Lady Glyde" to London on the 26th. Thus, on the very day (the 25th) when the doctor's certificate declared that she had died in St. John's Wood, she was alive, by Sir Percival's own showing, at Blackwater--and, on the day after, she was to take a journey! When the proof of that journey was obtained from the flyman, the evidence would be complete.

"A quarter-past five," said the Count, looking at his watch. "Time for my restorative snooze. I personally resemble Napoleon the Great, as you may have remarked, Mr. Hartright--I also resemble that immortal man in my power of commanding sleep at will. Excuse me one moment. I will summon Madame Fosco, to keep you from feeling dull."

Knowing as well as he did, that he was summoning Madame Fosco to ensure my not leaving the house while he was asleep, I made no reply, and occupied myself in tying up the papers which he had placed in my possession.

The lady came in, cool, pale, and venomous as ever. "Amuse Mr. Hartright, my angel," said the Count. He placed a chair for her, kissed her hand for the second time, withdrew to a sofa, and, in three minutes, was as peacefully and happily asleep as the most virtuous man in existence.

Madame Fosco took a book from the table, sat down, and looked at me, with the steady vindictive malice of a woman who never forgot and never forgave.

"I have been listening to your conversation with my husband," she said. "If I had been in HIS place--I would have laid you dead on the hearthrug."

With those words she opened her book, and never looked at me or spoke to me from that time till the time when her husband woke.

He opened his eyes and rose from the sofa, accurately to an hour from the time when he had gone to sleep.

"I feel infinitely refreshed," he remarked. "Eleanor, my good wife, are you all ready upstairs? That is well. My little packing here can be completed in ten minutes--my travelling-dress assumed in ten minutes more. What remains before the agent comes?" He looked about the room, and noticed the cage with his white mice in it. "Ah!" he cried piteously, "a last laceration of my sympathies still remains. My innocent pets! my little cherished children! what am I to do with them? For the present we are settled nowhere; for the present we travel incessantly--the less baggage we carry the better for ourselves. My cockatoo, my canaries, and my little mice--who will cherish them when their good Papa is gone?"

He walked about the room deep in thought. He had not been at all troubled about writing his confession, but he was visibly perplexed and distressed about the far more important question of the disposal of his pets. After long consideration he suddenly sat down again at the writing-table.

"An idea!" he exclaimed. "I will offer my canaries and my cockatoo to this vast Metropolis--my agent shall present them in my name to the Zoological Gardens of London. The Document that describes them shall be drawn out on the spot."

He began to write, repeating the words as they flowed from his pen.

"Number one. Cockatoo of transcendent plumage: attraction, of himself, to all visitors of taste. Number two. Canaries of unrivalled vivacity and intelligence: worthy of the garden of Eden, worthy also of the garden in the Regent's Park. Homage to British Zoology. Offered by Fosco."

The pen spluttered again, and the flourish was attached to his signature.

"Count! you have not included the mice," said Madame Fosco

He left the table, took her hand, and placed it on his heart.

"All human resolution, Eleanor," he said solemnly, "has its limits. MY limits are inscribed on that Document. I cannot part with my white mice. Bear with me, my angel, and remove them to their travelling cage upstairs."

"Admirable tenderness!" said Madame Fosco, admiring her husband, with a last viperish look in my direction. She took up the cage carefully, and left the room.

The Count looked at his watch. In spite of his resolute assumption of composure, he was getting anxious for the agent's arrival. The candles had long since been extinguished, and the sunlight of the new morning poured into the room. It was not till five minutes past seven that the gate bell rang, and the agent made his appearance. He was a foreigner with a dark beard.

"Mr. Hartright--Monsieur Rubelle," said the Count, introducing us. He took the agent (a foreign spy, in every line of his face, if ever there was one yet) into a corner of the room, whispered some directions to him, and then left us together. "Monsieur Rubelle," as soon as we were alone, suggested with great politeness that I should favour him with his instructions. I wrote two lines to Pesca, authorising him to deliver my sealed letter "to the bearer," directed the note, and handed it to Monsieur Rubelle.

