

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood Volume I

Thomas Preskett Prest

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VOLUME 1

-- "How graves give up their dead,
And how the night air hideous grows
With shrieks!"

Chapter I. MIDNIGHT. -- THE HAIL-STORM. -- THE DREADFUL VISITOR. -- THE VAMPYRE.

The solemn tones of an old cathedral clock have announced midnight -- the air is thick and heavy -- a strange, death like stillness pervades all nature. Like the ominous calm which precedes some more than usually terrific outbreak of the elements, they seem to have paused even in their ordinary fluctuations, to gather a terrific strength for the great effort. A faint peal of thunder now comes from far off. Like a signal gun for the battle of the winds to begin, it appeared to awaken them from their lethargy, and one awful, warring hurricane swept over a whole city, producing more devastation in the four or five minutes it lasted, than would a half century of ordinary phenomena.

It was as if some giant had blown upon some toy town, and scattered many of the buildings before the hot blast of his terrific breath; for as suddenly as that blast of wind had come did it cease, and all was as still and calm as before.

Sleepers awakened, and thought that what they had heard must be the confused chimera of a dream. They trembled and turned to sleep again.

All is still -- still as the very grave. Not a sound breaks the magic of repose. What is that -- a strange pattering noise, as of a million fairy feet? It is hail -- yes, a hail-storm has burst over the city. Leaves are dashed from the trees, mingled with small boughs; windows that lie most opposed to the direct fury of the pelting particles of ice are broken, and the rapt repose that before was so remarkable in its intensity, is exchanged for a noise which, in its accumulation, drowns every cry of surprise or consternation which here and there arose from persons who found their houses invaded by the storm.

Now and then, too, there would come a sudden gust of wind that in its strength, as it blew laterally, would, for a moment, hold millions of the hailstones suspended in mid air, but it was only to dash them with redoubled force in some new direction, where more mischief was to be done.

Oh, how the storm raged! Hail -- rain -- wind. It was, in very truth, an awful night.

* * * *

There was an antique chamber in an ancient house. Curious and quaint carvings adorn the walls, and the large chimney-piece is a curiosity of itself. The ceiling is low, and a large bay window, from roof to floor, looks to the west. The window is latticed, and filled with curiously painted glass and rich stained pieces, which send in a strange, yet beautiful light, when sun or moon shines into the apartment. There is but one portrait in that room, although the walls seem paneled for the express purpose of containing a series of pictures. That portrait is of a young man, with a pale face, a stately brow, and a strange expression about the eyes, which no one cared to look on twice.

There is a stately bed in that chamber, of carved walnut-wood is it made, rich in design and elaborate in execution; one of those works which owe their existence to the Elizabethan era. It is hung with heavy silken and damask furnishing; nodding feathers are at its corners -- covered with dust are they, and they lend a funereal aspect to the room. The floor is of polished oak.

God! how the hail dashes on the old bay window! Like an occasional discharge of mimic musketry, it comes clashing, beating, and cracking upon the small panes; but they resist it -- their small size saves them; the wind, the hail, the rain, expend their fury in vain.

The bed in that old chamber is occupied. A creature formed in all fashions of loveliness lies in a half sleep upon that ancient couch -- a girl young and beautiful as a spring morning. Her long hair has escaped from its confinement and streams over the blackened coverings of the bedstead; she has been restless in her sleep, for the clothing of the bed is in much confusion. One arm is over her head, the other hangs nearly off the side of the bed near to which she lies. A neck and bosom that would have formed a study for the rarest sculptor that ever Providence gave genius to, were half disclosed. She moaned slightly in her sleep, and once or twice the lips moved as if in prayer -- at least one might judge so, for the name of Him who suffered for all came once faintly from them.

She had endured much fatigue, and the storm dose not awaken her; but it can disturb the slumbers it does not

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possess the power to destroy entirely. The turmoil of the elements wakes the senses, although it cannot entirely break the repose they have lapsed into.

Oh, what a world of witchery was in that mouth, slightly parted, and exhibiting within the pearly teeth that glistened even in the faint light that came from that bay window. How sweetly the long silken eyelashes lay upon the cheek. Now she moves, and one shoulder is entirely visible — whiter, fairer than the spotless clothing of the bed on which she lies, is the smooth skin of that fair creature, just budding into womanhood, and in that transition state which presents to us all the charms of the girl — almost of the child, with the more matured beauty and gentleness of advancing years.

Was that lightning? Yes — an awful, vivid, terrifying flash — then a roaring peal of thunder, as if a thousand mountains were rolling one over the other in the blue vault of Heaven! Who sleeps now in that ancient city? Not one living soul. The dread trumpet of eternity could not more effectually have awakened any one.

The hail continues. The wind continues. The uproar of the elements seems at its height. Now she awakens — that beautiful girl on the antique bed; she opens those eyes of celestial blue, and a faint cry of alarm bursts from her lips. At least it is a cry which, amid the noise and turmoil without, sounds but faint and weak. She sits upon the bed and presses her hands upon her eyes. Heavens! what a wild torrent of wind, and rain, and hail! The thunder likewise seems intent upon awakening sufficient echoes to last until the next flash of forked lightning should again produce the wild concussion of the air. She murmurs a prayer — a prayer for those she loves best; the names of those dear to her gentle heart come from her lips; she weeps and prays; she thinks then of what devastation the storm must surely produce, and to the great God of Heaven she prays for all living things. Another flash — a wild, blue, bewildering flash of lightning streams across that bay window, for an instant bringing out every colour in it with terrible distinctness. A shriek bursts from the lips of the young girl, and then, with eyes fixed upon that window, which, in another moment, is all darkness, and with such an expression of terror upon her face as it had never before known, she trembled, and the perspiration of intense fear stood upon her brow.

"What — what was it?" she gasped; "real or delusion? Oh, God, what was it? A figure tall and gaunt, endeavouring from the outside to unclasp the window. I saw it. That flash of lightning revealed it to me. It stood the whole length of the window."

There was a lull of the wind. The hail was not falling so thickly — moreover, it now fell, what there was of it, straight, and yet a strange clattering sound came upon the glass of that long window. It could not be a delusion — she is awake, and she hears it. What can produce it? Another flash of lightning — another shriek — there could be now no delusion.

A tall figure is standing on the ledge immediately outside the long window. It is its finger-nails upon the glass that produces the sound so like the hail, now that the hail has ceased. Intense fear paralysed the limbs of the beautiful girl. That one shriek is all she can utter — with hand clasped, a face of marble, a heart beating so wildly in her bosom, that each moment it seems as if it would break its confines, eyes distended and fixed upon the window, she waits, froze with horror. The pattering and clattering of the nails continue. No word is spoken, and now she fancies she can trace the darker form of that figure against the window, and she can see the long arms moving to and fro, feeling for some mode of entrance. What strange light is that which now gradually creeps up into the air? red and terrible — brighter and brighter it grows. The lightning has set fire to a mill, and the reflection of the rapidly consuming building falls upon that long window. There can be no mistake. The figure is there, still feeling for an entrance, and clattering against the glass with its long nails, that appear as if the growth of many years had been untouched. She tries to scream again but a choking sensation comes over her, and she cannot. It is too dreadful — she tries to move — each limb seems weighted down by tons of lead — she can but in a hoarse faint whisper cry, —

"Help — help — help — help!"

And that one word she repeats like a person in a dream. The red glare of the fire continues. It throws up the tall gaunt figure in hideous relief against the long window. It shows, too, upon the one portrait that is in the chamber, and the portrait appears to fix its eyes upon the attempting intruder, while the flickering light from the fire makes it look fearfully lifelike. A small pane of glass is broken, and the form from without introduces a long gaunt hand, which seems utterly destitute of flesh. The fastening is removed, and one-half of the window, which opens like folding doors, is swung wide open upon its hinges.

And yet now she could not scream — she could not move. "Help! — help! — help!" was all she could say.

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But, oh, that look of terror that sat upon her face, it was dreadful — a look to haunt the memory for a life-time — a look to obtrude itself upon the happiest moments, and turn them to bitterness.

The figure turns half round, and the light falls upon its face. It is perfectly white — perfectly bloodless. The eyes look like polished tin; the lips are drawn back, and the principal feature next to those dreadful eyes is the teeth — the fearful looking teeth — projecting like those of some wild animal, hideously, glaringly white, and fang-like. It approaches the bed with a strange, gliding movement. It clashes together the long nails that literally appear to hang from the finger ends. No sound comes from its lips. Is she going mad — that young and beautiful girl exposed to so much terror? she has drawn up all her limbs; she cannot even now say help. The power of articulation is gone, but the power of movement has returned to her; she can draw herself slowly along to the other side of the bed from that towards which the hideous appearance is coming.

But her eyes are fascinated. The glance of a serpent could not have produced a greater effect upon her than did the fixed gaze of those awful, metallic-looking eyes that were bent down on her face. Crouching down so that the gigantic height was lost, and the horrible, protruding white face was the most prominent object, came on the figure. What was it? — what did it want there? — what made it look so hideous — so unlike an inhabitant of the earth, and yet be on it?

Now she has got to the verge of the bed, and the figure pauses. It seemed as if when it paused she lost the power to proceed. The clothing of the bed was now clutched in her hands with unconscious power. She drew her breath short and thick. Her bosom heaves, and her limbs tremble, yet she cannot withdraw her eyes from that marble-looking face. He holds her with his glittering eye.

The storm has ceased — all is still. The winds are hushed; the church clock proclaims the hour of one: a hissing sound comes from the throat of the hideous being, and he raises his long, gaunt arms — the lips move. He advances. The girl places one small foot on to the floor. She is unconsciously dragging the clothing with her. The door of the room is in that direction — can she reach it? Has she power to walk? — can she withdraw her eyes from the face of the intruder, and so break the hideous charm? God of Heaven! is it real, or some dream so like reality as to nearly overturn judgment forever?

The figure has paused again, and half on the bed and half out of it that young girl lies trembling. Her long hair streams across the entire width of the bed. As she has slowly moved along she has left it streaming across the pillows. The pause lasted about a minute — oh, what an age of agony. That minute was, indeed, enough for madness to do its full work in.

With a sudden rush that could not be foreseen — with a strange howling cry that was enough to awaken terror in every breast, the figure seized the long tresses of her hair, and twining them round his bony hands he held her to the bed. Then she screamed — Heaven granted her then power to scream. Shriek followed shriek in rapid succession. The bed-clothes fell in a heap by the side of the bed — she was dragged by her long silken hair completely on to it again. Her beautifully rounded limbs quivered with the agony of her soul. The glassy, horrible eyes of the figure ran over that angelic form with a hideous satisfaction — horrible profanation. He drags her head to the bed's edge. He forces it back by the long hair still entwined in his grasp. With a plunge he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth — a gush of blood, and a hideous sucking noise follows. The girl has swooned, and the vampyre is at his hideous repast!

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Chapter II. THE ALARM. -- THE PISTOL SHOT. -- THE PURSUIT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Lights flashed about the building, and various room doors opened; voices called one to the other. There was an universal stir and commotion among the inhabitants.

"Did you hear a scream, Harry?" asked a young man, half-dressed, as he walked into the chamber of another about his own age.

"I did -- where was it?"

"God knows. I dressed myself directly."

"All is still now."

"Yes; but unless I was dreaming there was a scream."

"We could not both dream there was. Where do you think it came from?"

"It burst so suddenly upon my ears that I cannot say."

There was a tap now at the door of the room where these young men were, and a female voice said, --

"For God's sake, get up!"

"We are up," said both the young men, appearing.

"Did you hear anything?"

"Yes, a scream."

"Oh, search the house -- search the house; where did it come from, can you tell?"

"Indeed we cannot, mother."

Another person now joined the party. He was a man of middle age, and, as he came up to them, he said, --

"Good God! what is the matter?"

Scarcely had the words passed his lips, than such a rapid succession of shrieks came upon their ears, that they felt absolutely stunned by them. The elderly lady, whom one of the young men had called mother, fainted, and would have fallen to the floor of the corridor in which they all stood, had she not been promptly supported by the last comer, who himself staggered, as those piercing cries came upon the night air. He, however, was the first to recover, for the young men seemed paralysed.

"Henry," he cried, "for God's sake support your mother. Can you doubt that these cries come from Flora's room?"

The young man mechanically supported his mother, and then the man who had just spoken darted back to his own bed-room, from whence he returned in a moment with a pair of pistols, and shouting, --

"Follow me who can!" he bounded across the corridor in the direction of the antique apartment, from whence the cries proceeded, but which were now hushed.

That house was built for strength, and the doors were all of oak, and of considerable thickness. Unhappily, they had fastenings within, so that when the man reached the chamber of her who so much required help, he was helpless, for the door was fast.

"Flora! Flora!" he cried; "Flora, speak!"

All was still.

"Good God!" he added; "we must force the door."

"I hear a strange noise within," said the young man, who trembled violently.

"And so do I. What does it sound like?"

"I scarcely know; but it closest resembles some animal eating, or sucking some liquid."

"What on earth can it be? Have you no weapon that will force the door? I shall go mad if I am kept here."

"I have," said the young man. "Wait here a moment."

He ran down the staircase, and presently returned with a small, but powerful, iron crow-bar.

"This will do," he said.

"It will, it will. -- Give it to me."

"Has she not spoken?"

"Not a word. My mind misgives me that something very dreadful must have happened to her."

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"And that odd noise!"

"Still goes on. Somehow, it curdles the very blood in my veins to hear it."

The man took the crow-bar, and with some difficulty succeeded in introducing it between the door and the side of the wall — still it required great strength to move it, but it did move, with a harsh, crackling sound.

"Push it!" cried he who was using the bar, "push the door at the same time."

The younger man did so. For a few moments the massive door resisted. Then, suddenly, something gave way with a loud snap — it was part of the lock, — and the door at once swung wide open.

How true it is that we measure time by the events which happen within a given space of it, rather than by its actual duration.

To those who were engaged in forcing open the door of the antique chamber, where slept the young girl whom they named Flora, each moment was swelled into an hour of agony; but, in reality, from the first moment of the alarm to that when the loud cracking noise heralded the destruction of the fastenings of the door, there had elapsed but very few minutes indeed.

"It opens — it opens," cried the young man.

"Another moment," said the stranger, as he still plied the crowbar — "another moment, and we shall have free ingress to the chamber. Be patient."

This stranger's name was Marchdale; and even as he spoke, he succeeded in throwing the massive door wide open, and clearing the passage to the chamber.

To rush in with a light in his hand was the work of a moment to the young man named Henry; but the very rapid progress he made into the apartment prevented him from observing accurately what it contained, for the wind that came in from the open window caught the flame of the candle, and although it did not actually extinguish it, it blew it so much on one side, that it was comparatively useless as a light.

"Flora — Flora!" he cried.

Then with a sudden bound something dashed from off the bed. The concussion against him was so sudden and so utterly unexpected, as well as so tremendously violent, that he was thrown down, and, in his fall, the light was fairly extinguished.

All was darkness, save a dull, reddish kind of light that now and then, from the nearly consumed mill in the immediate vicinity, came into the room. But by that light, dim, uncertain, and flickering as it was, some one was seen to make for the window.

Henry, although nearly stunned by his fall, saw a figure, gigantic in height, which nearly reached from the floor to the ceiling. The other young man, George, saw it, and Mr. Marchdale likewise saw it, as did the lady who had spoken to the two young men in the corridor when first the screams of the young girl awakened alarm in the breasts of all the inhabitants of that house.

The figure was about to pass out at the window which led to a kind of balcony, from whence there was an easy descent to a garden.

Before it passed out they each and all caught a glance of the side-face, and they saw that the lower part of it and the lips were dabbled in blood. They saw, too, one of those fearful-looking, shining, metallic eyes which presented so terrible an appearance of unearthly ferocity.

No wonder that for a moment a panic seized them all, which paralysed any exertions they might otherwise have made to detain that hideous form.

But Mr. Marchdale was a man of mature years; he had seen much in life, both in this and in foreign lands; and he, although astonished to the extent of being frightened, was much more likely to recover sooner than his younger companions, which, indeed, he did, and acted promptly enough.

"Don't rise, Henry," he cried. "Lie still."

Almost at the moment he uttered these words, he fired at the figure, which then occupied the window, as if it were a gigantic figure set in a frame.

The report was tremendous in that chamber, for the pistol was no toy weapon, but one made for actual service, and of sufficient length and bore of barrel to carry destruction along with the bullets that came from it.

"If that has missed its aim," said Mr. Marchdale, "I'll never pull trigger again."

As he spoke he dashed forward, and made a clutch at the figure he felt convinced he had shot.

The tall form turned upon him, and when he got a full view of the face, which he did at that moment, from the

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opportune circumstance of the lady returning at the instant with a light she had been to her own chamber to procure, even he, Marchdale, with all his courage, and that was great, and all his nervous energy, recoiled a step or two, and uttered the exclamation of, "Great God!"

That face was one never to be forgotten. It was hideously flushed with colour — the colour of fresh blood; the eyes had a savage and remarkable lustre whereas, before, they had looked like polished tin — they now wore a ten times brighter aspect, and flashes of light seemed to dart from them. The mouth was open, as if, from the natural formation of the countenance, the lips receded much from the large canine looking teeth.

A strange howling noise came from the throat of this monstrous figure, and it seemed upon the point of rushing upon Mr. Marchdale. Suddenly, then, as if some impulse had seized upon it, it uttered a wild and terrible shrieking kind of laugh; and then turning, dashed through the window, and in one instant disappeared from before the eyes of those who felt nearly annihilated by its fearful presence.

"God help us!" ejaculated Henry.

Mr. Marchdale drew a long breath, and then, giving a stamp on the floor, as if to recover himself from the state of agitation into which even he was thrown, he cried, —

"Be it what or who it may, I'll follow it."

"No — no — do not," cried the lady.

"I must, I will. Let who will come with me — I follow that dreadful form."

As he spoke, he took the road it took, and dashed through the window into the balcony.

"And we, too, George," exclaimed Henry; "we will follow Mr. Marchdale. This dreadful affair concerns us more nearly than it does him."

The lady who was the mother of these young men, and of the beautiful girl who had been so awfully visited, screamed aloud, and implored them to stay. But the voice of Mr. Marchdale was heard exclaiming aloud, —

"I see it — I see it; it makes for the wall."

They hesitated no longer, but at once rushed into the balcony, and from thence dropped into the garden.

The mother approached the bed-side of the insensible, perhaps murdered girl; she saw her, to all appearance, weltering in blood, and, overcome by her emotions, she fainted on the floor of the room.

When the two young men reached the garden, they found it much lighter than might have been fairly expected; for not only was the morning rapidly approaching, but the mill was still burning, and those mingled lights made almost every object plainly visible, except when deep shadows were thrown from some gigantic trees that had stood for centuries in that sweetly wooded spot. They heard the voice of Mr. Marchdale, as he cried, —

"There — there — towards the wall. There — there — God! how it bounds along."

The young men hastily dashed through a thicket in the direction from whence his voice sounded, and then they found him looking wild and terrified, and with something in his hand which looked like a portion of clothing.

"Which way, which way?" they both cried in a breath.

He leant heavily on the arm of George, as he pointed along a vista of trees, and said in a low voice, —

"God help us all. It is not human. Look there — look there — do you not see it?"

They looked in the direction he indicated. At the end of this vista was the wall of the garden. At that point it was full twelve feet in height, and as they looked, they saw the hideous, monstrous form they had traced from the chamber of their sister, making frantic efforts to clear the obstacle.

They saw it bound from the ground to the top of the wall, which it very nearly reached, and then each time it fell back again into the garden with such a dull, heavy sound, that the earth seemed to shake again with the concussion. They trembled — well indeed they might, and for some minutes they watched the figure making its fruitless efforts to leave the place.

"What — what is it?" whispered Henry, in hoarse accents. "God, what can it possibly be?"

"I know not," replied Mr. Marchdale. "I did seize it. It was cold and clammy like a corpse. It cannot be human."

"Not human?"

"Look at it now. It will surely escape now."

"No, no — we will not be terrified thus — there is Heaven above us. Come on, and, for dear Flora's sake, let us make an effort yet to seize this bold intruder."

"Take this pistol," said Marchdale. "It is the fellow of the one I fired. Try its efficacy."

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"He will be gone," exclaimed Henry, as at this moment, after many repeated attempts and fearful falls, the figure reached the top of the wall, and then hung by its long arms a moment or two, previous to dragging itself completely up.

The idea of the appearance, be it what it might, entirely escaping, seemed to nerve again Mr. Marchdale, and he, as well as the two young men, ran forward towards the wall. They got so close to the figure before it sprang down on the outer side of the wall, that to miss killing it with the bullet from the pistol was a matter of utter impossibility, unless wilfully.

Henry had the weapon, and he pointed it full at the tall form with steady aim. He pulled the trigger -- the explosion followed, and that the bullet did its office there could be no manner of doubt, for the figure gave a howling shriek, and fell headlong from the wall on the outside.

"I have shot him," cried Henry, "I have shot him."

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Chapter III. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE BODY. -- FLORA'S RECOVERY AND MADNESS. -- THE OFFER OF ASSISTANCE FROM SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

He is human!" cried Henry; "I have surely killed him."

"It would seem so," said M. Marchdale. "Let us now hurry round to the outside of the wall, and see where he lies."

This was at once agreed to, and the whole three of them made what expedition they could towards a gate which let into a paddock, across which they hurried, and soon found themselves clear of the garden wall, so that they could make way towards where they fully expected to find the body of him who had worn so unearthly an aspect, but who it would be an excessive relief to find was human.

So hurried was the progress they made, that it was scarcely possible to exchange many words as they went; a kind of breathless anxiety was upon them, and in the speed they disregarded every obstacle, which would, at any other time, have probably prevented them from taking the direct road they sought.

It was difficult on the outside of the wall to say exactly which was the precise spot which it might be supposed the body had fallen on; but, by following the wall its entire length, surely they would come upon it.

They did so; but, to their surprise, they got from its commencement to its further extremity without finding any dead body, or even any symptoms of one having lain there.

At some parts close to the wall there grew a kind of heath, and, consequently, the traces of blood would be lost among it, if it so happened that at the precise spot at which the strange being had seemed to topple over, such vegetation had existed. This was to be ascertained; but now, after traversing the whole length of the wall twice, they came to a halt, and looked wonderingly in each other's faces.

"There is nothing here," said Harry.

"Nothing," added his brother.

"It could not have been a delusion," at length said Mr. Marchdale, with a shudder.

"A delusion?" exclaimed the brothers. "That is not possible; we all saw it."

"Then what terrible explanation can we give?"

"By heavens! I know not," exclaimed Henry. "This adventure surpasses all belief, and but for the great interest we have in it, I should regard it with a world of curiosity."

"It is too dreadful," said George; "for God's sake, Henry, let us return to ascertain if poor Flora is killed."

"My senses," said Henry, "were all so much absorbed in gazing at that horrible form, that I never once looked towards her further than to see that she was, to appearance, dead. God help her! poor -- poor, beautiful Flora. This is, indeed, a sad, sad fate for you to come to. Flora -- Flora -- "

"Do not weep, Henry," said George. "Rather let us now hasten home, where we may find that tears are premature. She may yet be living and restored to us."

"And," said Mr. Marchdale, "she may be able to give us some account of this dreadful visitation."

"True -- true," exclaimed Henry; "we will hasten home."

They now turned their steps homewards, and as they went they much blamed themselves for all leaving home together, and with terror pictured what might occur in their absence to those who were now totally unprotected.

"It was a rash impulse of us all to come in pursuit of this dreadful figure," remarked Mr. Marchdale; "but do not torment yourself, Henry. There may be no reason for your fears."

At the pace they went, they very soon reached the ancient house; and when they came in sight of it, they saw lights flashing from the windows, and the shadows of faces moving to and fro, indicating that the whole household was up, and in a state of alarm.

Henry, after some trouble, got the hall door opened by a terrified servant, who was trembling so much that she could scarcely hold the light she had with her.

"Speak at once, Martha," said Henry. "Is Flora living?"

"Yes; but -- "

"Enough -- enough! Thank God she lives; where is she now?"

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"In her own room, Master Henry. Oh, dear — oh, dear, what will become of us all?"

Henry rushed up the staircase, followed by George and Mr. Marchdale, nor paused he once until he reached the room of his sister.

"Mother," he said, before he crossed the threshold, "are you here?"

"I am, my dear — I am. Come in, pray come in, and speak to Flora."

"Come in, Mr. Marchdale," said Henry — "come in; we will make no stranger of you."

They all entered the room.

Several lights had been now brought into that antique chamber, and, in addition to the mother of the beautiful girl who had been so fearfully visited, there were two female domestics, who appeared to be in the greatest possible fright, for they could render no assistance whatever to anybody.

The tears were streaming down the mother's face, and the moment she saw Mr. Marchdale, she clung to his arm, evidently unconscious of what she was about, and exclaimed, —

"Oh, what is this that has happened — what is this? Tell me, Marchdale! Robert Marchdale, you whom I have known even from my childhood, you will not deceive me. Tell me the meaning of all this?"

"I cannot," he said, in a tone of much emotion. "As God is my judge, I am as much puzzled and amazed at the scene that has taken place here to-night as you can be."

The mother wrung her hands and wept.

"It was the storm that first awakened me," added Marchdale; "and then I heard a scream."

The brothers tremblingly approached the bed. Flora was placed in a sitting, half-reclining posture, propped up by pillows. She was quite insensible, and her face was fearfully pale; while that she breathed at all could be but very faintly seen. On some of her clothing, about the neck, were spots of blood, and she looked more like one who had suffered some long and grievous illness, than a young girl in the prime of life and in the most robust health, as she had been on the day previous to the strange scene we have recorded.

"Does she sleep?" said Henry, as a tear fell from his eyes upon her pallid cheek.

"No," replied Mr. Marchdale. "This is a swoon, from which we must recover her."

Active measures were now adopted to restore the languid circulation, and, after persevering in them for some time, they had the satisfaction of seeing her open her eyes.

Her first act upon consciousness returning, however, was to utter a loud shriek, and it was not until Henry implored her to look around her, and see that she was surrounded by none but friendly faces, that she would venture again to open her eyes, and look timidly from one to the other. Then she shuddered, and burst into tears as she said, —

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy upon me — Heaven, have mercy upon me and save me from that dreadful form."

"There is no one here, Flora," said Mr. Marchdale, "but those who love you, and who, in defence of you, if needs were would lay down their lives."

"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"You have been terrified. But tell us distinctly what has happened? You are quite safe now."

She trembled so violently that Mr. Marchdale recommended that some stimulant should be given to her, and she was persuaded, although not without considerable difficulty, to swallow a small portion of some wine from a cup. There could be no doubt but that the stimulating effect of the wine was beneficial, for a slight accession of colour visited her cheeks, and she spoke in a firmer tone as she said, —

"Do not leave me. Oh, do not leave me, any of you. I shall die if left alone now. Oh, save me — save me. That horrible form! That fearful face!"

"Tell us how it happened, dear Flora?" said Henry.

"No — no — no," she said, "I do not think I shall ever sleep again."

"Say not so; you will be more composed in a few hours, and then you can tell us what has occurred."

"I will tell you now. I will tell you now."

She placed her hands over her face for a moment, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, and then she added,

—

"I was awakened by the storm, and I saw that terrible apparition at the window. I think I screamed, but I could not fly. Oh, God! I could not fly. It came — it seized me by the hair. I know no more. I know no more."

She passed her hand across her neck several times, and Mr. Marchdale said, in an anxious voice, —

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"You seem, Flora, to have hurt your neck — there is a wound."

"A wound!" said the mother, and she brought a light close to the bed, where all saw on the side of Flora's neck a small punctured wound; or, rather two, for there was one a little distance from the other.

It was from these wounds the blood had come which was observable upon her night clothing.

"How came these wounds?" said Henry.

"I do not know," she replied. "I feel very faint and weak, as if I had almost bled to death."

"You cannot have done so, dear Flora, for there are not above half-a-dozen spots of blood to be seen at all."

Mr. Marchdale leaned against the carved head of the bed for support, and he uttered a deep groan. All eyes were turned upon him, and Henry said, in a voice of the most anxious inquiry, —

"Have you something to say, Mr. Marchdale, which will throw some light upon this affair."

"No, no, no, nothing!" cried Mr. Marchdale, rousing himself at once from the appearance of depression that had come over him. "I have nothing to say, but that I think Flora had better get some sleep if she can."

"No sleep — no sleep for me," again screamed Flora. "Dare I be alone to sleep?"

"But you shall not be alone, dear Flora," said Henry. "I will sit by your bedside and watch you."

She took his hand in both hers, and while the tears chased each other down her cheeks, she said, —

"Promise me, Henry, by all your hopes of Heaven, you will not leave me."

"I promise."

She gently laid herself down, with a deep sigh, and closed her eyes.

"She is weak, and will sleep long," said Mr. Marchdale.

"You sigh," said Henry. "Some fearful thoughts, I feel certain, oppress your heart."

"Hush — hush!" said Mr. Marchdale, as he pointed to Flora. "Hush! not here — not here."

"I understand," said Henry.

"Let her sleep."

There was a silence of some few minutes' duration. Flora had dropped into a deep slumber. That silence was first broken by George, who said, —

"Mr. Marchdale, look at that portrait."

He pointed to the portrait in the frame to which we have alluded, and the moment Marchdale looked at it he sunk into a chair as he exclaimed, —

"Gracious Heaven, how like!"

"It is — it is," said Henry. "Those eyes — "

"And see the contour of the countenance, and the strange shape of the mouth."

"Exact — exact."

"That picture shall be moved from here. The sight of it is at once sufficient to awaken all her former terrors in poor Flora's brain if she should chance to awaken and cast her eyes suddenly upon it."

"And is it so like him who came here?" said the mother.

"It is the very man himself," said Mr. Marchdale. "I have not been in this house long enough to ask any of you whose portrait that may be?"

"It is," said Henry, "the portrait of Sir Runnagate Bannerworth, an ancestor of ours, who first, by his vices, gave the great blow to the family prosperity."

"Indeed. How long ago?"

"About ninety years."

"Ninety years. 'Tis a long while — ninety years."

"You muse upon it."

"No, no. I do wish, and yet I dread — "

"What?"

"To say something to you all. But not here — not here. We will hold a consultation on this matter to-morrow. Not now — not now."

"The daylight is coming quickly on," said Henry; "I shall keep my sacred promise of not moving from this room until Flora awakens; but there can be no occasion for the detention of any of you. One is sufficient here. Go all of you, and endeavour to procure what rest you can."

"I will fetch you my powder-flask and bullets," said Mr. Marchdale; "and you can, if you please, reload the

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pistols. In about two hours more it will be broad daylight."

This arrangement was adopted. Henry did reload the pistols, and placed them on a table by the side of the bed, ready for immediate action, and then, as Flora was sleeping soundly, all left the room but himself.

Mrs. Bannerworth was the last to do so. She would have remained, but for the earnest solicitation of Henry, that she would endeavour to get some sleep to make up for her broken night's repose, and she was indeed so broken down by her alarm on Flora's account, that she had not power to resist, but with tears flowing from her eyes, she sought her own chamber.

And now the calmness of the night resumed its sway in that evil-fated mansion; and although no one really slept but Flora, all were still. Busy thought kept every one else wakeful. It was a mockery to lie down at all, and Henry, full of strange and painful feelings as he was, preferred his present position to the anxiety and apprehension on Flora's account which he knew he should feel if she were not within the sphere of his own observation, and she slept as soundly as some gentle infant tired of its playmates and its sports.

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Chapter IV. THE MORNING. -- THE CONSULTATION. -- THE FEARFUL SUGGESTION.

What wonderfully different impressions and feelings, with regard to the same circumstances, come across the mind in the broad, clear, and beautiful light of day to what haunt the imagination, and often render the judgment almost incapable of action, when the heavy shadow of night is upon all things.

There must be a downright physical reason for this effect -- it is so remarkable and so universal. It seems that the sun's rays so completely alter and modify the constitution of the atmosphere, that it produces, as we inhale it, a wonderfully different effect upon the nerves of the human subject.

We can account for this phenomenon in no other way. Perhaps never in his life had he, Henry Bannerworth, felt so strongly this transition of feeling as he now felt it, when the beautiful daylight gradually dawned upon him, as he kept his lonely watch by the bedside of his slumbering sister.

The watch had been a perfectly undisturbed one. Not the least sight or sound or any intrusion had reached his senses. All had been as still as the very grave.

And yet while the night lasted, and he was more indebted to the rays of the candle, which he had placed upon a shelf, for the power to distinguish objects than to light of the morning, a thousand uneasy and strange sensations had found a home in his agitated bosom.

He looked so many times at the portrait which was in the panel that at length he felt an undefined sensation of terror creep over him whenever he took his eyes off it.

He tried to keep himself from looking at it, but he found it vain, so he adopted what, perhaps, was certainly the wisest, best plan, namely, to look at it continually.

He shifted his chair so that he could gaze upon it without any effort, and he placed the candle so that a faint light was thrown upon it, and there he sat, a prey to many conflicting and uncomfortable feelings, until the daylight began to make the candle flame look dull and sickly.

Solution for the events of the night he could find none. He racked his imagination in vain to find some means, however vague, of endeavouring to account for what occurred, and still he was at fault. All was to him wrapped in the gloom of the most profound mystery.

And how strangely, too, the eyes of that portrait appeared to look upon him -- as if instinct with life, and as if the head to which they belonged was busy in endeavouring to find out the secret communings of his soul. It was wonderfully well executed that portrait; so life-like, that the very features seemed to move as you gazed upon them.

"It shall be removed," said Henry. "I would remove it now, but that it seems absolutely painted on the panel, and I should awake Flora in any attempt to do so."

He arose and ascertained that such was the case, and that it would require a workman, with proper tools adapted to the job, to remove the portrait.

"True," he said, "I might now destroy it, but it is a pity to obscure a work of such rare art as this is; I should blame myself if I were. It shall be removed to some other room of the house, however."

Then, all of a sudden, it struck Henry how foolish it would be to remove the portrait from the wall of a room which, in all likelihood, after that night, would be uninhabited; for it was not probable that Flora would choose again to inhabit a chamber in which she had gone through so much terror.

"It can be left where it is," he said, "and we can fasten up, if we please, even the very door of this room, so that no one need trouble themselves any further about it."

The morning was now coming fast, and just as Henry thought he would partially draw a blind across the window, in order to shield from the direct rays of the sun the eyes of Flora, she awoke.

"Help -- help!" she cried, and Henry was by her side in a moment.

"You are safe, Flora -- you are safe," he said.

"Where is it now?" she said.

"What -- what, dear Flora?"

"The dreadful apparition. Oh, what have I done to be made thus perpetually miserable?"

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"Think no more of it, Flora."

"I must think. My brain is on fire! A million of strange eyes seem to be gazing on me."

"Great Heaven! she raves," said Henry.

"Hark -- hark -- hark! He comes on the wings of the storm. Oh, it is most horrible -- horrible!"

Henry rang the bell, but not sufficiently loudly to create any alarm. The sound reached the waking ear of the mother, who in a few moments was in the room.

"She has awakened," said Henry, "and has spoken, but she seems to me to wander in her discourse. For God's sake, soothe her, and try to bring her mind round to its usual state."

"I will, Henry -- I will."

"And I think mother, if you were to get her out of this room, and into some other chamber as far removed from this one as possible, it would tend to withdraw her mind from what has occurred."

"Yes; it shall be done. Oh, Henry, what was it -- what do you think it was?"

"I am lost in a sea of wild conjecture. I can form no conclusion; where is Mr. Marchdale?"

"I believe in his chamber."

"Then I will go and consult with him."

Henry proceeded at once to the chamber, which was, as he knew, occupied by Mr. Marchdale; and as he crossed the corridor, he could not but pause a moment to glance from a window at the face of nature.

As is often the case, the terrific storm of the preceding evening had cleared the air, and rendered it deliciously invigorating and lifelike. The weather had been dull, and there had been for some days a certain heaviness in the atmosphere, which was now entirely removed.

The morning sun was shining with uncommon brilliancy, birds were singing in every tree and on every bush; so pleasant, so spirit-stirring, health-giving a morning, seldom had he seen. And the effect upon his spirits was great, although not altogether what it might have been, had all gone on as it usually was in the habit of doing at that house. The ordinary little casualties of evil fortune had certainly from time to time, in the shape of illness, and one thing or another, attacked the family of the Bannerworths in common with every other family, but here suddenly had arisen a something at once terrible and inexplicable.

He found Mr. Marchdale up and dressed, and apparently in deep and anxious thought. The moment he saw Henry, he said, --

"Flora is awake, I presume?"

"Yes, but her mind appears to be much disturbed."

"From bodily weakness, I dare say."

"But why should she be bodily weak? she was strong and well, ay, as well as she could ever be in all her life. The glow of youth and health was on her cheeks. It is possible that, in the course of one night, she should become bodily weak to such an extent?"

"Henry," said Mr. Marchdale, sadly, "sit down. I am not, as you know, a superstitious man."

"You certainly are not."

"And yet, I never in all my life was so absolutely staggered as I have been by the occurrences of to-night."

"Say on."

"There is a frightful, a hideous solution for them; one which every consideration will tend to add strength to, one which I tremble to name now, although, yesterday, at this hour, I should have laughed it to scorn."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it is so. Tell no one that which I am about to say to you. Let the dreadful suggestion remain with ourselves alone, Henry Bannerworth."

"I -- I am lost in wonder."

"You promise me?"

"What -- what?"

"That you will not repeat my opinion to any one."

"I do."

"On your honour."

"On my honour, I promise."

Mr. Marchdale rose, and proceeding to the door, he looked out to see that there were no listeners near. Having

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ascertained then that they were quite alone, he returned, and drawing a chair close to that on which Henry sat, he said, —

"Henry, have you never heard of a strange and dreadful superstition which, in some countries, is extremely rife, by which it is supposed that there are beings who never die?"

"Never die!"

"Never. In a word, Henry, have you never heard of — of — I dread to pronounce the word."

"Speak it. God of Heaven! let me hear it."

"A vampyre!"

Henry sprung to his feet. His whole frame quivered with emotion; the drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, as, in a strange, hoarse voice, he repeated the words, —

"A vampyre!"

"Even so; one who has to renew a dreadful existence by human blood — one who eats not and drinks not as other men — a vampyre."

Henry dropped into his seat, and uttered a deep groan of the most exquisite anguish.

"I could echo that groan," said Marchdale, "but that I am so thoroughly bewildered I know not what to think."

"Good God — good God!"

"Do not too readily yield to belief in so dreadful a supposition, I pray you."

"Yield belief!" exclaimed Henry, as he rose, and lifted up one of his hands above his head. "No; by Heaven, and the great God of all, who there rules, I will not easily believe aught so awful and so monstrous."

"I applaud your sentiment, Henry; not willingly would I deliver up myself to so frightful a belief — it is too horrible. I merely have told you of that which you saw was on my mind. You have surely before heard of such things."

"I have — I have."

"I much marvel, then, that the supposition did not occur to you, Henry."

"It did not — it did not, Marchdale. It — it was too dreadful, I suppose, to find a home in my heart. Oh! Flora, Flora, if this horrible idea should once occur to you, reason cannot, I am quite sure, uphold you against it."

"Let no one presume to insinuate it to her, Henry. I would not have it mentioned to her for worlds."

"Nor I — nor I. Good God! I shudder at the very thought — the mere possibility; but there is no possibility, there can be none. I will not believe it."

"Nor I."

"No; by Heaven's justice, goodness, grace and mercy, I will not believe it."

"'Tis well sworn, Henry; and now, discarding the supposition that Flora has been visited by a vampyre, let us seriously set about endeavouring, if we can, to account for what has happened in this house."

"I — I cannot now."

"Nay, let us examine the matter; if we can find any natural explanation, let us cling to it, Henry, as the sheet-anchor of our very souls."

"Do you think. You are fertile in expedients. Do you think, Marchdale; and, for Heaven's sake, and for the sake of our worn peace, find out some other way of accounting for what has happened, than the hideous one you have suggested."

"And yet my pistol bullets hurt him not; and he has left the tokens of his presence on the neck of Flora."

"Peace, oh! peace. Do not, I pray you, accumulate reasons why I should receive such a dismal, awful superstition. Oh, do not, Marchdale, as you love me!"

"You know my attachment to you," said Marchdale, "is sincere; and yet, Heaven help us!"

His voice was broken by grief as he spoke, and he turned aside his head to hide the bursting tears that would, despite all his efforts, show themselves in his eyes.

"Marchdale," added Henry, after a pause of some moments' duration, "I will sit up to-night with my sister."

"Do — do!"

"Think you there is a chance it may come again?"

"I cannot — I dare not speculate upon the coming of so dreadful a visitor, Henry; but I will hold watch with you most willingly."

"You will, Marchdale?"

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"My hand upon it. Come what dangers may, I will share them with you, Henry."

"A thousand thanks. Say nothing, then, to George of what we have been talking about. He is of a highly susceptible nature and the very idea of such a thing would kill him."

"I will; be mute. Remove your sister to some other chamber, let me beg of you, Henry; the one she now inhabits will always be suggestive of horrible thoughts."

"I will; and that dreadful-looking portrait, with its perfect likeness to him who came last night."

"Perfect indeed. Do you intend to remove it?"

"I do not. I thought of doing so; but it is actually on the panel in the wall, and I would not willingly destroy it, and it may as well remain where it is in that chamber, which I can readily now believe will become henceforward a deserted one in this house."

"It may well become such."

"Who comes here? I hear a step."

There was a tap at the door at this moment, and George made his appearance in answer to the summons to come in. He looked pale and ill; his face betrayed how much he had mentally suffered during the night, and almost directly he got into the bed-chamber he said, --

"I shall, I am sure, be censured by you both for what I am going to say; but I cannot help saying it, nevertheless, for to keep it to myself would destroy me."

"Good God, George! what is it?" said Mr. Marchdale.

"Speak it out!" said Henry.

"I have been thinking of what has occurred here, and the result of that thought has been one of the wildest suppositions that ever I thought I should have to entertain. Have you never heard of a vampyre?"

Henry sighed deeply, and Marchdale was silent.

"I say a vampyre," added George, with much excitement in his manner. "It is a fearful, a horrible supposition; but our poor, dear Flora has been visited by a vampyre, and I shall go completely mad!"

He sat down, and covering his face with his hands, he wept bitterly and abundantly.

"George," said Henry, when he saw that the frantic grief had in some measure abated -- "be calm, George, and endeavour to listen to me."

"I hear, Henry."

"Well, then, do not suppose that you are the only one in this house to whom so dreadful a superstition has occurred."

"Not the only one?"

"No; it has occurred to Mr. Marchdale also."

"Gracious Heaven!"

"He mentioned it to me; but we have both agreed to repudiate it with horror."

"To -- repudiate -- it?"

"Yes, George."

"And yet -- and yet -- "

"Hush, hush! I know what you would say. You would tell us that our repudiation of it cannot affect the fact. Of that we are aware; but yet will we disbelieve that which a belief in would be enough to drive us mad."

"What do you intend to do?"

"To keep this supposition to ourselves, in the first place; to guard it most zealously from the ears of Flora."

"Do you think she has never heard of vampyres?"

"I never heard her mention that in all her reading she had gathered even a hint of such a fearful superstition. If she has, we must be guided by circumstances, and do the best we can."

"Pray Heaven she may not!"

"Amen to that prayer, George," said Henry. "Mr. Marchdale and I intend to keep watch over Flora to-night."

"May not I join you?"

"Your health, dear George, will not permit you to engage in such matters. Do you seek your natural repose, and leave it to us to do the best we can in this most fearful and terrible emergency."

"As you please, brother, and as you please, Mr. Marchdale. I know I am a frail reed, and my belief is that this affair will kill me quite. The truth is, I am horrified -- utterly and frightfully horrified. Like my poor, dear sister,

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I do not believe I shall ever sleep again."

"Do not fancy that, George," said Marchdale. "You very much add to the uneasiness which must be you poor mother's portion, by allowing this circumstance to so much affect you. You will know her affection for you all, and let me therefore, as a very old friend of hers, entreat you to wear as cheerful an aspect as you can in her presence."

"For once in my life," said George, sadly, "I will, to my dear mother, endeavour to play the hypocrite."

"Do so," said Henry. "The motive will sanction any such deceit as that, George, be assured."

The day wore on, and Poor Flora remained in a very precarious situation. It was not until mid-day that Henry made up his mind he would call in a medical gentleman to her, and then rode to the neighbouring market-town, where he knew an extremely intelligent practitioner resided. This gentleman Henry resolved upon, under a promise of secrecy, making a confidant of; but, long before he reached him, he found he might well dispense with the promise of secrecy.

He had never thought, so engaged had he been with other matters, that the servants were cognizant of the whole affair, and that from them he had no expectation of being able to keep the whole story in all its details. Of course such an opportunity for tale-bearing and gossiping was not likely to be lost; and while Henry was thinking over how he had better act in the matter, the news that Flora Bannerworth had been visited in the night by a vampyre — for the servants named the visitation such at once — was spreading all over the county.

As he rode along, Henry met a gentleman on horseback who belonged to the county, and who, reining in his steed, said to him,

"Good morning, Mr. Bannerworth."

"Good morning," responded Henry, and he would have ridden on, but the gentleman added, —

"Excuse me for interrupting you, sir; but what is the strange story that is in everybody's mouth about a vampyre?"

Henry nearly fell off his horse, he was so much astonished, and, wheeling the animal around, he said, —

"In everybody's mouth!"

"Yes; I have heard it from at least a dozen persons."

"You surprise me."

"Is it untrue? Of course I am not so absurd as really to believe about the vampyre; but is there no foundation at all to it? We generally find that at the bottom of these common reports there is a something around which, as a nucleus, the whole has formed."

"My sister is unwell."

"Ah, and that's all. It really is too bad, now."

"We had a visitor last night."