The agent waited with me till his employer returned, equipped in travelling costume. The Count examined the address of my letter before he dismissed the agent. "I thought so!" he said, turning on me with a dark look, and altering again in his manner from that moment.

He completed his packing, and then sat consulting a travelling map, making entries in his pocket-book, and looking every now and then impatiently at his watch. Not another word, addressed to myself, passed his lips. The near approach of the hour for his departure, and the proof he had seen of the communication established between Pesca and myself, had plainly recalled his whole attention to the measures that were necessary for securing his escape.

A little before eight o'clock, Monsieur Rubelle came back with my unopened letter in his hand. The Count looked carefully at the superscription and the seal, lit a candle, and burnt the letter. "I perform my promise," he said, "but this matter, Mr. Hartright, shall not end here."

The agent had kept at the door the cab in which he had returned. He and the maid-servant now busied themselves in removing the luggage. Madame Fosco came downstairs, thickly veiled, with the travelling cage of the white mice in her hand. She neither spoke to me nor looked towards me. Her husband escorted her to the cab. "Follow me as far as the passage," he whispered in my ear; "I may want to speak to you at the last moment."

I went out to the door, the agent standing below me in the front garden. The Count came back alone, and drew me a few steps inside the passage.

"Remember the Third condition!" he whispered. "You shall hear from me, Mr. Hartright--I may claim from you the satisfaction of a gentleman sooner than you think for." He caught my hand before I was aware of him, and wrung it hard--then turned to the door, stopped, and came back to me again.

"One word more," he said confidentially. "When I last saw Miss Halcombe, she looked thin and ill. I am anxious about that admirable woman. Take care of her, sir! With my hand on my heart, I solemnly implore you, take care of Miss Halcombe!"

Those were the last words he said to me before he squeezed his huge body into the cab and drove off.

The agent and I waited at the door a few moments looking after him. While we were standing together, a second cab appeared from a turning a little way down the road. It followed the direction previously taken by the Count's cab, and as it passed the house and the open garden gate, a person inside looked at us out of the window. The stranger at the Opera again!--the foreigner with a scar on his left cheek.

"You wait here with me, sir, for half an hour more!" said Monsieur Rubelle.

"I do."

We returned to the sitting-room. I was in no humour to speak to the agent, or to allow him to speak to me. I took out the papers which the Count had placed in my hands, and read the terrible story of the conspiracy told by the man who had planned and perpetrated it.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY ISIDOR, OTTAVIO, BALDASSARE FOSCO

(Count of the Holy Roman Empire, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Brazen Crown, Perpetual Arch-Master of the Rosicrucian Masons of Mesopotamia; Attached (in Honorary Capacities) to Societies Musical, Societies Medical, Societies Philosophical, and Societies General Benevolent, throughout Europe; etc. etc. etc.)

THE COUNT'S NARRATIVE

In the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty I arrived in England, charged with a delicate political mission from abroad. Confidential persons were semi-officially connected with me, whose exertions I was authorised to direct, Monsieur and Madame Rubelle being among the number. Some weeks of spare time were at my disposal, before I entered on my functions by establishing myself in the suburbs of London. Curiosity may stop here to ask for some explanation of those functions on my part. I entirely sympathise with the request. I also regret that diplomatic reserve forbids me to comply with it.

I arranged to pass the preliminary period of repose, to which I have just referred, in the superb mansion of my late lamented friend, Sir Percival Glyde. HE arrived from the Continent with his wife. I arrived from the Continent with MINE. England is the land of domestic happiness--how appropriately we entered it under these domestic circumstances!

The bond of friendship which united Percival and myself was strengthened, on this occasion, by a touching similarity in the pecuniary position on his side and on mine. We both wanted money. Immense necessity! Universal want! Is there a civilised human being who does not feel for us? How insensible must that man be! Or how rich!

I enter into no sordid particulars, in discussing this part of the subject. My mind recoils from them. With a Roman austerity, I show my empty purse and Percival's to the shrinking public gaze. Let us allow the deplorable fact to assert itself, once for all, in that manner, and pass on.

We were received at the mansion by the magnificent creature who is inscribed on my heart as "Marian," who is known in the colder atmosphere of society as "Miss Halcombe."

Just Heaven! with what inconceivable rapidity I learnt to adore that woman. At sixty, I worshipped her with the volcanic ardour of eighteen. All the gold of my rich nature was poured hopelessly at her feet. My wife--poor angel!--my wife, who adores me, got nothing but the shillings and the pennies. Such is the World, such Man, such Love. What are we (I ask) but puppets in a show-box? Oh, omnipotent Destiny, pull our strings gently! Dance us mercifully off our miserable little stage!

The preceding lines, rightly understood, express an entire system of philosophy. It is mine.

I resume.

The domestic position at the commencement of our residence at Blackwater Park has been drawn with amazing accuracy, with profound mental insight, by the hand of Marian herself. (Pass me the intoxicating familiarity of mentioning this sublime creature by her Christian name.) Accurate knowledge of the contents of her journal--to which I obtained access by clandestine means, unspeakably precious to me in the remembrance--warns my eager pen from topics which this essentially exhaustive woman has already made her own.

The interests--interests, breathless and immense!--with which I am here concerned, begin with the deplorable calamity of Marian's illness.

The situation at this period was emphatically a serious one. Large sums of money, due at a certain time, were wanted by Percival (I say nothing of the modicum equally necessary to myself), and the one source to look to for supplying them was the fortune of his wife, of which not one farthing was at his disposal until her death. Bad so far, and worse still farther on. My lamented friend had private troubles of his own, into which the delicacy of my disinterested attachment to him forbade me from inquiring too curiously. I knew nothing but that a woman, named Anne Catherick, was hidden in the neighbourhood, that she was in communication with Lady Glyde, and that the disclosure of a secret, which would be the certain ruin of Percival, might be the result. He had told me himself that he was a lost man, unless his wife was silenced, and unless Anne Catherick was found. If he was a lost man, what would become of our pecuniary interests? Courageous as I am by nature, I absolutely trembled at the idea!

The whole force of my intelligence was now directed to the finding of Anne Catherick. Our money affairs, important as they were, admitted of delay--but the necessity of discovering the woman admitted of none. I only knew her by description, as presenting an extraordinary personal resemblance to Lady Glyde. The statement of this curious fact--intended merely to assist me in identifying the person of whom we were in search--when coupled with the additional information that Anne Catherick had escaped from a mad-house, started the first immense conception in my mind, which subsequently led to such amazing results. That conception involved nothing less than the complete transformation of two separate identities. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick were to change names, places, and destinies, the one

with the other--the prodigious consequences contemplated by the change being the gain of thirty thousand pounds, and the eternal preservation of Sir Percival's secret.

My instincts (which seldom err) suggested to me, on reviewing the circumstances, that our invisible Anne would, sooner or later, return to the boat-house at the Blackwater lake. There I posted myself, previously mentioning to Mrs. Michelson, the housekeeper, that I might be found when wanted, immersed in study, in that solitary place. It is my rule never to make unnecessary mysteries, and never to set people suspecting me for want of a little seasonable candour on my part. Mrs. Michelson believed in me from first to last. This ladylike person (widow of a Protestant priest) overflowed with faith. Touched by such superfluity of simple confidence in a woman of her mature years, I opened the ample reservoirs of my nature and absorbed it all.

I was rewarded for posting myself sentinel at the lake by the appearance--not of Anne Catherick herself, but of the person in charge of her. This individual also overflowed with simple faith, which I absorbed in myself, as in the case already mentioned. I leave her to describe the circumstances (if she has not done so already) under which she introduced me to the object of her maternal care. When I first saw Anne Catherick she was asleep. I was electrified by the likeness between this unhappy woman and Lady Glyde. The details of the grand scheme which had suggested themselves in outline only, up to that period, occurred to me, in all their masterly combination, at the sight of the sleeping face. At the same time, my heart, always accessible to tender influences, dissolved in tears at the spectacle of suffering before me. I instantly set myself to impart relief. In other words, I provided the necessary stimulant for strengthening Anne Catherick to perform the journey to London.

The best years of my life have been passed in the ardent study of medical and chemical science. Chemistry especially has always had irresistible attractions for me from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists--I assert it emphatically--might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity. Let me explain this before I go further.

Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the mind? The body (follow me closely here) lies at the mercy of the most omnipotent of all potentates--the Chemist. Give me--Fosco--chemistry; and when Shakespeare has conceived Hamlet, and sits down to execute the conception--with a few grains of powder dropped into his daily food, I will reduce his mind, by the

action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that has ever degraded paper. Under similar circumstances, revive me the illustrious Newton. I guarantee that when he sees the apple fall he shall EAT IT, instead of discovering the principle of gravitation. Nero's dinner shall transform Nero into the mildest of men before he has done digesting it, and the morning draught of Alexander the Great shall make Alexander run for his life at the first sight of the enemy the same afternoon. On my sacred word of honour it is lucky for Society that modern chemists are, by incomprehensible good fortune, the most harmless of mankind. The mass are worthy fathers of families, who keep shops. The few are philosophers besotted with admiration for the sound of their own lecturing voices, visionaries who waste their lives on fantastic impossibilities, or quacks whose ambition soars no higher than our corns. Thus Society escapes, and the illimitable power of Chemistry remains the slave of the most superficial and the most insignificant ends.

Why this outburst? Why this withering eloquence?

Because my conduct has been misrepresented, because my motives have been misunderstood. It has been assumed that I used my vast chemical resources against Anne Catherick, and that I would have used them if I could against the magnificent Marian herself. Odious insinuations both! All my interests were concerned (as will be seen presently) in the preservation of Anne Catherick's life. All my anxieties were concentrated on Marian's rescue from the hands of the licensed imbecile who attended her, and who found my advice confirmed from first to last by the physician from London. On two occasions only--both equally harmless to the individual on whom I practised--did I summon to myself the assistance of chemical knowledge. On the first of the two, after following Marian to the inn at Blackwater (studying, behind a convenient waggon which hid me from her, the poetry of motion, as embodied in her walk), I availed myself of the services of my invaluable wife, to copy one and to intercept the other of two letters which my adored enemy had entrusted to a discarded maid. In this case, the letters being in the bosom of the girl's dress, Madame Fosco could only open them, read them, perform her instructions, seal them, and put them back again by scientific assistance--which assistance I rendered in a half-ounce bottle. The second occasion, when the same means were employed, was the occasion (to which I shall soon refer) of Lady Glyde's arrival in London. Never at any other time was I indebted to my Art as distinguished from myself. To all other emergencies and complications my natural capacity for grappling, single-handed, with circumstances, was invariably equal. I affirm the all-pervading intelligence of that capacity. At the expense of the Chemist I vindicate the Man.

Respect this outburst of generous indignation. It has inexpressibly relieved me. En route! Let us proceed.

Having suggested to Mrs. Clement (or Clements, I am not sure which) that the best method of keeping Anne out of Percival's reach was to remove her to London--having found that my proposal was eagerly received, and having appointed a day to meet the travellers at the station and to see them leave it, I was at liberty to return to the house and to confront the difficulties which still remained to be met.

My first proceeding was to avail myself of the sublime devotion of my wife. I had arranged with Mrs. Clements that she should communicate her London address, in Anne's interests, to Lady Glyde. But this was not enough. Designing persons in my absence might shake the simple confidence of Mrs. Clements, and she might not write after all. Who could I find capable of travelling to London by the train she travelled by, and of privately seeing her home? I asked myself this question. The conjugal part of me immediately answered--Madame Fosco.

After deciding on my wife's mission to London, I arranged that the journey should serve a double purpose. A nurse for the suffering Marian, equally devoted to the patient and to myself, was a necessity of my position. One of the most eminently confidential and capable women in existence was by good fortune at my disposal. I refer to that respectable matron, Madame Rubelle, to whom I addressed a letter, at her residence in London, by the hands of my wife.

On the appointed day Mrs. Clements and Anne Catherick met me at the station. I politely saw them off, I politely saw Madame Fosco off by the same train. The last thing at night my wife returned to Blackwater, having followed her instructions with the most unimpeachable accuracy. She was accompanied by Madame Rubelle, and she brought me the London address of Mrs. Clements. After-events proved this last precaution to have been unnecessary. Mrs. Clements punctually informed Lady Glyde of her place of abode. With a wary eye on future emergencies, I kept the letter.