"A thief, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes — I believe a thief. I do believe it was a thief, and she was terrified."

"Of course, and upon such a thing is grafted a story of a vampyre, and the marks of his teeth being upon her neck, and all the circumstantial particulars."

"Yes, yes."

"Good morning, Mr. Bannerworth."

Henry bade the gentleman good morning, and much vexed at the publicity which the affair had already obtained, he set spurs to his horse, determined that he would speak to no one else upon so uncomfortable a theme. Several attempts were made to stop him, but he only waved his hand and trotted on, nor did he pause in his speed till he reached the door of Mr. Chillingworth, the medical man whom he intended to consult.

Henry knew that at such a time he would be at home, which was the case, and he was soon closeted with the man of drugs. Henry begged his patient hearing, which being accorded, he related to him at full length what had happened, not omitting, to the best of his remembrance, any one particular. When he had concluded his narration the doctor shifted his position several times, and then said, —

"That's all?"

"Yes — and enough too."

"More than enough, I should say, my young friend. You astonish me."

"Can you form any supposition, sir, on the subject?"

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"Not just now. What is your own idea?"

"I cannot be said to have one about it. It is too absurd to tell you that my brother George is impressed with a belief a vampyre has visited the house."

"I never in all my life heard a more circumstantial narrative in favour of so hideous a superstition."

"Well, but you cannot believe —"

"Believe what?"

"That the dead can come to life again, and by such a process keep up vitality."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why do you ask me such questions?"

"But the glaring facts of the case?"

"I don't care if they were ten times more glaring, I won't believe it. I would rather believe you were all mad, the whole family of you — that at the full of the moon you all were a little cracked."

"And so would I."

"You go home now, and I will call and see your sister in the course of two hours. Something may turn up yet, to throw some new light on this strange subject."

With this understanding Henry went home, and he took care to ride as fast as before, in order to avoid questions, so that he got back to his old ancestral home without going through the disagreeable ordeal of having to explain to any one what had disturbed the peace of it.

When Henry reached his home, he found that the evening was rapidly coming on, and before he could permit himself to think upon any other subject, he inquired how his terrified sister had passed the hours during his absence.

He found that but little improvement had taken place in her, and that she had occasionally slept, but to awaken and speak incoherently, as if the shock she had received had had some serious effect upon her nerves. He repaired at once to her room, and finding that she was awake, he leaned over her, and spoke tenderly to her.

"Flora," he said, "dear Flora, you are better now?"

"Harry, is that you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, tell me what has happened?"

"Have you not a recollection, Flora?"

"Yes, yes, Henry; but what was it? They none of them will tell me what it was, Henry."

"Be calm, dear. No doubt some attempt to rob the house."

"Think you so?"

"Yes; the bay window was particularly adapted for such a purpose; but now that you are removed here to this room, you will be able to rest in peace."

"I shall die of terror, Henry. Even now those eyes are glaring on me so hideously. Oh, it is fearful — it is very fearful, Henry. Do you not pity me, and no one will promise to remain with me at night."

"Indeed, Flora, you are mistaken, for I intend to sit by your bedside armed, and so preserve you from all harm."

She clutched his hand eagerly, as she said, —

"You will, Henry. You will, and not think it too much trouble, dear Henry."

"It can be no trouble, Flora."

"Then I shall rest in peace, for I know that the dreadful vampyre cannot come to me when you are by."

"The what, Flora?"

"The vampyre, Henry. It was a vampyre."

"Good God, who told you so?"

"No one. I have read of them in the book of travels in Norway, which Mr. Marchdale lent us all."

"Alas, alas!" groaned Henry. "Discard, I pray you, such a thought from your mind."

"Can we discard thoughts. What power have we but from the mind, which is ourselves?"

"True, true."

"Hark, what noise is that? I thought I heard a noise. Henry, when you go, ring for some one first. Was there

not a noise?"

"The accidental shutting of some door, dear."

"Was it that?"

"It was."

"Then I am relieved. Henry, I sometimes fancy I am in the tomb, and that some one is feasting on my flesh. They do say, too, that those who in life have been bled by a vampyre, become themselves vampyres, and have the same horrible taste for blood as those before them. Is it not horrible?"

"You only vex yourself with such thoughts, Flora. Mr. Chillingworth is coming to see you."

"Can he minister to a mind diseased?"

"But yours is not, Flora. Your mind is healthful, and so, although his power extends not so far, we will thank Heaven, dear Flora, that you need it not."

She sighed deeply, and she said, —

"Heaven help me! I know not, Henry. The dreadful being held on to my hair. I must have it all taken off. I tried to get away, but it dragged me back — a brutal thing it was. Oh, then at that moment, Henry I felt as if something strange took place in my brain, and that I was going mad! I saw those glazed eyes close to mine — I felt a hot, pestiferous breath upon my face — help — help!"

"Hush! my Flora, hush! Look at me."

"I am calm again. It fixed its teeth in my throat. Did I faint away?"

"You did, dear; but let me pray you to refer all this to imagination; or at least the greater part of it."

"But you saw it."

"Yes — "

"All saw it."

"We all saw some man — a housebreaker — it must have been some housebreaker. What more easy, you know, dear Flora, than to assume some such disguise?"

"Was anything stolen?"

"Not that I know of; but there was an alarm, you know."

Flora shook her head, as she said, in a low voice, —

"That which came here was more than mortal. Oh, Henry, if it had but killed me, now I had been happy; but I cannot live — I hear it breathing now."

"Talk of something else, dear Flora," said the much distressed Henry; "you will make yourself much worse, if you indulge yourself in these strange fancies."

"Oh, that they were but fancies!"

"They are, believe me."

"There is a strange confusion in my brain, and sleep comes over me suddenly, when I least expect it. Henry, Henry, what I was, I shall never, never be again."

"Say not so. All this will pass away like a dream, and leave so faint a trace upon your memory, that the time will come when you will wonder it ever made so deep an impression on your mind."

"You utter these words, Henry," she said, "but they do not come from your heart. Ah, no, no, no! Who comes?"

The door was opened by Mrs. Bannerworth, who said, —

"It is only me, my dear. Henry, here is Dr. Chillingworth in the dining-room."

Henry turned to Flora, saying, —

"You will see him, dear Flora? You know Mr. Chillingworth well."

"Yes, Henry, yes, I will see him, or who-ever you please."

"Shew Mr. Chillingworth up," said Henry to the servant.

In a few moments the medical man was in the room, and he at once approached the bedside to speak to Flora, upon whose pale countenance he looked with evident interest, while at the same time it seemed mingled with a painful feeling — at least so his own face indicated.

"Well, Miss Bannerworth," he said, "what is all this I hear about an ugly dream you have had?"

"A dream?" said Flora, as she fixed her beautiful eyes on his face.

"Yes, as I understand."

She shuddered and was silent.

"Was it not a dream, then?" added Mr. Chillingworth.

She wrung her hands, and in a voice of extreme anguish and pathos, said, --

"Would it were a dream -- would it were a dream! Oh, if any one could but convince me it was a dream!"

"Well, will you tell me what it was?"

"Yes, sir, it was a vampyre."

Mr. Chillingworth glanced at Henry, as he said, in reply to Flora's words, --

"I suppose that is, after all, another name, Flora, for the nightmare?"

"No -- no -- no!"

"Do you really, then, persist in believing anything so absurd, Miss Bannerworth?"

"What can I say to the evidence of my own senses?" she replied. "I saw it, Henry saw it, George saw, Mr. Marchdale, my mother -- all saw it. We could not all be at the same time the victims of the same delusion."

"How faintly you speak."

"I am very faint and ill."

"Indeed. What wound is that on your neck?"

A wild expression came over the face of Flora; a spasmodic action of the muscles, accompanied with a shuddering, as if a sudden chill had come over the whole mass of blood took place, and she said, --

"It is the mark left by the teeth of the vampyre."

The smile was a forced one upon the face of Mr. Chillingworth.

"Draw up the blind of the window, Mr. Henry," he said, "and let me examine this puncture to which your sister attaches so extraordinary a meaning."

The blind was drawn up, and a strong light was thrown into the room. For full two minutes Mr. Chillingworth attentively examined the two small wounds in the neck of Flora. He took a powerful magnifying glass from his pocket, and looked at them through it, and after his examination was concluded, he said, --

"They are very trifling wounds, indeed."

"But how inflicted?" said Henry.

"By some insect, I should say, which probably -- it being the season for many insects -- has flown in at the window."

"I know the motive," said Flora, "which prompts all these suggestions: it is a kind one, and I ought to be the last to quarrel with it; but what I have seen, nothing can make me believe I saw not, unless I am, as once or twice I have thought myself, really mad."

"How do you now feel in general health?"

"Far from well; and a strange drowsiness at times creeps over me. Even now I feel it."

She sunk back on the pillows as she spoke, and closed her eyes with a deep sigh.

Mr. Chillingworth beckoned Henry to come with him from the room, but the latter had promised that he would remain with Flora; and as Mrs. Bannerworth had left the chamber because she was unable to control her feelings, he rang the bell, and requested that his mother would come.

She did so, and then Henry went down stairs along with the medical man, whose opinion he was certainly eager to be now made acquainted with.

As soon as they were alone in the old-fashioned room which was called the oak closet, Henry turned to Mr. Chillingworth, and said, --

"What, now, is your candid opinion, sir? You have seen my sister, and those strange indubitable evidences of something wrong."

"I have; and to tell you candidly the truth, Mr. Henry, I am sorely perplexed."

"I thought you would be."

"It is not often that a medical man likes to say so much, nor is it, indeed, often prudent that he should do so, but in this case I own I am much puzzled. It is contrary to all my notions upon all such subjects."

"Those wounds, what do you think of them?"

"I know not what to think. I am completely puzzled as regards them."

"But, but do they not really bear the appearance of being bites?"

"They really do."

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"And so far, then, they are actually in favour of the dreadful supposition which poor Flora entertains."

"So far they certainly are. I have no doubt in the world of their being bites; but we must not jump to a conclusion that the teeth which inflicted them were human. It is a strange case, and one which I feel assured must give you all much uneasiness, as, indeed, it gave me; but, as I said before, I will not let my judgment give in to the fearful and degrading superstition which all the circumstances connected with this strange story would seem to justify."

"It is a degrading superstition."

"To my mind your sister seems to be labouring under the effect of some narcotic."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; unless she really has lost a quantity of blood, which loss has decreased the heart's action sufficiently to produce the languor under which she now evidently labours."

"Oh, that I could believe the former supposition, but I am confident she has taken no narcotic; she could not even do so by mistake, for there is no drug of the sort in the house. Besides, she is not heedless by any means. I am quite convinced that she has not done so."

"Then I am fairly puzzled, my young friend, and I can only say that I would freely have given half of what I am worth to see that figure you saw last night."

"What would you have done?"

"I would not have lost sight of it for the world's wealth."

"You would have felt your blood freeze with horror. The face was terrible."

"And yet let it lead me where it liked I would have followed."

"I wish you had been here."

"I wish to Heaven I had. If I thought there was the least chance of another visit I would come and wait with patience every night for a month."

"I cannot say," replied Henry. "I am going to sit up to-night with my sister, and, I believe, our friend Mr. Marchdale will share my watch with me."

Mr. Chillingworth appeared to be for a few moments lost in thought, and then, suddenly rousing himself, as if he found it either impossible to come to any rational conclusion upon the subject, or had arrived at one which he chose to keep to himself, he said, —

"Well, well, we must leave the matter at present as it stands. Time may accomplish something towards its development; but at present so palpable a mystery I never came across, or a matter in which human calculation was so completely foiled."

"Nor I — nor I."

"I will send you some medicines, such as I think will be of service to Flora, and depend upon seeing me by ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"You have, of course, heard something," said Henry to the doctor, as he was pulling on his gloves, "about vampyres."

"I certainly have, and I understand that in some countries, particularly Norway and Sweden, the superstition is a very common one."

"And in the Levant."

"Yes. The ghouls of the Mahometans are of the same description of beings. All that I have heard of the European vampyre has made it a being which can be killed, but is restored to life again by the rays of a full moon falling on the body."

"Yes, yes, I have heard as much."

"And that the hideous repast of blood has to be taken very frequently, and that if the vampyre gets it not he wastes away, presenting the appearance of one in the last stage of a consumption, and visibly, so to speak, dying."

"That is what I have understood."

"To-night, do you know, Mr. Bannerworth, is the full of the moon."

Henry started.

"If now you had succeeded in killing — . Pshaw, what am I saying. I believe I am getting foolish, and that the horrible superstition is beginning to fasten itself upon me as well as upon all of you. How strangely the fancy will wage war with the judgment in such a way as this."

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"The full of the moon," repeated Henry, as he glanced towards the window, "and the night is near at hand."

"Banish these thoughts from your mind," said the doctor, "or else, my young friend, you will make yourself decidedly ill. Good evening to you, for it is evening. I shall see you to-morrow morning."

Mr. Chillingworth appeared now to be anxious to go, and Henry no longer opposed his departure; but when he was gone a sense of great loneliness came over him.

"To-night," he repeated, "is the full of the moon. How strange that this dreadful adventure should have taken place just the night before. 'Tis very strange. Let me see -- let me see."

He took from the shelves of a book-case the work which Flora had mentioned, entitled, "Travels in Norway," in which work he found some account of the popular belief in vampyres.

He opened the work at random, and then some of the leaves turned over of themselves to a particular place, as the leaves will frequently do when it has been kept open a length of time at that part, and the binding stretched there more than anywhere else. There was a note at the bottom of one of the pages at this part of the book, and Henry read as follows: --

"With regard to these vampyres, it is believed by those who are inclined to give credence to so dreadful a superstition, that they always endeavour to make their feast of blood, for the revival of their bodily powers, on some evening immediately preceding a full moon, because if any accident befall them, such as being shot, or otherwise killed or wounded, they can recover by lying down somewhere where the full moon's rays will fall on them."

Henry let the book drop from his hands with a groan and a shudder.

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**Chapter V. THE NIGHT WATCH. -- THE PROPOSAL. -- THE MOONLIGHT.
-- THE FEARFUL ADVENTURE.**

A kind of stupefaction came over Henry Bannerworth, and he sat for about a quarter of an hour scarcely conscious of where he was, and almost incapable of anything in the shape of rational thought. It was his brother, George, who roused him by saying, as he laid his hand upon his shoulder, --

"Henry, are you asleep?"

Henry had not been aware of his presence, and he started up as if he had been shot.

"Oh, George, is it you?" he said.

"Yes, Henry, are you unwell?"

"No, no; I was in a deep reverie."

"Alas, I need not ask upon what subject," said George, sadly. "I sought you to bring you this letter."

"A letter to me?"

"Yes, you see it is addressed to you, and the seal looks as if it came from some one of consequence."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Henry. Read it, and see from whence it comes."

There was just sufficient light by going to the window to enable Henry to read the letter, which he did aloud.

It ran thus: --

"Sir Francis Varney presents his compliments to Mr. Beaumont, and is much concerned to hear that some domestic affliction has fallen upon him. Sir Francis hopes that the genuine and loving sympathy of a neighbour will not be regarded as an intrusion, and begs to proffer any assistance or counsel that may be within the compass of his means.

"Ratford Abbey."

"Sir Francis Varney!" said Henry, "who is he?"

"Do you not remember, Henry," said George, "we were told a few days ago, that a gentleman of that name had become the purchaser of the estate of Ratford Abbey."

"Oh, yes, yes. Have you seen him?"

"I have not."

"I do not wish to make any new acquaintance, George. We are very poor -- much poorer indeed than the general appearance of this place, which, I fear, we shall soon have to part with, would warrant any one believing. I must, of course, return a civil answer to this gentleman, but it must be such a one as shall repress familiarity."

"That will be difficult to do while we remain here, when we come to consider the very close proximity of the two properties, Henry."

"Oh, no, not at all. He will easily perceive that we do not want to make acquaintance with him, and then, as a gentleman, which doubtless he is, he will give up the attempt."

"Let it be so, Henry. Heaven knows I have no desire to form any new acquaintance with any one, and more particularly under our present circumstances of depression. And now, Henry, you must permit me, as I have had some repose, to share with you your night watch in Flora's room."

"I would advise you not, George; your health, as you know, is far from good."

"Nay, allow me. If not, then the anxiety I shall suffer will do me more harm than the watchfulness I shall keep up in her chamber."

This was an argument which Henry felt himself the force of too strongly not to admit it in the case of George, and he therefore made no further opposition to his wish to make one in the night watch.

"There will be an advantage," said George, "you see, in three of us being engaged in this matter, because, should anything occur, two can act together, and yet Flora may not be left alone."

"True, true, that is a great advantage."

Now a soft gentle silvery light began to spread itself over the heavens. The moon was rising, and as the beneficial effects of the storm of the preceding evening were still felt in the clearness of the air, the rays appeared to be more lustrous and full of beauty than they commonly were.

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood Volume I

Each moment the night grew lighter, and by the time the brothers were ready to take their places in the chamber of Flora, the moon had risen considerably.

Although neither Henry nor George had any objection to the company of Mr. Marchdale, yet they gave him the option, and rather in fact urged him not to destroy his night's repose by sitting up with them; but he said —

"Allow me to do so; I am older, and have calmer judgment than you can have. Should anything again appear, I am quite resolved that it shall not escape me."

"What would you do?"

"With the name of God upon my lips," said Mr. Marchdale, solemnly, "I would grapple with it."

"You laid hands upon it last night."

"I did, and have forgotten to show you what I tore from it. Look here, — what should you say this was?"

He produced a piece of cloth, on which was an old-fashioned piece of lace, and two buttons. Upon a close inspection, this appeared to be a portion of the lappel of a coat of ancient times, and suddenly, Henry, with a look of intense anxiety, said, —

"This reminds me of the fashion of garments very many years ago, Mr. Marchdale."

"It came away in my grasp as if rotten and incapable of standing any rough usage."

"What a strange unearthly smell it has!"

"Now that you mention it yourself," added Mr. Marchdale, "I must confess it smells to me as if it had really come from the very grave."

"It does — it does. Say nothing of this relic of last night's work to any one."

"Be assured I shall not. I am far from wishing to keep up in any one's mind proofs of that which I would fain, very fain refute."

Mr. Marchdale replaced the portion of the coat which the figure had worn in his pocket, and then the whole three proceeded to the chamber of Flora. * * * * *

It was within a very few minutes of midnight, the moon had climbed high in the heavens, and a night of such brightness and beauty had seldom shown itself for a long period of time.

Flora slept, and in her chamber sat the two brothers and Mr. Marchdale, silently, for she had shown symptoms of restlessness, and they much feared to break the light slumber into which she had fallen.

Occasionally they had conversed in whispers, which could not have the effect of rousing her, for the room, although smaller than the one she had before occupied, was still sufficiently spacious to enable them to get some distance from the bed.

Until the hour of midnight now actually struck, they were silent, and when the last echo of the sounds had died away, a feeling of uneasiness came over them, which prompted some conversation to get rid of it.

"How bright the moon is now," said Henry in a low tone.

"I never saw it brighter," replied Marchdale. "I feel as if I were assured that we shall not to-night be interrupted."

"It was later than this," said Henry.

"Do not then yet congratulate us upon no visit."

"How still the house is!" remarked George; "it seems to me as if I had never found it so intensely quiet before."

"It is very still."

"Hush! she moves."

Flora moaned in her sleep, and made a slight movement. The curtains were all drawn closely round the bed to shield her eyes from the bright moonlight which streamed into the room so brilliantly. They might have closed the shutters of the window, but this they did not like to do, as it would render their watch there of no avail at all, inasmuch as they would not be able to see if any attempt was made by any one to obtain admittance.

A quarter of an hour longer might have thus passed when Mr. Marchdale said in a whisper —

"A thought has just struck me that the piece of coat I have, which I dragged from the figure last night, wonderfully resembles in colour and appearance the style of dress of the portrait in the room which Flora lately slept in."

"I thought of that," said Henry, "when first I saw it; but, to tell the honest truth, I dreaded to suggest any new proof connected with last night's visitation."

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood Volume I

"Then I ought not to have drawn your attention to it," said Mr. Marchdale, "and regret I have done so."

"Nay, do not blame yourself on such an account," said Henry. "You are quite right, and it is I who am too foolishly sensitive. Now, however, since you have mentioned it, I must own I have a great desire to test the accuracy of the observation by a comparison with the portrait."

"That may easily be done."

"I will remain here," said George, "in case Flora awakens, while you two go if you like. It is but across the corridor."

Henry immediately rose, saying --

"Come, Mr. Marchdale, come. Let us satisfy ourselves at all events upon this point at once. As George says it is only across the corridor, and we can return directly."

"I am willing," said Mr. Marchdale, with a tone of sadness.

There was no light needed, for the moon stood suspended in a cloudless sky, so that from the house being a detached one, and containing numerous windows, it was as light as day.

Although the distance from one chamber to the other was only across the corridor, it was a greater space than these words might occupy, for the corridor was wide, neither was it directly across, but considerably slanting. However, it was certainly sufficiently close at hand for any sound of alarm from one chamber to reach the other without any difficulty.

A few moments sufficed to place Henry and Mr. Marchdale in that antique room, where, from the effect of the moonlight which was streaming over it, the portrait on the panel looked exceedingly life like.

And this effect was probably the greater because the rest of the room was not illuminated by the moon's rays, which came through a window in the corridor, and then at the open door of that chamber upon the portrait.

Mr. Marchdale held the piece of cloth he had close to the dress of the portrait, and one glance was sufficient to show the wonderful likeness between the two.

"Good God!" said Henry, "it is the same!"

Mr. Marchdale dropped the piece of cloth and trembled.

"This fact shakes even your scepticism," said Henry.

"I know not what to make of it."

"I can tell you something which bears upon it. I do not know if you are sufficiently aware of my family history to know that this one of my ancestors, I wish I could say worthy ancestors, committed suicide, and was buried in his clothes."

"You -- you are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"I am more and more bewildered as each moment some strange corroborative fact of that dreadful supposition we so much shrink from seems to come to light and to force itself upon our attention."

There was a silence of a few moments duration, and Henry had turned towards Mr. Marchdale to say something, when the cautious tread of a footstep was heard in the garden, immediately beneath that balcony.

A sickening sensation came over Henry, and he was compelled to lean against the wall for support, as in scarcely articulate accents he said --

"The vampyre -- the vampyre! God of heaven, it has come once again!"

"Now, Heaven inspire us with more than mortal courage," cried Mr. Marchdale, and he dashed open the window at once, and sprang into the balcony.

Henry in a moment recovered himself sufficiently to follow him, and when he reached his side in the balcony, Marchdale said, as he pointed below, --

"There is some one concealed there."

"Where -- where?"

"Among the laurels. I will fire a random shot, and we may do some execution."

"Hold!" said a voice from below; "don't do any such thing, I beg of you."

"Why, that is Mr. Chillingworth's voice," cried Henry.

"Yes, and it's Mr. Chillingworth's person, too," said the doctor, as he emerged from among some laurel bushes.

"How is this?" said Marchdale.

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"Simply that I made up my mind to keep watch and ward to-night outside here, in the hope of catching the vampyre. I got into here by climbing the gate."

"But why did you not let me know?" said Henry.

"Because I did not know myself, my young friend, till an hour and a half ago."

"Have you seen anything?"

"Nothing. But I fancied I heard something in the park outside the wall."

"Indeed!"

"What say you, Henry," said Mr. Marchdale, "to descending and taking a hasty examination of the garden and grounds?"

"I am willing; but first allow me to speak to George, who otherwise might be surprised at our long absence."

Henry walked rapidly to the bed-chamber of Flora, and he said to George, --

"Have you any objection to being left alone here for about half an hour, George, while we make an examination of the garden?"

"Let me have some weapon and I care not. Remain here while I fetch a sword from my own room."

Henry did so, and when George returned with a sword, which he always kept in his bed-room, he said, --

"Now go, Henry. I prefer a weapon of this description to pistols much. Do not be gone longer than necessary."

"I will not, George, be assured."

George was then left alone, and Henry returned to the balcony, where Mr. Marchdale was waiting for him. It was a quicker mode of descending to the garden to do so by clambering over the balcony than any other, and the height was not considerable enough to make it very objectionable, so Henry and Mr. Marchdale chose that way of joining Mr. Chillingworth.

"You are, no doubt, much surprised at finding me here," said the doctor; "but the fact is, I half made up my mind to come while I was here; but I had not thoroughly done so, therefore I said nothing to you about it."

"We are much indebted to you," said Henry, "for making the attempt."

"I am prompted to it by a feeling of the strongest curiosity."

"Are you armed, sir?" said Marchdale.

"In this stick," said the doctor, "is a sword, the exquisite temper of which I know I can depend upon, and I fully intended to run through any one whom I saw that looked in the least of the vampyre order."

"You would have done quite right," replied Mr. Marchdale. "I have a brace of pistols here, loaded with ball; will you take one, Henry, if you please, and then we shall be all armed."

Thus, then, prepared for any exigency, they made the whole round of the house; but found all the fastenings secure, and everything as quiet as possible.

"Suppose, now, we take a survey of the park outside the garden wall," said Mr. Marchdale.

This was agreed to; but before they had proceeded far, Mr. Marchdale said, --

"There is a ladder lying on the wall; would it not be a good plan to place it against the very spot the supposed vampyre jumped over last night, and so, from a more elevated position, take a view of the open meadows. We could easily drop down on the outer side, if we saw anything suspicious."

"Not a bad plan," said the doctor. "Shall we do it?"

"Certainly," said Henry; and they accordingly carried the ladder, which had been used for pruning the trees, towards the spot at the end of the long walk, at which the vampyre had made good, after so many fruitless efforts, his escape from the premises.

Then made haste down the long vista of trees until they reached the exact spot, and then they placed the ladder as near as possible, exactly where Henry, in his bewilderment on the evening before, had seen the apparition from the grave spring to.

"We can ascend singly," said Marchdale; "but there is ample space for us all there to sit on the top of the wall and make our observations."

This was seen to be the case, and in about a couple of minutes they had taken up their position on the wall, and, although the height was but trifling, they found that they had a much more extensive view than they could have obtained by any other means.

"To contemplate the beauty of such a night as this," said Mr. Chillingworth, "is amply sufficient compensation for coming the distance I have."

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"And who knows," remarked Marchdale, "we may yet see something which may throw a light upon our present perplexities? God knows that I would give all I can call mine in the world to relieve you and your sister, Henry Bannerworth, from the fearful effect which last night's proceedings cannot fail to have upon you."

"Of that I am well assured, Mr. Marchdale," said Henry. "If the happiness of myself and family depended upon you, we should be happy indeed."

"You are silent, Mr. Chillingworth," remarked Marchdale, after a slight pause.

"Hush!" said Mr. Chillingworth -- "hush -- hush!"

"Good God, what do you hear?" cried Henry.

The doctor laid his hand upon Henry's arm as he said, --

"There is a young lime tree yonder to the right."

"Yes -- yes."

"Carry your eye from it in a horizontal line, as near as you can, towards the wood."

Henry did so, and then he uttered a sudden exclamation of surprise, and pointed to a rising spot of ground, which was yet, in consequence of the number of tall trees in its vicinity, partially enveloped in shadow.

"What is that?" he said.

"I see something," said Marchdale. "By Heaven! it is a human form lying stretched there."

"It is -- as if in death."

"What can it be?" said Chillingworth.

"I dread to say," replied Marchdale; "but to my eyes, even at this distance, it seems like the form of him we chased last night."

"The vampyre?"

"Yes -- yes. Look, the moonbeams touch him. Now the shadows of the trees gradually recede. God of Heaven! the figure moves."

Henry's eyes were rivetted to that fearful object, and now a scene presented itself which filled them all with wonder and astonishment, mingled with sensations of the greatest awe and alarm.

As the moonbeams, in consequence of the luminary rising higher and higher in the heavens, came to touch this figure that lay extended on the rising ground, a perceptible movement took place in it. The limbs appeared to tremble, and although it did not rise up, the whole body gave signs of vitality.

"The vampyre -- the vampyre!" said Mr. Marchdale. "I cannot doubt it now. We must have hit him last night with the pistol bullets, and the moonbeams are now restoring him to a new life."

Henry shuddered, and even Mr. Chillingworth turned pale. But he was the first to recover himself sufficiently to propose some course of action, and he said, --

"Let us descend and go up to this figure. It is a duty we owe to ourselves as much as to society."

"Hold a moment," said Mr. Marchdale, as he produced a pistol. "I am an unerring shot, as you well know, Henry. Before we move from this position we now occupy, allow me to try what virtue may be in a bullet to lay that figure low again."

"He is rising!" exclaimed Henry.

Mr. Marchdale levelled the pistol -- he took sure and deliberate aim, and then, just as the figure seemed to be struggling to its feet, he fired, and, with a sudden bound, it fell again.

"You have hit it," said Henry.

"You have indeed," exclaimed the doctor. "I think we can go now."

"Hush!" said Marchdale -- "Hush! Does it not seem to you that, hit it as often as you will, the moonbeams will recover it?"

"Yes -- yes," said Henry, "they will -- they will."

"I can endure this no longer," said Mr. Chillingworth, as he sprung from the wall. "Follow me or not, as you please, I will seek the spot where this being lies."

"Oh, be not rash," cried Marchdale. "See, it rises again, and its form looks gigantic."

"I trust in Heaven and a righteous cause," said the doctor, as he drew the sword he had spoken of from the stick, and threw away the scabbard. "Come with me if you like, or I go alone."

Henry at once jumped down from the wall, and then Marchdale followed him, saying, --

"Come on; I will not shrink."

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They ran towards the piece of rising ground; but before they got to it, the form rose and made rapidly towards a little wood which was in the immediate neighbourhood of the hillock.

"It is conscious of being pursued," cried the doctor. "See how it glances back, and then increases its speed."

"Fire upon it, Henry," said Marchdale.

He did so; but either his shot did not take effect, or it was quite unheeded, if it did, by the vampyre, which gained the wood before they could have a hope of getting sufficiently near it to effect, or endeavour to effect, a capture.

"I cannot follow it there," said Marchdale. "In open country I would have pursued it closely; but I cannot follow it into the intricacies of a wood."

"Pursuit is useless there," said Henry. "It is enveloped in the deepest gloom."

"I am not so unreasonable," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, "as to wish you to follow into such a place as that. I am confounded utterly by this affair."

"And I," said Marchdale. "What on earth is to be done?"

"Nothing -- nothing!" exclaimed Henry, vehemently; "and yet I have, beneath the canopy of Heaven, declared that I will, so help me God! spare neither time nor trouble in the unravelling of this most fearful piece of business. Did either of you remark the clothing which this spectral appearance wore?"

"They were antique clothes," said Mr. Chillingworth, "such as might have been fashionable a hundred years ago, but not now."

"Such was my own impression," added Marchdale.

"And such my own," said Henry, excitedly. "Is it at all within the compass of the wildest belief that what we have seen is a vampyre, and no other than my ancestor who, a hundred years ago, committed suicide?"

There was so much intense excitement, and evidence of mental suffering, that Mr. Chillingworth took him by the arm, saying, --

"Come home -- come home; no more of this at present; you will make yourself seriously unwell."

"No -- no -- no."

"Come home -- come home; I pray you; you are by far too much excited about this matter to pursue it with the calmness which should be brought to bear upon it."

"Take advice, Henry," said Marchdale, "take advice, and come home at once."

"I will yield to you; I feel that I cannot control my own feelings -- I will yield to you, who, as you say, are cooler on this subject than I can be. Oh, Flora, Flora, I have no comfort for you now."

Poor Henry Bannerworth appeared to be in a complete state of mental prostration, on account of the distressing circumstances that had occurred so rapidly and so suddenly in his family, which had had quite enough to contend with without having superadded to every other evil the horror of believing that some preternatural agency was at work to destroy every hope of future happiness in this world, under any circumstances.

He suffered himself to be led home by Mr. Chillingworth and Marchdale; he no longer attempted to dispute the dreadful fact concerning the supposed vampyre; he could not contend now against all the corroborating circumstances that seemed to collect together for the purpose of proving that which, even when proved, was contrary to all his notions of Heaven, and at variance with all that was recorded and established as part and parcel of the system of nature.

"I cannot deny," he said, when they had reached home, "that such things are possible; but the probability will not bear a moment's investigation."

"There are more things," said Marchdale, "in Heaven, and on earth, than are dreamed in our philosophy."

"There are indeed, it appears," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"Are you a convert?" said Henry, turning to him.

"A convert to what?"

"To a belief in -- in -- these vampyres?"

"I? No, indeed; if you were to shut me up in a room full of vampyres, I would tell them all to their teeth that I defied them."

"But after what we have seen to-night?"

"What have we seen?"

"You are yourself a witness."

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"True; I saw a man lying down, and then I saw a man get up; he seemed then to be shot, but whether he was or not he only knows; and then I saw him walk off in a desperate hurry. Beyond that, I saw nothing."

"Yes; but, taking such circumstances into combination with others, have you not a terrible fear of the truth of the dreadful appearance?"

"No -- no; on my soul, no. I will die in my disbelief of such an outrage upon Heaven as one of these creatures would most assuredly be."

"Oh! that I could think like you; but the circumstance strikes too nearly to my heart."

"Be of better cheer, Henry -- be of better cheer," said Marchdale; "there is one circumstance which we ought to consider, it is that, from all we have seen, there seems to be some things which would favour an opinion, Henry, that your ancestor, whose portrait hangs in the chamber which was occupied by Flora, is a vampire."

"The dress is the same," said Henry.

"I noted it was."

"And I."

"Do you not, then, think it possible that something might be done to set that part of the question at rest?"

"What -- what?"

"Where is your ancestor buried?"

"Ah! I understand you now."

"And I," said Mr. Chillingworth; "you would propose a visit to his mansion?"

"I would," added Marchdale; "anything that may in any way tend to assist in making this affair clearer, and divesting it of its mysterious circumstances, will be most desirable."

Henry appeared to rouse for some moments, and then he said, --

"He, in common with many other members of the family, no doubt occupies a place in the vault under the old church in the village."

"Would it be possible," asked Marchdale, "to get into that vault without exciting general attention?"

"It would," said Henry; "the entrance to the vault is in the flooring of the pew which belongs to the family in the old church."

"Then it could be done?" asked Mr. Chillingworth.

"Most undoubtedly."

"Will you undertake such an adventure?" said Mr. Chillingworth. "It may ease your mind."

"He was buried in the vault, and in his clothes," said Henry, musingly; "I will think of it. About such a proposition I would not decide hastily. Give me leave to think of it until to-morrow."

"Most certainly."

They now made their way to the chamber of Flora, and they heard from George that nothing of an alarming character had occurred to disturb him on his lonely watch. The morning was now again dawning, and Henry earnestly entreated Mr. Marchdale to go to bed, which he did, leaving the two brothers to continue as sentinels by Flora's bed-side, until the morning light should banish all uneasy thoughts.

Henry related to George what had taken place outside the house, and the two brothers held a long and interesting conversation for some hours upon that subject, as well as upon others of great importance to their welfare. It was not until the sun's early rays came glaring in at the casement that they both rose, and thought of awakening Flora, who had now slept soundly for so many hours.

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Chapter VI. A GLANCE AT THE BANNERWORTH FAMILY. -- THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MYSTERIOUS APPARITION'S APPEARANCE.

Having thus far, we hope, interested our readers in the fortunes of a family which had become subject to so dreadful a visitation, we trust that a few words concerning them, and the peculiar circumstances in which they are now placed, will not prove altogether out of place, or unacceptable. The Bannerworth family then were well known in the part of the country where they resided. Perhaps, if we were to say they were better known by name than they were liked, on account of that name, we should be near the truth, for it had unfortunately happened that for a very considerable time past the head of the family had been the very worst specimen of it that could be procured. While the junior branches were frequently amiable and most intelligent, and such in mind and manner as were calculated to inspire goodwill in all who knew them, he who held the family property, and who resided in the house now occupied by Flora and her brothers, was a very so--so sort of character.

This state of things, by some strange fatality, had gone on for nearly a hundred years, and the consequence was what might have been fairly expected, namely -- that, what with their vices and what with their extravagancies, the successive heads of the Bannerworth family had succeeded in so far diminishing the family property that, when it came into the hands of Henry Bannerworth, it was of little value, on account of the numerous encumbrances with which it was saddled.

The father of Henry had not been a very brilliant exception to the general rule, as regarded the head of the family. If he were not quite so bad as many of his ancestors, that gratifying circumstance was to be accounted for by the supposition that he was not quite so bold, and that the changes in habits, manners, and laws, which had taken place in a hundred years, made it not so easy for even a landed proprietor to play the petty tyrant.

He had, to get rid of those animal spirits which had prompted many of his predecessors to downright crimes, had recourse to the gaming table, and, after raising whatever sums he could upon the property which remained, he naturally, and as might have been fully expected, lost them all.

He was found lying dead in the garden of the house one day, and by his side was his pocket-book, on one leaf of which, it was the impression of the family, he had endeavoured to write something previous to his decease, for he held a pencil firmly in his grasp.

The probability was that he had felt himself getting ill, and, being desirous of making some communication to his family which pressed heavily upon his mind, he had attempted to do so, but was stopped by the too rapid approach of the hand of death.

For some days previous to his decease, his conduct had been extremely mysterious. He had announced an intention of leaving England for ever -- of selling the house and grounds for whatever they would fetch over and above the sums for which they were mortgaged, and so clearing himself of all encumbrances.

He had, but a few hours before he was found lying dead, made the following singular speech to Henry, --

"Do not regret, Henry, that the old house which has been in our family so long is about to be parted with. Be assured that, if it is but for the first time in my life, I have good and substantial reasons now for what I am about to do. We shall be able to go to some other country, and there live like princes of the land."

Where the means were to come from to live like a prince, unless Mr. Bannerworth had some of the German princes in his eye, no one knew but himself, and his sudden death buried with him that most important secret.

There were some words written on the leaf of his pocket-book, but they were of by far too indistinct and ambiguous a nature to lead to anything. They were these: --

"The money is -- -- "

And then there was a long scrawl of the pencil, which seemed to have been occasioned by his sudden decease.

Of course nothing could be made of these words, except in the way of a contradiction, as the family lawyer said, rather more facetiously than a man of law usually speaks, for if he had written "The money is not," he would have been somewhere remarkably near the truth.

However, with all his vices he was regretted by his children, who chose rather to remember him in his best aspect than to dwell upon his faults.

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For the first time then, within the memory of man, the head of the family of the Bannerworths was a gentleman, in every sense of the word. Brave, generous, highly educated, and full of many excellent and noble qualities — for such was Henry, whom we have introduced to our readers under such distressing circumstances.

And now, people said, that the family property having been all dissipated and lost, there would take place a change, and that the Bannerworths would have to take some course of honourable industry for a livelihood, and that then they would be as much respected as they had before been detested and disliked.

Indeed, the position which Henry held was now a most precarious one — for one of the amazingly clever acts of his father had been to encumber the property with overwhelming claims, so that when Henry administered to the estate, it was doubted almost by his attorney if it were at all desirable to do so.

An attachment, however, to the old house of his family, had induced the young man to hold possession of it as long as he could, despite any adverse circumstance which might eventually be connected with it.

Some weeks, however, only after the decease of his father, and when he fairly held possession, a sudden and a most unexpected offer came to him from a solicitor in London, of whom he knew nothing, to purchase the house and grounds, for a client of his, who had instructed him so to do, but whom he did not mention.

The offer made was a liberal one, and beyond the value of the place.

The lawyer who had conducted Henry's affairs for him since his father's decease, advised him by all means to take it; but after a consultation with his mother and sister, and George, they all resolved to hold by their own house as long as they could, and, consequently, he refused the offer.

He was then asked to let the place, and to name his own price for the occupation of it; but that he would not do: so the negotiation went off altogether, leaving only, in the minds of the family, much surprise at the exceeding eagerness of some one, whom they knew not, to get possession of the place on any terms.

There was another circumstance perhaps which materially aided in producing a strong feeling on the minds of the Bannerworths, with regard to remaining where they were.

That circumstance occurred thus: a relation of the family, who was now dead, and with whom had died all his means, had been in the habit, for the last half dozen years of his life, of sending a hundred pounds to Henry, for the express purpose of enabling him and his brother George and his sister Flora to take a little continental or home tour, in the autumn of the year.

A more acceptable present, or for a more delightful purpose, to young people, could not be found; and, with the quiet, prudent habits of all three of them, they contrived to go far and to see much for the sum which was thus handsomely placed at their disposal.

In one of those excursions, when among the mountains of Italy, an adventure occurred which placed the life of Flora in imminent hazard.

They were riding along a narrow mountain path, and, her horse slipping, she fell over the ledge of a precipice.

In an instant, a young man, a stranger to the whole party, who was travelling in the vicinity, rushed to the spot, and by his knowledge and exertions, they felt convinced her preservation was effected.

He told her to lie quiet; he encouraged her to hope for immediate succour; and then, with much personal exertion, and at immense risk to himself, he reached the ledge of rock on which she lay, and then he supported her until the brothers had gone to a neighbouring house, which, by—the—bye, was two good English miles off, and got assistance.

There came on, while they were gone, a terrific storm, and Flora felt that but for him who was with her she must have been hurled from the rock, and perished in an abyss below, which was almost too deep for observation.

Suffice it to say that she was rescued; and he who had, by his intrepidity, done so much towards saving her, was loaded with the most sincere and heartfelt acknowledgments by the brothers as well as by herself.

He frankly told them that his name was Holland; that he was travelling for amusement and instruction, and was by profession an artist.

He travelled with them for some time; and it was not at all to be wondered at, under the circumstances, that an attachment of the tenderest nature should spring up between him and the beautiful girl, who felt that she owed to him her life.

Mutual glances of affection were exchanged between them, and it was arranged that when he returned to England, he should come at once as an honoured guest to the house of the family of the Bannerworths.

All this was settled satisfactorily with the full knowledge and acquiescence of the two brothers, who had taken

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a strange attachment to the young Charles Holland, who was indeed in every way likely to propitiate the good opinion of all who knew him.

Henry explained to him exactly how they were situated, and told him that when he came he would find a welcome from all, except possibly his father, whose wayward temper he could not answer for.

Young Holland stated that he was compelled to be away for a term of two years, from certain family arrangements he had entered into, and that then he would return and hope to meet Flora unchanged as he should be.

It happened that this was the last of the continental excursions of the Bannerworths, for, before another year rolled round, the generous relative who had supplied them with the means of making such delightful trips was no more; and, likewise, the death of the father had occurred in the manner we have related, so that there was no chance, as had been anticipated and hoped for by Flora, of meeting Charles Holland on the continent again, before his two years of absence from England should be expired.

Such, however, being the state of things, Flora felt reluctant to give up the house, where he would be sure to come to look for her, and her happiness was too dear to Henry to induce him to make any sacrifice of it to expediency.

Therefore was it that Bannerworth Hall, as it was sometimes called, was retained, and fully intended to be retained at all events until after Charles Holland had made his appearance, and his advice (for he was, by the young people, considered one of the family) taken, with regard to what was advisable to be done.

With one exception this was the state of affairs at the hall, and that exception relates to Mr. Marchdale.

He was a distant relation of Mrs. Bannerworth, and, early in life, had been sincerely and tenderly attached to her. She, however, with the want of steady reflection of a young girl, as she then was, had, as is generally the case among several admirers, chosen the very worst: that is, the man who had treated her with the most indifference and who paid her the least attention, was, of course, thought the most of, and she gave her hand to him.

That man was Mr. Bannerworth. But future experience had made her thoroughly awake to her former error; and, but for the love she bore her children, who were certainly all that a mother's heart could wish, she would often have deeply regretted the infatuation which had induced her to bestow her hand in the quarter she had done so.

About a month after the decease of Mr. Bannerworth, there came one to the hall, who desired to see the widow. That one was Mr. Marchdale.

It might have been some slight tenderness towards him which had never left her, or it might be the pleasure merely of seeing one whom she had known intimately in early life, but, be that as it may, she certainly gave him a kindly welcome; and he, after consenting to remain for some time as a visitor at the hall, won the esteem of the whole family by his frank demeanour and cultivated intellect.

He had travelled much and seen much, and he had turned to good account all he had seen, that not only was Mr. Marchdale a man of sterling sound sense, but he was a most entertaining companion.

His intimate knowledge of many things concerning which they knew little or nothing; his accurate modes of thought, and a quiet, gentlemanly demeanour, such as is rarely to be met with, combined to make him esteemed by the Bannerworths. He had a small independence of his own, and being completely alone in the world, for he had neither wife nor child, Marchdale owned that he felt a pleasure in residing with the Bannerworths.

Of course he could not, in decent terms, so far offend them as to offer to pay for his subsistence, but he took good care that they should really be no losers by having him as an inmate, a matter which he could easily arrange by little presents of one kind and another, all of which he managed should be such as were not only ornamental, but actually spared his kind entertainers some positive expense which otherwise they must have gone to.

Whether or not this amiable piece of manoeuvring was seen through by the Bannerworths it is not our purpose to inquire. If it was seen through, it could not lower him in their esteem, for it was probably just what they themselves would have felt a pleasure in doing under similar circumstances, and if they did not observe it, Mr. Marchdale would, probably, be all the better pleased.

Such then may be considered by our readers as a brief outline of the state of affairs among the Bannerworths — a state which was pregnant with changes, and which changes were now likely to be rapid and conclusive.

How far the feelings of the family towards the ancient house of their race would be altered by the appearance at it of so fearful a visitor as a vampyre, we will not stop to inquire, inasmuch as such feelings will develop

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themselves as we proceed.

That the visitation had produced a serious effect upon all the household was sufficiently evident, as well among the educated as among the ignorant. On the second morning, Henry received notice to quit his service from the three servants he had with difficulty contrived to keep at the hall. The reason why he received such notice he knew well enough, and therefore he did not trouble himself to argue about a superstition to which he felt now himself almost compelled to give way; for how could he say there was no such thing as a vampyre, when he had, with his own eyes, had the most abundant evidence of the terrible fact?

He calmly paid the servants, and allowed them to leave him at once without at all entering into the matter, and, for the time being, some men were procured, who, however, came evidently with fear and trembling, and probably only took the place, on account of not being able to procure any other. The comfort of the household was likely to be completely put an end to, and reasons now for leaving the hall appeared to be most rapidly accumulating.

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Chapter VII. THE VISIT TO THE VAULT OF THE BANNERWORTHS, AND ITS UNPLEASANT RESULT. -- THE MYSTERY.

Henry and his brother roused Flora, and after agreeing together that it would be highly imprudent to say anything to her of the proceedings of the night, they commenced a conversation with her in encouraging and kindly accents.

"Well, Flora," said Henry, "you see you have been quite undisturbed to-night."

"I have slept long, dear Henry."

"You have, and pleasantly too, I hope."

"I have not had any dreams, and I feel much refreshed, now, and quite well again."

"Thank Heaven!" said George.

"If you will tell dear mother that I am awake, I will get up with her assistance."

The brothers left the room, and they spoke to each other of it as a favourable sign, that Flora did not object to being left alone now, as she had done on the preceding morning.

"She is fast recovering, now, George," said Henry. "If we could now but persuade ourselves that all this alarm would pass away, and that we should hear no more of it, we might return to our old and comparatively happy condition."

"Let us believe, Henry, that we shall."

"And yet, George, I shall not be satisfied in my mind, until I have paid a visit."

"A visit? Where?"

"To the family vault."

"Indeed, Henry! I thought you had abandoned that idea."

"I had. I have several times abandoned it; but it comes across my mind again and again."

"I much regret it."

"Look you, George; as yet, everything that has happened has tended to confirm a belief in this most horrible of all superstitions concerning vampyres."

"It has."

"Now, my great object, George, is to endeavour to disturb such a state of thing, by getting something, however slight, or of a negative character, for the mind to rest upon on the other side of the question."

"I comprehend you, Henry."

"You know that at present we are not only led to believe, almost irresistibly, that we have been visited by a vampyre, but that that vampyre is our ancestor, whose portrait is on the panel of the wall of the chamber into which he contrived to make his way."

"True, most true."

"Then let us, by an examination of the family vault, George, put an end to one of the evidences. If we find, as most surely we shall, the coffin of the ancestor of ours, who seems, in dress and appearance, so horribly mixed up in this affair, we shall be at rest on that head."

"But consider how many years have elapsed."

"Yes, a great number."

"What then, do you suppose, could remain of any corpse placed in a vault so long ago?"

"Decomposition must of course have done its work, but still there must be a something to show that a corpse has so undergone the process common to all nature. Double the lapse of time surely could not obliterate all traces of that which had been."

"There is reason in that, Henry."

"Besides, the coffins are all of lead, and some of stone, so that they cannot have all gone."

"True, most true."

"If in the one which, from the inscription and date, we discover to be that of our ancestor whom we seek, we find the evident remains of a corpse, we shall be satisfied that he has rested in his tomb in peace."

"Brother, you seem bent on this adventure," said George; "if you go, I will accompany you."

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"I will not engage rashly in it, George. Before I finally decide, I will again consult with Mr. Marchdale. His opinion will weigh much with me."

"And in good time, here he comes across the garden," said George, as he looked from the window of the room in which they sat.

It was Mr. Marchdale, and the brothers warmly welcomed him as he entered the apartment.

"You have been early afoot," said Henry.

"I have," he said. "The fact is, that although at your solicitation I went to bed, I could not sleep, and I went out once more to search about the spot where we had seen the — the I don't know what to call it, for I have a great dislike to naming it a vampyre."

"There is not much in a name," said George.

"In this instance there is," said Marchdale. "It is a name suggestive of horror."

"Made you any discovery?" said Henry.

"None whatever."

"You saw no trace of any one?"

"Not the least."

"Well, Mr. Marchdale, George and I were talking over this projected visit to the family vault."

"Yes."

"And we agreed to suspend our judgments until we saw you, and learned your opinion."

"Which I will tell you frankly," said Mr. Marchdale, "because I know you desire it freely."

"Do so."

"It is, you should make the visit."

"Indeed."

"Yes, and for this reason. You have now, as you cannot help having, a disagreeable feeling, that you may find that one coffin is untenanted. Now, if you do fine it so, you scarcely make matters worse, by an additional confirmation of what already amounts to a strong supposition, and one which is likely to grow stronger by time."

"True, most true."

"On the contrary, if you find indubitable proofs that your ancestor has slept soundly in the tomb, and gone the way of all flesh, you will find yourselves much calmer, and that an attack is made upon the train of events which at present all run one way."

"That is precisely the argument I was using to George," said Henry, "a few moments since."

"Then let us go," said George, "by all means."

"It is so decided then," said Henry.

"Let it be done with caution," replied Mr. Marchdale.

"If any one can manage it, of course we can."

"Why should it not be done secretly and at night? Of course we lose nothing by making a night visit to a vault into which daylight, I presume, cannot penetrate."

"Certainly not."

"Then let it be at night."

"But we shall surely require the concurrence of some of the church authorities."

"Nay, I do not see that," interposed Mr. Marchdale. "It is to the vault actually vested in and belonging to yourself you wish to visit, and, therefore, you have a right to visit it in any manner or at any time that may be most suitable to yourself."

"But detection in a clandestine visit might produce unpleasant consequences."

"The church is old," said George, "and we could easily find means of getting into it. There is only one objection that I see, just now, and that is, that we leave Flora unprotected."

"We do, indeed," said Henry. "I did not think of that."

"It must be put to herself, as a matter for her own consideration," said Mr. Marchdale, "if she will consider herself sufficiently safe with the company and protection of your mother only."

"It would be a pity were we not all three present at the examination of the coffin," remarked Henry.

"It would, indeed. There is ample evidence," said Mr. Marchdale, "but we must not give Flora a night of sleeplessness and uneasiness on that account, and the more particularly as we cannot well explain to her where we

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are going, or upon what errand."

"Certainly not."

"Let us talk to her, then, about it," said Henry. "I confess I am much bent upon the plan, and fain would not forego it; neither should I like other than that we three should go together."

"If you determine, then, upon it," said Marchdale, "we will go to-night; and, from your acquaintance with the place, doubtless you will be able to decide what tools are necessary."

"There is a trap-door at the bottom of the pew," said Henry; "it is not only secured down, but it is locked likewise, and I have the key in my possession."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; immediately beneath is a short flight of stone steps, which conduct at once into the vault."

"Is it large?"

"No; about the size of a moderate chamber, with no intricacies about it."

"There can be no difficulties, then."

"None whatever, unless we meet with actual personal interruption, which I am inclined to think is very far from likely. All we shall require will be a screwdriver, with which to remove the screws, and then something with which to wrench open the coffin."

"Those we can easily provide, along with lights," remarked Mr. Marchdale. "I hope to heaven that this visit to the tomb will have the effect of easing your minds, and enable you to make a successful stand against the streaming torrent of evidence that has poured in upon us regarding this most fearful of apparitions."

"I do, indeed, hope so," added Henry; "and now I will go at once to Flora, and endeavour to convince her she is safe without us to-night."

"By-the-bye, I think," said Marchdale, "that if we can induce Mr. Chillingworth to come with us, it will be a great point gained in the investigation."

"He would," said Henry, "be able to come to an accurate decision with respect to the remains -- if any -- in the coffin, which we could not."

"Then have him, by all means," said George. "He did not seem averse last night to go on such an adventure."

"I will ask him when he makes his visit this morning upon Flora; and should he not feel disposed to join us, I am quite sure he will keep the secret of our visit."

All this being arranged, Henry proceeded to Flora, and told her that he and George, and Mr. Marchdale wished to go out for about a couple of hours in the evening after dark, if she felt sufficiently well to feel a sense of security without them.

Flora changed colour, and slightly trembled, and then, as if ashamed of her fears, she said, --

"Go, go; I will not detain you. Surely no harm can come to me in presence of my mother."

"We shall not be gone longer than the time I mentioned to you," said Henry.

"Oh, I shall be quite content. Besides, am I to be kept thus in fear all my life? Surely, surely not. I ought, too, to learn to defend myself."

Henry caught at the idea, as he said, --

"If fire-arms were left you, do you think you would have courage to use them?"

"I do, Henry."

"Then you shall have them; and let me beg of you to shoot any one without the least hesitation who shall come into your chamber."

"I will, Henry. If ever human being was justified in the use of deadly weapons, I am now. Heaven protect me from a repetition of the visit to which I have now been once subjected. Rather, oh, much rather would I die a hundred deaths than suffer what I have suffered."

"Do not allow it, dear Flora, to press too heavily upon your mind in dwelling upon it in conversation. I still entertain a sanguine expectation that something may arise to afford a far less dreadful explanation of what has occurred than what you have put upon it. Be of good cheer, Flora, we shall go one hour after sunset, and return in about two hours from the time at which we leave here, you may be assured."

Notwithstanding this ready and courageous acquiescence of Flora in the arrangement, Henry was not without his apprehension that when the night should come again, her fears would return with it; but he spoke to Mr. Chillingworth upon the subject, and got that gentleman's ready consent to accompany them.

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He promised to meet them at the church porch exactly at nine o'clock, and matters were all arranged, and Henry waited with much eagerness and anxiety now for the coming night, which he hoped would dissipate one of the fearful deductions which his imagination had drawn from recent circumstances.

He gave to Flora a pair of pistols of his own, upon which he knew he could depend, and he took good care to load them well, so that there could be no likelihood whatever of their missing fire at a critical moment.

"Now, Flora," he said, "I have seen you use fire-arms when you were much younger than you are now, and therefore I need give you no instructions. If any intruder does come, and you do fire, be sure you take a good aim, and shoot low."

"I will, Henry, I will; and you will be back in two hours?"

"Most assuredly I will."

The day wore on, evening came, and then deepened into night. It turned out to be a cloudy night, and therefore the moon's brilliance was nothing near equal to what it had been on the preceding night. Still, however, it had sufficient power over the vapours that frequently covered it for many minutes together, to produce a considerable light effect upon the face of nature, and the night was consequently very far, indeed, from what might be called a dark one.

George, Henry, and Marchdale, met in one of the lower rooms of the house, previous to starting upon their expedition; and after satisfying themselves that they had with them all the tools that were necessary, inclusive of the same small, but well-tempered iron crow-bar with which Marchdale had, on the night of the visit of the vampyre, forced open the door of Flora's chamber, they left the hall, and proceeded at a rapid pace towards the church.

"And Flora does not seem much alarmed," said Marchdale, "at being left alone?"

"No," replied Henry, "she has made up her mind with a strong natural courage which I knew was in her disposition to resist as much as possible the depressing effect of the awful visitation she has endured."

"It would have driven some really mad."

"It would, indeed; and her own reason tottered on its throne, but, thank Heaven, she has recovered."

"And I fervently hope that, through her life," added Marchdale, "she may never have such another trial."

"We will not for a moment believe that such a thing can occur twice."

"She is one among a thousand. Most young girls would never at all have recovered the fearful shock to the nerves."

"Not only has she recovered," said Henry, "but a spirit, which I am rejoiced to see, because it is one which will uphold her, of resistance now possesses her."

"Yes, she actually -- I forgot to tell you before -- but she actually asked me for arms to resist any second visitation."

"You much surprise me."

"Yes, I was surprised, as well as pleased, myself."

"I would have left her one of my pistols had I been aware of her having made such a request. Do you know if she can use fire-arms?"

"Oh, yes; well."

"What a pity. I have both of them with me."

"Oh, she is provided."

"Provided?"

"Yes; I found some pistols which I used to take with me on the continent, and she has them both well loaded, so that if the vampyre makes his appearance, he is likely to meet with rather a warm reception."

"Good God! was it not dangerous?"

"Not at all, I think."

"Well, you know best, certainly, of course. I hope the vampyre may come, and that we may have the pleasure, when we return, of finding him dead. By-the-bye, I -- I -- . Bless me, I have forgot to get the materials for lights, which I pledged myself to do."

"How unfortunate."

"Walk on slowly, while I run back and get them."

"Oh, we are too far -- "

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"Hilloa!" cried a man at this moment, some distance in front of them.

"It is Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry.

"Hilloa," cried the worthy doctor again. "Is that you, my friend, Henry Bannerworth?"

"It is," cried Henry.

Mr. Chillingworth now came up to them, and said, --

"I was before my time, so rather than wait at the church porch, which would have exposed me to observation perhaps, I thought it better to walk on, and chance meeting with you."

"You guessed we should come this way?"

"Yes, and so it turns out, really. It is unquestionably your most direct route to the church."

"I think I will go back," said Mr. Marchdale.

"Back!" exclaimed the doctor; "what for?"

"I forgot the means of getting lights. We have candles, but no means of lighting them."

"Make yourselves easy on that score," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I am never without some chemical matches of my own manufacture, so that as you have the candles, that can be no bar to our going on at once."

"That is fortunate," said Henry.

"Very," added Marchdale; "for it seems a mile's hard walking for me, or at least half a mile from the hall. Let us now push on."

They did push on, all four walking at a brisk pace. The church, although it belonged to the village, was not in it. On the contrary, it was situated at the end of a long lane, which was a mile nearly from the village, in the direction of the hall; therefore, in going to it from the hall, that amount of distance was saved, although it was always called and considered the village church.

It stood alone, with the exception of a glebe house and two cottages, that were occupied by persons who held situations about the sacred edifice, and who were supposed, being on the spot, to keep watch and ward over it.

It was an ancient building of the early English style of architecture, or rather Norman, with one of those antique, square, short towers, built of flint stones firmly embedded in cement, which, from time, had acquired almost the consistency of stone itself. There were numerous arched windows, partaking something of the more florid gothic style, although scarcely ornamental enough to be called such. The edifice stood in the centre of a grave-yard, which extended over a space of about half an acre, and altogether it was one of the prettiest and most rural old churches within many miles of the spot.

Many a lover of the antique and of the picturesque, for it was both, went out of his way while travelling in the neighbourhood to look at it, and it had an extensive and well-deserved reputation as a fine specimen of its class and style of building.

In Kent, to the present day, are some fine specimens of the old Roman style of church building; and, although they are as rapidly pulled down as the abuse of modern architects, and the cupidity of speculators, and the vanity of clergymen can possibly encourage, in order to erect flimsy, Italianised structures in their stead, yet sufficient of them remain dotted over England to interest the traveller. At Willesden there is a church of this description, which will well repay a visit. This, then, was the kind of building into which it was the intention of our four friends to penetrate, not on an unholy, or an unjustifiable errand, but on one which, proceeding from good and proper motives, it was highly desirable to conduct in as secret a manner as possible.

The moon was more densely covered by clouds than it had yet been that evening, when they reached the little wicket-gate which led into the churchyard, through which was a regularly used thoroughfare.

"We have a favourable night," remarked Henry, "for we are not so likely to be disturbed."

"And now, the question is, how are we to get in?" said Mr. Chillingworth, as he paused, and glanced up at the ancient building.

"The doors," said George, "would effectually resist us."

"How can it be done, then?"

"The only way I can think of," said Henry, "is to get out one of the small, diamond-shaped panes of glass from one of the low windows, and then we can one of us put in our hands, and undo the fastening, which is very simple, when the window opens like a door, and it is but a step into the church."

"A good way," said Marchdale. "We will lose no time."

They walked round the church till they came to a very low window indeed, near to an angle of the wall, where

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a huge abutment struck far out into the burial-ground.

"Will you do it, Henry?" said George.

"Yes. I have often noticed the fastenings. Just give me a slight hoist up, and all will be right."

George did so, and Henry with his knife easily bent back some of the leadwork which held in one of the panes of glass, and then got it out whole. He handed it down to George, saying, —

"Take this, George. We can easily replace it when we leave, so that there can be no signs left of any one having been here at all."

George took the piece of thick, dim-coloured glass, and in another moment Henry had succeeded in opening the window, and the mode of ingress to the old church was fair and easy before them all, had there been ever so many.

"I wonder," said Marchdale, "that a place so inefficiently protected has never been robbed."

"No wonder at all," remarked Mr. Chillingworth. "There is nothing to take that I am aware of that would repay anybody the trouble of taking."

"Indeed!"

"Not an article. The pulpit, to be sure, is covered with faded velvet; but beyond that, and an old box, in which I believe nothing is left but some books, I think there is no temptation."

"And that, Heaven knows, is little enough, then."

"Come on," said Henry. "Be careful; there is nothing beneath the window, and the depth is about two feet."

Thus guided, they all got fairly into the sacred edifice, and then Henry closed the window, and fastened it on the inside, as he said, —

"We have nothing to do now but to set to work opening a way into the vault, and I trust that Heaven will pardon me for thus desecrating the tomb of my ancestors, from a consideration of the object I have in view by so doing."

"It does seem wrong thus to tamper with the secrets of the tomb," remarked Mr. Marchdale.

"The secrets of a fiddlestick!" said the doctor. "What secrets has the tomb, I wonder?"

"Well, but, my dear sir — "

"Nay, my dear sir, it is high time that death, which is, then, the inevitable fate of us all, should be regarded with more philosophic eyes than it is. There are no secrets in the tomb but such as may well be endeavoured to be kept secret."

"What do you mean?"

"There is one which very probably we shall find unpleasantly revealed."

"Which is that?"

"The not over pleasant odour of decomposed animal remains — beyond that I know of nothing of a secret nature that the tomb can show us."

"Ah, your profession hardens you to such matters."

"And a very good thing that it does, or else, if all men were to look upon a dead body as something almost too dreadful to look upon, and by far too horrible to touch, surgery would lose its value, and crime, in many instances of the most obnoxious character, would go unpunished."

"If we have a light here," said Henry, "we shall run the greatest chance in the world of being seen, for the church has many windows."

"Do not have one, then, by any means," said Mr. Chillingworth. "A match held low down in the pew may enable us to open the vault."

"That will be the only plan."

Henry led them to the pew which belonged to his family, and in the floor of which was the trap door.

"When was it last opened?" inquired Marchdale.

"When my father died," said Henry; "some ten months ago now, I should think."

"The screws, then, have had ample time to fix themselves with fresh rust."

"Here is one of my chemical matches," said Mr. Chillingworth, as he suddenly irradiated the pew with a clear and beautiful flame, that lasted about a minute.

The heads of the screws were easily discernible, and the short time that the light lasted had enabled Henry to turn the key he had brought with him in the lock.

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"I think that without a light now," he said, "I can turn the screws well."

"Can you?"

"Yes, there are but four."

"Try it, then."

Henry did so, and from the screws having very large heads, and being made purposely, for the convenience of removal when required, with deep indentations to receive the screw-driver, he found no difficulty in feeling for the proper places, and extracting the screws without any more light than was afforded to him from the general whitish aspect of the heavens.

"Now, Mr. Chillingworth," he said, "another of your matches, if you please. I have all the screws so loose that I can pick them up with my fingers."

"Here," said the doctor.

In another moment the pew was as light as day, and Henry succeeded in taking out the few screws, which he placed in his pocket for their greater security, since, of course, the intention was to replace everything exactly as it was found, in order that not the least surmise should arise in the mind of any person that the vault had been opened, and visited for any purpose whatever, secretly or otherwise.

"Let us descend," said Henry. "There is no further obstacle, my friends. Let us descend."

"If any one," remarked George, in a whisper, as they slowly descended the stairs which conducted into the vault — "if any one had told me that I should be descending into a vault for the purpose of ascertaining if a dead body, which had been nearly a century there, was removed or not, and had become a vampyre, I should have denounced the idea as one of the most absurd that ever entered the brain of a human being."

"We are the very slaves of circumstances," said Marchdale, "and we never know what we may do, or what we may not. What appears to us so improbable as to border even upon the impossible at one time, is at another the only course of action which appears feasibly open to us to attempt to pursue."

They had now reached the vault, the floor of which was composed of flat red tiles, laid in tolerable order the one beside the other. As Henry had stated, the vault was by no means of large extent. Indeed, several of the apartments for the living, at the hall, were much larger than was that one destined for the dead.

The atmosphere was damp and noisome, but not by any means so bad as might have been expected, considering the number of months which had elapsed since last the vault was opened to receive one of its ghastly and still visitants.

"Now for one of your lights, Mr. Chillingworth. You say you have the candle, I think, Marchdale, although you forgot the matches."

"I have. Here they are."

Marchdale took from his pocket a parcel which contained several wax candles, and when it was opened, a smaller packet fell to the ground.

"Why, these are instantaneous matches," said Mr. Chillingworth, as he lifted the small packet up.

"They are; and what a fruitless journey I should have had back to the hall," said Mr. Marchdale, "if you had not been so well provided as you are with the means of getting a light. These matches, which I thought I had not with me, have been, in the hurry of our departure, enclosed, you see, with the candles. Truly, I should have hunted for them at home in vain."

Mr. Chillingworth lit the wax candle which was now handed to him by Marchdale, and in another moment the vault from one end of it to the other was quite discernible.

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Chapter VIII. THE COFFIN. -- THE ABSENCE OF THE DEAD. -- THE MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE, AND THE CONSTERNATION OF GEORGE.

They were all silent for a few moments as they looked around them with natural feelings of curiosity. Two of that party had of course never been in that vault at all, and the brothers, although they had descended into it upon the occasion, nearly a year before, of their father being placed in it, still looked upon it with almost as curious eyes as they who now had their first sight of it.

If a man be at all of a thoughtful or imaginative cast of mind, some curious sensations are sure to come over him, upon standing in such a place, where he knows around him lie, in the calmness of death, those in whose veins have flowed kindred blood to him -- who bore the same name, and who preceded him in the brief drama of his existence, influencing his destiny and his position in life probably largely by their actions compounded of their virtues and their vices.

Henry Bannerworth and his brother George were just the kind of persons to feel strongly such sensations. Both were reflective, imaginative, educated young men, and, as the light from the wax candle flashed upon their faces, it was evident how deeply they felt the situation in which they were placed.

Mr. Chillingworth and Marchdale were silent. They both knew what was passing in the minds of the brothers, and they had too much delicacy to interrupt a train of thought which, although from having no affinity with the dead who lay around, they could not share in, yet they respected. Henry at length, with a sudden start, seemed to recover himself from his reverie.

"This is a time for action, George," he said, "and not for romantic thought. Let us proceed."

"Yes, yes," said George, and he advanced a step towards the centre of the vault.

"Can you find out among all these coffins, for there seem to be nearly twenty," said Mr. Chillingworth, "which is the one we seek?"

"I think we may," replied Henry. "Some of the earlier coffins of our race, I know, were made of marble, and others of metal, both of which materials, I expect, would withstand the encroaches of time for a hundred years, at least."

"Let us examine," said George.

There were shelves or niches built into the walls all round, on which the coffins were placed, so that there could not be much difficulty in a minute examination of them all, the one after the other.

When, however, they came to look, they found that "decay's offensive fingers" had been more busy than they could have imagined, and that whatever they touched of the earlier coffins crumbled into dust before their very fingers.

In some cases the inscriptions were quite illegible, and, in others, the plates that had borne them had fallen on to the floor of the vault, so that it was impossible to say to which coffin they belonged.

Of course, the more recent and fresh-looking coffins they did not examine, because they could not have anything to do with the object of that melancholy visit.

"We shall arrive at no conclusion," said George. "All seems to have rotted away among those coffins where we might expect to find the one belonging to Marmaduke Bannerworth, our ancestor."

"Here is a coffin plate," said Marchdale, taking one from the floor.

He handed it to Mr. Chillingworth, who, upon an inspection of it, close to the light, exclaimed, --

"It must have belonged to the coffin you seek."

"What says it?" "Ye mortale remains of Marmaduke Bannerworth, Yeoman. God reste his soule. A.D. 1640."

"It is the plate belonging to his coffin," said Henry, "and now our search is fruitless."

"It is so, indeed," exclaimed George, "for how can we tell to which of the coffins that have lost the plates this one really belongs?"

"I should not be so hopeless," said Marchdale. "I have, from time to time, in the pursuit of antiquarian lore, which I was once fond of, entered many vaults, and I have always observed that an inner coffin of metal was sound and good, while the outer one of wood had rotted away, and yielded at once to the touch of the first hand that was laid upon it."

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"But, admitting that to be the case," said Henry, "how does that assist us in the identification of the coffin?"

"I have always, in my experience, found the name and rank of the deceased engraved upon the lid of the inner coffin, as well as being set forth in a much more perishable manner on the plate which was once secured to the outer one."

"He is right," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I wonder we never thought of that. If your ancestor was buried in a leaden coffin, there will be no difficulty in finding which it is."

Henry seized the light, and proceeding to one of the coffins, which seemed to be a mass of decay, he pulled away some of the rotted wood work, and then suddenly exclaimed, --

"You are quite right. Here is a firm strong leaden coffin within, which, although quite black, does not appear otherwise to have suffered."

"What is the inscription on that?" said George.

With difficulty the name on the lid was deciphered, but it was found not to be the coffin of him whom they sought.

"We can make short work of this," said Marchdale, "by only examining those leaden coffins which have lost the plates from off their outer cases. There do not appear to be many in such a state."

He then, with another light, which he lighted from the one that Henry now carried, commenced actively assisting in the search, which was carried on silently for more than ten minutes.

Suddenly Mr. Marchdale cried, in a tone of excitement, --

"I have found it. It is here."

They all immediately surrounded the spot where he was, and then he pointed to the lid of a coffin, which he had been rubbing with his handkerchief, in order to make the inscription more legible, and said, --

"See. It is here."

By the combined light of the candles they saw the words, --

"Marmaduke Bannerworth, Yeoman. 1640."

"Yes, there can be no mistake here," said Henry. "This is the coffin, and it shall be opened."

"I have the iron crowbar here," said Marchdale. "It is an old friend of mine, and I am accustomed to the use of it. Shall I open the coffin?"

"Do so -- do so," said Henry.

They stood around in silence, while Mr. Marchdale, with much care, proceeded to open the coffin, which seemed of great thickness, and was of solid lead.

It was probably the partial rotting of the metal, in consequence of the damps of that place, what made it easier to open the coffin than it otherwise would have been, but certain it was that the top came away remarkably easily. Indeed, so easily did it come off, that another supposition might have been hazarded, namely, that it had never been effectively fastened.

The few moments that elapsed were ones of very great suspense to every one there present; and it would, indeed, be quite safe to assert, that all the world was for the time forgotten in the absorbing interest which appertained to the affair which was in progress.

The candles were now both held by Mr. Chillingworth, and they were so held as to cast a full and clear light upon the coffin. Now the lid slid off, and Henry eagerly gazed into the interior.

There lay something certainly there, and an audible "Thank God!" escaped his lips.

"The body is there!" exclaimed George.

"All right," said Marchdale, "here it is. There is something, and what else can it be?"

"Hold the lights," said Mr. Chillingworth; "hold the lights, some of you; let us be quite certain."

George took the lights, and Mr. Chillingworth, without any hesitation, dipped his hands at once into the coffin, and took up some fragments of rags which were there. They were so rotten, that they fell to pieces in his grasp, like so many pieces of tinder.

There was a death-like pause for some few moments, and then Mr. Chillingworth said, in a low voice, --

"There is not the least vestige of a dead body here."

Henry gave a deep groan, as he said, --

"Mr. Chillingworth, can you take upon yourself to say that no corpse has undergone the process of decomposition in this coffin?"

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"To answer your question exactly, as probably in your hurry you have worded it," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I cannot take upon myself to say any such thing; but this I can say, namely, that in this coffin there are no animal remains, and that it is quite impossible that any corpse enclosed here could, in any lapse of time, have so utterly and entirely disappeared."

"I am answered," said Henry.

"Good God!" exclaimed George, "and has this but added another damning proof, to those we have already on our minds, of one of the most dreadful superstitions that ever the mind of man conceived?"

"It would seem so," said Marchdale sadly.

"Oh, that I were dead! This is terrible. God of heaven, why are these things? Oh, if I were but dead, and so spared the torture of supposing such things possible."

"Think again, Mr. Chillingworth; I pray you think again," cried Marchdale.

"If I were to think for the remainder of my existence," he replied, "I could come to no other conclusion. It is not a matter of opinion; it is a matter of fact."

"You are positive, then," said Henry, "that the dead body of Marmaduke Bannerworth has not rested here?"

"I am positive. Look for yourselves. The lead is but slightly discoloured; it looks tolerably clean and fresh; there is not a vestige of putrefaction — no bones, no dust even."

They did all look for themselves, and the most casual glance was sufficient to satisfy the most sceptical.

"All is over," said Henry; "let us now leave this place; and all I can now ask of you, my friends, is to lock this dreadful secret deep in your own hearts."

"It shall never pass my lips," said Marchdale.

"Nor mine, you may depend," said the doctor. "I was much in hopes that this night's work would have had the effect of dissipating, instead of adding to, the gloomy fancies that now possess you."

"Good heavens!" cried George, "can you call them fancies, Mr. Chillingworth?"

"I do, indeed."

"Have you yet a doubt?"

"My young friend, I told you from the first, that I would not believe in your vampyre; and I tell you now, that if one was to come and lay hold of me by the throat, as long as I could at all gasp for breath I would tell him he was a d — — d impostor."

"This is carrying incredulity to the verge of obstinacy."

"Far beyond it, if you please."

"You will not be convinced?" said Marchdale.

"I most decidedly, on this point, will not."

"Then you are one who would doubt a miracle, if you saw it with your own eyes."

"I would, because I do not believe in miracles. I should endeavour to find some rational and some scientific means of accounting for the phenomenon, and that's the very reason why we have no miracles now—a—days, between you and I, and no prophets and saints, and all that sort of thing."

"I would rather avoid such observations in such a place as this," said Marchdale.

"Nay, do not be the moral coward," cried Mr. Chillingworth, "to make your opinions, or the expression of them, dependent upon any certain locality."

"I know not what to think," said Henry; "I am bewildered quite. Let us now come away."

Mr. Marchdale replaced the lid of the coffin, and then the little party moved towards the staircase. Henry turned before he ascended, and glanced back into the vault.

"Oh," he said, "if I could but think there had been some mistake, some error of judgment, on which the mind could rest for hope."

"I deeply regret," said Marchdale, "that I so strenuously advised this expedition. I did hope that from it would have resulted much good."

"And you have every reason so to hope," said Chillingworth. "I advised it likewise, and I tell you that its result perfectly astonishes me, although I will not allow myself to embrace at once all the conclusions to which it would seem to lead me."

"I am satisfied," said Henry; "I know you both advised me for the best. The curse of Heaven seems now to have fallen upon me and my house."

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"Oh, nonsense!" said Chillingworth. "What for?"

"Alas! I know not."

"Then you may depend that Heaven would never act so oddly. In the first place, Heaven don't curse anybody; and, in the second, it is too just to inflict pain where pain is not amply deserved."

They ascended the gloomy staircase of the vault. The countenances of both George and Henry were very much saddened, and it was quite evident that their thoughts were by far too busy to enable them to enter into any conversation. They did not, and particularly George, seem to hear all that was said to them. Their intellects seemed almost stunned by the unexpected circumstance of the disappearance of the body of their ancestor.

All along they had, although almost unknown to themselves, felt a sort of conviction that they must find some remains of Marmaduke Bannerworth, which would render the supposition, even in the most superstitious minds, that he was the vampire, a thing totally and physically impossible.

But now the whole question assumed a far more bewildering shape. The body was not in its coffin — it had not there quietly slept the long sleep of death common to humanity. Where was it then? What had become of it? Where, how, and under what circumstances had it been removed? Had it itself burst the bands that held it, and hideously stalked forth into the world again to make one of its seeming inhabitants, and kept up for a hundred years a dreadful existence by such adventures as it had consummated at the hall, where, in the course of ordinary human life, it had once lived?

All these were questions which irresistibly pressed themselves upon the consideration of Henry and his brother. They were awful questions.

And yet, take any sober, sane, thinking, educated man, and show him all that they had seen, subject him to all which they had been subjected, and say if human reason, and all the arguments that the subtlest brain could back it with, would be able to hold out against such a vast accumulation of horrible evidences, and say, — "I don't believe it."

Mr. Chillingworth's was the only plan. He would not argue the question. He said at once, —

"I will not believe this thing — upon this point I will yield to no evidence whatever."

That was the only way of disposing of such a question; but there are not many who could so dispose of it, and not one so much interested in it as were the brothers Bannerworth, who could at all hope to get into such a state of mind.

The boards were laid carefully down again, and the screws replaced. Henry found himself unequal to the task, so it was done by Marchdale, who took pains to replace everything in the same state in which they had found it, even to laying the matting at the bottom of the pew.

Then they extinguished the light, and, with heavy hearts, they all walked towards the window, to leave the sacred edifice by the same means they had entered it.

"Shall we replace the pane of glass?" said Marchdale.

"Oh, it matters not — it matters not," said Henry, listlessly; "nothing matters now. I care not what becomes of me — am getting weary of a life which now must be one of misery and dread."

"You must not allow yourself to fall into such a state of mind as this," said the doctor, "or you will become a patient of mine very quickly."

"I cannot help it."

"Well, but be a man. If there are serious evils affecting you, fight out against them the best way you can."

"I cannot."

"Come, now, listen to me. We need not, I think, trouble ourselves about the pane of glass, so come along."

He took the arm of Henry and walked on with him a little in advance of the others.

"Henry," he said, "the best way, you may depend, of meeting evils, be they great or small, is to get up an obstinate feeling of defiance against them. Now, when anything occurs which is uncomfortable to me, I endeavour to convince myself, and I have no great difficulty in doing so, that I am a decidedly injured man."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I get very angry, and that gets up a kind of obstinacy, which makes me not feel half so much mental misery as would be my portion if I were to succumb to the evil, and commence whining over it, as many people do, under the pretence of being resigned."

"But this family affliction of mine transcends anything that anybody else ever endured."

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"I don't know that; but it is a view of the subject which, if I were you, would only make me more obstinate."

"What can I do?"

"In the first place, I would say to myself, 'There may or there may not be supernatural beings, who, from some physical derangement of the ordinary nature of things, make themselves obnoxious to living people; if there are, d — n them! There may be vampyres; and if there are, I defy them.' Let the imagination paint its very worst terrors; let fear do what it will and what it can in peopling the mind with horrors. Shrink from nothing, and even then I would defy them all."

"Is not that like defying Heaven?"

"Most certainly not; for in all we say and in all we do we act from the impulses of that mind which is given to us by Heaven itself. If Heaven creates an intellect and a mind of a certain order, Heaven will not quarrel that it does the work which it was adapted to do."

"I know these are your opinions. I have heard you mention them before."

"They are the opinions of every rational person, Henry Bannerworth, because they will stand the test of reason; and what I urge upon you is, not to allow yourself to be mentally prostrated, even if a vampyre had paid a visit to your house. Defy him, say I — fight him. Self-preservation is a great law of nature, implanted in all our hearts; do you summon it to your aid."

"I will endeavour to think as you would have me. I thought more than once of summoning religion to my aid."

"Well, that is religion."

"Indeed!"

"I consider so, and the most rational religion of all. All that we read about religion that does not seem expressly to agree with it, you may consider as an allegory."

"But, Mr. Chillingworth, I cannot and will not renounce the sublime truths of Scripture. They may be incomprehensible; they may be inconsistent; and some of them may look ridiculous; but still they are sacred and sublime, and I will not renounce them although my reason may not accord with them, because they are the laws of Heaven."

No wonder this powerful argument silenced Mr. Chillingworth, who was one of those characters in society who hold most dreadful opinions, and who would destroy religious beliefs, and all the different sects of the world, if they could, and endeavour to introduce instead some horrible system of human reason and profound philosophy.

But how soon the religious man silences his opponent; and let it not be supposed that, because his opponent says no more upon the subject, he does so because he is disgusted with the stupidity of the other; no, it is because he is completely beaten, and has nothing more to say.

The distance now between the church and the hall was nearly traversed, and Mr. Chillingworth, who was a very good man, notwithstanding his disbelief in certain things of course paved the way for him to hell, took a kind leave of Mr. Marchdale and the brothers, promising to call on the following morning and see Flora.

Henry and George then, in earnest conversation with Marchdale, proceeded homewards. It was evident that the scene in the vault had made a deep and saddening impression on them, and one which was not likely easily to be eradicated.

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Chapter IX. THE OCCURRENCES OF THE NIGHT AT THE HALL. -- THE SECOND APPEARANCE OF THE VAMPYRE, AND THE PISTOL-SHOT.

Despite the full and free consent which Flora had given to her brothers to entrust her solely to the care of her mother and her own courage at the hall, she felt greater fear creep over her after they were gone than she chose to acknowledge.

A sort of presentiment appeared to come over her that some evil was about to occur, and more than once she caught herself almost in the act of saying, --

"I wish they had not gone."

Mrs. Bannerworth, too, could not be supposed to be entirely destitute of uncomfortable feelings, when she came to consider how poor a guard she was over her beautiful child, and how much terror might even deprive of the little power she had, should the dreadful visiter again make his appearance.

"But it is but for two hours," thought Flora, "and two hours will soon pass away."

There was, too, another feeling which gave her some degree of confidence, although it arose from a bad source, inasmuch as it was one which showed powerfully how much her mind was dwelling on the particulars of the horrible belief in the class of supernatural beings, one of whom she believed had visited her.

That consideration was this. The two hours of absence from the hall of its male inhabitants, would be from nine o'clock until eleven, and those were not the two hours during which she felt that she would be most timid on account of the vampyre.

"It was after midnight before," she thought, "when it came, and perhaps it may not be able to come earlier. It may not have the power, until that time, to make its hideous visits, and, therefore, I will believe myself safe."

She had made up her mind not to go to bed until the return of her brothers, and she and her mother sat in a small room that was used as a breakfast-room, and which had a latticed window that opened on to the lawn.

This window had in the inside strong oaken shutters, which had been fastened as securely as their construction would admit of some time before the departure of the brothers and Mr. Marchdale on that melancholy expedition, the object of which, if it had been known to her, would have added so much to the terrors of poor Flora.

It was not even guessed at, however remotely, so that she had not the additional affliction of thinking, that while she was sitting there, a prey to all sorts of imaginative terrors, they were perhaps gathering fresh evidence, as, indeed, they were, of the dreadful reality of the appearance which, but for the collateral circumstances attendant upon its coming and its going, she would fain have persuaded herself was but the vision of a dream.

It was before nine that the brothers started, but in her own mind Flora gave them to eleven, and when she heard ten o'clock sound from a clock which stood in the hall, she felt pleased to think that in another hour they would surely be at home.

"My dear," said her mother, "you look more like yourself, now."

"Do I, mother?"

"Yes, you are well again."

"Ah, if I could forget -- "

"Time, dear Flora, will enable you to do so, and all the rest of what made you so unwell will pass away. You will soon forget it all."

"I will hope to do so."

"Be assured that, some day or another, something will occur, as Henry says, to explain all that has happened, in some way consistent with reason and the ordinary nature of things, my dear Flora."

"Oh, I will cling to such a belief; I will get Henry, upon whose judgment I know I can rely, to tell me so, and each time that I hear such words from his lips, I will contrive to dismiss some portion of the terror which now, I cannot but confess, clings to my heart."

Flora laid her hand upon her mother's arm, and in a low, anxious tone of voice, said, -- "Listen, mother."

Mrs. Bannerworth turned pale, as she said, -- "Listen to what, dear?"

"Within these last ten minutes," said Flora, "I have thought three or four times that I heard a slight noise without. Nay, mother, do not tremble -- it may be only fancy."

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Flora herself trembled, and was of a death-like paleness; once or twice she passed her hand across her brow, and altogether she presented a picture of much mental suffering.

They now conversed in anxious whispers, and almost all they said consisted in anxious wishes for the return of the brothers and Mr. Marchdale.

"You will be happier and more assured, my dear, with some company," said Mrs. Bannerworth. "Shall I ring for the servants, and let them remain in the room with us, until they who are our best safeguards next to Heaven return?"

"Hush — hush — hush, mother!"

"What do you hear?"

"I thought — I heard a faint sound."

"I heard nothing, dear."

"Listen again, mother. Surely I could not be deceived so often. I have now, at least, six times heard a sound as if some one was outside by the windows."

"No, no, my darling, do not think; your imagination is active and in a state of excitement."

"It is, and yet — "

"Believe me, it deceives you."

"I hope to Heaven it does!"

There was a pause of some minutes' duration, and then Mrs. Bannerworth again urged slightly the calling of some of the servants, for she thought that their presence might have the effect of giving a different direction to her child's thoughts; but Flora saw her place her hand upon the bell, and she said, —

"No, mother, no — not yet, not yet. Perhaps I am deceived."

Mrs. Bannerworth upon this sat down, but no sooner had she done so than she heartily regretted she had not rung the bell, for, before another word could be spoken, there came too perceptibly upon their ears for there to be any mistake at all about it, a strange scratching noise upon the window outside.

A faint cry came from Flora's lips, as she exclaimed, in a voice of great agony, —

"Oh, God! — oh, God! It has come again!"

Mrs. Bannerworth became faint, and unable to move or speak at all; she could only sit like one paralysed, and unable to do more than listen to and see what was going on.

The scratching noise continued for a few seconds, and then altogether ceased. Perhaps, under ordinary circumstances, such a sound outside the window would have scarcely afforded food for comment at all, or, if it had, it would have been attributed to some natural effect, or to the exertions of some bird or animal to obtain admittance to the house.

But there had occurred now enough in that family to make any little sound of wonderful importance, and these things which before would have passed completely unheeded, at all events without creating much alarm, were now invested with a fearful interest.

When the scratching noise ceased, Flora spoke in a low, anxious whisper, as she said, —

"Mother, you heard it then?"

Mrs. Bannerworth tried to speak, but she could not; and then suddenly, with a loud clash, the bar, which on the inside appeared to fasten the shutters strongly, fell as if by some invisible agency, and the shutters now, but for the intervention of the window, could be easily pushed open from without.

Mrs. Bannerworth covered her face with her hands, and, after rocking to and fro for a moment, she fell off her chair, having fainted with the excess of terror that came over her.

For about the space of time in which a fast speaker could count twelve, Flora thought her reason was leaving her, but it did not. She found herself recovering; and there she sat, with her eyes fixed upon the window, looking more like some exquisitely-chiselled statue of despair than a being of flesh and blood, expecting each moment to have its eyes blasted by some horrible appearance, such as might be supposed to drive her to madness.

And now again came the strange knocking or scratching against the pane of glass of the window.

This continued for some minutes, during which it appeared likewise to Flora that some confusion was going on at another part of the house, for she fancied she heard voices and the banging of doors.

It seemed to her as if she must have sat looking at the shutters of that window a long time before she saw them shake, and then one wide hinged portion of them slowly opened.

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Once again horror appeared to be on the point of producing madness in her brain, and then, as before, a feeling of calmness rapidly ensued.

She was able to see plainly that something was by the window, but what it was she could not plainly discern, in consequence of the lights she had in the room. A few moments, however, sufficed to settle that mystery, for the window was opened and a figure stood before her.

One glance, one terrified glance, in which her whole soul was concentrated, sufficed to shew her who and what the figure was. There was a tall, gaunt form -- there was the faded ancient apparel -- the lustrous metallic-looking eyes -- its half-opened mouth, exhibiting tusk-like teeth! It was -- yes, it was -- the vampyre!

It stood for a moment gazing at her, and then in the hideous way it had attempted before to speak, it apparently endeavoured to utter some words which it could not make articulate to human ears. The pistols lay before Flora. Mechanically she raised one, and pointed it at the figure. It advanced a step, and then she pulled the trigger.

A stunning report followed. There was a loud cry of pain, and the vampyre fled. The smoke and confusion that was incidental to the spot prevented her from seeing if the figure walked or ran away. She thought she heard a crashing sound among the plants outside the window, as if it had fallen, but she did not feel quite sure.

It was no effort of any reflection, but a purely mechanical movement, that made her raise the other pistol, and discharge that likewise in the direction the vampyre had taken. Then casting the weapon away, she rose, and made a frantic rush from the room. She opened the door, and was dashing out, when she found herself caught in the circling arms of some one who either had been there waiting, or who had just at that moment got there.

The thought that it was the vampyre, who by some mysterious means had got there, and was about to make her his prey, now overcame her completely, and she sunk into a state of utter insensibility on the moment.

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Chapter X. THE RETURN FROM THE VAULT. -- THE ALARM, AND THE SEARCH AROUND THE HALL.

It so happened that George and Henry Bannerworth, along with Mr. Marchdale, had just reached the gate which conducted into the garden of the mansion when they all were alarmed by the report of a pistol. Amid the stillness of the night, it came upon them with so sudden a shock, that they involuntarily paused, and there came from the lips of each an expression of alarm.

"Good heavens!" cried George, "can that be Flora firing at any intruder?"

"It must be," cried Henry; "she has in her possession the only weapons in the house."

Mr. Marchdale turned very pale, and trembled slightly, but he did not speak.

"On, on," cried Henry; "for God's sake, let us hasten on."

As he spoke, he cleared the gate at a bound, and at a terrific pace he made towards the house, passing over beds, and plantations, and flowers heedlessly, so that he went the most direct way to it.

Before, however, it was possible for any human speed to accomplish even half of the distance, the report of the other shot came upon his ears, and he even fancied he heard the bullet whistle past his head in tolerably close proximity. This supposition gave him a clue to the direction at all events from whence the shots proceeded, otherwise he knew not from which window they were fired, because it had not occurred to him, previous to leaving home, to inquire in which room Flora and his mother were likely to be seated waiting his return.

He was right as regarded the bullet. It was that winged messenger of death which had passed his head in such very dangerous proximity, and consequently he made with tolerable accuracy towards the open window from whence the shots had been fired.