The same day I had a brief interview with the doctor, at which I protested, in the sacred interests of humanity, against his treatment of Marian's case. He was insolent, as all ignorant people are. I showed no resentment, I deferred quarrelling with him till it was necessary to quarrel to some purpose. My next proceeding was to leave Blackwater myself. I had my London residence to take in anticipation of coming events. I had also a little business of the

domestic sort to transact with Mr. Frederick Fairlie. I found the house I wanted in St. John's Wood. I found Mr. Fairlie at Limmeridge, Cumberland.

My own private familiarity with the nature of Marian's correspondence had previously informed me that she had written to Mr. Fairlie, proposing, as a relief to Lady Glyde's matrimonial embarrassments, to take her on a visit to her uncle in Cumberland. This letter I had wisely allowed to reach its destination, feeling at the time that it could do no harm, and might do good. I now presented myself before Mr. Fairlie to support Marian's own proposal--with certain modifications which, happily for the success of my plans, were rendered really inevitable by her illness. It was necessary that Lady Glyde should leave Blackwater alone, by her uncle's invitation, and that she should rest a night on the journey at her aunt's house (the house I had in St. John's Wood) by her uncle's express advice. To achieve these results, and to secure a note of invitation which could be shown to Lady Glyde, were the objects of my visit to Mr. Fairlie. When I have mentioned that this gentleman was equally feeble in mind and body, and that I let loose the whole force of my character on him, I have said enough. I came, saw, and conquered Fairlie.

On my return to Blackwater Park (with the letter of invitation) I found that the doctor's imbecile treatment of Marian's case had led to the most alarming results. The fever had turned to typhus. Lady Glyde, on the day of my return, tried to force herself into the room to nurse her sister. She and I had no affinities of sympathy--she had committed the unpardonable outrage on my sensibilities of calling me a spy--she was a stumbling-block in my way and in Percival's--but, for all that, my magnanimity forbade me to put her in danger of infection with my own hand. At the same time I offered no hindrance to her putting herself in danger. If she had succeeded in doing so, the intricate knot which I was slowly and patiently operating on might perhaps have been cut by circumstances. As it was, the doctor interfered and she was kept out of the room.

I had myself previously recommended sending for advice to London. This course had been now taken. The physician, on his arrival, confirmed my view of the case. The crisis was serious. But we had hope of our charming patient on the fifth day from the appearance of the typhus. I was only once absent from Blackwater at this time--when I went to London by the morning train to make the final arrangements at my house in St. John's Wood, to assure myself by private inquiry that Mrs. Clements had not moved, and to settle one or two little preliminary matters with the husband of Madame Rubelle. I returned at night. Five days afterwards the physician pronounced our interesting Marian to be out of all danger, and to be in need

of nothing but careful nursing. This was the time I had waited for. Now that medical attendance was no longer indispensable, I played the first move in the game by asserting myself against the doctor. He was one among many witnesses in my way whom it was necessary to remove. A lively altercation between us (in which Percival, previously instructed by me, refused to interfere) served the purpose in view. I descended on the miserable man in an irresistible avalanche of indignation, and swept him from the house.

The servants were the next encumbrances to get rid of. Again I instructed Percival (whose moral courage required perpetual stimulants), and Mrs. Michelson was amazed, one day, by hearing from her master that the establishment was to be broken up. We cleared the house of all the servants but one, who was kept for domestic purposes, and whose lumpish stupidity we could trust to make no embarrassing discoveries. When they were gone, nothing remained but to relieve ourselves of Mrs. Michelson--a result which was easily achieved by sending this amiable lady to find lodgings for her mistress at the sea-side.

The circumstances were now exactly what they were required to be. Lady Glyde was confined to her room by nervous illness, and the lumpish housemaid (I forget her name) was shut up there at night in attendance on her mistress. Marian, though fast recovering, still kept her bed, with Mrs. Rubelle for nurse. No other living creatures but my wife, myself, and Percival were in the house. With all the chances thus in our favour I confronted the next emergency, and played the second move in the game.