The night was not near so dark as it had been, although even yet it was very far from being a light one, and he was soon enabled to see that there was a room, the window of which was wide open, and lights burning on the table within. He made towards it in a moment, and entered it. To his astonishment, the first objects he beheld were Flora and a stranger, who was now supporting her in his arms. To grapple him by the throat was the work of a moment, but the stranger cried aloud in a voice which sounded familiar to Henry, --

"Good God, are you all mad?"

Henry relaxed his hold, and looked in his face.

"Gracious heavens, it is Mr. Holland!" he said.

"Yes; did you not know me?"

Henry was bewildered. He staggered to a seat, and, in doing so, he saw his mother stretched apparently lifeless upon the floor. To raise her was the work of a moment, and then Marchdale and George, who had followed him as fast as they could, appeared at the open window.

Such a strange scene as that small room now exhibited had never been equalled in Bannerworth Hall. There was young Mr. Holland, of whom mention has already been made, as the affianced lover of Flora, supporting her fainting form. There was Henry doing equal service to his mother; and on the floor lay the two pistols, and one of the candles which had been upset in the confusion: while the terrified attitudes of George and Mr. Marchdale at the window completed the strange-looking picture.

"What is this -- oh! what has happened?" cried George.

"I know not -- I know not," said Henry. "Some one summon the servants; I am nearly mad."

Mr. Marchdale at once rung the bell, for George looked so faint and ill as to be incapable of doing so; and he rung it so loudly and so effectually, that the two servants who had been employed suddenly upon the others leaving came with much speed to know what was the matter.

"See to your mistress," said Henry. "She is dead, or has fainted. For God's sake, let who can give me some account of what has caused all this confusion here."

"Are you aware, Henry," said Marchdale, "that a stranger is present in the room?"

He pointed at Mr. Holland as he spoke, who, before Henry could reply, said, --

"Sir, I may be a stranger to you, as you are to me, and yet no stranger to those whose home this is."

"No, no," said Henry, "you are no stranger to us, Mr. Holland, but are thrice welcome -- none can be more

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welcome. Mr. Marchdale, this is Mr. Holland, of whom you have heard me speak."

"I am proud to know you, sir," said Mr. Marchdale.

"Sir, I thank you," replied Holland, coldly.

It will so happen; but, at first sight, it appeared as if those two persons had some sort of antagonistic feeling towards each other, which threatened to prevent effectually their ever becoming intimate friends.

The appeal of Henry to the servants to know if they could tell him what had occurred was answered in the negative. All they knew was, that they had heard two shots fired, and that, since then, they had remained where they were, in a great fright, until the bell was rung violently. This was no news at all, and, therefore, the only chance was, to wait patiently for the recovery of the mother, or of Flora, from one or the other of whom surely some information could be at once then procured.

Mrs. Bannerworth was removed to her own room, and so would Flora have been; but Mr. Holland, who was supporting her in his arms, said, —

"I think the air from the open window is recovering her, and it is likely to do so. Oh, do not now take her from me, after so long an absence. Flora, Flora, look up; do you not know me? You have not yet given me one look of acknowledgement. Flora, dear Flora!"

The sound of his voice seemed to act as the most potent of charms in restoring her to consciousness; it broke through the death-like trance in which she lay, and, opening her beautiful eyes, she fixed them upon his face, saying, —

"Yes, yes; it is Charles — it is Charles."

She burst into a hysterical flood of tears, and clung to him like some terrified child to its only friend in the whole wide world.

"Oh, my dear friends," cried Charles Holland, "do not deceive me; has Flora been ill?"

"We have all been ill," said George.

"All ill?"

"Ay, and nearly mad," exclaimed Harry.

Holland looked from one to the other in surprise, as well he might, nor was that surprise at all lessened when Flora made an effort to extricate herself from his embrace, as she exclaimed, —

"You must leave me — you must leave me, Charles, for ever! Oh! never, never look upon my face again!"

"I — I am bewildered," said Charles.

"Leave me, now," continued Flora; "think me unworthy; think what you will, Charles, but I cannot, I dare not, now be yours."

"Is this a dream?"

"Oh, would it were. Charles, if we had never met, you would be happier — I could not be more wretched."

"Flora, Flora, do you say these words of so great cruelty to try my love?"

"No, as Heaven is my judge, I do not."

"Gracious Heaven, then, what do they mean?"

Flora shuddered, and Henry, coming up to her, took her hand in his tenderly, as he said, —

"Has it been again?"

"It has."

"You shot it?"

"I fired full upon it, Henry, but it fled."

"It did — fly?"

"It did, Henry, but it will come again — it will surely come again."

"You — you hit it with the bullet?" interposed Mr. Marchdale. "Perhaps you killed it?"

"I think I must have hit it, unless I am mad."

Charles Holland looked from one to the other with such a look of intense surprise, that George remarked it, and said at once to him, —

"Mr. Holland, a full explanation is due to you, and you shall have it."

"You seem to be the only rational person here," said Charles. "Pray what is it that everybody calls 'it'?"

"Hush — hush!" said Henry; "you will soon hear, but not at present."

"Hear me, Charles," said Flora. "From this moment, mind, I do release you from every vow, from every

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promise made to me of constancy and love; and if you are wise, Charles, and will be advised, you will now this moment leave this house never to return to it."

"No," said Charles — "no; by Heaven I love you, Flora! I have come to say again all that in another clime I said with joy to you. When I forget you, let what trouble may oppress you, may God forget me, and my own right hand forget to do me honest service."

"Oh! no more — no more!" sobbed Flora.

"Yes, much more, if you will tell me of words which will be stronger than others in which to paint my love, my faith, and my constancy."

"Be prudent," said Henry. "Say no more."

"Nay, upon such a theme I could speak for ever. You may cast me off, Flora; but until you tell me you love another, I am yours till the death, and then with a sanguine hope at my heart that we shall meet again, never, dearest, to part."

Flora sobbed bitterly.

"Oh!" she said, "this is the unkindest blow of all — this is worse than all."

"Unkind!" echoed Holland.

"Heed her not," said Henry; "she means not you."

"Oh, no — no!" she cried. "Farewell, Charles — dear Charles."

"Oh, say that word again!" he exclaimed, with animation. "It is the first time such music has met my ears."

"It must be the last."

"No, no — oh, no."

"For your own sake I shall be able now, Charles, to show you that I really loved you."

"Not by casting me from you?"

"Yes, even so. That will be the way to show that I love you."

She held up her hands wildly, as she added, in an excited voice, —

"The curse of destiny is upon me! I am singled out as one lost and accursed. Oh, horror — horror! would that I were dead!"

Charles staggered back a pace or two until he came to a table, at which he clutched for support. He turned very pale as he said, in a faint voice, —

"Is — is she mad, or am I?"

"Tell him that I am mad, Henry," cried Flora. "Do not, oh, do not make his lonely thoughts terrible with more than that. Tell him I am mad."

"Come with me," whispered Henry to Holland. "I pray you come with me at once, and you shall know all."

"I — will."

"George, stay with Flora for a time. Come, come, Mr. Holland, you ought, and you shall know all; then you can come to a judgment for yourself. This way, sir. You cannot, in the wildest freak of your imagination, guess that I have now to tell you."

Never was mortal man so utterly bewildered by the events of the last hour of his existence as was now Charles Holland, and truly he might well be so. He had arrived in England, and made what speed he could to the house of a family whom he admired for their intelligence, their high culture, and in one member of which his whole thoughts of domestic happiness in this world were centered, and he found nothing but confusion, incoherence, mystery, and the wildest dismay.

Well might he doubt if he were sleeping or waking — well might he ask if he or they were mad.

And now, as, after a long, lingering look of affection upon the pale, suffering form of Flora, he followed Henry from the room, his thoughts were busy in fancying a thousand vague and wild imaginations with respect to the communication which was promised to be made to him.

But, as Henry had truly said to him, not in the wildest freak of his imagination could he conceive of anything near the terrible strangeness and horror of that which he had to tell him, and consequently he found himself closeted with Henry in a small private room, removed from the domestic part of the hall, to the full in as bewildered a state as he had been from the first.

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Chapter XI. THE COMMUNICATION TO THE LOVER. -- THE HEART'S DESPAIR.

Consternation is sympathetic, and any one who had looked upon the features of Charles Holland, now that he was seated with Henry Bannerworth, in expectation of a communication which his fears told him was to blast all the dearest and most fondly cherished hopes for ever, would scarcely have recognised in him the same young man who, one short hour before, had knocked so loudly, and so full of joyful hope and expectation, at the door of the hall.

But so it was. He knew Henry Bannerworth too well to suppose that any unreal cause could blanch his cheek. He knew Flora too well to imagine for one moment that caprice had dictated the, to him, fearful words of dismissal she had uttered to him.

Happier would it at that time have been to Charles Holland had she acted capriciously towards him, and convinced him that his true heart's devotion had been cast at the feet of one unworthy of so really noble a gift. Pride would then have enabled him, no doubt, successfully to resist the blow. A feeling of honest and proper indignation at having his feelings trifled with, would, no doubt, have sustained him; but, alas! the case seemed to be widely different.

True, she implored him to think of her no more -- no longer to cherish in his breast the fond dream of affection which had been its guest so long; but the manner in which she did so brought along with it an irresistible conviction, that she was making a noble sacrifice of her own feelings for him, from some cause which was involved in the profoundest mystery.

But now he was to hear all. Henry had promised to tell him, and as he looked into his pale, but handsomely intellectual face, he half dreaded the disclosure he yet panted to hear.

"Tell me all, Henry -- tell me all," he said. "Upon the words that come from your lips I know I can rely."

"I will have no reservations with you," said Henry, sadly. "You ought to know all, and you shall. Prepare yourself for the strangest revelation you ever heard."

"Indeed!"

"Ay. One which in hearing you may well doubt; and one which, I hope you will never find opportunity of verifying."

"You speak in riddles."

"And yet speak truly, Charles. You heard with what a frantic vehemence Flora desired you to think no more of her?"

"I did -- I did."

"She was right. She is a noble-hearted girl for uttering those words. A dreadful incident in our family has occurred, which might well induce you to pause before uniting your fate with that of any member of it."

"Impossible. Nothing can possibly subdue the feelings of affection I entertain for Flora. She is worthy of any one, and, as such, amid all changes -- all mutations of fortune, she shall be mine."

"Do not suppose that any change of fortune has produced the scene you were witness to."

"Then, what else?"

"I will tell you, Holland. In all your travels, and in all your reading, did you ever come across anything about vampyres?"

"About what?" cried Charles, drawing his chair forward a little. "About what?"

"You may well doubt the evidence of your own ears, Charles Holland, and wish me to repeat what I said. I say, do you know anything about vampyres?"

Charles Holland looked curiously in Henry's face, and the latter immediately added, --

"I can guess what is passing in your mind at present, and I do not wonder at it. You think I must be mad."

"Well, really, Henry, your extraordinary question -- "

"I knew it. Were I you, I should hesitate to believe the tale; but the fact is, we have every reason to believe that one member of our own family is one of those horrible preternatural beings called vampyres."

"Good God, Henry, can you allow your judgment for a moment to stoop to such a superstition?"

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"That's what I have asked myself a hundred times; but, Charles Holland, the judgment, the feelings, and all the prejudices, natural and acquired, must succumb to actual ocular demonstration. Listen to me, and do not interrupt me. You shall know all, and you shall know it circumstantially."

Henry then related to the astonished Charles Holland all that had occurred, from the first alarm of Flora, up to that period when he, Holland, caught her in his arms as she was about to leave the room.

"And now," he said in conclusion, "I cannot tell what opinion you may come to as regards these most singular events. You will recollect that here is the unbiased evidence of four or five people to the facts, and, beyond that, the servants, who have seen something of the horrible visitor."

"You bewilder me, utterly," said Charles Holland.

"As we are all bewildered."

"But — but, gracious Heaven! it cannot be."

"It is."

"No — no. There is — there must be yet some dreadful mistake."

"Can you start any supposition by which we can otherwise explain any of the phenomena I have described to you? If you can, for Heaven's sake do so, and you will find no one who will cling to it with more tenacity than I."

"Any other species or kind of supernatural appearance might admit of argument; but this, to my perception, is too wildly improbable — too much at variance with all we see and know of the operations of nature."

"It is so. All that we have told ourselves repeatedly, and yet is all human reason at once struck down by the few brief words of — 'We have seen it.'"

"I would doubt my eyesight."

"One might; but many cannot be labouring under the same delusion."

"My friend, I pray you, do not make me shudder at the supposition that such a dreadful thing as this is possible."

"I am, believe me, Charles, most unwilling to oppress any one with the knowledge of these evils; but you will clearly understand that you may, with perfect honour, now consider yourself free from all engagements you have entered into with Flora."

"No, no! By Heaven, no!"

"Yes, Charles. Reflect upon the consequences now of a union with such a family."

"Oh, Henry Bannerworth, can you suppose me so dead to all good feeling, so utterly lost to honourable impulses, as to eject from my heart her who has possession of it entirely, on such a ground as this?"

"You would be justified."

"Coldly justified in prudence I might be. There are a thousand circumstances in which a man may be justified in a particular course of action, and that course yet may be neither honourable nor just. I love Flora; and were she tormented by the whole of the supernatural world, I should still love her. Nay, it becomes, then, a higher and a nobler duty on my part to stand between her and those evils, if possible."

"Charles — Charles," said Henry, "I cannot of course refuse you my meed of praise and admiration for your generosity of feeling; but, remember, if we are compelled, despite all our feelings and all our predilections to the contrary, to give in to a belief in the existence of vampyres, why may we not at once receive as the truth all that is recorded of them?"

"To what do you allude?"

"To this. That one who has been visited by a vampyre, and whose blood has formed a horrible repast for such a being, becomes, after death, one of the dreadful race, and visits others in the same way."

"Now this must be insanity," cried Charles.

"It bears the aspect of it, indeed," said Henry; "oh that you could by some means satisfy yourself that I am mad."

"There may be insanity in this family," thought Charles, with such an exquisite pang of misery that he groaned aloud.

"Already," added Henry, mournfully, "already the blighting influence of the dreadful tale is upon you, Charles. Oh, let me add my advice to Flora's entreaties. She loves you, and we all esteem you; fly, then, from us, and leave us to encounter our miseries alone. Fly from us, Charles Holland, and take with you our best wishes for happiness which you cannot know here."

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"Never," cried Charles; "I devote my existence to Flora. I will not play the coward, and fly from one whom I love, on such grounds. I devote my life to her."

Henry could not speak for emotion for several minutes, and when at length, in a faltering voice, he could utter some words, he said, —

"God of heaven, what happiness is marred by these horrible events? What have we all done to be the victims of such a dreadful act of vengeance?"

"Henry, do not talk in that way," cried Charles. "Rather let us bend all our energies to overcoming the evil, than spend any time in useless lamentations. I cannot even yet give in to a belief in the existence of such a being as you say visited Flora."

"But the evidences."

"Look you here, Henry: until I am convinced that some things have happened which it is totally impossible could happen by any human means whatever, I will not ascribe them to supernatural influence."

"But what human means, Charles, could produce what I have now narrated to you?"

"I do not know, just at present, but I will give the subject the most attentive consideration. Will you accommodate me here for a time?"

"You know you are welcome here as if the house were your own, and all that it contains."

"I believe so, most truly. You have no objection, I presume, to my conversing with Flora upon this strange subject?"

"Certainly not. Of course you will be careful to say nothing which can add to her fears."

"I shall be most guarded, believe me. You say that your brother George, Mr. Chillingworth, yourself, and this Mr. Marchdale, have all been cognisant of the circumstances."

"Yes — yes."

"Then with the whole of them you permit me to hold free communication upon the subject?"

"Most certainly."

"I will do so then. Keep up good heart, Henry, and this affair, which looks so full of terror at first sight, may yet be divested of some of its hideous aspect."

"I am rejoiced, if anything can rejoice me now," said Henry, "to see you view the subject with so much philosophy."

"Why," said Charles, "you made a remark of your own, which enabled me, viewing the matter in its very worst and most hideous aspect, to gather hope."

"What was that?"

"You said, properly and naturally enough, that if ever we felt that there was such a weight of evidence in favour of a belief in the existence of vampyres that we are compelled to succumb to it, we might as well receive all the popular feelings and superstitions concerning them likewise."

"I did. Where is the mind to pause, when once we open it to the reception of such things?"

"Well, then, if that be the case, we will watch this vampyre and catch it."

"Catch it?"

"Yes; surely it can be caught; as I understand, this species of being is not like an apparition, that may be composed of thin air, and utterly impalpable to the human touch, but it consists of a revived corpse."

"Yes, yes."

"Then it is tangible and destructible. By Heaven! if ever I catch a glimpse of any such thing, it shall drag me to its home, be that where it may, or I will make it prisoner."

"Oh, Charles! you know not the feeling of horror that will come across you when you do. You have no idea of how the warm blood will seem to curdle in your veins, and how you will be paralysed in every limb."

"Did you feel so?"

"I did."

"I will endeavour to make head against such feelings. The love of Flora shall enable me to vanquish them. Think you it will come again to-morrow?"

"I can have no thought one way or the other."

"It may. We must arrange among us all, Henry, some plan of watching which, without completely prostrating our health and strength, will always provide that some one shall be up all night and on the alert."

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"It must be done."

"Flora ought to sleep with the consciousness now that she has ever at hand some intrepid and well-armed protector, who is not only himself prepared to defend her, but who can in a moment give an alarm to us all, in case of necessity requiring it."

"It would be a dreadful capture to make to seize a vampyre," said Henry.

"Not at all; it would be a very desirable one. Being a corpse revived, it is capable of complete destruction, so as to render it no longer a scourge to any one."

"Charles, Charles, are you jesting with me, or do you really give any credence to the story?"

"My dear friend, I always make it a rule to take things at their worst, and then I cannot be disappointed. I am content to reason upon this matter as if the fact of the existence of a vampyre were thoroughly established, and then to think upon what is best to be done about it."

"You are right."

"If it should turn out then that there is an error in the fact, well and good — we are all the better off; but if otherwise, we are prepared, and armed at all points."

"Let it be so, then. It strikes me, Charles, that you will be the coolest and the calmest among us all on the emergency; but the hour now waxes late, I will get them to prepare a chamber for you, and at least to-night, after what has occurred already, I should think we can be under no apprehension."

"Probably not. But, Henry, if you would allow me to sleep in that room where the portrait hangs of him whom you suppose to be the vampyre, I should prefer it."

"Prefer it!"

"Yes; I am not one who courts danger for danger's sake, but I would rather occupy that room, to see if the vampyre, who perhaps has a partiality for it, will pay me a visit."

"As you please, Charles. You can have the apartment. It is in the same state as when occupied by Flora. Nothing has been, I believe, removed from it."

"You will let me, then, while I remain here, call it my room?"

"Assuredly."

This arrangement was accordingly made to the surprise of all the household, not one of whom would, indeed, have slept, or attempted to sleep there for any amount of reward. But Charles Holland had his own reasons for preferring that chamber, and he was conducted to it in the course of half an hour by Henry, who looked around it with a shudder, as he bade his young friend good night.

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Chapter XII. CHARLES HOLLAND'S SAD FEELINGS. -- THE PORTRAIT. -- THE OCCURRENCE OF THE NIGHT AT THE HALL.

Charles Holland wished to be alone, if ever any human being had wished fervently to be so. His thoughts were most fearfully oppressive. The communication that had been made to him by Henry Bannerworth, had about it too many strange, confirmatory circumstances to enable him to treat it, in his own mind, with the disrespect that some mere freak of a distracted and weak imagination would, most probably, received from him.

He had found Flora in a state of excitement which could arise only from some such terrible cause as had been mentioned by her brother, and then he was, from an occurrence which certainly never could have entered into his calculations, asked to forego the bright dream of happiness which he had held so long and so rapturously to his heart.

How truly he found that the course of true love ran not smooth; and yet how little would any one have suspected that from such a cause as that which now oppressed his mind, any obstruction would arise.

Flora might have been fickle and false; he might have seen some other fairer face, which might have enchained his fancy, and woven for him a new heart's chain; death might have stepped between him and the realization of his fondest hopes; loss of fortune might have made love cruel which would have yoked to its distresses a young and beautiful girl, reared in the lap of luxury, and who was not, even by those who loved her, suffered to feel, even in later years, any of the pinching necessities of the family.

All these things were possible -- some of them were probable; and yet none of them had occurred. She loved him still; and he, although he had looked on many a fair face, and basked in the sunny smile of beauty, had never for a moment forgotten her faith, or lost his devotion to his own dear English girl.

Fortune he had enough for both; death had not even threatened to rob him of the prize of such a noble and faithful heart which he had won. But a horrible superstition had arisen, which seemed to place at once an impassable abyss between them, and to say to him, in a voice of thundering denunciation, --

"Charles Holland, will you have a vampyre for your bride?"

The thought was terrific. He paced the gloomy chamber to and fro with rapid strides, until the idea came across his mind that by so doing he might not only be proclaiming to his kind entertainers how much he was mentally distracted, but he likewise might be seriously distracting them.

The moment this occurred to him he sat down, and was profoundly still for some time. He then glanced at the light which had been given to him, and he found himself almost unconsciously engaged in a mental calculation as to how long it would last him in the night.

Half ashamed, then, of such terrors, as such a consideration would seem to indicate, he was on the point of hastily extinguishing it, when he happened to cast his eyes on the now mysterious and highly interesting portrait in the panel.

The picture, as a picture, was well done, whether it was a correct likeness or not of the party whom it represented. It was one of those kind of portraits that seem so lifelike, that, as you look at them, they seem to return your gaze fully, and even to follow you with their eyes from place to place.

By candle-light such an effect is more likely to become striking and remarkable than by daylight; and now, as Charles Holland shaded his eyes from the light, so as to cast its full radiance upon the portrait, he felt wonderfully interested in its life-like appearance.

"Here is true skill," he said; "such as I have not before seen. How strangely this likeness of a man whom I never saw seems to gaze upon me."

Unconsciously, too, he aided the effect, which he justly enough called life-like, by a slight movement of the candle, such as any one not blessed with nerves of iron would be sure to make, and such a movement made the face look as if it was inspired with vitality.

Charles remained looking at the portrait for a considerable period of time. He found a kind of fascination in it which prevented him from drawing his eyes away from it. It was not fear which induced him to continue gazing on it, but the circumstance that it was a likeness of the man who, after death, was supposed to have borrowed so new and so hideous an existence, combined with its artistic merits, chained him to the spot.

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"I shall now," he said, "know that face again, let me see it where I may, or under what circumstances I may. Each feature is now indelibly fixed upon my memory -- I can never mistake it."

He turned aside as he uttered these words, and as he did so his eyes fell upon a part of the ornamental frame which composed the edge of the panel, and which seemed to him to be of a different colour from the surrounding portion.

Curiosity and increased interest prompted him at once to make a closer inquiry into the matter; and by a careful and diligent scrutiny, he was almost induced to come to the positive opinion, that at no very distant period in time past, the portrait had been removed from the place it occupied.

When once this idea, even vague and indistinct as it was, in consequence of the slight grounds he had formed it on, had got possession of his mind, he felt most anxious to prove its verification or its fallacy.

He held the candle in a variety of situations, so that its light fell in different ways on the picture; and the more he examined it, the more he felt convinced that it must have been moved lately.

It would appear as if, in its removal, a piece of the old oaken carved framework of the panel had been accidentally broken off, which caused the new look of the fracture, and that this accident, from the nature of the broken bit of framing, could have occurred in any other way than from an actual or attempted removal of the picture, he felt was extremely unlikely.

He set down the candle on a chair near at hand, and tried if the panel was fast in its place. Upon the very first touch, he felt convinced it was not so, and that it was easily moved. How to get it out, though, presented a difficulty, and to get it out was tempting.

"Who knows," he said to himself, "what may be behind it? This is an old baronial sort of hall, and the greater portion of it was, no doubt, built at a time when the construction of such places as hidden chambers and intricate staircases were, in all buildings of importance, considered desiderata."

That he should make some discovery behind the portrait, now became an idea that possessed him strongly, although he certainly had no definite grounds for really supposing that he should do so.

Perhaps the wish was more father to the thought than he, in the partial state of excitement he was in, really imagined; but so it was. He felt convinced that he should not be satisfied until he had removed that panel from the wall, and seen what was immediately behind it.

After the panel containing the picture had been placed where it was, it appeared that pieces of moulding had been inserted all around, which had had the effect of keeping it in its place, and it was a fracture of one of these pieces which had first called Charles Holland's attention to the probability of the picture having been removed. That he should have to get two, at least, of the pieces of moulding away, before he could hope to remove the picture, was to him quite apparent, and he was considering how he should accomplish such a result, when he was suddenly startled by a knock at his chamber door.

Until that sudden demand for admission at his door came, he scarcely knew to what a nervous state he had worked himself up. It was an odd sort of tap -- one only--a single tap, as if some one demanded admittance, and wished to awaken his attention with the least possible chance of disturbing any one else.

"Come in," said Charles, for he knew he had not fastened his door; "come in."

There was no reply, but after a moment's pause, the same sort of low tap came again.

Again he cried "come in," but, whoever it was, seemed determined that the door should be opened for him, and no movement was made from the outside. A third time the tap came, and Charles was very close to the door when he heard it, for with a noiseless step he had approached it intending to open it. The instant this third mysterious demand for admission came, he did open it wide. There was no one there! In an instant he crossed the threshold into the corridor, which ran right and left. A window at one end of it now sent in the moon's rays, so that it was tolerably light, but he could see no one. Indeed, to look for any one, he felt sure was needless, for he had opened his chamber-door almost simultaneously with the last knock for admission.

"It is strange," he said, as he lingered on the threshold of his room door for some moments; "my imagination could not so completely deceive me. There was most certainly a demand for admission."

Slowly, then, he returned to his room again, and closed the door behind him.

"One thing is evident," he said, "that if I am in this apartment and to be subjected to these annoyances, I shall get no rest, which will soon exhaust me."

This thought was a very provoking one, and the more he thought that he should ultimately find a necessity for

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giving up that chamber he had himself asked as a special favour to be allowed to occupy, the more vexed he became to think what construction might be put upon his conduct for so doing.

"They will fancy me a coward," he thought, "and that I dare not sleep here. They may not, of course, say so, but they will think that my appearing so bold was one of those acts of bravado which I have not courage to carry fairly out."

Taking this view of the matter was just the way to enlist a young man's pride in staying, under all circumstances, where he was, and, with a slight accession of colour, which, even although he was alone, would visit his cheeks, Charles Holland said aloud, --

"I will remain the occupant of this room come what may, happen what may. No terrors, real or unsubstantial, shall drive me from it: I will brave them all, and remain here to brave them."

Tap came the knock at the door again, and now, with more an air of vexation than fear, Charles turned again towards it, and listened. Tap in another minute again succeeded, and most annoyed, he walked close to the door, and laid his hand upon the lock, ready to open it at the precise moment of another demand for admission being made.

He had not to wait long. In about half a minute it came again, and, simultaneously with the sound, the door flew open. There was no one to be seen; but, as he opened the door, he heard a strange sound in the corridor -- a sound which scarcely could be called a groan, and scarcely a sigh, but seemed a compound of both, having the agony of the one combined with the sadness of the other. From what direction it came he could not at the moment decide, but he called out, --

"Who's there? who's there?"

The echo of his own voice alone answered him for a few moments, and then he heard a door open, and a voice, which he knew to be Henry's, cried, --

"What is it? who speaks?"

"Henry," said Charles.

"Yes -- yes -- yes."

"I fear I have disturbed you."

"You have been disturbed yourself, or you would not have done so. I shall be with you in a moment."

Henry closed his door before Charles Holland could tell him not to come to him, as he intended to do, for he felt ashamed to have, in a manner of speaking, summoned assistance for so trifling a cause of alarm as that to which he had been subjected. However, he could not go to Henry's chamber to forbid him from coming to his, and, more vexed than before, he retired to his room again to await his coming.

He left the door open now, so that Henry Bannerworth, when he had got on some articles of dress, walked in at once, saying, --

"What has happened, Charles?"

"A mere trifle, Henry, concerning which I am ashamed you should have been at all disturbed."

"Never mind that, I was wakeful."

"Did you hear me open my door?"

"I heard a door open, which kept me listening, but I could not decide which door it was till I heard your voice in the corridor."

"Well, it was this door; and I opened it twice in consequence of the repeated taps for admission that came to it; some one had been knocking at it, and, when I go to it, lo! I can see nobody."

"Indeed!"

"Such is the case."

"You surprise me."

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you, because, upon such a ground, I do not feel that I ought to have done so; and, when I called out in the corridor, I assure you it was with no such intention."

"Do not regret it for a moment," said Henry; "you were quite justified in making an alarm on such an occasion."

"It's strange enough, but still it may arise from some accidental cause; admitting, if we did but know it, of some ready enough explanation."

"It may, certainly, but, after what has happened already, we may well suppose a mysterious connexion

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between any unusual sight or sound, and the fearful ones we have already seen."

"Certainly we may."

"How earnestly that strange portrait seems to look upon us, Charles."

"It does, and I have been examining it carefully. It seems to have been removed lately."

"Removed!"

"Yes, I think as far as I can judge, that it has been taken from its frame; I mean, that the panel on which it is painted has been taken out."

"Indeed!"

"If you touch it you will find it loose, and, upon a close examination, you will perceive that a piece of the moulding which holds it in its place has been chipped off, which is done in such a place what I think it could only have arisen during the removal of the picture."

"You must be mistaken."

"I cannot, of course, take upon myself, Henry, to say precisely such is the case," said Charles.

"But there is no one here to do so."

"That I cannot say. Will you permit me and assist me to remove it? I have a great curiosity to know what is behind it."

"If you have, I certainly will do so. We thought of taking it away altogether, but when Flora left this room the idea was given up as useless. Remain here a few moments, and I will endeavour to find something which shall assist us in its removal."

Henry left the mysterious chamber in order to search in his own for some means of removing the frame-work of the picture, so that the panel would slip easily out, and while he was gone, Charles Holland continued gazing upon it with greater interest, if possible, than before.

In a few minutes Henry returned, and although what he had succeeded in finding were very inefficient implements for the purpose, yet with this aid the two young men set about the task.

It is said, and said truly enough, that "where there is a will there is a way," and although the young men had no tools at all adapted for the purpose, they did succeed in removing the moulding from the sides of the panel, and then by a little tapping at one end of it, and using a knife as a lever at the other end of the panel, they got it fairly out.

Disappointment was all they got for their pains. On the other side there was nothing but a rough wooded wall, against which the finer and more nicely finished oak panelling of the chamber rested.

"There is no mystery here," said Henry.

"None whatever," said Charles, as he tapped the wall with his knuckles, and found all hard and sound. "We are foiled."

"We are indeed."

"I had a strange presentiment, now," added Charles, "that we should make some discovery that would repay us for our trouble. It appears, however, that such is not to be the case; for you see nothing presents itself to us but the most ordinary appearances."

"I perceive as much; and the panel itself, although of more than ordinary thickness, is, after all, but a bit of planed oak, and apparently fashioned for no other object than to paint the portrait on."

"True. Shall we replace it?"

Charles reluctantly assented, and the picture was replaced in its original position. We say Charles reluctantly assented, because, although he had now had ocular demonstration that there was really nothing behind the panel but the ordinary woodwork which might have been expected from the construction of the old house, but he could not, even with such a fact staring him in the face, get rid entirely of the feeling that had come across him, to the effect that the picture had some mystery or another.

"You are not yet satisfied," said Henry, as he observed the doubtful look of Charles Holland's face.

"My dear friend," said Charles, "I will not deceive you. I am much disappointed that we have made no discovery behind that picture."

"Heaven knows we have mysteries enough in our family," said Henry.

Even as he spoke they were both startled by a strange clattering noise at the window, which was accompanied by a shrill, odd kind of shriek, which sounded fearful and preternatural on the night air.

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"What is that?" said Charles.

"God only knows," said Henry.

The two young men naturally turned their earnest gaze in the direction of the window, which we have before remarked was one unprovided with shutters, and there, to their intense surprise, they saw, slowly rising up from the lower part of it, what appeared to be a human form. Henry would have dashed forward, but Charles restrained him, and drawing quickly from its case a large holster pistol, he levelled it carefully at the figure, saying in a whisper, --

"Henry, if I don't hit it, I will consent to forfeit my head."

He pulled the trigger -- a loud report followed -- the room was filled with smoke, and then all was still. A circumstance, however, had occurred, as a consequence of the concussion of the air produced by the discharge of the pistol, which neither of the young men had for the moment calculated upon, and that was the putting out of the only light they there had.

In spite of this circumstance, Charles, the moment he had discharged the pistol, dropped it and sprung forward to the window. But here he was perplexed, for he could not find the old fashioned, intricate fastening which held it shut, and he had to call to Henry, --

"Henry! For God's sake open the window for me, Henry! The fastening of the window is known to you, but not to me. Open it for me."

Thus called upon, Henry sprung forward, and by this time the report of the pistol had effectually alarmed the whole household. The flashing of lights from the corridor came into the room, and in another minute, just as Henry succeeded in getting the window wide open, and Charles Holland had made his way on to the balcony, both George Bannerworth and Mr. Marchdale entered the chamber, eager to know what had occurred. To their eager questions Henry replied, --

"Ask me not now;" and then calling to Charles, he said, -- "Remain where you are, Charles, while I run down to the garden immediately beneath the balcony."

"Yes -- yes," said Charles.

Henry made prodigious haste, and was in the garden immediately below the bay window in a wonderfully short space of time. He spoke to Charles, saying, --

"Will you now descend? I can see nothing here; but we will both make a search."

George and Mr. Marchdale were both now in the balcony, and they would have descended likewise, but Henry said, --

"Do not all leave the house. God only knows, now, situated as we are, what might happen."

"I will remain, then," said George. "I have been sitting up to-night as the guard, and, therefore, may as well continue to do so."

Marchdale and Charles Holland clambered over the balcony, and easily, from its insignificant height, dropped into the garden. The night was beautiful, and profoundly still. There was not a breath of air sufficient to stir a leaf on a tree, and the very flame of the candle which Charles had left burning in the balcony burnt clearly and steadily, being perfectly unruffled by any wind.

It cast a sufficient light close to the window to make everything very plainly visible, and it was evident at a glance that no object was there, although had that figure, which Charles had shot at, and no doubt hit, been flesh and blood, it must have dropped immediately below.

As they looked up for a moment after a cursory examination of the ground, Charles exclaimed, --

"Look at the window! As the light is now situated, you can see the hole made in one of the panes of glass by the passage of the bullet from my pistol."

They did look, and there the clear, round hole, without any starring, which a bullet discharged close to a pane of glass will make in it, was clearly and plainly discernible.

"You must have hit him," said Henry.

"One would think so," said Charles; "for that was the exact place where the figure was."

"And there is nothing here," added Marchdale. "What can we think of these events -- what resource has the mind against the most dreadful suppositions concerning them?"

Charles and Henry both were silent; in truth, they knew not what to think and the words uttered by Marchdale were too strikingly true to dispute for a moment. They were lost in wonder.

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"Human means against such an appearance as we saw to-night," said Charles, "are evidently useless."

"My dear young friend," said Marchdale, with much emotion, as he grasped Henry Bannerworth's hand, and the tears stood in his eyes as he did so, — "my dear young friend, these constant alarms will kill you. They will drive you, and all whose happiness you hold dear, distracted. You must control these dreadful feelings, and there is but one chance that I can see of getting the better of these."

"What is that?"

"By leaving this place for ever."

"Alas! am I to be driven from the home of my ancestors from such a cause as this? And whither am I to fly? Where are we to find a refuge? To leave here will be at once to break up the establishment which is now held together, certainly upon the sufferance of creditors, but still to their advantage, inasmuch as I am doing what no one else would do, namely, paying away to within the scantiest pittance the whole proceeds of the estate which spreads around me."

"Heed nothing but an escape from such horrors as seem to be accumulating now around you."

"If I were sure that such a removal would bring with it such a corresponding advantage, I might, indeed, be induced to risk all to accomplish it."

"As regards poor dear Flora," said Mr. Marchdale, "I know not what to say, or what to think; she has been attacked by a vampyre, and after this mortal life shall have ended, it is dreadful to think there may be a possibility that she, with all her beauty, all her excellence and purity of mind, and all those virtues and qualities which should make her the beloved of all, and which do, indeed, attach all hearts towards her, should become one of that dreadful tribe of beings who cling to existence by feeding, in the most dreadful manner, upon the life blood of others — oh, it is dreadful to contemplate! Too horrible — too horrible!"

"Then wherefore speak of it?" said Charles, with some asperity. "Now, by the great God of Heaven, who sees all our hearts, I will not give in to such a horrible doctrine! I will not believe it; and were death itself my portion for my want of faith, I would this moment die in my disbelief of anything so truly fearful!"

"Oh, my young friend," added Marchdale, "if anything could add to the pangs which all who love, and admire, and respect Flora Bannerworth must feel at the unhappy condition in which she is placed, it would be the noble nature of you, who, under happier auspices, would have been her guide through life, and the happy partner of her destiny."

"As I will be still."

"May Heaven forbid it! We are now among ourselves, and can talk freely upon such a subject. Mr. Charles Holland, if you wed, you would look forward to being blessed with children — those sweet ties which bind the sternest hearts to life with so exquisite a bondage. Oh, fancy, then, for a moment, the mother of your babes coming at the still hour of midnight to drain from their veins the very life blood she gave to them. To drive you and them mad with the expected horror of such visitations — to make your nights hideous — your days but so many hours of melancholy retrospection. Oh, you know not the world of terror, on the awful brink of which you stand, when you talk of making Flora Bannerworth a wife."

"Peace! oh, peace!" said Henry.

"Nay, I know my words are unwelcome," continued Mr. Marchdale. "It happens, unfortunately for human nature, that truth and some of our best and holiest feelings are too often at variance, and hold a sad contest —"

"I will hear no more of this," cried Charles Holland, — "I will hear no more!"

"I have done," said Mr. Marchdale.

"And 'twere well you had not begun."

"Nay, say not so. I have but done what I considered a solemn duty."

"Under that assumption of doing duty — a solemn duty — heedless of the feelings and the opinions of others," said Charles, sarcastically, "more mischief is produced — more heart-burnings and anxieties caused, than by any other two causes of such mischievous results combined. I wish to hear no more of this."

"Do not be angered with Mr. Marchdale, Charles," said Henry. "He can have no motive but our welfare in what he said. We should not condemn a speaker because his words may not sound pleasant to our ears."

"By Heaven!" said Charles, with animation, "I meant not to be illiberal; but I will not, because I cannot see a man's motives for active interference in the affairs of others, always be ready, merely on account of such ignorance, to jump to a conclusion that they must be estimable."

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"To-morrow, I leave this house," said Marchdale.

"Leave us?" exclaimed Henry.

"Ay, for ever."

"Nay, now, Mr. Marchdale, is this generous?"

"Am I treated generously by one who is your own guest, and towards whom I was willing to hold out the honest right hand of friendship?"

Henry turned to Charles Holland, saying, --

"Charles, I know your generous nature. Say you meant no offence to my mother's old friend."

"If to say I meant no offence," said Charles, "is to say I meant no insult, I say it freely."

"Enough," cried Marchdale; "I am satisfied."

"But do not," added Charles, "draw me any more such pictures as the one you have already presented to my imagination, I beg of you. From the storehouse of my own fancy I can find quite enough to make me wretched, if I choose to be so; but again and again do I say I will not allow this monstrous superstition to tread me down, like the tread of a giant on a broken reed. I will contend against it while I have life to do so."

"Bravely spoken."

"And when I desert Flora Bannerworth, may Heaven from that moment, desert me!"

"Charles!" cried Henry, with emotion, "dear Charles, my more than friend -- brother of my heart -- noble Charles!"

"Nay, Henry, I am not entitled to your praises. I were base indeed to be other than that which I purpose to be. Come weal or woe -- come what may, I am the affianced husband of your sister, and she, and she only, can break asunder the tie that binds me to her."

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Chapter XIII. THE OFFER FOR THE HALL. -- THE VISIT TO SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. -- THE STRANGE RESEMBLANCE. -- A DREADFUL SUGGESTION.

The party made a strict search through every nook and corner of the garden, but it proved to be a fruitless one: not the least trace of any one could be found. There was only one circumstance, which was pondered over deeply by them all, and that was that, beneath the window of the room in which Flora and her mother sat while the brothers were on their visit to the vault of their ancestors, were visible marks of blood to a considerable extent.

It will be remembered that Flora had fired a pistol at the spectral appearance, and that immediately upon that it had disappeared, after uttering a sound which might well be construed into a cry of pain from a wound.

That a wound then had been inflicted upon some one, the blood beneath the window now abundantly testified; and when it was discovered, Henry and Charles made a very close examination indeed of the garden, to discover what direction the wounded figure, be it man or vampyre, had taken.

But the closest scrutiny did not reveal to them a single spot of blood, beyond the space immediately beneath the window; -- there the apparition seemed to have received its wound, and then, by some mysterious means, to have disappeared.

At length, wearied with the continued excitement, combined with want of sleep, to which they had been subjected, they returned to the hall.

Flora, with the exception of the alarm she experienced from the firing of the pistol, had met with no disturbance, and that, in order to spare her painful reflections, they told her was merely done as a precautionary measure, to proclaim to any one who might be lurking in the garden that the inmates of the house were ready to defend themselves against any aggression.

Whether or not she believed this kind deceit they knew not. She only sighed deeply, and wept. The probability is, that she more than suspected the vampyre had made another visit, but they forbore to press the point; and, leaving her with her mother, Henry and George went from her chamber again -- the former to endeavour to seek some repose, as it would be his turn to watch on the succeeding night, and the latter to resume his station in a small room close to Flora's chamber, where it had been agreed watch and ward should be kept by turns while the alarm lasted.

At length, the morning again dawned upon that unhappy family, and to none were its beams more welcome.

The birds sang their pleasant carols beneath the window. The sweet, deep-coloured autumnal sun shone upon all objects with a golden lustre; and to look abroad, upon the beaming face of nature, no one could for a moment suppose, except from sad experience, that there were such things as gloom, misery, and crime, upon the earth.

"And must I," said Henry, as he gazed from a window of the hall upon the undulating park, the majestic trees, the flowers, the shrubs, and the many natural beauties with which the place was full, -- "must I be chased from this spot, the home of my self and my kindred, by a phantom -- must I indeed seek refuge elsewhere, because my own home has become hideous?"

It was indeed a cruel and a painful thought! It was one he yet would not, could not be convinced was absolutely necessary. But now the sun was shining: it was morning; and the feelings, which found a home in his breast amid the darkness, the stillness, and the uncertainty of night, were chased away by those glorious beams of sunlight, that fell upon hill, valley, and stream, and the thousand sweet sounds of life and animation that filled that sunny air!

Such a revulsion of feeling was natural enough. Many of the distresses and mental anxieties of night vanish with the night, and those which oppressed the heart of Henry Bannerworth were considerably modified.

He was engaged in these reflections when he heard the sound of the lodge bell, and as a visitor was now somewhat rare at this establishment, he waited with some anxiety to see to whom he was indebted for so early a call.

In the course of a few minutes, one of the servants came to him with a letter in her hand.

It bore a large handsome seal, and, from its appearance, would seem to have come from some personage of consequence. A second glance at it shewed him the name of "Varney" in the corner, and, with some degree of

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vexation, he muttered to himself,

"Another condoling epistle from the troublesome neighbor whom I have not yet seen."

"If you please, sir," said the servant who had brought him the letter, "as I'm here, and you are here, perhaps you'll have no objection to give me what I'm to have for the day and two nights as I've been here, cos I can't stay in the family as is so familiar with all sorts o' ghostesses: I ain't used to such company."

"What do you mean?" said Henry.

The question was a superfluous one: too well he knew what the woman meant, and the conviction came across his mind strongly that no domestic would consent to live long in a house which was subject to such dreadful visitations.

"What does I mean!" said the woman, — "why, sir, if it's all the same to you, I don't myself come of a wampyre family, and I don't choose to remain in a house where there is sich things encouraged. That's what I means, sir."

"What wages are owing to you?" said Henry.

"Why, as to wages, I only comed here by the day."

"Go, then, and settle with my mother. The sooner you leave this house, the better."

"Oh, indeed, I'm sure I don't want to stay."

This woman was one of these who were always armed at all points for a row, and she had no notion of concluding any engagement, of any character whatever, without some disturbance; therefore to see Henry take what she said with such provoking calmness was aggravating in the extreme; but there was no help for such a source of vexation. She could find no other ground of quarrel than what was connected with the vampyre, and, as Henry would not quarrel with her on such a score, she was compelled to give it up in despair.

When Henry found himself alone, and free from the annoyance of this woman, he turned his attention to the letter he held in his hand, and which, from the autograph in the corner, he knew came from his new neighbor, Sir Francis Varney, whom, by some chance or another, he had never yet seen.

To his great surprise, he found that the letter contained the following words: —

Dear Sir, — "As a neighbour, by purchase of an estate contiguous to your own, I am quite sure you have excused, and taken in good part, the cordial offer I made to you of friendship and service some short time since; but now, in addressing to you a distinct proposition, I trust I shall meet with an indulgent consideration, whether such a proposition be accordant with your views or not.

"What I have heard from common report induces me to believe that Bannerworth Hall cannot be a desirable residence for yourself, or your amiable sister. If I am right in that conjecture, and you have any serious thought of leaving the place, I would earnestly recommend you, as one having some experience in such descriptions of property, to sell it at once.

"Now the proposition with which I conclude this letter is, I know, of a character to make you doubt the disinterestedness of such advice; but that it is disinterested, nevertheless, is a fact of which I can assure my own heart, and of which I beg to assure you. I propose, then, should you, upon consideration, decide upon such a course of proceeding, to purchase of you the Hall. I do not ask for a bargain on account of any extraneous circumstances which may at the present time depreciate the value of the property, but I am willing to give a fair price for it. Under these circumstances, I trust, sir, that you will give a kindly consideration to my offer, and even if you reject it, I hope that, as neighbours, we may live on in peace and amity, and in the interchange of those good offices which should subsist between us. Awaiting your reply,

"Believe me to be, dear sir,

"Your very obedient servant, "FRANCIS VARNEY.