The object of the second move was to induce Lady Glyde to leave Blackwater unaccompanied by her sister. Unless we could persuade her that Marian had gone on to Cumberland first, there was no chance of removing her, of her own free will, from the house. To produce this necessary operation in her mind, we concealed our interesting invalid in one of the uninhabited bedrooms at Blackwater. At the dead of night Madame Fosco, Madame Rubelle, and myself (Percival not being cool enough to be trusted) accomplished the concealment. The scene was picturesque, mysterious, dramatic in the highest degree. By my directions the bed had been made, in the morning, on a strong movable framework of wood. We had only to lift the framework gently at the head and foot, and to transport our patient where we pleased, without disturbing herself or her bed. No chemical assistance was needed or used in this case. Our interesting Marian lay in the deep repose of convalescence. We placed the candles and opened the doors beforehand. I, in right of my great personal strength, took the head of the framework--my wife and Madame Rubelle took the foot. I bore my share of that inestimably precious burden with a manly tenderness, with a fatherly

care. Where is the modern Rembrandt who could depict our midnight procession? Alas for the Arts! alas for this most pictorial of subjects! The modern Rembrandt is nowhere to be found.

The next morning my wife and I started for London, leaving Marian secluded, in the uninhabited middle of the house, under care of Madame Rubelle, who kindly consented to imprison herself with her patient for two or three days. Before taking our departure I gave Percival Mr. Fairlie's letter of invitation to his niece (instructing her to sleep on the journey to Cumberland at her aunt's house), with directions to show it to Lady Glyde on hearing from me. I also obtained from him the address of the Asylum in which Anne Catherick had been confined, and a letter to the proprietor, announcing to that gentleman the return of his runaway patient to medical care.

I had arranged, at my last visit to the metropolis, to have our modest domestic establishment ready to receive us when we arrived in London by the early train. In consequence of this wise precaution, we were enabled that same day to play the third move in the game--the getting possession of Anne Catherick.

Dates are of importance here. I combine in myself the opposite characteristics of a Man of Sentiment and a Man of Business. I have all the dates at my fingers' ends.

On Wednesday, the 24th of July 1850, I sent my wife in a cab to clear Mrs. Clements out of the way, in the first place. A supposed message from Lady Glyde in London was sufficient to obtain this result. Mrs. Clements was taken away in the cab, and was left in the cab, while my wife (on pretence of purchasing something at a shop) gave her the slip, and returned to receive her expected visitor at our house in St. John's Wood. It is hardly necessary to add that the visitor had been described to the servants as "Lady Glyde."

In the meanwhile I had followed in another cab, with a note for Anne Catherick, merely mentioning that Lady Glyde intended to keep Mrs. Clements to spend the day with her, and that she was to join them under care of the good gentleman waiting outside, who had already saved her from discovery in Hampshire by Sir Percival. The "good gentleman" sent in this note by a street boy, and paused for results a door or two farther on. At the moment when Anne appeared at the house door and closed it this excellent man had the cab door open ready for her, absorbed her into the vehicle, and drove off.

(Pass me, here, one exclamation in parenthesis. How interesting this is!)

On the way to Forest Road my companion showed no fear. I can be paternal--no man more so--when I please, and I was intensely paternal on this occasion. What titles I had to her confidence! I had compounded the medicine which had done her good--I had warned her of her danger from Sir Percival. Perhaps I trusted too implicitly to these titles--perhaps I underrated the keenness of the lower instincts in persons of weak intellect--it is certain that I neglected to prepare her sufficiently for a disappointment on entering my house. When I took her into the drawing-room--when she saw no one present but Madame Fosco, who was a stranger to her--she exhibited the most violent agitation; if she had scented danger in the air, as a dog scents the presence of some creature unseen, her alarm could not have displayed itself more suddenly and more causelessly. I interposed in vain. The fear from which she was suffering I might have soothed, but the serious heart-disease, under which she laboured, was beyond the reach of all moral palliatives. To my unspeakable horror she was seized with convulsions--a shock to the system, in her condition, which might have laid her dead at any moment at our feet.