"To Henry Bannerworth, Esq."

Henry, after having read this most unobjectionable letter through, folded it up again, and placed it in his pocket. Clasping his hands, then, behind his back, a favourite attitude of his when he was in deep contemplation, he paced to and fro in the garden for some time in deep thought.

"How strange," he muttered. "It seems that every circumstance combines to induce me to leave my old ancestral home. It appears as if everything now that happened had that direct tendency. What can be the meaning of all this? 'Tis very strange — amazingly strange. Here arise circumstances which are enough to induce any man to leave a particular place. Then a friend, in whose single-mindedness and judgment I know I can rely, advised

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that step, and immediately upon the back of that comes a fair and candid offer."

There was an apparent connexion between all these circumstances which much puzzled Henry. He walked to and fro for nearly an hour, until he heard a hasty footstep approaching him and upon looking in the direction from whence it came, he saw Mr. Marchdale.

"I will seek Marchdale's advice," he said, "upon this matter. I will hear what he says concerning it."

"Henry," said Marchdale, when he came sufficiently near to him for conversation, "why do you remain here alone?"

"I have received a communication from our neighbour, Sir Francis Varney," said Henry.

"Indeed!"

"It is here. Peruse it for yourself, and then tell me, Marchdale, candidly what you think of it."

"I suppose," said Marchdale, as he opened the letter, "it is another friendly note of condolence on the state of your domestic affairs, which, I grieve to say, from the prattling of domestics, whose tongues it is quite impossible to silence, have become the food for gossip all over the neighboring villages and estates."

"If anything could add another pang to those I have already been made to suffer," said Henry, "it would certainly arise from being made the food of vulgar gossip. But read the letter, Marchdale. You will find its contents of a more important character than you anticipate."

"Indeed!" said Marchdale, as he ran his eyes eagerly over the note.

When he had finished it he glanced at Henry, who then said, --

"Well, what is your opinion?"

"I know not what to say, Henry. You know that my own advice to you had been to get rid of this place."

"It has."

"With the hope that the disagreeable affair connected with it now may remain connected with it as a house, and not with you and yours as a family."

"It may be so."

"There appears to me every likelihood of it."

"I do not know," said Henry, with a shudder. "I must confess, Marchdale, that to my own perceptions it seems more probably that the infliction we have experienced from the strange visiter, who seems now resolved to pester us with visits, will rather attach to a family than to a house. The vampyre may follow us."

"If so, of course the parting with the Hall would be a great pity, and no gain."

"None in the least."

"Henry, a thought has struck me."

"Let's hear it, Marchdale."

"It is this: -- Suppose you were to try the experiment of leaving the Hall without selling it. Suppose for one year you were to let it to someone, Henry."

"It might be done."

"Ay, and it might, with very great promise and candour, be proposed to this very gentleman, Sir Francis Varney, to take it for one year, to see how he likes it before becoming the possessor of it. Then if he found himself tormented by the vampyre, he need not complete the purchase, or if you found that the apparition followed you from hence, you might yourself return, feeling that perhaps here, in the spots familiar to your youth, you might be most happy, even under such circumstances as at present oppress you."

"Most happy!" ejaculated Henry.

"Perhaps I should not have used that word."

"I am sure you should not," said Henry, "when you speak of me."

"Well -- well; let us hope that the time may not be very far distant when I may use the term happy, as applied to you in the most conclusive and the strongest manner it can be used."

"Oh," said Henry, "I will hope; but do not mock me with it now, Marchdale, I pray you."

"Heaven forbid that I should mock you!"

"Well -- well; I do not believe you are the man to do so to any one. But about the affair of the house."

"Distinctly, then, if I were you, I would call upon Sir Francis Varney, and make him an offer to become a tenant of the hall for twelve months, during which time you could go where you please, and test the fact of absence ridding you or not ridding you of the dreadful visitant who makes the night here truly hideous."

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"I will speak to my mother, to George, and to my sister of the matter. They shall decide."

Mr. Marchdale now strove in every possible manner to raise the spirits of Henry Bannerworth, by painting to him the future in far more radiant colours than the present, and endeavoring to induce a belief in his mind that a short period of time might after all replace in his mind, and the minds of those who were naturally so dear to him, all their wonted serenity.

Henry, although he felt not much comfort from these kindly efforts, yet could feel gratitude to him who made them; and after expressing such a feeling to Marchdale, in strong terms, he repaired to the house, in order to hold a solemn consultation with those whom he felt ought to be consulted as well as himself as to what steps should be taken with regard to the Hall.

The proposition, or rather the suggestion, which had been made by Marchdale upon the proposition of Sir Francis Varney, was in every respect so reasonable and just, that it met, as was to be expected, with the concurrence of every member of the family.

Flora's cheeks almost resumed some of their wonted colour at the mere thought now of leaving that home to which she had been at one time so much attached.

"Yes, dear Henry," she said, "let us leave here if you are agreeable so to do, and in leaving this house, we will believe that we leave behind us a world of terror."

"Flora," remarked Henry, in a tone of slight reproach, "if you were so anxious to leave Bannerworth Hall, why did you not say so before this proposition came from other mouths? You know your feelings upon such a subject would have been laws to me."

"I knew you were attached to the old house," said Flora; "and, besides, events have come upon us all with such fearful rapidity, there has scarcely been time to think."

"True — true."

"And you will leave, Henry?"

"I will call upon Sir Francis Varney myself, and speak to him upon the subject."

A new impetus to existence appeared now to come over the whole family, at the idea of leaving a place which always would be now associated in their minds with so much terror. Each member of the family felt happier, and breathed more freely than before, so that the change which had come over them seemed almost magical. And Charles Holland, too, was much better pleased, and he whispered to Flora, —

"Dear Flora, you will now surely no longer talk of driving from you the honest heart that loves you?"

"Hush, Charles, hush!" she said; "meet me in an hour hence in the garden, and we will talk of this."

"That hour will seem an age," he said.

Henry, now, having made a determination to see Sir Francis Varney, lost no time in putting it into execution. At Mr. Marchdale's own request, he took him with him, as it was desirable to have a third person present in the sort of business negotiation which was going on. The estate which had been so recently entered upon by the person calling himself Sir Francis Varney, and which common report said he had purchased, was a small, but complete property, and situated so close to the grounds connected with Bannerworth Hall, that a short walk soon placed Henry and Mr. Marchdale before the residence of this gentleman, who had shown so kindly a feeling towards the Bannerworth family.

"Have you seen Sir Francis Varney?" asked Henry of Mr. Marchdale, as he rung the gate-bell.

"I have not. Have you?"

"No; I never saw him. It is rather awkward our both being absolute strangers to his person."

"We can but send in our names, however; and, from the great vein of courtesy that runs through his letter, I have no doubt but we shall receive the most gentlemanly reception from him."

A servant in handsome livery appeared at the iron-gates, which opened upon a lawn in the front of Sir Francis Varney's house, and to this domestic Henry Bannerworth handed his card, on which he had written, in pencil, likewise the name of Mr. Marchdale.

"If your master," he said, "is within, we shall be glad to see him."

"Sir Francis is at home, sir," was the reply, "although not very well. If you will be pleased to walk in, I will announce you to him."

Henry and Marchdale followed the man into a handsome enough reception-room where they were desired to wait while their names were announced.

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"Do you know if this gentleman be a baronet," said Henry, "or a knight merely?"

"I really do not; I never saw him in my life, or heard of him before he came into this neighbourhood."

"And I have been too much occupied with the painful occurrences of this hall to know anything of our neighbours. I dare say Mr. Chillingworth, if we had thought to ask him, would have known something concerning him."

"No doubt."

This brief colloquy was put an end to by the servant, who said, —

"My master, gentlemen, is not very well; but he begs me to present his best compliments, and to say he is much gratified with your visit, and will be happy to see you in his study."

Henry and Marchdale followed the man up a flight of stone stairs, and then they were conducted through a large apartment into a smaller one. There was very little light in this small room; but at the moment of their entrance a tall man, who was seated, rose, and, touching the spring of a blind that was to the window, it was up in a moment, admitting a broad glare of light. A cry of surprise, mingled with terror, came from Henry Bannerworth's lip. The original of the portrait on the panel stood before him! There was the lofty stature, the long, sallow face, the slightly projecting teeth, the dark, lustrous, although somewhat sombre eyes; the expression of the features — all were alike.

"Are you unwell, sir?" said Sir Francis Varney, in soft, mellow accents, as he handed a chair to the bewildered Henry.

"God of Heaven!" said Henry; "how like!"

"You seem surprised, sir. Have you ever seen me before?"

Sir Francis drew himself up to his full height, and cast a strange glance upon Henry, whose eyes were rivetted upon his face, as if with a species of fascination which he could not resist.

"Marchdale," Henry gasped; "Marchdale, my friend, Marchdale. I — I am surely mad."

"Hush! be calm," whispered Marchdale.

"Calm — calm — can you not see? Marchdale, is this a dream? Look — look — oh! look."

"For God's sake, Henry, compose yourself."

"Is your friend often thus?" said Sir Francis Varney, with the same mellifluous tone which seemed habitual with him.

"No, sir, he is not; but recent circumstances have shattered his nerves; and, to tell the truth, you bear so strong a resemblance to an old portrait, in his house, that I do not wonder so much as I otherwise should at his agitation."

"Indeed."

"A resemblance!" said Henry; "a resemblance! God of Heaven! it is the face itself."

"You much surprise me," said Sir Francis.

Henry sunk into the chair which was near him, and he trembled violently. The rush of painful thoughts and conjectures that came through his mind was enough to make any one tremble. "Is this the vampyre?" was the horrible question that seemed impressed upon his very brain, in letters of flame. "Is this the vampyre?"

"Are you better, sir?" said Sir Francis Varney, in his bland, musical voice. "Shall I order refreshment for you?"

"No — no," gasped Henry; "for the love of truth tell me! Is — is your name really Varney?"

"Sir?"

"Have you no other name to which, perhaps, a better title you could urge?"

"Mr. Bannerworth, I can assure you that I am too proud of the name of the family to which I belong to exchange it for any other, be it what it may."

"How wonderfully like!"

"I grieve to see you so much distressed, Mr. Bannerworth. I presume ill health has thus shattered your nerves?"

"No; ill health has not done the work. I know not what to say, Sir Francis Varney, to you; but recent events in my family have made the sight of you full of horrible conjectures."

"What mean you, sir?"

"You know, from common report, that we have had a fearful visiter at our house."

"A vampyre, I have heard," said Sir Francis Varney, with a bland, and almost beautiful smile, which displayed

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his white, glistening teeth to perfection.

"Yes; a vampyre, and — and — "

"I pray you go on, sir; you surely are above the vulgar superstition of believing in such matters?"

"My judgment is assailed in too many ways and shapes for it to hold out probably as it ought to do against so hideous a belief, but never was it so much bewildered as now."

"Why so?"

"Because — "

"Nay, Henry," whispered Mr. Marchdale, "it is scarcely civil to tell Sir Francis to his face, that he resembles a vampyre."

"I must, I must."

"Pray, sir," interrupted Varney to Marchdale, "permit Mr. Bannerworth to speak here freely. There is nothing in the whole world I so much admire as candour."

"Then you so much resemble the vampyre," added Henry, "that — that I know not what to think."

"Is it possible?" said Varney.

"It is a damning fact."

"Well, it's unfortunate for me, I presume? Ah!"

Varney gave a twinge of pain, as if some sudden bodily ailment had attacked him severely.

"You are unwell, sir?" said Marchdale.

"No, no — no," he said; "I — hurt my arm, and happened accidentally to touch the arm of this chair with it."

"A hurt?" said Henry.

"Yes, Mr. Bannerworth."

"A — a wound?"

"Yes, a wound, but not much more than skin deep. In fact, little beyond an abrasion of the skin."

"May I inquire how you came by it?"

"Oh, yes. A slight fall."

"Indeed."

"Remarkable, is it not? Very remarkable. We never know a moment when, from some most trifling cause, we may receive some serious bodily hurt. How true it is, Mr. Bannerworth, that in the midst of life we are in death."

"And equally true, perhaps," said Henry, "that in the midst of death there may be found a horrible life."

"Well, I should not wonder. There are really so many strange things in this world, that I have left off wondering at anything now."

"There are strange things," said Henry. "You wish to purchase of me the Hall, sir?"

"If you wish to sell."

"You — you are perhaps attached to the place? Perhaps you recollected it, sir, long ago?"

"Not very long," smiled Sir Francis Varney. "It seems a nice comfortable old house; and the grounds, too, appear to be amazingly well wooded, which, to one of rather a romantic temperament like myself, is always an additional charm to a place. I was extremely pleased with it the first time I beheld it, and a desire to call myself the owner of it took possession of my mind. The scenery is remarkable for its beauty, and, from what I have seen of it, it is rarely to be excelled. No doubt you are greatly attached to it."

"It has been my home from infancy," returned Henry, "and being also the residence of my ancestors for centuries, it is natural that I should be so."

"True — true."

"The house, no doubt, has suffered much," said Henry, "within the last hundred years."

"No doubt it has. A hundred years is a tolerable long space of time, you know."

"It is, indeed. Oh, how any human life which is spun out to such an extent, must lose its charms, by losing all its fondest and dearest associations."

"Ah, how true," said Sir Francis Varney.

He had some minutes previously touched a bell, and at this moment a servant brought in on a tray some wine and refreshments.

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Chapter XIV. HENRY'S AGREEMENT WITH SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. -- THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL AT THE HALL. -- FLORA'S ALARM.

On the tray which the servant brought into the room, were refreshments of different kinds, including wine, and after waving his hand for the domestic to retire, Sir Francis Varney said, --

"You will be better, Mr. Bannerworth, for a glass of wine after your walk, and you too, sir. I am ashamed to say, I have quite forgotten your name."

"Marchdale."

"Mr. Marchdale. Ay, Marchdale. Pray, sir, help yourself."

"You take nothing yourself?" said Henry.

"I am under a strict regimen," replied Varney. "The simplest diet alone does for me, and I have accustomed myself to long abstinence."

"He will not eat or drink," muttered Henry, abstractedly.

"Will you sell me the Hall?" said Sir Francis Varney.

Henry looked in his face again, from which he had only momentarily withdrawn his eyes, and he was then more struck than ever with the resemblance between him and the portrait on the panel of what had been Flora's chamber. What made that resemblance, too, one about which there could scarcely be two opinions, was the mark or cicatrix of a wound in the forehead, which the painter had slightly indented in the portrait, but which was much more plainly visible on the forehead of Sir Francis Varney. Now that Henry observed the distinctive mark, which he had not done before, he could feel no doubt, and a sickening sensation came over him at the thought that he was actually now in the presence of one of those terrible creatures, vampires.

"You do not drink," said Varney. "Most young men are not so modest with a decanter of unimpeachable wine before them. Pray help yourself."

"I cannot."

Henry rose as he spoke, and turning to Marchdale, he said, in addition, --

"Will you come away?"

"If you please," said Marchdale, rising.

"But you have not, my dear sir," said Varney, "given me yet an answer about the Hall?"

"I cannot yet," answered Henry, "I will think. My present impression is, to let you have it on whatever terms you may yourself propose, always provided you consent to one of mine."

"Name it."

"That you never show yourself in my family."

"How very unkind. I understand you have a charming sister, young, beautiful, and accomplished. Shall I confess, now, that I had hopes of making myself agreeable to her?"

"You make yourself agreeable to her? The sight of you would blast her for ever, and drive her to madness."

"Am I so hideous?"

"No, but -- you are -- "

"Hush, Henry, hush," cried Marchdale. "Remember you are in this gentleman's house."

"True, true. Why does he tempt me to say these dreadful things? I do not want to say them."

"Come away, then -- come away at once. Sir Francis Varney, my friend, Mr. Bannerworth, will think over your offer, and let you know. I think you may consider that your wish to become the purchaser of the Hall will be complied with."

"I wish to have it," said Varney, "and I can only say, that if I am master of it, I shall be very happy to see any of the family on a visit at any time."

"A visit!" said Henry, with a shudder. "A visit to the tomb were far more desirable. Farewell, sir."

"Adieu," said Sir Francis Varney, and he made one of the most elegant bows in the world, while there came over his face a peculiarity of expression that was strange, if not painful, to contemplate. In another minute Henry and Marchdale were clear of the house, and with feelings of bewilderment and horror, which beggar all description, poor Henry allowed himself to be led by the arm by Marchdale to some distance, without uttering a

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word. When he did speak, he said, --

"Marchdale, it would be charity of some one to kill me."

"To kill you?"

"Yes, for I am certain otherwise that I must go mad."

"Nay, nay; rouse yourself."

"This man, Varney, is a vampyre."

"Hush! hush!"

"I tell you, Marchdale," cried Henry, in a wild, excited manner, "he is a vampyre. He is the dreadful being who visited Flora at the still hour of midnight, and drained the life-blood from her veins. He is a vampyre. There are such things. I cannot doubt now. Oh, God, I wish now that your lightnings would blast me, as here I stand, for ever into annihilation, for I am going mad to be compelled to feel that such horrors can really have existence."

"Henry -- Henry."

"Nay, talk not to me. What can I do? Shall I kill him? Is it not a sacred duty to destroy such a thing? Oh, horror -- horror. He must be killed -- destroyed -- burnt, and the very dust to which he is consumed must be scattered to the winds of Heaven. It would be a deed well done, Marchdale."

"Hush! hush! These words are dangerous."

"I care not."

"What if they were overheard now by unfriendly ears? What might not be the uncomfortable results? I pray you be more cautious what you say of this strange man."

"I must destroy him."

"And wherefore?"

"Can you ask? Is he not a vampyre?"

"Yes; but reflect, Henry, for a moment upon the length to which you might carry out so dangerous an argument. It is said that vampyres are made by vampyres sucking the blood of those who, but for that circumstance, would have died and gone to decay in the tomb along with ordinary mortals; but that being so attacked during life by a vampyre, they themselves, after death, become such."

"Well -- well, what is that to me?"

"Have you forgotten Flora?"

A cry of despair came from poor Henry's lips, and in a moment he seemed completely, mentally and physically, prostrated.

"God of Heaven!" he moaned, "I had forgotten her!"

"I thought you had."

"Oh, if the sacrifice of my own life would suffice to put an end to all this accumulating horror, how gladly would I lay it down. Ay, in any way -- in any way. No mode of death should appal me. No amount of pain make me shrink. I could smile then upon the destroyer, and say, 'welcome -- welcome -- most welcome.'"

"Rather, Henry, seek to live for those whom you love than die for them. Your death would leave them desolate. In life you may ward off many a blow of fate from them."

"I may endeavour so to do."

"Consider that Flora may be wholly dependent upon such kindness as you may be able to bestow upon her."

"Charles clings to her."

"Humph!"

"You do not doubt him?"

"My dear friend, Henry Bannerworth, although I am not an old man, yet I am so much older than you that I have seen a great deal of the world, and am, perhaps, far better able to come to accurate judgments with regard to individuals."

"No doubt -- no doubt; but yet -- "

"Nay, hear me out. Such judgments, founded upon experience, when uttered have all the character of prophecy about them. I, therefore, now prophecy to you that Charles Holland will yet be so stung with horror at the circumstance of a vampyre visiting Flora, that he will never make her his wife."

"Marchdale, I differ from you most completely," said Henry. "I know that Charles Holland is the very soul of honour."

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"I cannot argue the matter with you. It has not become a thing of fact. I have only sincerely to hope that I am wrong."

"You are, you may depend, entirely wrong. I cannot be deceived in Charles. From you such words produce no effect but one of regret that you should so much err in your estimate of any one. From any one but yourself they would have produced in me a feeling of anger I might have found it difficult to smother."

"It has often been my misfortune through life," said Mr. Marchdale, sadly, "to give the greatest offence where I feel the truest friendship, because it is in such quarters that I am always tempted to speak too freely."

"Nay, no offence," said Henry. "I am distracted, and scarcely know what I say. Marchdale, I know that you are my sincere friend; but, I tell you, I am nearly mad."

"My dear Henry, be calmer. Consider upon what is to be said concerning this interview at home."

"Ay; that is a consideration."

"I should not think it advisable to mention the disagreeable fact, that in your neighbour you think you have found out the nocturnal disturber of your family."

"No -- no."

"I would say nothing of it. It is not at all probable that, after what you have said to him, this Sir Francis Varney, or whatever his real name may be, will obtrude himself upon you."

"If he should he surely dies."

"He will, perhaps, consider that such a step would be dangerous to him."

"It would be fatal, so help me, Heaven; and then would I take especial care that no power of resuscitation should ever enable that man again to walk the earth."

"They say the only way of destroying a vampyre is to fix him to the earth with a stake, so that he cannot move, and then, of course, decomposition will take its course, as in ordinary cases."

"Fire would consume him, and be a quicker process," said Henry. "But these are fearful reflections, and, for the present, we will not pursue them. Now to play the hypocrite, and endeavour to look composed and serene to my mother, and to Flora, while my heart is breaking."

The two friends had by this time reached the hall, and leaving his friend Marchdale, Henry Bannerworth, with feelings of the most unenviable description, slowly made his way to the apartment occupied by his mother and sister.

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Chapter XV. THE OLD ADMIRAL AND HIS SERVANT. -- THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE LANDLORD OF THE NELSON'S ARMS.

While those matters of most grave and serious import were going on at the Hall, while each day, and almost each hour in each day, was producing more and more conclusive evidence upon a matter which at first had seemed too monstrous to be at all credited, it may well be supposed what a wonderful sensation was produced among the gossip-mongers of the neighbourhood by the exaggerated reports that had reached them.

The servants, who had left the Hall on no other account, as they declare, but sheer fright at the awful visits of the vampyre, spread the news far and wide, so that in the adjoining villages and market-towns the vampyre of Bannerworth Hall became quite a staple article of conversation.

Such a positive godsend for the lovers of the marvellous had not appeared in the country side within the memory of that sapient individual -- the oldest inhabitant.

And, moreover, there was one thing which staggered some people of better education and maturer judgments, and that was, that the more they took pains to inquire into the matter, in order, if possible, to put an end to what they considered a gross lie from the commencement, the more evidence they found to stagger their own senses upon the subject.

Everywhere then, in every house, public as well as private, something was being continually said of the vampyre. Nursery maids began to think a vampyre vastly superior to "old scratch and old bogie" as a means of terrifying their infant charges into quietness, if not to sleep, until they themselves became too much afraid upon the subject to mention it.

But nowhere was gossiping carried on upon the subject with more systematic fervour than at an inn called the Nelson's Arms, which was in the high street of the nearest market town to the Hall.

There, it seemed as if the lovers of the horrible made a point of holding their head quarters, and so thirsty did the numerous discussions make the guests, that the landlord was heard to declare that he, from his heart, really considered a vampyre as very nearly equal to a contested election.

It was towards evening on the same day that Marchdale and Henry made their visit to Sir Francis Varney, that a postchaise drew up to the inn we have mentioned. In the vehicle were two persons of exceedingly dissimilar appearance and general aspect.

One of these people was a man who seemed fast verging upon seventy years of age, although, from his still ruddy and embrowned complexion and stentorian voice, it was quite evident he intended yet to keep time at arm's-length for many years to come.

He was attired in ample and expensive clothing, but every article had a naval animus about it, if we may be allowed such an expression with regard to clothing. On his buttons was an anchor, and the general assortment and colour of the clothing as nearly assimilated as possible to the undress naval uniform of an officer of high rank some fifty or sixty years ago.

His companion was a younger man, and about his appearance there was no secret at all. He was a genuine sailor, and he wore the shore costume of one. He was hearty-looking, and well dressed, and evidently well fed.

As the chaise drove up to the door of the inn, this man made an observation to the other to the following effect, --

"A-hoy!"

"Well, you lubber, what now?" cried the other.

"They call this the Nelson's Arms; and you know, shiver me, that for the best half of his life he had but one."

"D -- n you!" was the only rejoinder he got for his observation; but, with that, he seemed very well satisfied.

"Heave to!" he then shouted to the postillion, who was about to drive the chaise into the yard. "Heave to, you lubberly son of a gun! we don't want to go into the dock."

"Ah!" said the old man, "let's get out, Jack. This is the port; and, do you hear, and be cursed to you, let's have no swearing, d -- n you, nor bad language, you lazy swab."

"Aye, aye," cried Jack; "I've not been ashore now a matter o' ten years, and not larnt a little shore-going politeness, admiral, I ain't been your walley de sham without larning a little about land reckonings. Nobody would

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take me for a sailor now, I'm thinking, admiral."

"Hold your noise!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Jack, as he was called, bundled out of the chaise when the door was opened, with a movement so closely resembling what would have ensued had he been dragged out by the collar, that one was tempted almost to believe that such a feat must have been accomplished by some invisible agency.

He then assisted the old gentleman to alight, and the landlord of the inn commenced the usual profusion of bows with which a passenger by a postchaise is usually welcomed in preference to one by a stage coach.

"Be quiet, will you!" shouted the admiral, for such indeed he was. "Be quiet."

"Best accommodations, sir -- good wine -- well-aired beds -- good attendance -- fine air -- "

"Belay there," said Jack; and he gave the landlord what he considered a gentle admonition, but which consisted of such a dig in the ribs, that he made as many evolutions as the clown in a pantomime when he vociferated hot codlings.

"Now, Jack, where's the sailing instructions?" said his master.

"Here, sir, in the locker," said Jack, as he took from his pocket a letter, which he handed to the admiral.

"Won't you step in, sir?" said the landlord, who had begun now to recover a little from the dig in the ribs.

"What's the use of coming into port and paying harbour dues, and all that sort of thing, till we know if it's the right, you lubber, eh?"

"No; oh, dear me, sir, of course -- God bless me, what can the old gentleman mean?"

The admiral opened the letter, and read: --

"If you stop at the Nelson's Arms at Uxotter, you will hear of me, and I can be sent for, when I will tell you more.

"Yours, very obediently and humbly, "JOSIAH CRINKLES."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"This is Uxotter, sir," said the landlord; "and here you are, sir, at the Nelson's Arms. Good beds -- good wine -- good -- "

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir, -- oh, of course."

"Who the devil is Josiah Crinkles?"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! Makes me laugh, sir. Who the devil indeed! They do say the devil and lawyers, sir, know something of each other -- makes me smile."

"I'll make you smile out of the other side of that d -- -- d great hatchway of a mouth of yours in a minute. Who is Crinkles?"

"Oh, Mr. Crinkles, sir, everybody knows. A most respectable attorney, sir, indeed, a highly respectable man, sir."

"A lawyer?"

"Yes, sir, a lawyer."

"Well, I'm d -- -- d!"

Jack gave a long whistle, and both master and man looked at each other aghast.

"Now, hang me!" cried the admiral, "if ever I was so taken in all my life."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack.

"To come a hundred and seventy miles to see a d -- -- d swab of a rascally lawyer."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I'll smash him -- Jack!"

"Yer honour?"

"Get into the chaise again."

"Well, but where's Master Charles? Lawyers, in course, sir, is all blessed rogues; but howsomedever, he may have for once in his life this here one of 'em have told us of the right channel, and if so be as he has, don't be the Yankee to leave him among the pirates. I'm ashamed of you."

"You infernal scoundrel; how dare you preach to me in such a way, you lubberly rascal?"

"Cos you deserves it."

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"Mutiny — mutiny — by Jove! Jack, I'll have you put in irons — you're a scoundrel, and no seaman."

"No seaman! — no seaman!"

"Not a bit of one."

"Very good. It's time, then, as I was off the purser's books. Good bye to you; I only hopes as you may get a better seaman to stick to you and be your walley de sham nor Jack Pringle, that's all the harm I wish you. You didn't call me no seaman in the Bay of Corfu, when the bullets were scuttling our nob's."

"Jack, you rascal, give us your fin. Come here, you d — — d villain. You'll leave me, will you?"

"Not if I know it."

"Come in, then."

"Don't tell me I'm no seaman. Call me a wagabone if you like, but don't hurt my feelins. There I'm as tender as a baby, I am. — Don't do it."

"Confound you, who is doing it?"

"The devil."

"Who is?"

"Don't, then."

Thus wrangling, they entered the inn, to the great amusement of several bystanders, who had collected to hear the altercation between them.

"Would you like a private room, sir?" said the landlord.

"What's that to you?" said Jack.

"Hold your noise, will you?" cried his master. "Yes, I should like a private room, and some grog."

"Strong as the devil!" put in Jack.

"Yes, sir — yes, sir. Good wines — good beds — good — "

"You said all that before, you know," remarked Jack, as he bestowed upon the landlord another terrific dig in the ribs.

"Hilloa!" cried the admiral, "you can send for that infernal lawyer, Mister Landlord."

"Mr. Crinkles, sir?"

"Yes, yes."

"Who may I have the honour to say, sir, wants to see him?"

"Admiral Bell."

"Certainly, admiral, certainly. You'll find him a very conversible, nice, gentlemanly little man, sir."

"And tell him Jack Pringle is here, too," cried the seaman.

"Oh, yes, yes — of course," said the landlord, who was in such a state of confusion from the digs in the ribs he had received, and the noise his guests had already made in his house, that, had he been suddenly put upon his oath, he would scarcely have liked to say which was the master and which was the man.

"The idea, now, Jack," said the admiral, "of coming all this way to see a lawyer."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"If he's said he was a lawyer, we would have known what to do. But it's a take in, Jack."

"So I think. Howsomedever, we'll serve him out when we catch him, you know."

"Good — so we will."

"And, then, again, he may know something about Master Charles, sir, you know. Lord love him, don't you remember when he came aboard to see you once at Portsmouth?"

"Ah! I do indeed."

"And how he said he hated the French, and quite a baby, too. What perseverance and sense. 'Uncle,' says he to you, 'when I'm a big man, I'll go in a ship, and fight all the French in a heap,' says he. 'And beat 'em, my boy, too,' says you; cos you thought he'd forgot that; and then he says, 'what's the use of saying that, stupid? — don't we always beat 'em?'"

The admiral laughed and rubbed his hands, as he cried aloud, —

"I remember, Jack — I remember him. I was stupid to make such a remark."

"I know you was — a d — — d old fool I thought you."

"Come, come. Hilloa, there!"

"Well, then, what do you call me no seaman for?"

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"Why, Jack, you bear malice like a marine."

"There you go again. Good bye. Do you remember when we were yard arm to yard arm with those two Yankee frigates, and took 'em both? You didn't call me a marine then, when the scuppers were running with blood. Was I a seaman then?"

"You were, Jack — you were; and you saved my life."

"I didn't."

"You did."

"I say I didn't — it was a marline-spike."

"But I say you did, you rascally scoundrel. I say you did, and I won't be contradicted in my own ship."

"Call this your ship?"

"No, d — n it, — I — "

"Mr. Crinkles," said the landlord, flinging the door wide open, and so at once putting an end to the discussion which always apparently had a tendency to wax exceedingly warm.

"The shark, by G—d!" said Jack.

A little, neatly dressed man made his appearance, and advanced rather timidly into the room. Perhaps he had heard from the landlord that the parties who had sent for him were of rather a violent sort.

"So you are Crinkles, are you?" cried the admiral. "Sit down, though you are a lawyer."

"Thank you, sir. I am an attorney, certainly and my name is certainly Crinkles."

"Look at that."

The admiral placed the letter in the little lawyer's hands, who said, —

"Am I to read it?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"Aloud?"

"Read it to the devil, of you like, in a pig's whisper, or a West India hurricane."

"Oh, very good, sir. I — I am willing to be agreeable, so I'll read it aloud, if it's all the same to you."

He then opened the letter and read as follows: —

"To Admiral Bell.

"Admiral, — Being, from various circumstances, aware that you take a warm and a praiseworthy interest in your nephew Charles Holland, I venture to write to you concerning a matter in which your immediate and active co-operation with others may rescue him from a condition which will prove, if allowed to continue, very much to his detriment, and ultimate unhappiness.

"You are, then, hereby informed, that he, Charles Holland, has, much earlier than he ought to have done, returned to England, and that the object of his return is to contract a marriage into a family in every way objectionable, and with a girl who is highly objectionable.

"You, admiral, are his nearest and almost his only relative in the world; you are the guardian of his property, and, therefore, it becomes a duty on your part to interfere to save him from the ruinous consequences of a marriage, which is sure to bring ruin and distress upon himself and all who take an interest in his welfare.

"The family he wishes to marry into is named Bannerworth, and the young lady's name is Flora Bannerworth. When, however, I inform you that a vampyre is in that family, and that if he married into it, he marries a vampyre, and will have vampyres for children, I trust I have said enough to warn you upon the subject, and to induce you to lose no time in repairing to the spot.

"If you stop at the Nelson's Arms in Uxotter, you will hear of me. I can be sent for, when I will tell you more.

"Yours, very obediently and humbly,

"JOSIAH CRINKLES."

P.S. I enclose you Dr. Johnson's definition of a vampyre, which is as follows:

"VAMPYRE (a German blood-sucker) — by which you perceive how many vampyres, from time immemorial, must have been well entertained at the expense of John Bull, at the court of St. James, where nothing hardly is to be met with but German blood-suckers."

The lawyer ceased to read, and the amazed look with which he glanced at the face of Admiral Bell would, under any other circumstances, have much amused him. His mind, however, was by far too much engrossed with

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a consideration of the danger of Charles Holland, his nephew, to be amused at anything; so, when he found that the little lawyer said nothing, he bellowed out, —

"Well, sir?"

"We—we—well," said the attorney.

"I've sent for you, and here you are, and here I am, and here's Jack Pringle. What have you got to say?"

"Just this much," said Mr. Crinkles, recovering himself a little, "just this much, sir, that I never saw that letter before in all my life."

"You — never — saw — it?"

"Never."

"Didn't write it?"

"On my solemn word of honour, sir, I did not."

Jack Pringle whistled, and the admiral looked puzzled. Like the admiral in the song, too, he "grew paler," and then Mr. Crinkles added, —

"Who has forged my name to a letter such as this, I cannot imagine. As for writing to you, sir, I never heard of your existence, except publicly, as one of those gallant officers who have spent a long life in nobly fighting their country's battles, and who are entitled to the admiration and the applause of every Englishman."

Jack and the admiral looked at each other in amazement, and then the latter exclaimed, —

"What! This from a lawyer?"

"A lawyer, sir," said Crinkles, "may know how to appreciate the deeds of gallant men, although he many not be able to imitate them. That letter, sir, is a forgery, and I now leave you, only much gratified at the incident which has procured me the honour of an interview with a gentleman, whose name will live in the history of his country. Good day, sir! Good day!"

"No. I'm d — — d if you go like that," said Jack, as he sprang to the door, and put his back against it. "You shall take a glass with me in honour of the wooden walls of Old England, d — — e, if you was twenty lawyers."

"That's right, Jack," said the admiral. "Come, Mr. Crinkles, I'll think, for your sake, there may be two decent lawyers in the world, and you one of them. We must have a bottle of the best wine the ship — I mean the house — can afford together."

"If it is your command, admiral, I obey with pleasure," said the attorney; "and although I assure you, on my honour, I did not write that letter, yet some of the matters mentioned in it are so generally notorious here, that I can afford you some information concerning them."

"Can you?"

"I regret to say I can, for I respect the parties."

"Sit down, then — sit down. Jack, run to the steward's room and get the wine. We will go into it now starboard and larboard. Who the deuce could have written that letter?"

"I have not the least idea, sir."

"Well — well, never mind; it has brought me here, that's something, so I won't grumble much at it. I didn't know my nephew was in England, and I dare say he didn't know I was; but here we both are, and I won't rest till I've seen him, and ascertained how the what's—its—name — "

"The vampyre."

"Ah! the vampyre."

"Shiver my timbers!" said Jack Pringle, who now brought in some wine much against the remonstrances of the waiters of the establishment, who considered that he was treading upon their vested interests by so doing. —

"Shiver my timbers, if I knows what a wamphigher is, unless he's some distant relation to Davy Jones!"

"Hold your ignorant tongue," said the admiral; "nobody wants you to make a remark, you great lubber!"

"Very good," said Jack, and he sat down the wine on the table, and then retired to the other end of the room, remarking to himself that he was not called a great lubber on a certain occasion, when bullets were scuttling their nobs, and they were yard arm to yard arm with God knows who.

"Now, mister lawyer," said Admiral Bell, who had about him a large share of the habits of a rough sailor.

"Now, mister lawyer, here is a glass first to our better acquaintance, for d — — e, if I don't like you!"

"You are very good, sir."

"Not at all. There was a time, when I'd just as soon have thought of asking a young shark to supper with me in

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my own cabin as a lawyer, but I begin to see that there may be such a thing as a decent, good sort of fellow seen in the law; so here's good luck to you, and you shall never want a friend or a bottle while Admiral Bell has a shot in the locker."

"Gammon," said Jack.

"D -- n you, what do you mean by that?" roared the admiral, in a furious tone.

"I wasn't speaking to you," shouted Jack, about two octaves higher. It's two boys in the street as is pretending they're a going to fight, and I know d -- -- d well they won't."

"Hold your noise."

"I'm going. I wasn't told to hold my noise, when our nob's were being scuttled off Beyrout."

"Never mind him, mister lawyer," added the admiral. "He don't know what he's talking about. Never mind him. You go on and tell me all you know about the -- the -- "

"The vampyre!"

"Ah! I always forget the names of strange fish. I suppose, after all, it's something of the mermaid order?"

"That I cannot say, sir; but certainly the story, in all its painful particulars, has made a great sensation all over the country."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. You shall hear how it occurred. It appears that one night Miss Flora Bannerworth, a young lady of great beauty, and respected and admired by all who knew her was visited by a strange being who came in at the window."

"My eye," said Jack, "if it warent me, I wish it had a been."

"So petrified by fear was she, that she had only time to creep half out of the bed, and to utter one cry of alarm, when the strange visitor seized her in his grasp."

"D -- n my pig tail," said Jack, "what a squall there must have been, to be sure."

"Do you see this bottle?" roared the admiral.

"To be sure, I does; I think as it's time I seed another."

"You scoundrel, I'll make you feel it against that d -- -- d stupid head of yours, if your interrupt this gentleman again."

"Don't be violent."

"Well, as I was saying," continued the attorney, "she did, by great good fortune, manage to scream, which had the effect of alarming the whole house. The door of her chamber, which was fast, was broken open."

"Yes, yes -- "

"Ah," cried Jack.

"You may imagine the horror and the consternation of those who entered the room to find her in the grasp of a fiend-like figure, whose teeth were fastened on her neck and who was actually draining her veins of blood."

"The devil!"

"Before any one could lay hands sufficiently upon the figure to detain it, it had fled precipitately from its dreadful repast. Shots were fired after it in vain."

"And they let it go?"

"They followed it, I understand, as well as they were able, and saw it scale the garden wall of the premises; there it escaped, leaving, as you may well imagine, on all their minds, a sensation of horror difficult to describe."

"Well, I never did hear anything the equal of that. Jack, what do you think of it?"

"I haven't begun to think, yet," said Jack.

"But what about my nephew, Charles?" added the admiral.

"Of him I know nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Not a word, admiral. I was not aware you had a nephew, or that any gentleman bearing that, or any other relationship to you, had any sort of connexion with these mysterious and most unaccountable circumstances. I tell you all I have gathered from common report about this vampyre business. Further I know not, I assure you."

"Well, a man can't tell what he don't know. It puzzles me to think who could possibly have written me this letter."

"That I am completely at a loss to imagine," said Crinkles. "I assure you, my gallant sir, that I am much hurt at

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the circumstance of any one using my name in such a way. But, nevertheless, as you are here, permit me to say, that it will be my pride, my pleasure, and the boast of the remainder of my existence, to be of some service to so gallant a defender of my country, and one whose name, along with the memory of his deeds, is engraved upon the heart of every Briton."

"Quite ekal to a book, he talks," said Jack. "I never could read one myself, on account o' not knowing how, but I've heard 'em read, and that's just the sort o' incomprehensible gammon."

"We don't want any of your ignorant remarks," said the admiral, "so you be quiet."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Now, Mister Lawyer, you are an honest fellow, and an honest fellow is generally a sensible fellow."

"Sir, I thank you."

"If so be as what this letter says it true, my nephew Charles has got a liking for this girl, who has had her neck bitten by a vampyre, you see."

"I perceive, sir."

"Now what would you do?"

"One of the most difficult, as well, perhaps, as one of the most ungracious of tasks," said the attorney, "is to interfere with family affairs. The cold and steady eye of reason generally sees things in such very different lights to what they appear to those whose feelings and whose affections are much compromised in their results."

"Very true. Go on."

"Taking, my dear sir, what in my humble judgment appears a reasonable view of this subject, I should say it would be a dreadful thing for your nephew to marry into a family any member of which was liable to the visitations of a vampyre."

"It wouldn't be pleasant."

"The young lady might have children."

"Oh, lots," cried Jack.

"Hold your noise, Jack."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"And she might herself actually, when after death she became a vampyre, come and feed on her own children."

"Become a vampyre! What, is she going to be a vampyre too?"

"My dear sir, don't you know that it is a remarkable fact, as regards the physiology of vampyres, that whoever is bitten by one of these dreadful beings, becomes a vampyre?"

"The devil!"

"It is a fact, sir."

"Whew!" whistled Jack; "she might bite us all, and we should be a whole ship's crew o' wamphigaers. There would be a confounded go!"

"It's not pleasant," said the admiral, as he rose from his chair, and paced to and fro in the room, "it's not pleasant. Hang me up at my own yard-arm if it is."

"Who said it was?" cried Jack.

"Who asked you, you brute?"

"Well, sir," added Mr. Crinkles, "I have given you all the information I can; and I can only repeat what I before had the honour of saying more at large, namely, that I am your humble servant to command, and that I shall be happy to attend upon you at any time."

"Thank ye -- thank ye, Mr. -- a -- a -- "

"Crinkles."

"Ah, Crinkles. You shall hear from me again, sir, shortly. Now that I am down here, I will see to the very bottom of this affair, were it deeper than fathom ever sounded. Charles Holland was my poor sister's son; he's the only relative I have in the wide world, and his happiness is dearer to my heart than my own."

Crinkles turned aside, and, by the twinkle of his eyes, one might premise that the honest little lawyer was much affected.

"God bless you, sir," he said; "farewell."

"Good day to you."

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"Good-bye, lawyer," cried Jack. "Mind how you go. D -- n me, if you don't seem a decent sort of fellow, and, after all, you may give the devil a clear berth, and get into heaven's straits, with a flowing sheet, provided you don't, towards the end of the voyage, make any lubberly blunders."

The old admiral threw himself into a chair with a deep sigh.

"Jack," said he.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"What's to be done now?"

Jack opened the window to discharge the superfluous moisture from an enormous quid he had indulged himself with while the lawyer was telling about the vampyre, and then again turning his face towards his master, he said, --

"Do? What shall we do? Why, go at once and find out Charles, our nevy, and ask him all about it, and see the young lady, too, and lay hold o' the wamphigher if we can, as well, and go at the whole affair broadside to broadside, till we make a prize of all the particulars, arter which we can turn it over in our minds agin, and see what's to be done."

"Jack, you are right. Come along."

"I knows I am. Do you know now which way to steer?"

"Of course not. I never was in this latitude before, and the channel looks intricate. We will hail a pilot, Jack, and then we shall be all right, and if we strike it will be his fault."

"Which is a mighty great consolation," said Jack. "Come along."

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Chapter XVI. THE MEETING OF THE LOVERS IN THE GARDEN. -- AN AFFECTING SCENE. -- THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

Our readers will recollect that Flora Bannerworth had made an appointment with Charles Holland in the garden of the hall. This meeting was looked forward to by the young man with a variety of conflicting feelings, and he passed the intermediate time in a most painful state of doubt as to what would be its result.

The thought that he should be much urged by Flora to give up all thoughts of making her his, was a most bitter one to him, who loved her with so much truth and constancy, and that she would say all she could to induce such a resolution in his mind he felt certain. But to him the idea of now abandoning her presented itself in the worst of aspects.

"Shall I," he said, "sink so low in my own estimation, as well as in hers, and in that of all honourable-minded persons, as to desert her now in the hour of affliction? Dare I be so base as actually or virtually to say to her, 'Flora, when your beauty was undimmed by sorrow -- when all around you seemed life and joy, I loved you selfishly for the increased happiness which you might bestow upon me; but now the hand of misfortune presses heavily upon you -- you are not what you were, and I desert you?' Never -- never -- never!"

Charles Holland, it will be seen by some of our more philosophic neighbours, felt more acutely than he reasoned; but let his errors of argumentation be what they may, can we do other than admire the nobility of soul which dictated such a self denying generous course as that he was pursuing?

As for Flora, Heaven only knows if at that precise time her intellect had completely stood the test of the trying events which had nearly overwhelmed it.

The two grand feelings that seemed to possess her mind were fear of the renewed visits of the vampyre, and an earnest desire to release Charles Holland from his repeated vows of constancy towards her.

Feeling, generosity, and judgment, all revolted holding a young man to such a destiny as her's. To link him to her fate, would be to make him to a real extent a sharer in it, and the more she heard fall from his lips in the way of generous feelings of continued attachment to her, the more severely did she feel that he would suffer most acutely if united to her.

And she was right. The very generosity of feeling which would have now prompted Charles Holland to lead Flora Bannerworth to the altar, even with the marks of the vampyre's teeth upon her throat, gave an assurance of the depth of feeling which would have made him an ample haven in all her miseries, in all her distresses and afflictions.

What was familiarly in the family at the Hall called the garden, was a semicircular piece of ground shaded in several directions by trees, and which was exclusively devoted to the growth of flowers. The piece of ground was nearly hidden from the view of the house, and in its centre was a summer-house, which at the usual season of the year was covered with all kinds of creeping plants of exquisite perfumes, and rare beauty. All around, too, bloomed the fairest and sweetest of flowers, which a rich soil and a sheltered situation could produce.

Alas! though, of late many weeds had straggled up among their more estimable floral culture, for the decayed fortunes of the family had prevented them from keeping the necessary servants, to place the Hall and its grounds in a state of neatness, such as it had once been the pride of the inhabitants of the place to see them. It was then in this flower-garden that Charles and Flora used to meet.

As may be supposed, he was on the spot before the appointed hour, anxiously expecting the appearance of her who was so really and truly dear to him. What to him were the sweet flowers that there grew in such happy luxuriance and heedless beauty? Alas, the flower that to his mind was fairer than them all, was blighted, and in the wan cheek of her whom he loved, he sighed to see the lily usurping the place of the radiant rose.

"Dear, dear Flora," he ejaculated, "you must indeed be taken from this place, which is so full of the most painful remembrances now. I cannot think that Mr. Marchdale somehow is a friend to me, but that conviction, or rather impression, does not paralyze my judgment sufficiently to induce me not to acknowledge that his advice is good. He might have couched it in pleasanter words -- words that would not, like daggers, each have brought a deadly pang home to my heart, but still I do think that in his conclusion he was right."

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A light sound, as of some fairy footstep among the flowers, came upon his ears, and turning instantly to the direction from whence the sound proceeded, he saw what his heart had previously assured him of, namely that it was his Flora that was coming.

Yes, it was she; but, ah, how pale, how wan — how languid and full of the evidences of much mental suffering was she. Where now was the elasticity of that youthful step? Where now was that lustrous beaming beauty of mirthfulness, which was wont to dawn in those eyes?

Alas, all was changed. The exquisite beauty of form was there, but the light of joy which had lent its most transcendent charms to that heavenly face, was gone. Charles was by her side in a moment. He had her hand clasped in his, while his disengaged one was wound tenderly around her taper waist.

"Flora, dear, dear Flora," he said, "you are better. Tell me that you feel the gentle air revives you?"

She could not speak. Her heart was too full of woe.

"Oh; Flora, my own, my beautiful," he added, in those tones which come so direct from the heart, and which are so different from any assumption of tenderness. "Speak to me, dear, dear Flora — speak to me if it be but a word."

"Charles," was all she could say, and then she burst into a flood of tears, and leant so heavily upon his arm, that it was evident but for that support she must have fallen.

Charles Holland welcomed those, although they grieved him so much that he could have accompanied them with his own, but then he knew that she would be soon now more composed, and they would relieve the heart whose sorrows had called them into existence.

He forbore to speak to her until he felt this sudden gush of feeling was subsiding into sobs, and then in low, soft accents, he again endeavoured to breathe comfort to her afflicted and terrified spirit.

"My dear Flora," he said, "remember that there are warm hearts that love you. Remember that neither time nor circumstance can change such endearing affection as mine. Ah, Flora, what evil is there in the whole world that love may not conquer, and in the height of its noble feelings laugh to scorn."

"Oh, hush, hush, Charles, hush."

"Wherefore, Flora, would you still the voice of pure affection? I love you surely, as few have ever loved. Ah, why would you forbid me to give such utterance as I may to those feelings which fill up my whole heart?"

"No — no — no."

"Flora, Flora, wherefore do you say no?"

"Do not, Charles, now speak to me of affection or love. Do not tell me you love me now."

"Not tell you I love you! Ah, Flora, if my tongue, with its poor eloquence to give utterance to such a sentiment, were to do its office, each feature of my face would tell the tale. Each action would show to all the world how much I loved you."

"I must not now hear this. Great God of Heaven give me strength to carry out the purpose of my soul."

"What purpose is it, Flora, that you have to pray thus fervently for strength to execute? Oh, if it savour aught of reason against love's majesty, forget it. Love is a gift from Heaven. The greatest and the most glorious gift it ever bestowed upon its creatures. Heaven will not aid you in repudiating that which is the one grand redeeming feature that rescues human nature from a world of reproach."

Flora wrung her hands despairingly as she said, —

"Charles, I know I cannot reason with you. I know I have not power of language, aptitude of illustration, nor depth of thought to hold a mental contention with you."

"Flora, for what do I contend?"

"You, you speak of love."

"And I have, ere this, spoken to you of love unchecked."

"Yes, yes. Before this."

"And now, wherefore not now? Do not tell me you are changed."

"I am changed, Charles. Fearfully changed. The curse of God has fallen upon me, I know not why. I know not that in word or in thought I have done evil, except perchance unwittingly, and yet — the vampyre."

"Let not that affright you."

"Affright me! It has killed me."

"Nay, Flora, you think too much of what I still hope to be susceptible of far more rational explanation."

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"By your own words, then, Charles, I must convict you. I cannot, I dare not be yours, while such a dreadful circumstance is hanging over me, Charles; if a more rational explanation than the hideous one which my own fancy gives to the form that visits me can be found, find it, and rescue me from despair and from madness."

They had now reached the summer-house, and as Flora uttered these words she threw herself on to a seat, and covering her beautiful face with her hands, she sobbed convulsively.

"You have spoken," said Charles, dejectedly. "I have heard that which you wished to say to me."

"No, no. Not all, Charles."

"I will be patient, then, although what more you may have to add should tear my very heart-strings."

"I -- I have to add, Charles," she said, in a tremulous voice, "that justice, religion, mercy -- every human attribute which bears the name of virtue, calls loudly upon me no longer to hold you to vows made under different auspices."

"Go on, Flora."

"I then implore you, Charles, finding me what I am, to leave me to the fate which it has pleased Heaven to cast upon me. I do not ask you, Charles, not to love me."

"'Tis well. Go on, Flora."

"Because I should like to think that, although I might never see you more, you loved me still. But you must think seldom of me, and you must endeavour to be happy with some other -- "

"You cannot, Flora, pursue the picture you yourself would draw. These words come not from your heart."

"Yes -- yes -- yes."

"Did you ever love me?"

"Charles, Charles, why will you add another pang to those you know must already rend my heart?"

"No, Flora, I would tear my own heart from my bosom ere I would add one pang to yours. Well I know that gentle maiden modesty would seal your lips to the soft confession that you love me. I could not hope the joy of hearing you utter these words. The tender devoted lover is content to see the truthful passion in the speaking eyes of beauty. Content is he to translate it from a thousand acts, which, to eyes that look not so acutely as a lover's, bear no signification; but when you tell me to seek happiness with another, well may the anxious question burst from my throbbing heart of, 'Did you ever love me, Flora?'"

Her senses hung entranced upon his words. Oh, what a witchery is in the tongue of love. Some even of the former colour of her cheek returned as, forgetting all for the moment but that she was listening to the voice of him, the thoughts of whom had made up the day dream of her happiness, she gazed upon his face.

His voice ceased. To her it seemed as if some music had suddenly left off in its most exquisite passage. She clung to his arm -- she looked imploringly up to him. Her head sunk upon his breast as she cried,

"Charles, Charles, I did love you. I do love you now."

"Then let sorrow and misfortune shake their grisly locks in vain," he cried. "Heart to heart -- hand to hand with me, defy them."

He lifted up his arms towards Heaven as he spoke, and at the moment came such a rattling peal of thunder, that the very earth seemed to shake upon its axis.

A half scream of terror burst from the lips of Flora, as she cried, --

"What was that?"

"Only thunder," said Charles, calmly.

"'Twas an awful sound."

"A natural one."

"But at such a moment, when you were defying Fate to injure us. Oh! Charles, is it ominous?"

"Flora, can you really give way to such idle fancies?"

"The sun is obscured."

"Ay, but it will shine all the brighter for its temporary eclipse. The thunder-storm will clear the air of many noxious vapours; the forked lightning has its uses as well as its powers of mischief. Hark! there it is again."

Another peal, of almost equal intensity to the other, shook the firmament. Flora trembled.

"Charles," she said, "this is the voice of Heaven. We must part -- we must part for ever. I cannot be yours."

"Flora, this is madness. Think again, dear Flora. Misfortunes for a time will hover over the best and most fortunate of us; but, like the clouds that now obscure the sweet sunshine, will pass away, and leave no trace

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behind them. The sunshine of joy will shine on you again."

There was a small break in the clouds, like a window looking into Heaven. From it streamed one beam of sunlight, so bright, so dazzling, and so beautiful, that it was a sight of wonder to look upon. It fell upon the face of Flora; it warmed her cheek; it lent lustre to her pale lips and tearful eyes; it illuminated that little summer-house as if it had been the shrine of some saint.

"Behold!" cried Charles, "where is your omen now?"

"God of Heaven!" cried Flora; and she stretched out her arms.

"The clouds that hover over your spirit now," said Charles, "shall pass away. Accept this beam of sunlight as a promise from God."

"I will — I will. It is going."

"It has done its office."

The clouds closed over the small orifice, and all was gloom again as before.

"Flora," said Charles, "you will not ask me now to leave you?"

She allowed him to clasp her to his heart. It was beating for her, and for her only.

"You will let me, Flora, love you still?"

Her voice, as she answered him, was like the murmur of some distant melody the ears can scarcely translate to the heart.

"Charles, we will live, love, and die together."

And now there was a wrapt stillness in that summer-house for many minutes — a trance of joy. They did not speak, but now and then she would look into his face with an old familiar smile, and the joy of his heart was near to bursting in tears from his eyes. * * * *

A shriek burst from Flora's lips — as shriek so wild and shrill that it awakened echoes far and near. Charles staggered back a step, as if shot, and then in such agonised accents as he was long indeed in banishing the remembrance of, she cried, —

"The vampyre! the vampyre!"

—

Chapter XVII. THE EXPLANATION. -- THE ARRIVAL OF THE ADMIRAL AT THE HOUSE. -- A SCENE OF CONFUSION, AND SOME OF ITS RESULTS.

So sudden and so utterly unexpected a cry of alarm from Flora, at such a time might well have the effect of astounding the nerves of any one, and no wonder that Charles was for a few seconds absolutely petrified and almost unable to think.

Mechanically, then, he turned his eyes towards the door of the summer-house, and there he saw a tall, thin man, rather elegantly dressed, whose countenance certainly, in its wonderful resemblance to the portrait on the panel, might well appal any one.

The stranger stood in the irresolute attitude on the threshold of the summer-house of one who did not wish to intrude, but who found it as awkward, if not more so now, to retreat than to advance.

Before Charles Holland could summon any words to his head, or think of freeing himself from the clinging grasp of Flora, which was wound around him, the stranger made a very low and courtly bow, after which he said, in winning accents, --

"I very much fear that I am an intruder here. Allow me to offer my warmest apologies, and to assure, sir, and you, madam, that I had no idea any one was in the arbour. You perceive the rain is falling smartly, and I made towards here, seeing it was likely to shelter me from the shower."

These words were spoken in such a plausible and courtly tone of voice, that they might well have become any drawing-room in the kingdom.

Flora kept her eyes fixed upon him during the utterance of these words, and as she convulsively clutched the arm of Charles, she kept on whispering --

"The vampyre! the vampyre!"

"I much fear," added the stranger, in the same bland tones, "that I have been the cause of some alarm to the young lady!"

"Release me," whispered Charles to Flora. "Release me; I will follow him at once."

"No, no -- do not leave me -- do not leave me. The vampyre -- the dreadful vampyre!"

"But, Flora -- "

"Hush -- hush -- hush! It speaks again."

"Perhaps I ought to account for my appearance in the garden at all," added the insinuating stranger. "The fact is, I came on a visit -- "

Flora shuddered.

"To Mr. Henry Bannerworth," continued the stranger; "and finding the garden-gate open, I came in without troubling the servants, which I much regret, as I can perceive I have alarmed and annoyed the lady. Madam, pray accept of my apologies."

"In the name of God, who are you?" said Charles.

"My name is Varney."

"Oh, yes. You are the Sir Francis Varney, residing close by, who bears so fearful a resemblance to -- "

"Pray go on, sir. I am all attention."

"To a portrait here."

"Indeed! Now I reflect a moment, Mr. Henry Bannerworth did incidentally mention something of the sort. It's a most singular coincidence."

The sound of approaching footsteps was now plainly heard, and in a few moments Henry and George, along with Mr. Marchdale, reached the spot. Their appearance showed that they had made haste, and Henry at once exclaimed, --

"We heard, or fancied we heard, a cry of alarm."

"You did hear it," said Charles Holland. "Do you know this gentleman?"

"It is Sir Francis Varney."

"Indeed!"

Varney bowed to the new comers, and was altogether as much at his ease as everybody else seemed quite the

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contrary. Even Charles Holland found the difficulty of going up to such a well-bred, gentlemanly man, and saying, "Sir, we believe you to be a vampyre" — to be almost, if not insurmountable.

"I cannot do it," he thought, "but I will watch him."

"Take me away," whispered Flora. "'Tis he — 'tis he. Oh, take me away, Charles."

"Hush, Flora, hush. You are in some error; the accidental resemblance should not make us be rude to this gentleman."

"The vampyre! — it is the vampyre!"

"Are you sure, Flora?"

"Do I know your features — my own — my brother's? Do not ask me to doubt — I cannot. I am quite sure. Take me from his hideous presence, Charles."

"The young lady, I fear, is very much indisposed," remarked Sir Francis Varney, in a sympathetic tone of voice. "If she will take my arm, I shall esteem it a great honour."

"No — no — no! — God! no," cried Flora.

"Madam, I will not press you."

He bowed, and Charles led Flora from the summer-house towards the hall.

"Flora," he said, "I am bewildered — I know not what to think. That man most certainly has been fashioned after the portrait which is on the panel in the room you formerly occupied; or it has been painted from him."

"He is my midnight visitor!" exclaimed Flora. "He is the vampyre; — this Sir Francis Varney is the vampyre."

"Good God! What can be done?"

"I know not. I am nearly distracted."

"Be calm, Flora. If this man be really what you name him, we now know from what quarter the mischief comes, which is, at all events, a point gained. Be assured we shall place a watch upon him."

"Oh, it is terrible to meet him here."

"And he is so wonderfully anxious, too, to possess the Hall."

"He is — he is."

"It looks strange, the whole affair. But, Flora, be assured of one thing, and that is, for your own safety."

"Can I be assured of that?"

"Most certainly. Go to your mother now. Here we are, you see, fairly within doors. Go to your mother, dear Flora, and keep yourself quiet. I will return to this mysterious man now with a cooler judgment than I left him."

"You will watch him, Charles?"

"I will, indeed."

"And you will not let him approach the house here alone?"

"I will not."

"Oh, that the Almighty should allow such beings to haunt the earth!"

"Hush, Flora, hush! we cannot judge of his allwise purpose."

"'Tis hard that the innocent should be inflicted with its presence."

Charles bowed his head in mournful assent.

"Is it not very, very dreadful?"

"Hush — hush! Calm yourself, dearest, calm yourself. Recollect that all we have to go upon in this matter is a resemblance, which, after all, may be accidental. But leave it all to me, and be assured that now I have some clues to this affair, I will not lose sight of it, or of Sir Francis Varney."

So saying, Charles surrendered Flora to the care of their mother, and then was hastening back to the summer-house, when he met the whole party coming towards the Hall, for the rain was each moment increasing in intensity.

"We are returning," remarked Sir Francis Varney, with a half bow and a smile, to Charles.

"Allow me," said Henry, "to introduce you, Mr. Holland, to our neighbour, Sir Francis Varney."

Charles felt himself compelled to behave with courtesy, although his mind was so full of conflicting feelings as regarded Varney; but there was no avoiding, without such brutal rudeness as was inconsistent with all his pursuits and habits, replying in something like the same strain to the extreme courtly politeness of the supposed vampyre.

"I will watch him closely," thought Charles. "I can do no more than watch him closely."

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Sir Francis Varney seemed to be a man of the most general and discursive information. He talked fluently and pleasantly upon all sorts of topics, and notwithstanding he could not but have heard what Flora had said of him, he asked no question whatever upon that subject.

This silence as regarded a matter which would at once have induced some sort of inquiry from any other man, Charles felt told much against him, and he trembled to believe for a moment that, after all, it really might be true.

"Is he a vampyre?" he asked himself. "Are there vampyres, and is this man of fashion — this courtly, talented, educated gentleman one?" It was a perfectly hideous question.

"You are charmingly situated here," remarked Varney, as, after ascending the few steps that led to the hall door, he turned and looked at the view from that slight altitude.

"The place has been much esteemed," said Henry, "for its picturesque beauties of scenery."

"And well it may be. I trust, Mr. Holland, the young lady is much better?"

"She is, sir," said Charles.

"I was not honoured by an introduction."

"It was my fault," said Henry, who spoke to his extraordinary guest with an air of forced hilarity. "It was my fault for not introducing you to my sister."

"And that was your sister?"

"It was, sir."

"Report has not belied her — she is beautiful. But she looks rather pale, I thought. Has she bad health?"

"The best of health."

"Indeed! Perhaps the little disagreeable circumstance, which is made so much food for gossip in the neighbourhood, has affected her spirits?"

"It has."

"You allude to the supposed visit here of a vampyre?" said Charles, as he fixed his eyes upon Varney's face.

"Yes, I allude to the supposed appearance of the supposed vampyre in this family," said Sir Francis Varney, as he returned the earnest gaze of Charles, with such unshrinking assurance, that the young man was compelled, after about a minute, nearly to withdraw his own eyes.

"He will not be cowed," thought Charles. "Use has made him familiar to such cross-questioning."

It appeared now suddenly to occur to Henry that he had said something at Varney's own house which should have prevented him from coming to the Hall, and he now remarked, —

"We scarcely expected the pleasure of your company here, Sir Francis Varney."

"Oh, my dear sir, I am aware of that; but you roused my curiosity. You mentioned to me that there was a portrait here amazingly like me."

"Did I?"

"Indeed you did, or how could I know it? I wanted to see if the resemblance was so perfect."

"Did you hear, sir," added Henry, "that my sister was alarmed at your likeness to the portrait?"

"No, really."

"I pray you walk in, and we will talk more at large upon that matter."

"With great pleasure. One leads a monotonous life in the country, when compared with the brilliancy of a court existence. Just now I have no particular engagement. As we are near neighbours I see no reason why we should not be good friends, and often interchange such civilities as make up the amenities of existence, and which, in the country, more particularly, are valuable."

Henry could not be hypocrite enough to assent to this; but still, under the present aspect of affairs, it was impossible to return any but a civil reply; so he said, —

"Oh, yes, of course — certainly. My time is very much occupied, and my sister and mother see no company."

"Oh, now, how wrong."

"Wrong, sir?"

"Yes, surely. If anything more than another tends to harmonize individuals, it is the society of that fairer half of the creation which we love for their very foibles. I am much attached to the softer sex — to young persons of health. I like to see the rosy cheeks, where the warm blood mantles in the superficial veins, and all is loveliness and life."

Charles shrank back, and the word "Demon" unconsciously escaped his lips.

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Sir Francis took no manner of notice of the expression, but went on talking, as if he had been on the very happiest terms with every one present.

"Will you follow me, at once, to the chamber where the portrait hangs," said Henry, "or will you partake of some refreshment first?"

"No refreshment for me," said Varney. "My dear friend, if you will permit me to call you such, this is a time of the day at which I never do take any refreshment."

"Nor at any other," thought Henry.

They all went to the chamber where Charles had passed one very disagreeable night, and when they arrived, Henry pointed to the portrait on the panel, saying --

"There, Sir Francis Varney, is your likeness."

He looked, and, having walked up to it, in an under tone, rather as if he were conversing with himself than making a remark, for anyone else to hear, he said --

"It is wonderfully like."

"It is, indeed," said Charles.

"If I stand beside it, thus," said Varney, placing himself in a favourable attitude for comparing the two faces, "I dare say you will be more struck with the likeness than before."

So accurate was it now, that the same light fell upon his face as that under which the painter had executed the portrait, that all started back a step or two.

"Some artists," remarked Varney, "have the sense to ask where a portrait is to be hung before they paint it, and then they adapt their lights and shadows to those which would fall upon the original, were it similarly situated."

"I cannot stand this," said Charles to Henry; "I must question him farther."

"As you please, but do not insult him."

"I will not."

"He is beneath my roof now, and, after all, it is but a hideous suspicion we have of him."

"Rely upon me."

Charles stepped forward, and once again confronting Varney, with an earnest gaze, he said --

"Do you know, sir, that Miss Bannerworth declares the vampyre she fancies to have visited this chamber to be, in features, the exact counterpart of this portrait?"

"Does she indeed?"

"She does, indeed."

"And perhaps, then, that accounts for her thinking that I am the vampyre, because I bear a strong resemblance to the portrait."

"I should not be surprised," said Charles.

"How very odd."

"Very."

"And yet entertaining. I am rather amused than otherwise. The idea of being a vampyre. Ha! ha! If ever I go to a masquerade again, I shall certainly assume the character of a vampyre."

"You would do it well."

"I dare say, now, I should make quite a sensation."

"I am certain you would. Do you not think, gentlemen, that Sir Francis Varney would enact the character to the very life? By Heavens, he would do it so well that one might, without much difficulty, really imagine him a vampyre."

"Bravo -- bravo," said Varney, as he gently folded his hands together, with that genteel applause that may even be indulged in in a box at the opera itself. "Bravo. I like to see young persons enthusiastic; it looks as if they had some of the real fire of genius in their composition. Bravo -- bravo."

This was, Charles thought, the very height and acme of impudence, and yet what could he do? What could he say? He was foiled by the downright coolness of Varney.

As for Henry, George, and Mr. Marchdale, they had listened to what was passing between Sir Francis and Charles in silence. They feared to diminish the effect of anything Charles might say, by adding a word of their own; and, likewise, they did not wish to lose one observation that might come from the lips of Varney.

But now Charles appeared to have said all he had to say, he turned to the window and looked out. He seemed

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like a man who had made up his mind, for a time, to give up some contest in which he had been engaged.

And, perhaps, not so much did he give it up from any feeling or consciousness of being beaten, as from a conviction that it could be the more effectually, at some other and far more eligible opportunity, renewed.

Varney now addressed Henry, saying, — "I presume the subject of our conference, when you did me the honour of a call, is no secret to any one here?"

"None whatever," said Henry.

"Then, perhaps, I am too early in asking you if you have made up your mind?"

"I have scarcely, certainly, had time to think."

"My dear sir, do not let me hurry you; I much regret, indeed, the intrusion."

"You seem anxious to possess the Hall," remarked Mr. Marchdale, to Varney.

"I am."

"Is it new to you?"

"Not quite. I have some boyish recollections connected with this neighbourhood, among which Bannerworth Hall stands sufficiently prominent."

"May I ask how long ago that was?" said Charles Holland, rather abruptly.

"I do not recollect, my enthusiastic young friend," said Varney. "How old are you?"

"Just about twenty—one."

"You are, then, for your age, quite a model of discretion."

It would have been difficult for the most accurate observer of human nature to have decided whether this was said truthfully or ironically, so Charles made no reply to it whatever.

"I trust," said Henry, "we shall induce you, as this is your first visit, Sir Francis Varney, to the Hall, to partake of something."

"Well, well, a cup of wine — "

"Is at your service."

Henry now led the way to a small parlour, which, although by no means one of the showiest rooms of the house, was, from the care and exquisite carving with which it abounded, much more to the taste of any who possessed an accurate judgment in such works of art.

Then wine was ordered, and Charles took an opportunity of whispering to Henry, —

"Notice well if he drinks."

"I will."

"Do you see that beneath his coat there is a raised place, as if his arm was bound up?"

"I do."

"There, then, was where the bullet from the pistol fired by Flora, when we were at the church, hit him."

"Hush! for God's sake, hush! you are getting into a dreadful state of excitement, Charles; hush! hush!"

"And can you blame — "

"No, no; but what can we do?"

"You are right. Nothing we can do at present. We have a clue now, and be it our mutual inclination, as well as a duty, to follow it. Oh, you shall see how calm I will be!

"For heaven's sake, be so. I have noted that his eyes flash upon yours with no friendly feeling."

"His friendship were a curse."

"Hush! he drinks!"

"Watch him."

"I will."

"Gentlemen all," said Sir Francis Varney, in such soft, dulcet tones, that it was quite a fascination to hear him speak; "gentlemen all, being as I am, much delighted with your company, do not accuse me of presumption, if I drink now, poor drinker that I am, to our future merry meetings."

He raised the wine to his lips, and seemed to drink, after which he replaced the glass upon the table.

Charles glanced at it, it was still full.

"You have not drunk, Sir Francis Varney," he said.

"Pardon me, enthusiastic young sir," said Varney, "perhaps you will have the liberality to allow me to take my wine how I please and when I please."

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"Your glass is full."

"Well, sir?"

"Will you drink it?"

"Not at any man's bidding, most certainly. If the fair Flora Bannerworth would grace the board with her sweet presence, methinks I could then drink on, on, on."

"Hark you, sir," cried Charles, "I can bear no more of this. We have had in this house most horrible and damning evidence that there are such things as vampyres."

"Have you really? I suppose you eat raw pork at supper, and so had the nightmare?"

"A jest is welcome in its place, but pray hear me out, sir, if it suit your lofty courtesy to do so."

"Oh, certainly."

"Then I say we believe, as far as human judgment has a right to go, that a vampyre has been here."

"Go on, it's interesting. I always was a lover of the wild and the wonderful."

"We have, too," continued Charles, "some reason to believe that you are the man."

Varney tapped his forehead as he glanced at Henry, and said, --

"Oh, dear, I did not know. You should have told me he was a little wrong about the brain; I might have quarrelled with the lad. Dear me, how lamentable for his poor mother."

"This will not do, Sir Francis Varney alias Bannerworth."

"Oh -- oh! Be calm -- be calm."

"I defy you to your teeth, sir! No, God, no! Your teeth!"

"Poor lad! Poor lad!"

"You are a cowardly demon, and here I swear to devote myself to your destruction."

Sir Francis Varney drew himself up to his full height, and that was immense, as he said to Henry, --

"I pray you, Mr. Bannerworth, since I am thus grievously insulted beneath your roof, to tell me if your friend here be mad or sane?"

"He's not mad."

"Then -- "

"Hold, sir! The quarrel shall be mine. In the name of my persecuted sister -- in the name of Heaven, Sir Francis Varney, I defy you."

Sir Francis, in spite of his impenetrable calmness, appeared somewhat moved, as he said, --

"I have endured insult sufficient -- I will endure no more. If there are weapons at hand -- "

"My young friend," interrupted Mr. Marchdale, stepping between the excited men, "is carried away by his feelings, and knows not what he says. You will look upon it in that light, Sir Francis."

"We need no interference," exclaimed Varney, his hitherto bland voice changing to one of fury. "The hot blooded fool wishes to fight, and he shall -- to the death -- to the death."

"And I say he shall not," exclaimed Mr. Marchdale, taking Henry by the arm. "George," he added, turning to the young man, "assist me in persuading your brother to leave the room. Conceive the agony of your sister and mother if anything should happen to him."

Varney smiled with a devilish sneer, as he listened to these words, and then he said, --

"As you will -- as you will. There will be plenty of time, and perhaps better opportunity, gentlemen. I bid you good day."

And with provoking coolness, he then moved towards the door, and quitted the room.

"Remain here," said Mr. Marchdale; "I will follow him, and see that he quits the premises."

He did so, and the young men, from the window, beheld Sir Francis walking slowly across the garden, and then saw Mr. Marchdale follow on his track.

While they were thus occupied, a tremendous ringing came at the gate, but their attention was so rivetted to what was passing in the garden, that they paid not the least attention to it.

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Chapter XVIII. THE ADMIRAL'S ADVICE. -- THE CHALLENGE TO THE VAMPYRE. -- THE NEW SERVANT AT THE HALL.

The violent ringing of the bell continued uninterruptedly until at length George volunteered to answer it. The fact was, that now there was no servant at all in the place for, after the one who had recently demanded of Henry her dismissal had left, the other was terrified to remain alone, and had precipitately gone from the house, without even going through the ceremony of announcing her intention to do so. To be sure she sent a boy for her money afterwards, which may be considered as a great act of condescension.

Suspecting, then, this state of things, George himself hastened to the gate, and, being not over well pleased at the continuous and unnecessary ringing which was kept up at it, he opened it quickly, and cried, with more impatience, by a vast amount, than was usual with him.

"Who is so impatient that he cannot wait a seasonable time for the door to be opened?"

"And who the d -- --I are you?" cried one who was immediately outside.

"Who do you want?" cried George.

"Shiver my timbers!" cried Admiral Bell, for it was no other than that personage. "What's it to you?"

"Ay, ay," added Jack, "answer that if you can, you shore-going-looking swab."

"Two madmen, I suppose," ejaculated George, and he would have closed the gate upon them; but Jack introduced between it and the post the end of a thick stick, saying, --

"Avast there! None of that; we have had trouble enough to get in. If you are the family lawyer, or the chaplain, perhaps you'll tell us where Mister Charley is."

"Once more I demand of you who you want?" said George, who was now perhaps a little amused at the conduct of the impatient visitors.

"We want the admiral's nevey," said Jack.

"But how do I know who is the admiral's nevey, as you call him."

"Why, Charles Holland, to be sure. Have you got him aboard or not?"

"Mr. Charles Holland is certainly here; and, if you had said at once, and explicitly, that you wished to see him, I could have given you a direct answer."

"He is here?" cried the admiral.

"Most certainly."

"Come along, then; yet, stop a bit. I say, young fellow, just before we go any further, tell us if he has maimed the vampyre?"

"The what?"

"The wamphigher," said Jack, by way of being, as he considered, a little more explanatory than the admiral.

"I do not know what you mean," said George; "if you wish to see Mr. Charles Holland walk in and see him. He is in this house; but, for myself, as you are strangers to me, I decline answering any questions, let their import be what they may."

"Hilloa! who are they?" suddenly cried Jack, as he pointed to two figures some distance off in the meadows, who appeared to be angrily conversing.

George glanced in the direction towards which Jack pointed, and there he saw Sir Francis Varney and Mr. Marchdale standing within a few paces of each other, and apparently engaged in some angry discussion.

His first impulse was to go immediately towards them; but before he could execute even that suggestion of his mind, he saw Varney strike Marchdale, and the latter fell to the ground.

"Allow me to pass," cried George, as he endeavoured to get by the rather unwieldy form of the admiral. But, before he could accomplish this, for the gate was narrow, he saw Varney, with great swiftness, make off, and Marchdale, rising to his feet, came towards the Hall.

When Marchdale got near enough to the garden-gate to see George, he motioned to him to remain where he was, and then, by quickening his pace, he soon came up to the spot.

"Marchdale," cried George, "you have had an encounter with Sir Francis Varney."

"I have," said Marchdale, in an excited manner. "I threatened to follow him, but he struck me to the earth as

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easily as I could a child. His strength is superhuman."

"I saw you fall."

"I believe, but that he was observed, he would have murdered me."

"Indeed!"

"What, do you mean to say that lankey, horse-marine looking fellow is as bad as that?" said the admiral.

Marchdale now turned his attention to the two new comers, upon whom he looked with some surprise, and then, turning to George, he said, —

"Is this gentleman a visitor?"

"To Mr. Holland, I believe he is," said George; "but I have not the pleasure of knowing his name."

"Oh, you may know my name as soon as you like," cried the admiral. "The enemies of old England know it, and I don't care if all the world knows it. I'm old Admiral Bell, something of a hulk now, but still able to head a quarter-deck if there was any need to do so."

"Ay, ay," cried Jack, and taking from his pocket a boatswain's whistle, he blew a blast, so long, and loud, and shrill, that George was fain to cover his ears with his hands to shut out the brain-piercing, and, to him, unusual sound.

"And are you, then, a relative," said Marchdale, "of Mr. Holland's, sir, may I ask?"

"I'm his uncle, and be d — — d to him, if you must know, and some one has told me that the young scamp thinks of marrying a mermaid, or a ghost or a vampyre, or some such thing, so, for the sake of the memory of his poor mother, I've come to say no to the bargain, and d — n me, who cares."

"Come in, sir," said George, "I will conduct you to Mr. Holland. I presume this is your servant?"

"Why, not exactly. That's Jack Pringle, he was my boatswain, you see, and now he's a kind o' something betwixt and between. Not exactly a servant."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack. "Have it all your own way, though we is paid off."

"Hold your tongue, you audacious scoundrel, will you."

"Oh, I forgot, you don't like anything said about paying off, cos it puts you in mind of — "

"Now, d — n you, I'll have you strung up to the yard-arm, you dog, if you don't belay there."

"I'm done. All's right."

By this time the party, including the admiral, Jack, George Bannerworth, and Marchdale, had got more than half-way across the garden, and were observed by Charles Holland and Henry, who had come to the steps of the hall to see what was going on. The moment Charles saw the admiral a change of colour came over his face, as he exclaimed, —

"By all that's surprising, there is my uncle!"

"Your uncle!" said Henry.

"Yes, as good a hearted man as ever drew breath, and yet, withal, as full of prejudices, and as ignorant of life, as a child."

Without waiting for any reply from Henry, Charles Holland rushed forward, and seizing his uncle by the hand, he cried, in tones of genuine affection, —

"Uncle, dear uncle, how came you to find me out?"

"Charley, my boy," cried the old man, "bless you; I mean, confound your d — — d impudence; you rascal, I'm glad to see you; no, I ain't, you young mutineer. What do you mean by it, you ugly, ill-looking, d — — d fine fellow — my dear boy. Oh, you infernal scoundrel."

All this accompanied by a shaking of the hand, which was enough to dislocate anybody's shoulder, and which Charles was compelled to bear as well as he could.

It quite prevented him from speaking, however, for a few moments, for it nearly shook the breath out of him. When, then, he could get in a word, he said, —

"Uncle, I dare say you are surprised."

"Surprised! D — n me, I am surprised."

"Well, I shall be able to explain all to your satisfaction, I am sure. Allow me now to introduce you to my friends."

Turning then to Henry, Charles said, —

"This is Mr. Henry Bannerworth, uncle; and this is Mr. George Bannerworth, both good friends of mine; and

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this is Mr. Marchdale, a friend of theirs, uncle."

"Oh, indeed!"

"And here you see Admiral Bell, my most worthy, but rather eccentric uncle."

"Confound your impudence."

"What brought him here I cannot tell; but he is a brave officer, and a gentleman."

"None of your nonsense," said the admiral.

"And here you see Jack Pringle," said that individual, introducing himself, since no one appeared inclined to do that office for him, "a tar for all weathers. One who hates the French, and is never so happy as when he's alongside o' some o' those lubberly craft blazing away."

"That's uncommonly true," remarked the admiral.

"Will you walk in, sir?" said Henry, courteously. "Any friend of Charles Holland is most welcome here. You will have much to excuse us for, because we are deficient in servants at present, in consequence of some occurrences in our family, which your nephew has our full permission to explain to you in full."

"Oh, very good, I tell you what it is, all of you, what I've seen of you, d --- e, I like, so here goes. Come along, Jack."

The admiral walked into the house, and as he went, Charles Holland said to him, ---

"How came you to know I was here, uncle?"

"Some fellow wrote me a despatch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, saying as you was a going to marry some odd sort of fish as it wasn't at all the thing to introduce into the family."

"Was --- was a vampyre mentioned?"

"That's the very thing."

"Hush, uncle --- hush."

"What for?"

"Do not, I implore, hint at such a thing before these kind friends of mine. I will take an opportunity within the next hour of explaining all to you, and you shall form your own kind and generous judgment upon circumstances in which my honour and my happiness are so nearly concerned."

"Gammon," said the admiral.

"What, uncle?"

"Oh, I know you want to palaver me into saying it's all right. I suppose if my judgment and generosity don't like it, I shall be an old fool, and a cursed goose?"

"Now, uncle."

"Now, nevey."

"Well, well --- no more at present. We will talk over this at leisure. You promise me to say nothing about it until you have heard my explanation, uncle?"

"Very good. Make it as soon as you can, and as short as you can, that's all I ask of you."

"I will, I will."

Charles was to the full as anxious as his uncle could be to enter upon the subject, some remote information of which, he felt convinced, had brought the old man down to the Hall. Who it could have been that so far intermeddled with his affairs as to write to him, he could not possibly conceive.

A very few words will suffice to explain the precise position in which Charles Holland was. A considerable sum of money had been left to him, but it was saddled with the condition that he should not come into possession of it until he was one year beyond the age which is usually denominated that of discretion, namely, twenty-one. His uncle, the admiral, was the trustee of his fortune, and he, with rare discretion, had got the active and zealous assistance of a professional gentleman of great honour and eminence to conduct the business for him.

This gentleman had advised that for the two years between the ages of twenty and twenty-two, Charles Holland should travel, inasmuch as in English society he would find himself in an awkward position, being for one whole year of age, and yet waiting for his property.

Under such circumstances, reasoned the lawyer, a young man, unless he is possessed of a very rare discretion indeed, is almost sure to get fearfully involved with money-lenders. Being of age, his notes, and bills, and bonds

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would all be good, and he would be in a ten times worse situation than a wealthy minor.

All this was duly explained to Charles, who, rather eagerly than otherwise, caught at the idea of a two years wander on the continent, where he could visit so many places, which to a well read young man like himself, and one of a lively imagination, were full of the most delightful associations.

But the acquaintance with Flora Bannerworth effected a great revolution in his feelings. The dearest, sweetest spot on earth became that which she inhabited. When the Bannerworths left him abroad, he knew not what to do with himself. Everything, and every pursuit in which he had before taken a delight, became most distasteful to him. He was, in fact, in a short time, completely "used up," and then he determined upon returning to England, and finding out the dear object of his attachment at once. This resolution was no sooner taken, than his health and spirits returned to him, and with what rapidity he could, he now made his way to his native shores.

The two years were so nearly expired, that he made up his mind he would not communicate either with his uncle, the admiral, or the professional gentleman upon whose judgment he set so high and so just a value. And at the Hall he considered he was in perfect security from any interruption, and so he would have been, but for that letter which was written to Admiral Bell, and signed Josiah Crinkles, but which Josiah Crinkles so emphatically denied all knowledge of. Who wrote it, remains at present one of those mysteries which time, in the progress of our narrative, will clear up.

The opportune, or rather the painful juncture at which Charles Holland had arrived at Bannerworth Hall, we are well cognisant of. Where he expected to find smiles he found tears, and the family with whom he had fondly hoped he should pass a time of uninterrupted happiness, he found plunged in the gloom incidental to an occurrence of the most painful character.

Our readers will perceive, too, that coming as he did with an utter disbelief in the vampyre, Charles had been compelled, in some measure, to yield to the overwhelming weight of evidence which had been brought to bear upon the subject, and although he could not exactly be said to believe in the existence and the appearance of the vampyre at Bannerworth Hall, he was upon the subject in a most painful state of doubt and indecision.

Charles now took an opportunity to speak to Henry privately, and inform him exactly how he stood with his uncle, adding —

"Now, my dear friend, if you forbid me, I will not tell my uncle of this sad affair, but I must own I would rather do so fully and freely, and trust to his own judgment upon it."

"I implore you to do so," said Henry. "Conceal nothing. Let him know the precise situation and circumstances of the family by all means. There is nothing so mischievous as secrecy: I have the greatest dislike of it. I beg you tell him all."

"I will; and with it, Henry, I will tell him that my heart is irrevocably Flora's."

"Your generous clinging to one whom your heart saw and loved, under very different auspices," said Henry, "believe me, Charles, sinks deep into my heart. She has related to me something of a meeting she had with you."

"Oh, Henry, she may tell you what I said; but there are no words which can express the depth of my tenderness. 'Tis only time which can prove how much I love her."

"Go to your uncle," said Henry, in a voice of emotion. "God bless you, Charles. It is true you would have been fully justified in leaving my sister; but the nobler and the more generous path you have chosen has endeared you to us all."

"Where is Flora now?" said Charles.

"She is in her own room. I have persuaded her, by some occupation, to withdraw her mind from a too close and consequently painful contemplation of the distressing circumstances in which she feels herself placed."

"You are right. What occupation best pleases her?"

"The pages of a romance once had charms for her gentle spirit."

"Then come with me, and, from among the few articles I brought with me here, I can find some papers which may help her to pass some merry hours."

Charles took Henry to his room, and, unstrapping a small valise, he took from it some manuscript paper, one of which he handed to Henry, saying, —

"Give that to her: it contains an account of a wild adventure, and shows that human nature may suffer much more — and that wrongfully too — than came ever under our present mysterious affliction."

"I will," said Henry; "and, coming from you, I am sure it will have a more than ordinary value in her eyes."

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"I will now," said Charles, "seek my uncle. I will tell him how I love her; and at the end of my narration, if he should not object, I would fain introduce her to him, that he might himself see that, let what beauty may have met his gaze, her peer he never yet met with, and may in vain hope to do so."

"You are partial, Charles."

"Not so. 'Tis true I look upon her with a lover's eyes, but I look still with those of truthful observation."

"Well, I will speak to her about seeing your uncle, and let you know. No doubt, he will not be at all averse to an interview with any one who stands high in your esteem."

The young men now separated -- Henry, to seek his beautiful sister; and Charles, to communicate to his uncle the strange particulars connected with Varney, the Vampyre.

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Chapter XIX. FLORA IN HER CHAMBER. -- HER FEARS. -- THE MANUSCRIPT. -- AN ADVENTURE.

Henry found Flora in her chamber. She was in deep thought when he tapped at the door of the room, and such was the state of nervous excitement in which she was that even the demand for admission made by him to the room was sufficient to produce from her a sudden cry of alarm.

"Who -- who is there?" she then said, in accents full of terror.

"'Tis I, dear Flora," said Henry.

She opened the door in an instant, and, with a feeling of grateful relief, exclaimed, --

"Oh, Henry, is it only you?"

"Who did you suppose it was, Flora?"

She shuddered.

"I -- I -- do not know; but I am so foolish now, and so weak-spirited, that the slightest noise is enough to alarm me."

"You must, dear Flora, fight up, as I had hoped you were doing, against this nervousness."

"I will endeavour. Did not some strangers come a short time since, brother?"

"Strangers to us, Flora, but not to Charles Holland. A relative of his -- an uncle whom he much respects, has found him out here, and has now come to see him."

"And to advise him," said Flora as she sunk into a chair, and wept bitterly; "to advise him, of course, to desert, as he would a pestilence, a vampyre bride."

"Hush, hush! for the sake of Heaven, never make use of such a phrase, Flora. You know not what a pang it brings to my heart to hear you."

"Oh, forgive me, brother."

"Say no more of it, Flora. Heed it not. It may be possible -- in fact, it may well be supposed as more than probable -- that the relative of Charles Holland may shrink from sanctioning the alliance, but do you rest securely in the possession of the heart which I feel convinced is wholly yours, and which, I am sure, would break ere it surrendered you."

A smile of joy came across Flora's pale but beautiful face, as she cried, --

"And you, dear brother -- you think so much of Charles's faith?"

"As heaven is my judge, I do."

"Then I will bear up with what strength God may give me against all things that seek to depress me; I will not be conquered."

"You are right, Flora; I rejoice to find in you such a disposition. Here is some manuscript which Charles thinks will amuse you, and he bade me ask you if you would be introduced to his uncle."

"Yes, yes -- willingly."

"I will tell him so; I know he wishes it, and I will tell him so. Be patient, dear Flora, and all may yet be well." "But, brother, on your sacred word, tell me do you not think this Sir Francis Varney is the vampyre?"

"I know not what to think, and do not press me for a judgment now. He shall be watched."

Henry left his sister, and she sat for some moments in silence with the papers before her that Charles had sent her.

"Yes," she then said, gently, "he loves me -- Charles loves me; I ought to be very, very happy. He loves me. In those words are concentrated a whole world of joy -- Charles loves me -- he will not forsake me. Oh, was there ever such dear love -- such fond devotion? -- never, never. Dear Charles. He loves me -- he loves me!"

The very repetition of these words had a charm for Flora -- a charm which was sufficient to banish much sorrow; even the much-dreaded vampyre was forgotten while the light of love was beaming up on her, and she told herself, --

"He is mine! -- he is mine! He loves me truly."

After a time, she turned to the manuscript which her brother had brought her, and, with a far greater concentration of mind than she had thought it possible she could bring to it, considering the many painful subjects

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of contemplation that she might have occupied herself with, she read the pages with very great pleasure and interest.

The tale was one which chained her attention both by its incidents and the manner of its recital. It commenced as follows, and was titled, "Hugo de Verole; or, the Double Plot."

In a very mountainous part of Hungary lived a nobleman whose paternal estates covered many a mile of rock and mountain land, as well as some fertile valleys, in which reposed a hardy and contented peasantry.

The old Count Hugo de Verole had quitted life early, and had left his only son, the then Count Hugo de Verole, a boy of scarcely ten years, under the guardianship of his mother, an arbitrary and unscrupulous woman.

The count, her husband, had been one of those quiet, even-tempered men, who have no desire to step beyond the sphere in which they are placed; he had no cares, save those included in the management of his estate, the prosperity of his serfs, and the happiness of those around him.

His death caused much lamentation throughout his domains, it was so sudden and unexpected, being in the enjoyment of his health and strength until a few hours previous, and then his energies became prostrated by pain and disease. There was a splendid funeral ceremony, which, according the usages of his house, took place by torch-light.

So great and rapid were the ravages of disease, that the count's body quickly became a mass of corruption. All were amazed at the phenomena, and were heartily glad when the body was disposed of in the place prepared for its reception in the vaults of his own castle. The guests who came to witness the funeral, and attend the count's obsequies, and to condole with the widow on the loss she had sustained, were entertained sumptuously for many days.

The widow sustained her part well. She was inconsolable for the loss of her husband, and mourned his death bitterly. Her grief appeared profound, but she, with difficulty, subdued it to within decent bounds, that she might not offend any of her numerous guests.