The nearest doctor was sent for, and was told that "Lady Glyde" required his immediate services. To my infinite relief, he was a capable man. I represented my visitor to him as a person of weak intellect, and subject to delusions, and I arranged that no nurse but my wife should watch in the sick-room. The unhappy woman was too ill, however, to cause any anxiety about what she might say. The one dread which now oppressed me was the dread that the false Lady Glyde might die before the true Lady Glyde arrived in London.

I had written a note in the morning to Madame Rubelle, telling her to join me at her husband's house on the evening of Friday the 26th, with another note to Percival, warning him to show his wife her uncle's letter of invitation, to assert that Marian had gone on before her, and to despatch her to town by the midday train, on the 26th, also. On reflection I had felt the necessity, in Anne Catherick's state of health, of precipitating events, and of having Lady Glyde at my disposal earlier than I had originally contemplated. What fresh directions, in the terrible uncertainty of my position, could I now issue? I could do nothing but trust to chance and the doctor. My emotions expressed themselves in pathetic apostrophes, which I was just self-possessed enough to couple, in the hearing of other people, with the name of "Lady Glyde." In all other respects Fosco, on that memorable day, was Fosco shrouded in total eclipse.

She passed a bad night, she awoke worn out, but later in the day she revived amazingly. My elastic spirits revived with her. I could receive no answers from Percival and Madame Rubelle till the morning of the next day, the 26th. In anticipation of their following my directions, which, accident apart, I knew they would do, I went to secure a fly to fetch Lady Glyde from the railway, directing it to be at my house on the 26th, at two o'clock. After seeing the order entered in the book, I went on to arrange matters with Monsieur Rubelle. I also procured the services of two gentlemen who could furnish me with the necessary certificates of lunacy. One of them I knew personally--the other was known to Monsieur Rubelle. Both were men whose vigorous minds soared superior to narrow scruples--both were labouring under temporary embarrassments--both believed in ME.

It was past five o'clock in the afternoon before I returned from the performance of these duties. When I got back Anne Catherick was dead. Dead on the 25th, and Lady Glyde was not to arrive in London till the 26th!

I was stunned. Meditate on that. Fosco stunned!

It was too late to retrace our steps. Before my return the doctor had officiously undertaken to save me all trouble by registering the death, on the date when it happened, with his own hand. My grand scheme, unassailable hitherto, had its weak place now--no efforts on my part could alter the fatal event of the 25th. I turned manfully to the future. Percival's interests and mine being still at stake, nothing was left but to play the game through to the end. I recalled my impenetrable calm--and played it.

On the morning of the 26th Percival's letter reached me, announcing his wife's arrival by the midday train. Madame Rubelle also wrote to say she would follow in the evening. I started in the fly, leaving the false Lady Glyde dead in the house, to receive the true Lady Glyde on her arrival by the railway at three o'clock. Hidden under the seat of the carriage, I carried with me all the clothes Anne Catherick had worn on coming into my house--they were destined to assist the resurrection of the woman who was dead in the person of the woman who was living. What a situation! I suggest it to the rising romance writers of England. I offer it, as totally new, to the worn-out dramatists of France.

Lady Glyde was at the station. There was great crowding and confusion, and more delay than I liked (in case any of her friends had happened to be on the spot), in reclaiming her luggage. Her first questions, as we drove off, implored me to tell her news of her sister. I invented news of the most pacifying kind, assuring her that she was about to see her sister at my

house. My house, on this occasion only, was in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and was in the occupation of Monsieur Rubelle, who received us in the hall.

I took my visitor upstairs into a back room, the two medical gentlemen being there in waiting on the floor beneath to see the patient, and to give me their certificates. After quieting Lady Glyde by the necessary assurances about her sister, I introduced my friends separately to her presence. They performed the formalities of the occasion briefly, intelligently, conscientiously. I entered the room again as soon as they had left it, and at once precipitated events by a reference of the alarming kind to "Miss Halcombe's" state of health.