However, they left her with the assurances of their profound regard, and then when they were gone, when the last guest had departed, and were no longer visible to the eye of the countess, as she gazed from the battlements, then her behaviour changed totally.

She descended from the battlements, and then with an imperious gesture she gave her orders that all the gates of the castle should be closed, and a watch set.

All signs of mourning she ordered to be laid on one side save her own, which she wore, and then she retired to her own apartment, where she remained unseen.

Here the countess remained in profound meditation for nearly two days, during which time the attendants believed she was praying for the welfare of the soul of their deceased master, and they feared she would starve herself to death if she remained any longer.

Just as they had assembled together for the purpose of either recalling her from her vigils or breaking open the door, they were amazed to see the countess open the room-door, and stand in the midst of them.

"What do you here?" she demanded, in a stern voice.

"We came, my lady, to see -- see -- if -- if you are well."

"And why?"

"Because we hadn't seen your ladyship these two days, and we thought that your grief was so excessive that we feared some harm might befall you."

The countess's brows contracted for a few seconds, and she was about to make a hasty reply, but she conquered the desire to do so, and merely said, --

"I am not well, I am faint; but, had I been dying, I should not have thanked you for interfering to prevent me; however, you acted for the best, but do so no more. Now prepare me some food."

The servants, thus dismissed, repaired to their stations, but with such degree of alacrity, that they sufficiently showed how much they feared their mistress.

The young count, who was only in his sixth year, knew little about the loss he had sustained; but after a day or two's grief, there was an end of his sorrow for the time.

That night there came to the castle-gate a man dressed in a black cloak, attended by a servant. They were both mounted on good horses, and they demanded to be admitted to the presence of the Countess de Hugo de Verole.

The message was carried to the countess, who started, but said, --

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"Admit the stranger."

Accordingly the stranger was admitted, and shown into the apartment where the countess was sitting.

At a signal the servants retired, leaving the countess and the stranger alone. It was some moments ere they spoke, and then the countess said in a low tone, --

"You are come?"

"I am come."

"You cannot now, you see, perform your threat. My husband, the count, caught a putrid disease, and he is no more."

"I cannot indeed do what I intended, inform your husband of your amours; but I can do something as good, and which will give you as much annoyance."

"Indeed."

"Aye, more, if will cause you to be hated. I can spread reports."

"You can."

"And these may ruin you."

"They may."

"What do you intend to do? Do you intend that I shall be an enemy or a friend? I can be either, according to my will."

"What, do you desire to be either?" inquired the countess, with a careless tone.

"If you refuse my terms, you can make me an implacable enemy, and if you grant them, you can make me a useful friend and auxiliary," said the stranger.

"What would you do if you were my enemy?" inquired the countess.

"It is hardly my place," said the stranger, "to furnish you with a knowledge of my intentions, but I will say this much, that the bankrupt Count of Morven is your lover."

"Well?"

"And in the second place, that you were the cause of the death of your husband."

"How dare you, sir -- "

"I dare say so much, and I dare say, also, that the Count of Morven bought you the drug of me, and that he gave it to you, and that you gave it to the count your husband."

"And what could you do if you were my friend?" inquired the countess, in the same tone, and without emotion.

"I should abstain from doing all this; I should be able to put any one else out of your way for you, when you get rid of this Count of Morven, as you assuredly will; for I know him too well not to be sure of that."

"Get rid of him!"

"Exactly, in the same manner you got rid of the old count."

"Then I accept your terms."

"It is agreed, then?"

"Yes, quite."

"Well, then, you must order me some rooms in a tower, where I can pursue my studies in quiet."

"You will be seen and noticed -- all will be discovered."

"No, indeed, I will take care of that. I can so far disguise myself that he will not recognise me, and you can give out I am a philosopher or necromancer, or what you will; no one will come to me -- they will be terrified."

"Very well."

"And the gold?"

"Shall be forthcoming as soon as I can get it. The count has placed all his gold in safe keeping, and all I can seize are the rents as they become due."

"Very well; but let me have them. In the meantime you must provide for me, as I have come here with the full intention of staying here, or in some neighbouring town."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and my servant must be discharged, as I want none here."

The countess called to an attendant and gave the necessary orders, and afterwards remained some time with the stranger, who had thus so unceremoniously thrust himself upon her, and insisted upon staying under such

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strange and awful circumstances. * * * *

The Count of Morven came a few weeks after, and remained some days with the countess. They were ceremonious and polite until they had a moment to retire from before people, when the countess changed her cold disdain to a cordial and familiar address.

"And now, my dear Morven," she exclaimed, as soon as they were unobserved — "and now, my dear Morven, that we are not seen, tell me, what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Why, I have been in some trouble. I never had gold that would stay by me. You know my hand was always open."

"The old complaint again."

"No; but having come to the end of my store, I began to grow serious."

"Ah, Morven!" said the countess, reproachfully.

"Well, never mind; when my purse is low my spirits sink, as the mercury does with the cold. You used to say my spirits were mercurial — I think they were."

"Well, what did you do?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Was that what you were about to tell me?" inquired the countess.

"Oh, dear, no. You recollect the Italian quack of whom I bought the drug you gave to the count, and which put an end to his days — he wanted more money. Well, as I had no more to spare, I could spare no more to him, and he turned vicious, and threatened. I threatened, too, and he knew I was fully able and willing to perform any promise I might make to him on that score. I endeavoured to catch him, as he had already begun to set people off on the suspicious and marvellous concerning me, and if I could have come across him, I would have laid him very low indeed."

"And you could not find him?"

"No, I could not."

"Well, then, I will tell you where he is at this present moment."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"I can scarcely credit my senses at what you say," said Count Morven. "My worthy doctor, you are little better than a candidate for divine honours. But where is he?"

"Will you promise to be guided by me?" said the countess.

"If you make it a condition upon which you grant the information, I must."

"Well, then, I take that as a promise."

"You may. Where — oh, where is he?"

"Remember your promise. Your doctor is at this moment in this castle."

"This castle?"

"Yes, this castle."

"Surely there must be some mistake; it is too much fortune at once."

"He came here for the same purpose he went to you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, to get more money by extortion and a promise to poison anybody I liked."

"D — n! it is the offer he made to me, and he named you."

"He named you to me, and said I should be soon tired of you."

"You have caged him?"

"Oh, dear, no; he has a suite of apartments in the eastern tower, where he passes for a philosopher, or a wizard, as people like best."

"How?"

"I have given him leave there."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and what is more amazing is, that he is to aid me in poisoning you when I have become tired of you."

"This is a riddle I cannot unravel; tell me the solution."

"Well, dear, listen, — he came to me and told me of something I already knew, and demanded money and a

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residence for his convenience, and I have granted him the asylum."

"You have?"

"I have."

"I see; I will give him an inch or two of my Andrea Ferrara."

"No -- no."

"Do you countenance him?"

"For a time. Listen -- we want men in the mines; my late husband sent very few men to them in late years, and therefore they are getting short of men there."

"Aye, aye."

"The thing will be for you to feign ignorance of the man, and then you will be able to get him seized, and placed in the mines, for such men as he are dangerous, and carry poisoned weapons."

"Would he not be better out of the world at once; there would be no escape, and no future contingencies?"

"No -- no. I will have no more lives taken; and he will be made useful; and, moreover, he will have time to reflect upon the mistake he had made in threatening me."

"He was paid for the job, and he had no future claim. But what about the child?"

"Oh, he may remain for some time longer here with us."

"It will be dangerous to do so," said the count; "he is now ten years old, and there is no knowing what may be done for him by his relatives."

"They dare not enter the gates of this castle Morven."

"Well, well; but you know he might have travelled the same road as his father, and all would be settled."

"No more lives, as I told you; but we can easily secure him in some other way, and we shall be equally as free from him and them."

"That is enough -- there are dungeons, I know, in this castle, and he can be kept there safe enough."

"He can; but that is not what I propose. We can put him in the mines and confine him as a lunatic."

"Excellent!"

"You see, we must make those mines more productive somehow or other; they would be so, but the count would not hear of it; he said it was so inhuman, they were so destructive of life."

"Psha! what were the mines intended for if not for use?"

"Exactly -- I often said so, but he always put a negative to it."

"We'll make use of an affirmative, my dear countess, and see what will be the result in a change of policy. By the way, when will our marriage be celebrated?"

"Not for some months."

"How, so long? I am impatient."

"You must restrain your impatience -- but we must have the boy settled first, and the count will have been dead a longer time then, and we shall not give so much scandal to the weak-minded fools that were his friends, for it will be dangerous to have so many events happen about the same period."

"You shall act as you think proper -- but the first thing to be done will be, to get this cunning doctor quietly out of the way."

"Yes."

"I must contrive to have him seized, and carried to the mines."

"Beneath the tower in which he lives is a trap-door and a vault, from which, by means of another trap and vault, is a long subterranean passage that leads to a door that opens into one end of the mines; near this end live several men whom you must give some reward to, and they will, by concert, seize him, and set him to work."

"And if he will not work?"

"Why, they will scourge him in such a manner, that he would be afraid even of a threat of repetition of the same treatment."

"That will do. But I think the worthy doctor will split himself with rage and malice, he will be like a caged tiger."

"But he will be denuded of his teeth and claws," replied the countess, smiling; "therefore he will have leisure to repent of having threatened his employers." * * * *

Some weeks passed over, and the Count of Morven contrived to become acquainted with the doctor. They

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appeared to be utter strangers to each other, though each knew the other; the doctor having disguised himself, he believed the disguise impenetrable, and therefore sat at ease.

"Worthy doctor," said the count to him, one day; "you have, no doubt, in your studies, become acquainted with many of the secrets of science."

"I have, my lord count; I may say there are few that are not known to Father Aldrovani. I have spent many years in research."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; the midnight lamp has burned till the glorious sun has reached the horizon, and brings back the day, and yet have I been found beside my books."

"'Tis well; men like you should well know the value of the purest and most valuable metals the earth produces?"

"I know of but one — that is gold!"

"'Tis what I mean."

"But 'tis hard to procure from the bowels of the earth — from the heart of these mountains by which we are surrounded."

"Yes, that is true. But know you not the owners of this castle and territory possess these mines and work them?"

"I believe they do; but I thought they had discontinued working them some years."

"Oh, no! that was given out to deceive the government, who claimed so much out of its products."

"Oh! ah! aye, I see now."

"And ever since they have been working it privately, and storing bars of gold up in the vaults of this — "

"Here, in this castle?"

"Yes, beneath this very tower — it being the least frequented — the strongest, and perfectly inaccessible from all sides, save the castle — it was placed there for the safest deposit."

"I see; and there is much gold deposited in the vaults?"

"I believe there is an immense quantity in the vaults."

"And what is your motive for telling me of this hoard of the precious metal?"

"Why, doctor, I thought that you or I could use a few bars; and that, if we acted in concert, we might be able to take away, at various times, and secrete, in some place or other, enough to make us rich men for all our lives."

"I should like to see this gold before I said anything about it," replied the doctor, thoughtfully.

"As you please; do you find a lamp that will not go out by the sudden draughts of air, or have the means of relighting it, and I will accompany you."

"When?"

"This very night, good doctor, when you shall see such a golden harvest you never yet hoped for, or even believed in."

"To-night be it, then," replied the doctor. "I will have a lamp that will answer our purpose, and some other matters."

"Do, good doctor," and the count left the philosopher's cell. * * * *

"The plan takes," said the count to the countess, "give me the keys, and the worthy man will be in safety before daylight."

"Is he not suspicious?"

"Not at all." * * * *

That night, about an hour before midnight, the Count Morven stole towards the philosopher's room. He tapped at the door.

"Enter," said the philosopher.

The count entered, and saw the philosopher seated, and by him a lamp of peculiar construction, and incased in gauze wire, and a cloak.

"Are you ready?" inquired the count.

"Quite," he replied.

"Is that your lamp?"

"It is."

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"Follow me, then, and hold the lamp tolerably high, as the way is strange, and the steps steep."

"Lead on."

"You have made up your mind, I dare say, as to what share of the undertaking you will accept of with me."

"And what if I will not?" said the philosopher, coolly.

"It falls to the ground, and I return the keys to their place."

"I dare say I shall not refuse, if you have not deceived me as to the quantity and purity of the metal they have stored up."

"I am no judge of these metals, doctor. I am no assayest; but I believe you will find what I have to show you will far exceed your expectations on that head."

"'Tis well; proceed."

They had now got to the first vault, in which stood the first door, and, with some difficulty, they opened the vault door.

"It has not been opened for some time," said the philosopher.

"I dare say not, they seldom used to go here, from what I can learn, though it is kept a great secret."

"And we can keep it so, likewise."

"True."

They now entered the vault, and came to the second door, which opened into a kind of flight of steps, cut out of the solid rock, and then along a passage cut out of the mountain, of some kind of stone, but not so hard as the rock itself.

"You see," said the count, "what care has been taken to isolate the place, and detach it from the castle, so that it should not be dependent upon the possessor of the castle. This is the last door but one, and now prepare yourself for a surprise, doctor, this will be an extraordinary one."

So saying, the count opened the door, and stepped on one side, when the doctor approached the place, and was immediately thrust forward by the count and he rolled down some steps into the mine, and was immediately seized by some of the miners, who had been stationed there for that purpose, and carried to a distant part of the mine, there to work for the remainder of his life.

The count, seeing all secure, refastened the doors, and returned to the castle. A few weeks after this the body of a youth, mangled and disfigure, was brought to the castle, which the countess said was her son's body.

The count had immediately secured the real heir, and thrust him into the mines, there to pass a life of labour and hopeless misery. * * * *

There was a high feast held. The castle gates were thrown open, and everybody who came were entertained without question.

This was on the occasion of the count's and countess's marriage. It seemed many months after the death of her son, whom she affected to mourn for a long time.

However, the marriage took place, and in all magnificence and splendour. The countess again appeared arrayed in splendour and beauty: she was proud and haughty, and the count was imperious.

In the mean time, the young Count de Hugo de Verole was confined in the mines, and the doctor with him.

By a strange coincidence, the doctor and the young count became companions, and the former, meditating projects of revenge, educated the young count as well as he was able for several years in the mines, and cherished in the young man a spirit of revenge. They finally escaped together, and proceeded to Leyden, where the doctor had friends, and where he placed his pupil at the university, and thus made him a most efficient means of revenge, because the education of the count gave him a means of appreciating the splendour and rank he had been deprived of. He, therefore, determined to remain at Leyden until he was of age, and then apply to his father's friends, and then to his sovereign, to dispossess and punish them both for their double crimes.

The count and countess lived on in a state of regal splendour. The immense revenue of his territory, and the treasure the late count had amassed, as well as the revenue that the mines brought in, would have supported a much larger expenditure than even their tastes disposed them to enjoy.

They had heard nothing of the escape of the doctor and the young count. Indeed, those who knew of it held their peace and said nothing about it, for they feared the consequences of their negligence. The first intimation they received was at the hands of a state messenger, summoning them to deliver up the castle revenues and treasure of the late count.

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This was astonishing to them, and they refused to do so, but were soon after seized upon by a regiment of cuirassiers sent to take them, and they were accused of the crime of murder at the instance of the doctor.

They were arraigned and found guilty, and, as they were of the patrician order, their execution was delayed, and they were committed to exile. This was done out of favour to the young count, who did not wish to have his family name tainted by a public execution, or their being confined like convicts.

The count and countess quitted Hungary, and settled in Italy, where they lived upon the remains of the Count of Morven's property, shorn of all their splendour but enough to keep them from being compelled to do any menial office.

The young count took possession of his patrimony and his treasure at last, such as was left by his mother and her paramour.

The doctor continued to hide his crimes from the young count, and the perpetrators denying all knowledge of it, he escaped; but he returned to his native place, Leyden, with a reward for his services from the young count.

Flora rose from her perusal of the manuscript, which here ended, and even as she did so, she heard a footstep approaching her chamber door.

Chapter XX. THE DREADFUL MISTAKE. -- THE TERRIFIC INTERVIEW IN THE CHAMBER. -- THE ATTACK OF THE VAMPYRE.

The footstep which Flora, upon the close of the tale she had been reading, heard approaching her apartment, came rapidly along the corridor.

"It is Henry, returned to conduct me to an interview with Charles's uncle," she said. "I wonder, now, what manner of man he is. He should in some respect resemble Charles; and if he do so, I shall bestow upon him some affection for that alone."

Tap — tap came upon the chamber door.

Flora was not at all alarmed now, as she had been when Henry brought her the manuscript. From some strange action of the nervous system, she felt quite confident, and resolved to brave everything. But then she felt quite sure that it was Henry, and before the knocking had taken her by surprise.

"Come in," she said, in a cheerful voice. "Come in."

The door opened with wonderful swiftness — a figure stepped into the room, and then closed it as rapidly, and stood against it. Flora tried to scream, but her tongue refused its office; a confused whirl of sensations passed through her brain — she trembled, and an icy coldness came over her. It was Sir Francis Varney, the vampyre!

He had drawn up his tall, gaunt frame to its full height, and crossed his arms upon his breast; there was a hideous smile upon his sallow countenance, and his voice was deep and sepulchral, as he said, —

"Flora Bannerworth, hear that which I have to say, and hear it calmly. You need have nothing to fear. Make an alarm — scream, or shout for help, and, by the hell beneath us, you are lost!"

There was a death-like, cold, passionless manner about the utterance of these words, as if they were spoken mechanically, and came from no human lips.

Flora heard them, and yet scarcely comprehended them; she stepped slowly back till she reached a chair, and there she held for support. The only part of the address of Varney that thoroughly reached her ears, was that if she gave any alarm some dreadful consequences were to ensue. But it was not on account of these words that she really gave no alarm; it was because she was utterly unable to do so.

"Answer me," said Varney. "Promise that you will hear that which I have to say. In so promising you commit yourself to no evil, and you shall hear that which shall give you much peace."

It was in vain she tried to speak; her lips moved, but she uttered no sound.

"You are terrified," said Varney, "and yet I know not why. I do not come to do you harm, although harm have you done me. Girl, I come to rescue you from a thralldom of the soul under which you now labour."

There was a pause of some moments' duration, and then, faintly, Flora managed to say, —

"Help! help! Oh, help me, Heaven!"

Varney made a gesture of impatience, as he said, —

"Heaven works no special matters now. Flora Bannerworth, if you have as much intellect as your nobility and beauty would warrant the world in supposing, you will listen to me."

"I — I hear," said Flora, as she still, dragging the chair with her, increased the distance between them.

"'Tis well. You are now more composed."

She fixed her eyes upon the face of Varney with a shudder. There could be no mistake. It was the same which, with the strange, glassy looking eyes, had glared upon her on that awful night of the storm, when she was visited by the vampyre. And Varney returned that gaze unflinchingly. There was a hideous and strange contortion of his face now as he said, —

"You are beautiful. The most cunning statuary might well model some rare work of art from those rounded limbs, that were surely made to bewitch the gazer. Your skin rivals the driven snow — what a face of loveliness, and what a form of enchantment."

She did not speak, but a thought came across her mind, which at once crimsoned her cheek — she knew she had fainted on the first visit of the vampyre, and now he, with a hideous reverence, praised beauties which he might have cast his demonic eyes over at such a time.

"You understand me," he said. "Well, let that pass. I am something allied to humanity yet."

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"Speak your errand," gasped Flora, "or come what may, I scream for help to those who will not be slow to render it."

"I know it."

"You know I will scream?"

"No; you will hear me. I know they would not be slow to render help to you, but you will not call for it; I will present to you no necessity."

"Say on — say on."

"You perceive I do not attempt to approach you; my errand is one of peace."

"Peace from you! Horrible being, if you be really what even now my appalled imagination shrinks from naming you, would not even to you absolute annihilation be a blessing?"

"Peace, peace. I came not here to talk on such a subject. I must be brief, Flora Bannerworth, for time presses. I do not hate you. Wherefore should I? You are young, and you are beautiful, and you bear a name which should command, and does command, some portion of my best regard."

"There is a portrait," said Flora, "in this house."

"No more — no more. I know what you would say."

"It is yours."

"The house, and all within, I covet," he said, uneasily. "Let that suffice. I have quarrelled with your brother — I have quarrelled with one who just now fancies he loves you."

"Charles Holland loves me truly."

"It does not suit me now to dispute that point with you. I have the means of knowing more of the secrets of the human heart than common men. I tell you, Flora Bannerworth, that he who talks to you of love, loves you not but with the fleeting fancy of a boy; and there is one who hides deep in his heart a world of passion, one who has never spoken to you of love, and yet who loves you with a love as afar surpassing the evanescent fancy of this boy Holland, as does the mighty ocean the most placid lake that ever basked in idleness beneath a summer's sun."

There was a wonderful fascination in the manner now of Varney. His voice sounded like music itself. His words flowed from his tongue, each gently and properly accented, with all the charm of eloquence.

Despite her trembling horror of that man — despite her fearful opinion, which might be said to amount to a conviction of what he really was, Flora felt an irresistible wish to hear him speak on. Ay, despite, too, the ungrateful theme to her heart which he had now chosen as the subject of his discourse, she felt her fear of him gradually dissipating, and now when he made a pause, she said, —

"You are much mistaken. On the constancy and truth of Charles Holland, I would stake my life."

"No doubt, no doubt."

"Have you spoken now that which you had to say?"

"No, no. I tell you I covet this place, I would purchase it, but having with your bad-tempered brothers quarrelled, they will hold no further converse with me."

"And well they may refuse."

"Be that as it may, sweet lady, I come to you to be my mediator. In the shadows of the future I can see many events which are to come."

"Indeed."

"It is so. Borrowing some wisdom from the past, and some from resources I would not detail to you, I know that if I have inflicted much misery upon you, I can spare you much more. Your brother or your lover will challenge me."

"Oh, no, no."

"I say such will happen, and I can kill either. My skill as well as my strength is superhuman."

"Mercy! mercy!" gasped Flora.

"I will spare either or both on a condition."

"What fearful condition?"

"It is not a fearful one. Your terrors go far beyond the fact. All I wish, maiden, of you is to induce these imperious brothers of yours to sell or let the Hall to me."

"Is that all?"

"It is. I ask no more, and, in return, I promise you not only that I will not fight with them, but that you shall

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never see me again. Rest securely, maiden, you will be undisturbed by me."

"Oh, God! that were indeed an assurance worth the striving for," said Flora.

"It is one you may have. But — "

"Oh, I knew — my heart told me there was yet some fearful condition to come."

"You are wrong again. I only ask of you that you keep this meeting a secret."

"No, no, no — I cannot."

"Nay, what so easy?"

"I will not; I have no secrets from those I love."

"Indeed, you will find soon the expediency of a few at least; but if you will not, I cannot urge it longer. Do as your wayward woman's nature prompts you."

There was a slight, but a very slight, tone of aggravation in these words, and the manner in which they were uttered.

As he spoke, he moved from the door towards the window, which opened into a kitchen garden. Flora shrunk as far from him as possible, and for a few minutes they regarded each other in silence.

"Young blood," said Varney, "mantles in your veins."

She shuddered with terror.

"Be mindful of the condition I have proposed to you. I covet Bannerworth Hall."

"I — I hear."

"And I must have it. I will have it, although my path to it be through a sea of blood. You understand me, maiden? Repeat what has passed between us or not, as you please. I say, beware of me, if you keep not the condition I have proposed."

"Heaven knows that this place is becoming daily more hateful to us all," said Flora.

"Indeed!"

"You well might know so much. It is no sacrifice to urge it now. I will urge my brothers."

"Thanks — a thousand thanks. You may not live to regret having made a friend of Varney — "

"The vampyre!" said Flora.

He advanced towards her a step, and she involuntarily uttered a scream of terror.

In an instant his hand clasped her waist with the power of an iron vice; she felt his hot breath flushing on her cheek. Her senses reeled, and she found herself sinking. She gathered all her breath and all her energies into one piercing shriek, and then she fell to the floor. There was a sudden crash of broken glass, and then all was still.

—

Chapter XXI. THE CONFERENCE BETWEEN THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW, AND THE ALARM.

Meanwhile Charles Holland had taken his uncle by the arm, and led him into a private room.

"Dear uncle," he said, "be seated, and I will explain everything without reserve."

"Seated! — nonsense! I'll walk about," said the admiral. "D — n me! I've no patience to be seated, and very seldom had or have. Go on now, you young scamp."

"Well — well; you abuse me, but I am quite sure, had you been in my situation, you would have acted precisely as I have done."

"No, I shouldn't."

"Well, but, uncle — "

"Don't think to come over me by calling me uncle. Hark you, Charles — from this moment I won't be your uncle any more."

"Very well, sir."

"It ain't very well. And how dare you, you buccaneer, call me sir, eh? I say, how dare you?"

"I will call you anything I like."

"But I won't be called anything I like. You might as well call me at once Morgan the Pirate, for he was called anything he liked. Hilloa, sir! how dare you laugh, eh? I'll teach you to laugh at me. I wish I had you on board ship — that's all, you young rascal. I'd soon teach you to laugh at your superior officer, I would."

"Oh, uncle, I did not laugh at you."

"What did you laugh at, then?"

"At the joke."

"Joke. D — n me, there was no joke at all!"

"Oh, very good."

"And it ain't very good."

Charles knew very well that, this sort of humour, in which was the old admiral, would soon pass away, and then that he would listen to him comfortably enough; so he would not allow the least exhibition of petulance or mere impatience to escape himself, but contented himself by waiting until the ebullition of feeling fairly worked itself out.

"Well, well," at length said the old man, "you have dragged me here, into a very small and very dull room, under pretence of having something to tell me, and I have heard nothing yet."

"Then I will now tell you," said Charles. "I fell in love — "

"Bah!"

"With Flora Bannerworth, abroad; she is not only the most beautiful of created beings — "

"Bah!"

"But her mind is of the highest order of intelligence, honour, candour, and all amiable feelings — "

"Bah!"

"Really, uncle, if you say 'Bah!' to everything, I cannot go on."

"And what the deuce difference, sir, does it make to you, whether I say 'Bah!' or not?"

"Well, I love her. She came to England, and, as I could not exist, but was getting ill, and should, no doubt, have died if I had not done so, I came to England."

"But d — e, I want to know about the mermaid."

"The vampyre, you mean, sir."

"Well, well, the vampyre."

"Then, uncle, all I can tell you is, that it is supposed a vampyre came one night and inflicted a wound upon Flora's neck with his teeth, and that he is still endeavouring to renew his horrible existence from the young, pure blood that flows through her veins."

"The devil he is!"

"Yes. I am bewildered, I must confess, by the mass of circumstances that have combined to give the affair a

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horrible truthfulness. Poor Flora is much injured in health and spirits; and when I came home, she, at once, implored me to give her up, and think of her no more, for she could not think of allowing me to unite my fate with hers, under such circumstances."

"She did?"

"Such were her words, uncle. She implored me --- she used the word 'implore' --- to fly from her, to leave her to her fate, to endeavour to find happiness with some one else."

"Well?"

"But I saw her heart was breaking."

"What o' that?"

"Much of that, uncle. I told her that when I deserted her in the hour of misfortune that I hoped Heaven would desert me. I told her that if her happiness was wrecked, to cling yet to me, and that with what power and what strength God had given me, I would stand between her and all ill."

"And what then?"

"She --- she fell upon my breast and wept and blessed me. Could I desert her --- could I say to her, 'My dear girl, when you were full of health and beauty, I loved you, but now that sadness is at your heart I leave you?' Could I tell her that, uncle, and yet call myself a man?"

"No!" reared the old admiral, in a voice that made the room echo again; "and I tell you what, if you had done so, d --- n you, you puppy, I'd have braced you, and --- and married the girl myself. I would, d --- e, but I would."

"Dear uncle!"

"Don't dear me, sir. Talk of deserting a girl when the signal of distress, in the shape of a tear, is in her eye?"

"But I --- "

"You are a wretch --- a confounded lubberly boy --- a swab --- a d --- d bad grampus."

"You mistake, uncle."

"No, I don't. God bless you, Charles, you shall have her --- if a whole ship's crew of vampyres said no, you shall have her. Let me see her --- just let me see her."

The admiral gave his lips a vigorous wipe with his sleeve, and Charles said hastily, ---

"My dear uncle, you will recollect that Miss Bannerworth is quite a young lady."

"I suppose she is."

"Well, then, for God's sake, don't attempt to kiss her."

"Not kiss her! d --- e, they like it. Not kiss her, because she's a young lady! D --- e, do you think I'd kiss a corporal of marines?"

"No, uncle; but you know young ladies are very delicate."

"And ain't I delicate --- shiver my timbers, ain't I delicate? Where is she? that's what I want to know."

"Then you approve of what I have done?"

"You are a young scamp, but you have got some of the old admiral's family blood in you, so don't take any credit for acting like an honest man --- you couldn't help it."

"But if I had not so acted, " said Charles, with a smile, "what would have become of the family blood, then?"

"What's that to you? I would have disowned you, because that very thing would have convinced me you were an impostor, and did not belong to the family at all."

"Well, that would have been one way of getting over the difficulty."

"No difficulty at all. The man who deserts the good ship that carries him through the waves, or the girl that trusts her heart to him, ought to be chopped up into meat for wild monkeys."

"Well, I think so too."

"Of course you do."

"Why, of course?"

"Because it's so d --- d reasonable that, being a nephew of mine, you can't possibly help it."

"Bravo, uncle! I had no idea you were so argumentative."

"Hadn't you a spooney; you'd be an ornament to the gun-room, you would; but where's the 'young lady' who is so infernal delicate --- where is she, I say?"

"I will fetch her, uncle."

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"Ah, do; I'll be bound, now, she's one of the right build — a good figure—head, and don't make too much stern—way."

"Well, well, whatever you do, now don't pay her any compliments, for your efforts in that line are of such a very doubtful order, that I shall dread to hear you."

"You be off, and mind your own business; I haven't been at sea forty years without picking up some out—and—out delicate compliments to say to a young lady."

"But do you really imagine, now, that the deck of a man—of—war is a nice place to pick up courtly compliments in?"

"Of course I do. There you hear the best of language, d — e! You don't know what you are talking about, you fellows that have stuck on shore all your lives; it's we seamen who learn life."

"Well, well — hark!"

"What's that?"

"A cry — did you not hear a cry?"

"A signal of distress, by G—d!"

In their efforts to leave the room, the uncle and nephew for about a minute actually blocked up the door—way, but the superior bulk of the admiral prevailed, and after nearly squeezing poor Charles flat, he got out first.

But this did not avail him, for he knew not where to go. Now, the second scream which Flora had uttered when the vampyre had clasped her waist came upon their ears, and, as they were outside the room, it acted well as a guide in which direction to come.

Charles fancied correctly enough at once that it proceeded from the room which was called "Flora's own room," and thither—ward accordingly he dashed at tremendous speed.

Henry, however, happened to be nearer at hand, and, moreover, he did not hesitate a moment, because he knew that Flora was in her own room; so he reached it first, and Charles saw him rush in a few moments before he could reach the room.

The difference of time, however, was very slight, and Henry had only just raised Flora from the floor as Charles appeared.

"God of Heaven!" cried the latter, "what has happened?"

"I know not," said Henry; "as God is my judge, I know not. Flora, Flora, speak to us! Flora! Flora!"

"She has fainted!" cried Charles. "Some water may restore her. Oh, Henry, Henry, is not this horrible?"

"Courage! courage!" said Henry, although his voice betrayed what a terrible state of anxiety he was himself in; "you will find water in that decanter, Charles. Here is my mother, too! Another visit! God help us!"

Mrs. Bannerworth sat down on the edge of the sofa which was in the room, and could only wring her hands and weep.

"Avast!" cried the admiral, making his appearance. "Where's the enemy, lads?"

"Uncle," said Charles, "uncle, uncle, the vampyre has been here again — the dreadful vampyre!"

"D — n me, and he's gone, too, and carried half the window with him. Look there!"

It was literally true; the window, which was a long latticed one, was smashed through.

"Help! oh, help!" said Flora, as the water that was dashed in her face began to recover her.

"You are safe!" cried Henry, "you are safe!"

"Flora," said Charles; "you know my voice, dear Flora? Look up, and you will see there are none here but those who love you."

Flora opened her eyes timidly as she said, —

"Has it gone?"

"Yes, yes, dear," said Charles. "Look around you; here are none but true friends."

"And tried friends, my dear," said Admiral Bell, "excepting me; and whenever you like to try me, afloat or ashore, d — n me, shew me Old Nick himself, and I won't shrink — yard arm and yard arm — grapnel to grapnel — pitch pots and grenades!"

"This is my uncle, Flora," said Charles.

"I thank you, sir," said Flora, faintly.

"All right!" whispered the admiral to Charles; "what a figure—head to be sure! Poll at Swansea would have made just about four of her, but she wasn't so delicate, d — n me!"

"I should think not."

"You are right for once in a way, Charley."

"What was it that alarmed you?" said Charles, tenderly, as he now took one of Flora's hands in his.

"Varney -- Varney, the vampyre."

"Varney!" exclaimed Henry; "Varney here!"

"Yes, he came in at that door; and when I screamed, I suppose -- for I hardly was conscious -- he darted out through the window."

"This," said Henry, "is beyond all human patience. By Heaven! I cannot and will not endure it."

"It shall be my quarrel," said Charles; "I shall go at once and defy him. He shall meet me."

"Oh, no, no, no," said Flora, as she clung convulsively to Charles. "No, no; there is a better way."

"What way?"

"The place has become full of terrors. Let us leave it. Let him, as he wishes, have it."

"Let him have it?"

"Yes, yes, God knows, if it purchase an immunity from these visits, we may well be overjoyed. Remember that we have ample reasons to believe him more than human. Why should you allow yourselves to risk a personal encounter with such a man, who might be glad to kill you that he might have an opportunity of replenishing his own hideous existence from your best heart's blood?"

The young men looked aghast.

"Besides," added Flora, "you cannot tell what dreadful powers of mischief he may have, against which human courage might be of no avail."

"There is truth and reason," said Mr. Marchdale, stepping forward, "in what Flora says."

"Only let me come across him, that's all," said Admiral Bell, "and I'll soon find out what he is. I suppose he's some long slab of a lubber after all, ain't he, with no strength."

"His strength is immense," said Marchdale. "I tried to seize him, and I fell beneath his arm as if I had been struck by the hammer of a Cyclops."

"A what?" cried the admiral.

"A Cyclops."

"D -- n me, I served aboard the Cyclops eleven years, and never saw a very big hammer aboard of her."

"What on earth is to be done?" said Henry.

"Oh," chimed in the admiral, "there's always a bother about what's to be done on earth. Now, at sea, I could soon tell you what was to be done."

"We must hold a solemn consultation over this matter," said Henry. "You are safe now, Flora."

"Oh, be ruled by me. Give up the Hall."

"You tremble."

"I do tremble, brother, for what may yet ensue. I implore you to give up the Hall. It is but a terror to us now -- give it up. Have no more to do with it. Let us make terms with Sir Francis Varney. Remember, we dare not kill him."

"He ought to be smothered," said the admiral.

"It is true," remarked Henry, "we dare not, even holding all the terrible suspicions we do, take his life."

"By foul means certainly not," said Charles, "were he ten times a vampyre. I cannot, however, believe that he is so invulnerable as he is represented."

"No one represents him here," said Marchdale. "I speak, sir, because I saw you glance at me. I only know that, having made two unsuccessful attempts so to seize him, he eluded me, once by leaving in my grasp a piece of his coat, and the next time he struck me down, and I feel yet the effects of the terrific blow."

"You hear?" said Flora.

"Yes, I hear," said Charles.

"For some reason," added Marchdale, in a tone of emotion, "what I say seems to fall always badly upon Mr. Holland's ear. I know not why; but if it will give him any satisfaction, I will leave Bannerworth Hall to-night."

"No, no, no," said Henry; "for the love of Heaven, do not let us quarrel."

"Hear, hear," cried the admiral. "We can never fight the enemy well if the ship's crew are on bad terms. Come now, you Charles, this appears to be an honest, gentlemanly fellow -- give him your hand."

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"If Mr. Charles Holland," said Marchdale, "knows aught to my prejudice in any way, however slight, I here beg of him to declare it at once, and openly."

"I cannot assert that I do," said Charles.

"Then what the deuce do you make yourself so disagreeable for, eh?" cried the admiral.

"One cannot help one's impression and feelings," said Charles; "but I am willing to take Mr. Marchdale's hand."

"And I yours, young sir," said Marchdale, "in all sincerity of spirit, and with good will towards you."

They shook hands; but it required no conjuror to perceive that it was not done willingly or cordially. It was a hand-shaking of that character which seemed to imply on each side, "I don't like you, but I don't know positively any harm of you."

"There now," said the admiral, "that's better."

"Now, let us hold counsel about this Varney," said Henry. "Come to the parlour all of you, and we will endeavor to come to some decided arrangement."

"Do not weep, mother," said Flora. "All may yet be well. We will leave this place."

"We will consider that question, Flora," said Henry; "and believe me your wishes will go a long way with all of us, as you may well suppose they always would."

They left Mrs. Bannerworth with Flora, and proceeded to the small oaken parlour, in which were the elaborate and beautiful carvings which have been before mentioned.

Henry's countenance, perhaps, wore the most determined expression of all. He appeared now as if he had thoroughly made up his mind to do something which should have a decided tendency to put a stop to the terrible scenes which were now day by day taking place beneath that roof.

Charles Holland looked serious and thoughtful, as if he were revolving some course of action in his mind concerning which he was not quite clear.

Mr. Marchdale was more sad and depressed, to all appearance, than any of them.

As for the admiral, he was evidently in a state of amazement, and knew not what to think. He was anxious to do something, and yet what that was to be he had not the most remote idea, any more than as if he was not at all cognizant of any of those circumstances, every one of which was so completely out of the line of his former life and experience.

George had gone to call on Mr. Chillingworth, so he was not present at the first part of this serious council of war.

Chapter XXII. THE CONSULTATION. -- THE DETERMINATION TO LEAVE THE HALL.

This was certainly the most seriously reasonable meeting which had been held at Bannerworth Hall on the subject of the much dreaded vampyre. The absolute necessity for doing something of a decisive character was abundantly apparent, and when Henry promised Flora that her earnest wish to leave the house should not be forgotten as an element in the discussion which was about to ensue, it was with a rapidly growing feeling on his own part, to the effect that that house, associated even as it was with many endearing recollections, was no home for him.

Hence he was the more inclined to propose a departure from the Hall if it could possibly be arranged satisfactorily in a pecuniary point of view. The pecuniary point of view, however, in which Henry was compelled to look at the subject, was an important and a troublesome one.

We have already hinted at the very peculiar state of the finances of the family; and, in fact, although the income derivable from various sources ought to have been amply sufficient to provide Henry, and those who were dependent upon him, with a respectable livelihood, yet it was nearly all swallowed up by the payment of regular instalments upon family debts incurred by his father. And the creditors took great credit to themselves that they allowed of such an arrangement, instead of sweeping off all before them, and leaving the family to starve.

The question, therefore, or, at all events, one of the questions, now was, how far would a departure from the Hall of him, Henry, and the other branches of the family, act upon that arrangement?

During a very few minutes' consideration, Henry, with the frank and candid disposition which was so strong a characteristic of his character, made up his mind to explain all this fully to Charles Holland and his uncle.

When once he formed such a determination he was not likely to be slow in carrying it into effect, and no sooner, then, were the whole of them seated in the small oaken parlour than he made an explicit statement of his circumstances.

"But," said Mr. Marchdale, when he had done, "I cannot see what right your creditors have to complain of where you live, so long as you perform your contract to them."

"True; but they always expected me, I know, to remain at the Hall, and if they chose, why, of course, at any time, they could sell off the whole property for what it would fetch, and pay themselves as far as the proceeds would go. At all events, I am quite certain there could be nothing at all left for me."

"I cannot imagine," added Mr. Marchdale, "that any men could be so unreasonable."

"It is scarcely to be borne," remarked Charles Holland, with more impatience than he usually displayed, "that a whole family are to be put to the necessity of leaving their home for no other reason than the being pestered by such a neighbour as Sir Francis Varney. It makes one impatient and angry to reflect upon such a state of things."

"And yet they are lamentably true," said Henry. "What can we do?"

"Surely there must be some sort of remedy."

"There is but one that I can imagine, and that is one we all alike revolt from. We might kill him."

"That is out of the question."

"Of course my impression is that he bears the same name really as myself, and that he is my ancestor, from whom was painted the portrait on the panel."

"Have circumstances really so far pressed upon you," said Charles Holland, "as at length to convince you that this man is really the horrible creature we surmise he may be?"

"Dare we longer doubt it?" cried Henry, in a tone of excitement. "He is the vampyre."

"I'll be hanged if I believe it," said Admiral Bell! "Stuff and nonsense! Vampyre, indeed! Bother the vampyre."

"Sir," said Henry, "you have not had brought before you, painfully, as we have, all the circumstances upon which we, in a manner, feel compelled to found this horrible belief. At first incredulity was a natural thing. We had no idea that ever we would be brought to believe in such a thing."

"That is the case," added Marchdale. "But, step by step, we have been driven from utter disbelief in this phenomenon to a trembling conviction that it must be true."

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"Unless we admit that, simultaneously, the senses of a number of persons have been deceived."

"That is scarcely possible."

"Then do you mean really to say there are such fish?" said the admiral.

"We think so."

"Well, I'm d --- d! I have heard all sorts of yarns about what fellows have seen in one ocean or another; but this does beat them all to nothing."

"It is monstrous," exclaimed Charles.

There was a pause of some few moments' duration, and then Mr. Marchdale said, in a low voice, --

"Perhaps I ought not to propose any course of action until you, Henry, have yourself done so; but even at the risk of being presumptuous, I will say that I am firmly of the opinion that you ought to leave the Hall."

"I am inclined to think so, too," said Henry.

"But the creditors?" interposed Charles.

"I think they might be consulted on the matter beforehand," added Marchdale, "when no doubt they would acquiesce in an arrangement which could do them no harm."

"Certainly, no harm," said Henry, "for I cannot take the estate with me, as they well know."

"Precisely. If you do not like to sell it, you can let it."

"To whom?"

"Why, under the existing circumstances, it is not likely you would get any tenant for it than the one who has offered himself."

"Sir Francis Varney?"

"Yes. It seems to be a great object with him to live here, and it appears to me, that notwithstanding all that has occurred, it is most decidedly the best policy to let him."

Nobody could really deny the reasonableness of this advice, although it seemed strange, and was repugnant to the feelings of them all, as they heard it. There was a pause of some seconds' duration, and then Henry said, --

"It does, indeed seem singular, to surrender one's house to such a being."

"Especially," said Charles, "after what has occurred."

"True."

"Well," said Mr. Marchdale, "if any better plan of proceeding, taking the whole case into consideration, can be devised, I shall be most happy."

"Will you consent to put off all proceedings for three days?" said Charles Holland, suddenly.

"Have you any plan, my dear sir?" said Mr. Marchdale.

"I have, but it is one which I would rather say nothing about for the present."

"I have no objection," said Henry, "I do not know that three days can make any difference in the state of affairs. Let it be so, if you wish, Charles."

"Then I am satisfied," said Charles. "I cannot but feel that, situated as I am regarding Flora, this is almost more my affair than even yours, Henry."

"I cannot see that," said Henry. "Why should you take upon yourself more of the responsibility of these affairs than I, Charles? You induce in my mind a suspicion that you have some desperate project in your imagination, which by such a proposition you would seek to reconcile us to."

Charles was silent, and Henry then added, --

"Now, Charles, I am quite convinced that what I have hinted at is the fact. You have conceived some scheme which you fancy would be much opposed by us?"

"I will not deny that I have," said Charles. "It is one, however, which you must allow me for the present to keep locked in my own breast."

"Why will you not trust us?"

"For two reasons."

"Indeed!"

"The one is, that I have not yet thoroughly determined upon the course I project; and the other is, that it is one in which I am not justified in involving anyone else."

"Charles, Charles," said Henry, despondingly; "only consider for a moment into what new misery you may plunge poor Flora, who is, Heaven knows, already sufficiently afflicted, by attempting an enterprise which even

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we, who are your friends, may unwittingly cross you in the performance of."

"This is one in which I fear no such result. It cannot so happen. Do not urge me."

"Can't you say at once what you think of doing?" said the old admiral. "What do you mean by turning your sails in all sorts of directions so oddly? You sneak, why don't you be what do you call it — explicit?"

"I cannot, uncle."

"What, are you tongue-tied?"

"All here know well," said Charles, "that if I do not unfold my mind fully, it is not that I fear to trust any one present, but from some other most special reason."

"Charles, I forbear to urge you further," said Henry, "and only implore you to be careful."

At this moment the room door opened, and George Bannerworth, accompanied by Mr. Chillingworth, came in.

"Do not let me intrude," said the surgeon; "I fear, as I see you seated, gentlemen, that my presence must be a rudeness and a disturbance to some family consultation among yourselves?"

"Not at all, Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry. "Pray be seated; we are very glad indeed to see you. Admiral Bell, this is a friend on whom we can rely — Mr. Chillingworth."

"And one of the right sort, I can see," said the admiral, as he shook Mr. Chillingworth by the hand.

"Sir, you do me much honour," said the doctor.

"None at all, none at all; I suppose you know all about this infernal odd vampyre business?"

"I believe I do, sir."

"And what do you think of it?"

"I think time will develop the circumstances sufficiently to convince us all that such things cannot be."

"D — n me, you are the most sensible fellow, then, that I have yet met with since I have been in this neighbourhood; for everybody else is so convinced about the vampyre, that they are ready to swear by him."

"It would take much more to convince me. I was coming over here when I met Mr. George Bannerworth coming to my house."

"Yes," said George, "and Mr. Chillingworth has something to tell us of a nature confirmatory of our own suspicions."

"It is strange," said Henry; "but any piece of news, come it from what quarter it may, seems to be confirmatory, in some degree or another, of that dreadful belief in vampyres."