Results followed as I had anticipated. Lady Glyde became frightened, and turned faint. For the second time, and the last, I called Science to my assistance. A medicated glass of water and a medicated bottle of smelling-salts relieved her of all further embarrassment and alarm. Additional applications later in the evening procured her the inestimable blessing of a good night's rest. Madame Rubelle arrived in time to preside at Lady Glyde's toilet. Her own clothes were taken away from her at night, and Anne Catherick's were put on her in the morning, with the strictest regard to propriety, by the matronly hands of the good Rubelle. Throughout the day I kept our patient in a state of partially-suspended consciousness, until the dexterous assistance of my medical friends enabled me to procure the necessary order rather earlier than I had ventured to hope. That evening (the evening of the 27th) Madame Rubelle and I took our revived "Anne Catherick" to the Asylum. She was received with great surprise, but without suspicion, thanks to the order and certificates, to Percival's letter, to the likeness, to the clothes, and to the patient's own confused mental condition at the time. I returned at once to assist Madame Fosco in the preparations for the burial of the False "Lady Glyde," having the clothes and luggage of the true "Lady Glyde" in my possession. They were afterwards sent to Cumberland by the conveyance which was used for the funeral. I attended the funeral, with becoming dignity, attired in the deepest mourning.

My narrative of these remarkable events, written under equally remarkable circumstances, closes here. The minor precautions which I observed in communicating with Limmeridge House are already known, so is the magnificent success of my enterprise, so are the solid pecuniary results which followed it. I have to assert, with the whole force of my conviction, that the one weak place in my scheme would never have been found out if the one weak place in my heart had not been discovered first. Nothing but my fatal admiration for Marian restrained me from stepping in to my own

rescue when she effected her sister's escape. I ran the risk, and trusted in the complete destruction of Lady Glyde's identity. If either Marian or Mr. Hartright attempted to assert that identity, they would publicly expose themselves to the imputation of sustaining a rank deception, they would be distrusted and discredited accordingly, and they would therefore be powerless to place my interests or Percival's secret in jeopardy. I committed one error in trusting myself to such a blindfold calculation of chances as this. I committed another when Percival had paid the penalty of his own obstinacy and violence, by granting Lady Glyde a second reprieve from the mad-house, and allowing Mr. Hartright a second chance of escaping me. In brief, Fosco, at this serious crisis, was untrue to himself. Deplorable and uncharacteristic fault! Behold the cause, in my heart--behold, in the image of Marian Halcombe, the first and last weakness of Fosco's life!

At the ripe age of sixty, I make this unparalleled confession. Youths! I invoke your sympathy. Maidens! I claim your tears.

A word more, and the attention of the reader (concentrated breathlessly on myself) shall be released.

My own mental insight informs me that three inevitable questions will be asked here by persons of inquiring minds. They shall be stated--they shall be answered.

First question. What is the secret of Madame Fosco's unhesitating devotion of herself to the fulfilment of my boldest wishes, to the furtherance of my deepest plans? I might answer this by simply referring to my own character, and by asking, in my turn, Where, in the history of the world, has a man of my order ever been found without a woman in the background self-immolated on the altar of his life? But I remember that I am writing in England, I remember that I was married in England, and I ask if a woman's marriage obligations in this country provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand here on a supreme moral elevation, and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, Wives of England, for Madame Fosco!

Second question. If Anne Catherick had not died when she did, what should I have done? I should, in that case, have assisted worn-out Nature in finding permanent repose. I should have opened the doors of the Prison of Life, and have extended to the captive (incurably afflicted in mind and body both) a happy release.

Third question. On a calm revision of all the circumstances--Is my conduct worthy of any serious blame? Most emphatically, No! Have I not carefully avoided exposing myself to the odium of committing unnecessary crime? With my vast resources in chemistry, I might have taken Lady Glyde's life. At immense personal sacrifice I followed the dictates of my own ingenuity, my own humanity, my own caution, and took her identity instead. Judge me by what I might have done. How comparatively innocent! how indirectly virtuous I appear in what I really did!

I announced on beginning it that this narrative would be a remarkable document. It has entirely answered my expectations. Receive these fervid lines--my last legacy to the country I leave for ever. They are worthy of the occasion, and worthy of

FOSCO.