"Why," said the doctor, "when Mr. George says that my news is of such a character, I think he goes a little too far. What I have to tell you, I do not conceive has anything whatever to do with the fact, or one fact of there being vampyres."

"Let us hear it," said Henry.

"It is simply this, that I was sent for by Sir Francis Varney myself."

"You sent for?"

"Yes; he sent for me by a special messenger to come to him, and when I went, which, under the circumstances, you may well guess, I did with all the celerity possible, I found it was to consult me about a flesh wound in his arm, which was showing some angry symptoms."

"Indeed."

"Yes, it was so. When I was introduced to him I found him lying on a couch, and looking pale and unwell. In the most respectful manner, he asked me to be seated, and when I had taken a chair, he added, —

"'Mr. Chillingworth, I have sent for you in consequence of a slight accident which has happened to my arm. I was incautiously loading some fire-arms, and discharged a pistol so close to me that the bullet inflicted a wound on my arm.'

"'If you will allow me,' said I, 'to see the wound, I will give you my opinion.'

"He then showed me a jagged wound, which had evidently been caused by the passage of a bullet, which, had it gone a little deeper, must have inflicted a serious injury. As it was, the wound was trifling.

"He had evidently been attempting to dress it himself, but finding some considerable inflammation, he very likely got a little alarmed."

"You dressed the wound?"

"I did."

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"And what do you think of Sir Francis Varney, now that you have had so capital an opportunity," said Henry, "of a close observation of him?"

"Why, there is certainly something odd about him which I cannot well define, but, take him altogether, he can be a very gentlemanly man indeed."

"So he can."

"His manners are easy and polished; he has evidently mixed in good society, and I never, in all my life, heard such a sweet, soft, winning voice."

"That is strictly him. You noticed, I presume, his great likeness to the portrait on the panel?"

"I did. At some moments, and viewing his face in some particular lights, it showed much more strongly than at others. My impression was that he could, when he liked, look much more like the portrait on the panel than when he allowed his face to assume its ordinary appearance."

"Probably such an impression would be produced upon your mind," said Charles, "by some accidental expression of the countenance which even he was not aware of, and which often occurs in families."

"It may be so."

"Of course you did not hint, sir, at what has passed here with regard to him?" said Henry.

"I did not. Being, you see, called in professionally, I had no right to take advantage of that circumstance to make any remarks to him about his private affairs."

"Certainly not."

"It was all one to me whether he was a vampyre or not, professionally, and however deeply I might feel, personally, interested in the matter, I said nothing to him about it, because, you see, if I had, he would have had a fair opportunity of saying at once, 'Pray, sir, what is that to you?' and I should have been at a loss what to reply."

"Can we doubt," said Henry, "but that this very wound has been inflicted upon Sir Francis Varney, by the pistol-bullet which was discharged at him by Flora?"

"Everything leads to such an assumption certainly," said Charles Holland.

"And yet you cannot even deduce from that the absolute fact of Sir Francis Varney's being a vampyre?"

"I do not think, Mr. Chillingworth," said Marchdale, "anything would convince you but a visit from him, and an actual attempt to fasten upon some of your own veins." "That would not convince me," said Chillingworth.

"Then you will not be convinced?"

"I certainly will not. I mean to hold out to the last. I said at the first, and I say so still, that I never will give way to this most outrageous superstition."

"I wish I could think with you," said Marchdale, with a shudder; "but there may be something in the very atmosphere of this house which has been rendered hideous by the awful visits that have been made to it, which forbids me to disbelieve in those things which others more happily situated can hold at arm's length, and utterly repudiate."

"There may be," said Henry; "but as to that, I think, after the very strongly expressed wish of Flora, I will decide upon leaving the house."

"Will you sell it or let it?"

"The latter I should much prefer," was the reply.

"But who will take it now, except Sir Francis Varney? Why not at once let him have it? I am well aware that this does sound odd advice, but remember, we are all the creatures of circumstance, and that, in some cases where we least like it, we must swim with the stream."

"That you will not decide upon, however, at present," said Charles Holland, as he rose.

"Certainly not; a few days can make no difference."

"None for the worse, certainly, and possibly much for the better."

"Be it so; we will wait."

"Uncle," said Charles, "Will you spare me half an hour of your company?"

"An hour, my boy, if you want it," said the admiral, rising from his chair.

"Then this consultation is over," said Henry, "and we quite understand that to leave the Hall is a matter determined on, and that in a few days a decision shall come as to whether Varney the Vampyre shall be its tenant or not."

Chapter XXIII. THE ADMIRAL'S ADVICE TO CHARLES HOLLAND. -- THE CHALLENGE TO THE VAMPYRE.

When Charles Holland got his uncle into a room by themselves, he said, --

"Uncle, you are a seaman, and accustomed to decide upon matters of honour. I look upon myself as having been most grievously insulted by this Sir Francis Varney. All accounts agree in representing him as a gentleman. He goes openly by a title, which, if it were not his, could easily be contradicted; therefore, on the score of position in life, there is no fault to find with him. What would you do if you were insulted by this gentleman?"

The old admiral's eyes sparkled, and he looked comically in the face of Charles, as he said, --

"I know now where you are steering."

"What would you do, uncle?"

"Fight him!"

"I knew you would say so, and that's just what I want to do as regards Sir Francis Varney."

"Well, my boy, I don't know that you can do better. He must be a thundering rascal, whether he is a vampyre or not; so if you feel that he has insulted you, fight him by all means, Charles."

"I am much pleased, uncle, to find that you take my view of the subject," said Charles. "I knew that if I mentioned such a thing to the Bannerworths, they would endeavour all in their power to persuade me against it."

"Yes, no doubt; because they are all impressed with a strange fear of this fellow's vampyre powers. Besides, if a man is going to fight, the fewer people he mentions it to the most decidedly the better, Charles."

"I believe that is the fact, uncle. Should I overcome Varney, there will most likely be at once an end to the numerous and uncomfortable perplexities of the Bannerworths as regards him; and if he overcome me, why, then, at all events, I shall have made an effort to rescue Flora from the dread of this man."

"And then he shall fight me," added the admiral, "so he shall have two chances, at all events, Charles."

"Nay, uncle, that would, you know, scarcely be fair. Besides, if I should fall, I solemnly bequeath Flora Bannerworth to your good offices. I much fear that the pecuniary affairs of poor Henry, -- from no fault of his, Heaven knows, -- are in a very bad state, and that Flora may yet live to want some kind and able friend."

"Never fear, Charles. The young creature shall never want while the old admiral has got a shot in the locker."

"Thank you, uncle, thank you. I have ample cause to know, and to be able to rely upon your kind and generous nature. And now about the challenge?"

"You write it, boy, and I'll take it."

"Will you second me, uncle?"

"To be sure I will. I wouldn't trust anybody else to do so on any account. You leave all the arrangements with me, and I'll second you as you ought to be seconded."

"Then I will write it at once, for I have received injuries at the hands of that man, or devil, be he what he may, that I cannot put up with. His visit to the chamber of her whom I love would alone constitute ample ground of action."

"I should say it rather would, my boy."

"And after this corroborative story of the wound, I cannot for a moment doubt that Sir Francis Varney is the vampyre, or the personifier of the vampyre."

"That's clear enough, Charles. Come, just you write your challenge, my boy, at once, and let me have it."

"I will, uncle."

Charles was a little astonished, although pleased, at his uncle's ready acquiescence in his fighting a vampyre, but that circumstance he ascribed to the old man's habits of life, which made him so familiar with strife and personal contentions of all sorts, that he did not ascribe to it that amount of importance which more peaceable people did. Had he, while he was writing the note to Sir Francis Varney, seen the old admiral's face, and the exceedingly cunning look it wore, he might have suspected that the acquiescence in the duel was but a seeming acquiescence. This, however, escaped him, and in a few moments he read to his uncle the following note: --

"TO SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

"Sir, -- The expressions made use of towards me by you, as well as general circumstances, which I need not

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further allude to here, induce me to demand of you that satisfaction due from one gentleman to another. My uncle, Admiral Bell, is the bearer of this note, and will arrange preliminaries with any friend you may choose to appoint to act in your behalf. I am, sir, yours, "CHARLES HOLLAND."

"Will that do?" said Charles.

"Capital!" said the admiral.

"I am glad you like it."

"Oh, I could not help liking it. The least said and the most to the purpose, always pleases me best; and this explains nothing and demands all you want — which is a fight; so it's all right, you see, and nothing can possibly be better."

Charles did glance in his uncle's face, for he suspected, from the manner in which these words were uttered, that the old man was amusing himself a little at his expense. The admiral, however, looked so supernaturally serious that Charles was foiled.

"I repeat, it's a capital letter," he said.

"Yes, you said so."

"Well, what are you staring at?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Do you doubt my word?"

"Not at all, uncle; only I thought there was a degree of irony in the manner in which you spoke."

"Not at all, my boy. I never was more serious in all my life."

"Very good. Then you will remember that I leave my honour in this affair completely in your hands."

"Depend upon me, my boy."

"I will, and do."

"I'll be off and see the fellow at once."

"The admiral bustled out of the room, and in a few moments Charles heard him calling loudly, —

"Jack — Jack Pringle, you lubber, where are you? — Jack Pringle, I say."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack, emerging from the kitchen, where he had been making himself generally useful in assisting Mrs. Bannerworth, there being no servant in the house, to cook some dinner for the family.

"Come on, you rascal, we are going for a walk."

"The rations will be served out soon," growled Jack.

"We shall be back in time, you cormorant, never fear. You are always thinking of eating and drinking, you are, Jack; and I'll be hanged if I think you ever think of anything else. Come on, will you; I'm going on rather a particular cruise just now, so mind what you are about."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the tar, and these two originals, who so perfectly understood each other, walked away, conversing as they went, and their different voices coming upon the ear of Charles, until distance obliterated all impression of the sound.

Charles paced to and fro in the room where he had held this brief and conclusive conversation with his uncle. He was thoughtful, as any one might well be who knew not but that the next four—and—twenty hours would be the limit of his sojourn in this world.

"Oh, Flora — Flora!" he at length said, "how happy we might to have been! but all is past now, and there seems nothing left us and that is in my killing this fearful man who is invested with so dreadful an existence. And if I do kill him in fair and in open fight, I will take care that his mortal frame has no power again to revisit the glimpses of the moon."

It was strange to imagine that such was the force of many concurrent circumstances, that a young man like Charles Holland, of first-rate abilities and education, should find it necessary to give in so far to a belief which was repugnant to all his best feelings and habits of thought, as to be reasoning with himself upon the best means of preventing the resuscitation of the corpse of a vampyre. But so it was. His imagination had yielded to a succession of events which very few persons indeed could have held out against.

"I have heard and read," he said, as he continued his agitated and uneasy walk, "of how these dreadful beings are to be kept in their graves. I have heard of stakes being driven through the body so as to pin it to the earth until the gradual progress of decay has rendered its revivification a thing of utter and total impossibility. Then, again," he added, after a slight pause, "I have heard of their being burned, and the ashes scattered to the winds of Heaven

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to prevent them from ever again uniting or assuming human form."

These were disagreeable and strange fancies, and he shuddered while he indulged in them. He felt a kind of trembling horror come over him even at the thought of engaging in conflict with a being who, perhaps, had lived more than a hundred years.

"That portrait," he thought, "on the panel, is the portrait of a man in the prime of life. If it be the portrait of Sir Francis Varney, by the date which the family ascribe to it he must be nearly one hundred and fifty years of age now."

This was a supposition which carried the imagination to a vast amount of strange conjectures.

"What changes he must have witnessed about him in that time," thought Charles. "How he must have seen kingdoms totter and fall, and how many changes of habits, of manners, and of custom must he have become a spectator of. Renewing too, ever and anon, his fearful existence by such fearful means."

This was a wide field of conjecture for a fertile imagination, and now that he was on the eve of engaging with such a being in mortal combat, on behalf of her he loved, the thoughts it gave rise to came more strongly and thickly upon him than ever they had done before.

"But I will fight him," he suddenly said, "for Flora's sake, were he a hundred times more hideous a being than so many evidences tend to prove him. I will fight with him, and it may be my fate to rid the world of such a monster in human form."

Charles worked himself up to a kind of enthusiasm by which he almost succeeded in convincing himself that, in attempting the destruction of Sir Francis Varney, he was the champion of human nature.

It would be aside from the object of these pages, which is to record facts as they occurred, to enter into the metaphysical course of reasoning which came across Charles's mind; suffice it to say that he felt nothing shaken as regarded his resolve to meet Varney the Vampyre, and that he made up his mind the conflict should be one of life or death.

"It must be so," he said. "It must be so. Either he or I must fall in the fight which shall surely be."

He now sought Flora, for how soon might he now be torn from her for ever by the irresistible hand of death. He felt that, during the few brief hours which now would only elapse previous to his meeting with Sir Francis Varney, he could not enjoy too much of the society of her who reigned supreme in his heart, and held in her own keeping his best affections.

But while Charles is thus employed, let us follow his uncle and Jack Pringle to the residence of Varney, which, as the reader is aware, was so near at hand that it required not many minutes' sharp walking to reach it.

The admiral knew well he could trust Jack with any secret, for long habits of discipline and deference to the orders of superiors takes off the propensity to blabbering which, among civilians who are not accustomed to discipline, is so very prevalent. The old man therefore explained to Jack what he meant to do, and it received Jack's full approval; but as in the enforced detail of other matters it must come out, we will not here prematurely enter into the admiral's plans.

When they reached the residence of Sir Francis Varney, they were received courteously enough, and the admiral desired Jack to wait for him the handsome hall of the house, while he was shewn up stairs to the private room of the vampyre.

"Confound the fellow!" muttered the old admiral, "he is well lodged at all events. I should say he was not one of those vampyres who have nowhere to go to but their own coffins when the evening comes."

The room into which the admiral was shewn had green blinds to it, and they were all drawn down. It is true that the sun was shining brightly outside, although transiently, but still a strange green tinge was thrown over everything in the room, and more particularly did it appear to fall upon the face of Varney, converting his usually sallow countenance into a still more hideous and strange colour. He was sitting upon a couch, and, when the admiral came in, he rose, and said, in a deep-toned voice, extremely different to that he usually spoke in, --

"My humble home is much honoured, sir, by your presence in it."

"Good morning," said the admiral. "I have come to speak to you, sir, rather seriously."

"However abrupt this announcement may sound to me," said Varney, "I am quite sure I shall always hear, with the most profound respect, whatever Admiral Bell may have to say."

"There is no respect required," said the admiral, "but only a little attention."

Sir Francis bowed in a stately manner, saying, --

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"I shall be quite unhappy if you will not be seated, Admiral Bell."

"Oh, never mind that, Sir Francis Varney, if you be Sir Francis Varney; for you may be the devil himself, for all I know. My nephew, Charles Holland, considers that, one way and another, he has a very tolerable quarrel with you."

"I much grieve to hear it."

"Do you?"

"Believe me, I do. I am most scrupulous in what I say; and an assertion that I am grieved, you may thoroughly and entirely depend upon."

"Well, well, never mind that; Charles Holland is a young man just entering into life. He loves a girl who is, I think, every way worthy of him."

"Oh, what a felicitous prospect!"

"Just hear me out, if you please."

"With pleasure, sir — with pleasure."

"Well, then, when a young, hot-headed fellow thinks he has a good ground of quarrel with anybody, you will not be surprised at his wanting to fight it out."

"Not at all."

"Well, then, to come to the point, my nephew, Charles Holland, has a fancy for fighting with you."

"Ah!"

"You take it d — — d easy."

"My dear sir, why should I be uneasy? He is not my nephew, you know. I shall have no particular cause, beyond those feelings of common compassion which I hope inhabit my breast as well as every one else's."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he is a young man just, as you say, entering into life, and I cannot help thinking it would be a pity to cut him off like a flower in the bud, so very soon."

"Oh, you make quite sure, then, of settling him, do you?"

"My dear sir, only consider; he might be very troublesome, indeed; you know young men are hot-headed and troublesome. Even if I were only to maim him, he might be a continual and never-ceasing annoyance to me. I think I should be absolutely, in a manner of speaking, compelled to cut him off."

"The devil you do!"

"As you say, sir."

"D — n your assurance, Mr. Vampyre, or whatever odd fish you may be."

"Admiral Bell, I never called upon you and received a courteous reception, and then insulted you."

"Then why do you talk of cutting off a better man than yourself? D — n it, what would you say to him cutting you off?"

"Oh, as for me, my good sir, that's quite another thing. Cutting me off is very doubtful."

Sir Francis Varney gave a strange smile as he spoke, and shook his head, as if some most extraordinary and extravagant proposition had been mooted, which it was scarcely worth the while of anybody possessed of common sense to set about expecting.

Admiral Bell felt strongly inclined to get into a rage, but he repressed the idea as much as he could, although, but for the curious faint green light that came through the blinds, his heightened colour would have sufficiently proclaimed what state of mind he was in.

"Mr. Varney," he said, "all this is quite beside the question; but at all events, if it have any weight at all, it could to have a considerable influence in deciding you to accept the terms I propose."

"What are they, sir?"

"Why, that you permit me to espouse my nephew Charles's quarrel, and meet you instead of him."

"You meet me?"

"Yes; I've met a better man more than once before. It can make no difference to you."

"I don't know that, Admiral Bell. One generally likes, in a duel, to face him with whom one has had the misunderstanding, be it on what grounds it may."

"There's some reason, I know, in what you say; but, surely, if I am willing, you need not object."

"And is your nephew willing thus to shift the danger and the job of resenting his own quarrels on to your

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shoulders?"

"No; he knows nothing about it. He has written you a challenge, of which I am the bearer, but I voluntarily, and of my own accord, wish to meet you instead."

"This is a strange mode of proceeding."

"If you will not accede to it, and fight him first, and any harm comes to him, you shall fight me afterwards."

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed you shall, however surprised you may look."

"As this appears to be a family affair, then," said Sir Francis Varney, "it certainly does appear immaterial which of you I fight with first."

"Quite so; now you take a sensible view of the question. Will you meet me?"

"I have no particular objection. Have you settled all your affairs, and made your will?"

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, I only asked, because there is generally so much food for litigation if a man dies intestate, and is worth any money."

"You make devilish sure," said the admiral, "of being the victor. Have you made your will?"

"Oh, my will," smiled Sir Francis; "that, my good sir, is quite an indifferent affair."

"Well, make it or not, as you like. I am old, I know, but I can pull a trigger as well as any one."

"Do what?"

"Pull a trigger."

"Why, you don't suppose I resort to any such barbarous modes of fighting?"

"Barbarous! Why, how do you fight then?"

"As a gentleman, with my sword."

"Swords! Oh, nonsense! nobody fights with swords now—a—days. That's all exploded."

"I cling to the customs and the fashions of my youth," said Varney. "I have been, years ago, accustomed always to wear a sword, and to be without one now vexes me."

"Pray, how many years ago?"

"I am older than I look, but that is not the question. I am willing to meet you with swords if you like. You are no doubt aware that, as the challenged party, I am entitled to the choice of weapons."

"I am."

"Then you cannot object to my availing myself of the one in the use of which I am perfectly unequalled."

"Indeed."

"Yes, I am, I think, the first swordsman in Europe; I have had immense practice."

"Well, sir, you have certainly made a most unexpected choice of weapons. I can use a sword still, but am by no means I master of fencing. However, it shall not be said that I went back from my word, and let the chances be as desperate as they may, I will meet you."

"Very good."

"With swords?"

"Ay, with swords; but I must have everything properly arranged, so that no blame can rest on me, you know. As you will be killed, you are safe from all consequences, but I shall be in a very different position; so, if you please, I must have this meeting got up in such a manner as shall enable me to prove, to whoever may question me on the subject, that you had fair play."

"Oh, never fear that."

"But I do fear it. The world, my good sir, is censorious, and you cannot stop people from saying extremely ill-natured things."

"What is it that you require, then?"

"I require that you send me a friend with a formal challenge."

"Well?"

"Then I shall refer him to a friend of mine, and they two must settle everything between them."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. I will have a surgeon on the ground, in case, when I pink you, there should be a chance of saving your life. It always looks humane."

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"When you pink me?"

"Precisely."

"Upon my word, you take these affairs easy. I suppose you have had a few of them?"

"Oh, a good number. People like yourself worry me into them. I don't like the trouble, I assure you; it is no amusement to me. I would rather, by a great deal, make some concession than fight, because I will fight with swords, and the result is then so certain that there is no danger in the matter to me."

"Hark you, Sir Francis Varney. You are either a very clever actor, or a man, as you say, of such skill with your sword, that you can make sure of the result of a duel. You know, therefore, that it is not fair play on your part to fight a duel with that weapon."

"Oh, I beg your pardon there. I never challenge anybody, and when foolish people call me out, contrary to my inclination, I think I am bound to take what care of myself I can."

"D -- n me, there's some reason in that, too," said the admiral; "but why do you insult people?"

"People insult me first."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"How should you like to be called a vampyre, and stared at as if you were some hideous natural phenomenon?"

"Well, but -- "

"I say, Admiral Bell, how should you like it? I am a harmless country gentleman, and because, in the heated imagination of some member of a crack-brained family, some housebreaker has been converted into a vampyre, I am to be pitched upon as the man, and insulted and persecuted accordingly."

"But you forget the proofs."

"What proofs?"

"The portrait, for one."

"What! Because there is an accidental likeness between me and an old picture, am I to be set down as a vampyre? Why, when I was in Austria last, I saw an old portrait of a celebrated court fool, and you so strongly resemble it, that I was quite struck when I first saw you with the likeness; but I was not so unpolite as to tell you that I considered you were the court fool turned vampyre."

"D -- n your assurance!"

"And d -- n yours, if you come to that."

The admiral was fairly beaten. Sir Francis Varney was by far too long-headed and witty for him. After now in vain endeavouring to find something to say, the old man buttoned up his coat in a great passion, and looking fiercely at Varney, he said, --

"I don't pretend to a gift of the gab. D -- n me, it ain't one of my peculiarities; but though you may talk me down, you sha'n't keep me down."

"Very good, sir."

"It is not very good. You shall hear from me."

"I am willing."

"I don't care whether you are willing or not. You shall find that when once I begin to tackle an enemy, I don't so easily leave him. One or both of us, sir, is sure to sink."

"Agreed."

"So say I. You shall find that I'm a tar for all weathers, and if you were hundred and fifty vampyres all rolled into one, I'd tackle you somehow."

The admiral walked to the door in high dudgeon; when he was near to it, Varney said, in some of his most winning and gentle accents, --

"Will you not take some refreshment, sir, before you go from my humble house?"

"No!" roared the admiral.

"Something cooling?"

"No!"

"Very good, sir. A hospitable host can do no more than offer to entertain his guests."

Admiral Bell turned at the door, and said, with some degree of intense bitterness, "You look rather poorly. I suppose, tonight, you will go and suck somebody's blood, you shark -- you confounded vampyre! You ought to

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be made to swallow a red-hot brick, and then let dance about till it digests."

Varney smiled as he rang the bell, and said to a servant, --

"Show my very excellent friend Admiral Bell out. He will not take any refreshments."

The servant bowed, and preceded the admiral down the staircase; but, to his great surprise, instead of a compliment in the shape of a shilling or half-a-crown for his pains, he received a tremendous kick behind, with a request to go and take it to his master, with his compliments.

The fume that the old admiral was in beggars all description. He walked to Bannerworth Hall at such a rapid pace, that Jack Pringle had the greatest difficulty in the world to keep up with him, so as to be at all within speaking distance.

"Hilloa, Jack," cried the old man, when they were close to the Hall. "Did you see me kick that fellow?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Well, that's some consolation, at any rate, if somebody saw it. It ought to have been his master, that's all I can say to it, and I wish it had."

"How have you settled it, sir?"

"Settled what?"

"The fight, sir."

"D -- n me, Jack, I haven't settled it at all."

"That's bad, sir."

"I know it is; but it shall be settled for all that, I can tell him, let him vapour as much as he may about pinking me, and one thing and another."

"Pinking you, sir?"

"Yes. He wants to fight with cutlasses, or toasting-forks, d -- n me, I don't know exactly which, and then he must have a surgeon on the ground, for fear when he pinks me I shouldn't slip my cable in a regular way, and he should be blamed."

Jack gave a long whistle, as he replied, --

"Going to do it, sir?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. Mind, Jack, mum's the word."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I'll turn the matter over in my mind, and then decide upon what had best be done. If he pinks me, I'll take d -- d good care he don't pink Charles."

"No, sir, don't let him do that. A wamphigher, sir, ain't no good opponent to anybody. I never seed one afore, but it strikes me as the best way to settle him, would be to shut him up in some little bit of a cabin, and then smoke him with brimstone, sir."

"Well, well, I'll consider, Jack, I'll consider. Something must be done, and that quickly too. Zounds, here's Charles -- what the deuce shall I say to him, by way of an excuse, I wonder, for not arranging his affair with Varney? Hang me, if I ain't taken aback now, and don't know where to place a hand."

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Chapter XXIV. THE LETTER TO CHARLES. -- THE QUARREL. -- THE ADMIRAL'S NARRATIVE. -- THE MIDNIGHT MEETING

It was Charles Holland who now advanced hurriedly to meet the admiral. The young man's manner was anxious. He was evidently most intent upon knowing what answer could be sent by Sir Francis Varney to his challenge. "Uncle," he said, "tell me at once, will he meet me? You can talk of particulars afterwards, but now tell me at once if he will meet me?"

"Why, as to that," said the admiral, with a great deal of fidgetty hesitation, "you see, I can't exactly say."

"Not say!"

"No. He's a very odd fish. Don't you think he's a very odd fish, Jack Pringle?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"There, you hear, Charles, that Jack is of my opinion that your opponent is an odd fish."

"But, uncle, why trifle with my impatience thus? Have you seen Sir Francis Varney?"

"Seen him. Oh, yes."

"And what did he say?"

"Why, to tell the truth, my lad, I advise you not to fight with him at all."

"Uncle, is this like you? This advice from you, to compromise my honour, after sending a man a challenge?"

"D -- n it all, Jack, I don't know how to get out of it," said the admiral. "I tell you what it is, Charles, he wants to fight with swords; and what on earth is the use of your engaging with a fellow who has been practising at his weapon for more than a hundred years?"

"Well, uncle, if any one had told me that you would be terrified by this Sir Francis Varney into advising me not to fight, I should have had no hesitation whatever in saying such a thing was impossible."

"I terrified?"

"Why, you advise me not to meet this man, even after I have challenged him."

"Jack," said the admiral, "I can't carry it on, you see. I never could go on with anything that was not as plain as an anchor, and quite straightforward. I must just tell all that has occurred."

"Ay, ay, sir. The best way."

"You think so, Jack?"

"I know it is, sir, always axing pardon for having a opinion at all, excepting when it happens to be the same as yourn, sir."

"Hold your tongue, you libellous villain! Now, listen to me, Charles. I got up a scheme of my own."

Charles gave a groan, for he had a very tolerable appreciation of his uncle's amount of skill in getting up a scheme of any kind of description.

"Now here am I," continued the admiral, "an old hulk, and not fit for use any more. What's the use of me, I should like to know? Well, that's settled. But you are young and hearty, and have a long life before you. Why should you throw away your life upon a lubberly vampyre?"

"I begin to perceive now, uncle," said Charles, reproachfully, "why you, with such apparent readiness, agreed to this duel taking place."

"Well I intended to fight the fellow myself, that's the long and short of it, boy."

"How could you treat me so?"

"No nonsense, Charles. I tell you it was all in the family. I intended to fight him myself. What was the odds whether I slipped my cable with his assistance, or in the regular course a little after this? That's the way to argufy the subject; so, as I tell you, I made up my mind to fight him myself."

Charles looked despairingly, but said, --

"What was the result?"

"Oh, the result! D -- n me, I suppose that's to come. The vagabond won't fight like a Christian. He says he's quite willing to fight anybody that calls him out, provided it's all regular."

"Well -- well."

"And he, being the party challenged -- for he says he never himself challenges anybody, as he is quite tired of

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it — must have his choice of weapons."

"He is entitled to that; but it is generally understood now—a—days that pistols are the weapons in use among gentlemen for such purposes."

"Ah, but he won't understand any such thing, I tell you. He will fight with swords."

"I suppose he is, then, an adept at the use of the sword?"

"He says he is."

"No doubt — no doubt. I cannot blame a man for choosing, when he has the liberty of choice, that weapon in the use of which he most particularly, from practice, excels."

"Yes; but if he be one half the swordsman he has had time enough, according to all accounts, to be, what sort of chance have you with him?"

"Do I hear you reasoning thus?"

"Yes, to be sure you do. I have turned wonderfully prudent, you see: so I mean to fight him myself, and mind, now, you have nothing whatever to do with it."

"An effort of prudence that, certainly."

"Well, didn't I say so?"

"Come — come, uncle, this won't do. I have challenged Sir Francis Varney, and I must meet him with any weapon he may, as the challenged party, choose to select. Besides, you are not, I dare say, aware that I am a very good fencer, and probably stand as fair a chance as Varney in a contest with swords."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, uncle. I could not be so long on the continent as I have been without picking up a good knowledge of the sword, which is so popular all over Germany."

"Humph! but only consider, this d — — d fellow is no less than a hundred and fifty years old."

"I care not."

"Yes, but I do."

"Uncle, uncle, I tell you I will fight with him; and if you do not arrange matters for me so that I can have the meeting with this man, which I have myself sought, and cannot, even if I wished, now recede from with honour, I must seek some other less scrupulous friend to do so."

"Give me an hour or two to think of it, Charles," said the admiral. "Don't speak to any one else, but give me a little time. You shall have no cause of complaint. Your honour cannot suffer in my hands."

"I will wait your leisure, uncle; but remember that such affairs as these, when once broached, had always better be concluded with all convenient dispatch."

"I know that, boy — I know that."

The admiral walked away, and Charles, who really felt much fretted at the delay which had taken place, returned to the house.

He had not been there long, when a lad, who had been temporarily hired during the morning by Henry to answer the gate, brought him a note saying, —

"A servant, sir, left this for you just now."

"For me?" said Charles as he glanced at the direction. "This is strange, for I have no acquaintance about here. Does any one wait?"

"No, sir."

The note was properly directed to him, therefore Charles Holland at once opened it. A glance at the bottom of the page told him that it came from his enemy, Sir Francis Varney, and then he read it with much eagerness. It ran thus: —

"SIR, — Your uncle, as he stated himself to be, Admiral Bell, was the bearer to me, as I understood him this day, of a challenge from you. Owing to some unaccountable hallucination of intellect, he seemed to imagine that I intended to set myself up as a sort of animated target, for any one to shoot at who might have a fancy so to do.

"According to this eccentric view of the case, the admiral had the kindness to offer to fight me first, when, should he not have the good fortune to put me out of the world, you were to try your skill, doubtless.

"I need scarcely say that I object to these family arrangements. You have challenged me, and fancying the offence sufficient, you defy me to mortal combat. If, therefore, I fight with any one at all, it must be with you.

"You will clearly understand me, sir, that I do not accuse you of being at all privy to this freak of intellect of

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your uncle's. He, no doubt, alone conceived it, with a laudable desire on his part of serving you. If, however, you have any inclination to meet me, do so to-night, in the middle of the park surrounding your own friends' estate.

"There is a pollard oak growing close to a small pool; you, no doubt, have noticed the spot often. Meet me there, if you please, and any satisfaction you like I will give you, at twelve o'clock this night.

"Come alone, or you will not see me. It shall be at your own option entirely, to convert the meeting to a hostile one or not. You need send me no answer to this. If you are at the place I mention at the time I have named, well and good. If you are not, I can only, if I please, imagine that you shrink from a meeting with "FRANCIS VARNEY."

Charles Holland read this letter twice over carefully, and then folding it up, and placing it in his pocket, he said, --

"Yes, I will meet him; he may be assured that I do not shrink from Francis Varney. In the name of honour, love, virtue, and Heaven, I will meet this man, and it shall go hard with me but I will this night wring from him the secret of what he really is. For the sake of her who is so dear to me -- for her sake, I will meet this man, or monster, be he what he may."

It would have been far more prudent had Charles informed Henry Bannerworth or George of his determination to meet the vampyre that evening, but he did not do so. Somehow he fancied it would be some reproach against his courage if he did not go, and go alone, too, for he could not help suspecting that, from the conduct of his uncle, Sir Francis Varney might have got up an opinion inimical to his courage.

With all the eager excitement of youth, there was nothing that arrayed itself to his mind in such melancholy and uncomfortable colours as an imputation upon his courage.

"I will show this vampyre, if he be such," he said, "that I am not afraid to meet him, and alone, too, at his own hour -- at midnight, even when, if his preternatural powers be of more avail to him than at any other time, he can attempt, if he dare, to use them."

Charles resolved upon going armed, and with the greatest care he loaded his pistols, and placed them aside ready for action, when the time should come to set out to meet the vampyre at the spot in the park which had been particularly alluded to in his letter.

This spot was perfectly well known to Charles; indeed, no one could be a single day at Bannerworth Hall without noticing it, so prominent an object was that pollard oak, standing, as it did, alone, with the beautiful green sward all around it. Near it was the pool which had been mentioned, which was, in reality, a fish-pond, and some little distance off commenced the thick plantation, among the intricacies of which Sir Francis Varney, or the vampyre, had been supposed to disappear, after the revivification of his body at the full of the moon.

This spot was in view of several of the windows of the house, so that if the night should happen to be a very light one, and any of the inhabitants of the Hall should happen to have the curiosity to look from those particular windows, no doubt the meeting between Charles Holland and the vampyre would be seen.

This, however, was a contingency which was nothing to Charles, whatever it might be to Sir Francis Varney, and he scarcely at all considered it was worth consideration. He felt more happy and comfortable now that everything seemed to be definitely arranged by which he could come to some sort of explanation with that mysterious being who had so effectually, as yet, succeeded in destroying his peace of mind and his prospects of happiness.

"I will this night force him to declare himself," thought Charles. "He shall tell me who and what he really is, and by some means I will endeavor to put an end to those frightful persecutions which Flora has suffered."

This was a thought which considerably raised Charles's spirits, and when he sought Flora again, which he now did, she was surprised to see him so much more easy and composed in his mind, which was sufficiently shown by his manner, than he had been but so short a time before.

"Charles," she said, "what has happened to give such an impetus to your spirits?"

"Nothing, dear Flora, nothing; but I have been endeavoring to throw from my mind all gloomy thoughts, and to convince myself that in the future you and I, dearest, may yet be very happy."

"Oh, Charles, if I could but think so."

"Endeavour, Flora, to think so. Remember how much our happiness is always in our own power, Flora, and that, let fate do her worst, so long as we are true to each other, we have a recompense for every ill."

"Oh, indeed, Charles, that is a dear recompense."

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"And it is well that no force of circumstances short of death itself can divide us."

"True, Charles, true, and I am more than ever now bound to look upon you with a loving heart; for have you not clung to me generously under circumstances which, if any at all could have justified you in rending asunder every tie which bound us together, surely would have done so most fully."

"It is misfortune and distress that tries love," said Charles. "It is thus that the touchstone is applied to see if it be current gold indeed, or some base metal, which by a superficial glitter imitates it."

"And your love is indeed true gold."

"I am unworthy of one glance from those dear eyes if it were not."

"Oh, if we could but go from here, I think then we might be happy. A strong impression is upon my mind, and has been so for some time, that these persecutions to which I have been subjected are peculiar to this house."

"Think you so?"

"I do, indeed!"

"It may be so, Flora. You are aware that your brother has made up his mind that he will leave the Hall."

"Yes, yes."

"And that only in deference to an expressed wish of mine he put off the carrying such a resolve into effect for a few days."

"He said so much."

"Do not, however, imagine, dearest Flora, that those few days will be idly spent."

"Nay, Charles, I could not imagine so."

"Believe me, I have some hopes that in that short space of time I shall be able to accomplish yet something which shall have a material effect upon the present posture of affairs."

"Do not run into danger, Charles."

"I will not. Believe me, Flora, I have too much appreciation of the value of an existence which is blessed by your love, to encounter any needless risks."

"You say needless. Why do you not confide in me, and tell me if the object you have in view to accomplish in the few days delay is a dangerous one at all."

"Will you forgive me, Flora, if for once I keep a secret from you?"

"Then, Charles, along with the forgiveness I must conjure up a host of apprehensions."

"Nay, why so?"

"You would tell me if there were no circumstances that you feared would fill me with alarm."

"Now, Flora, your fears and not your judgment condemn me. Surely you cannot think me so utterly heedless as to court danger for danger's sake."

"No, not so -- --"

"You pause."

"And yet you have a sense of what you call honour, which, I fear, would lead you into much risk."

"I have a sense of honour; but not that foolish one which hangs far more upon the opinions of others than my own. If I thought a course of honour lay before me, and all the world, in a mistaken judgment, were to condemn it as wrong, I would follow it."

"You are right, Charles, you are right. Let me pray of you to be careful, and, at all events, to interpose no more delay to our leaving this house than you shall feel convinced is absolutely necessary for some object of real and permanent importance."

Charles promised Flora Bannerworth that for her sake, as well as his own, he would be most specially careful of his safety; and then in such endearing conversation as may well be supposed to be dictated by such hearts as theirs another happy hour was passed away.

They pictured to themselves the scene where first they met, and with a world of interest hanging on every word they uttered, they told each other of the first delightful dawnings of that affection which had sprung up between them, and which they fondly believed neither time nor circumstance would have the power to change or subvert.

In the meantime the old admiral was surprised that Charles was so patient, and had not been to him to demand the result of his deliberation.

But he knew not on what rapid pinions time flies, when in the presence of those whom we love. What was an

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actual hour, was but a fleeting minute to Charles Holland, as he sat with Flora's hand clasped in his, and looking at her sweet face.

At length a clock striking reminded him of his engagement with his uncle, and he reluctantly rose.

"Dear Flora," he said, "I am going to sit up to watch to-night, so be under no sort of apprehension."

"I will feel doubly safe," she said.

"I have now something to talk to my uncle about, and must leave you."

Flora smiled, and held out her hand to him. He pressed it to his heart. He knew not what impulse came over him, but for the first time he kissed the cheek of the beautiful girl.

With a heightened colour she gently repulsed him. He took a long lingering look at her as he passed out of the room, and when the door was closed between them, the sensation he experienced was as if some sudden cloud had swept across the face of the sun, dimming to a vast extent its precious lustre.

A strange heaviness came across his spirits, which before had been so unaccountably raised. He felt as if the shadow of some coming evil was resting on his soul -- as if some momentous calamity was preparing for him, which would almost be enough to drive him to madness, and irredeemable despair.

"What can this be," he exclaimed, "that thus oppressed me? What feeling is this that seems to tell me, I shall never again see Flora Bannerworth?"

Unconsciously he uttered these words, which betrayed the nature of his worst forebodings.

"Oh, this is weakness," he then added. "I must fight out against this; it is mere nervousness. I must not endure it, I will not suffer myself thus to become the sport of imagination. Courage, courage, Charles Holland. There are real evils enough, without your adding to them by those of a disordered fancy. Courage, courage, courage."

Chapter XXV. THE ADMIRAL'S OPINION. -- THE REQUEST OF CHARLES.

Charles then sought the admiral, whom he found with his hands behind him, pacing to and fro in one of the long walks of the garden, evidently in a very unsettled state of mind. When Charles appeared, he quickened his pace, and looked in such a state of unusual perplexity that it was quite ridiculous to observe him.

"I suppose, uncle, you have made up your mind thoroughly by this time?"

"Well, I don't know that."

"Why, you have had long enough surely to think over it. I have not troubled you soon."

"Well, I cannot exactly say you have, but, somehow or another, I don't think very fast, and I have an unfortunate propensity after a time of coming exactly round to where I began."

"Then, to tell the truth, uncle, you can come to no sort of conclusion."

"Only one."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, that you are right in one thing, Charles, which is, that having sent a challenge to this fellow of a vampyre, you must fight him."

"I suspect that that is a conclusion you had from the first, uncle?"

"Why so?"

"Because it is an obvious and a natural one. All your doubts, and trouble, and perplexities, have been to try and find some excuse for not entertaining that opinion, and now that you really find it in vain to make it, I trust that you will accede as you first promised to do, and not seek by any means to thwart me."

"I will not thwart you, my boy, although in my opinion you ought not to fight with a vampyre."

"Never mind that. We cannot urge that as a valid excuse, so long as he chooses to deny being one. And after all, if he be really wrongfully suspected, you must admit that he is a very injured man."

"Injured! -- nonsense. If he is not a vampyre, he's some other out-of-the-way sort of fish, you may depend. He's the oddest-looking fellow ever I came across in all my born days, ashore or afloat."

"Is he?"

"Yes, he is: and yet, when I come to look at the thing again, in my mind, some droll sights that I have seen come across my memory. The sea is a place for wonders and for mysteries. Why, we see more in a day and a night there, than you landsmen could contrive to make a whole twelvemonth's wonder of."

"But you never saw a vampyre, uncle?"

"Well, I don't know that. I didn't know anything about vampyres till I came here, but that was my ignorance, you know. There might have been lots of vampyres where I've been, for all I know."

"Oh, certainly, but as regards this duel, will you wait now until to-morrow morning, before you take any further steps in the matter?"

"Till to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Why, only a little while ago, you were all eagerness to have something done off-hand."

"Just so; but now I have a particular reason for waiting until to-morrow morning."

"Have you? Well, as you please, boy -- as you please. Have everything your own way."

"You are very kind, uncle; and now I have another favour to ask of you."

"What is it!"

"Why, you know that Henry Bannerworth receives but a very small sum out of the whole proceeds of the estate here, which ought, but for his father's extravagance, to be wholly at his disposal."

"So I have heard."

"I am certain he is at present distressed for money, and I have not much. Will you lend me fifty pounds, uncle, until my own affairs are sufficiently arranged to enable you to pay yourself again?"

"Will I! of course I will."

"I wish to offer that sum as an accommodation to Henry. From me, I dare say he will receive it freely, because he must be convinced how freely it is offered; and, besides, they look upon me now almost as a member of the

family, in consequence of my engagement with Flora."

"Certainly, and quite correct too; there's a fifty-pound note, my boy; take it, and do what you like with it, and when you want any more, come to me for it."

"I know I could trespass thus far on your kindness, uncle."

"Trespass! It's no trespass at all."

"Well, we will not fall out about the terms in which I cannot help expressing my gratitude to you for many favours. To-morrow, you will arrange the duel for me."

"As you please. I don't altogether like going to that fellow's house again."

"Well, then, we can manage, I dare say, by note."

"Very good. Do so. He puts me in mind altogether of a circumstance that happened a good while ago, when I was at sea, and not so old a man as I am now."

"Puts you in mind of a circumstance, uncle?"

"Yes; he's something like a fellow that figured in an affair that I know a good deal about; only I do think as my chap was more mysterious by a d -- -- d sight than this one."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, dear, yes. When anything happens in an odd way at sea, it is as odd again as anything that occurs on land, my boy, you may depend."

"Oh, you only fancy that, uncle, because you have spent so long a time at sea."

"No, I don't imagine it, you rascal. What can you have on shore equal to what we have at sea? Why, the sights that come before us would make you landsmen's hairs stand up on end, and never come down again."

"In the ocean, do you mean, that you see those sights, uncle?"

"To be sure. I was once in the southern ocean, in a small frigate, looking out for a seventy-four we were to join company with, when a man at the mast-head sung out that he saw her on the larboard bow. Well, we thought it all right enough, and made away that quarter, when what do you think it turned out to be?"

"I really cannot say."

"The head of a fish."

"A fish!"

"Yes! a d -- -- d deal bigger than the hull of a vessel. He was swimming along with his head just what I dare say he considered a shaving or so out of the water."

"But where were the sails, uncle?"

"The sails?"

"Yes; your man at the mast-head must have been a poor seaman not to have missed the sails."

"Ah, that's one of your shore-going ideas, now. You know nothing whatever about it. I'll tell you where the sails were, master Charley."

"Well, I should like to know."

"The spray, then, that he dashed up with a pair of fins that were close to his head, was in such a quantity, and so white, that they looked just like sails."

"Oh!"

"Ah! you may say 'oh!' but we all saw him -- the whole ship's crew; and we sailed alongside of him for some time, till he got tired of us, and suddenly dived down, making such a vortex in the water, that the ship shook again, and seemed for about a minute as if she was inclined to follow him to the bottom of the sea."

"And what do you suppose it was, uncle?"

"How should I know?"

"Did you ever see it again?"

"Never; though others have caught a glimpse of him now and then in the same ocean, but never came so near him as we did, that ever I heard of, at all events. They may have done so."

"It is singular!"

"Singular or not, it's a fool to what I can tell you. Why I've seen things that if I were to set about describing them to you, you would say I was making up a romance."

"Oh, now; it's quite impossible, uncle, anyone could ever suspect you of such a thing."

"You'd believe me, would you?"

"Of course I would."

"Then here goes. I'll just tell you now of a circumstance that I haven't liked to mention to anybody yet."

"Indeed! why so?"

"Because I didn't want to be continually fighting people for not believing it; but here you have it: --

We were outward bound; a good ship, a good captain, and good messmates, you know, go far toward making a prosperous voyage a pleasant and happy one, and on this occasion we had every reasonable prospect of all.

Our hands were all tried men -- they had been sailors from infancy; none of your French craft, that serve an apprenticeship and then become land lubbers again. Oh, no, they were stanch and true, and loved the sea as the sluggard loves his bed, or the lover his mistress.

Ay, and for the matter of that, the love was a more enduring and a more healthy love, for it increased with years, and made men love one another, and they would stand by each other while they had a limb to life -- while they were able to chew a quid or wink an eye, leave alone wag a pigtail.

We were outward bound for Ceylon, with cargo, and were to bring spices and other matters home from the Indian market. The ship was new and good -- a pretty craft; she sat like a duck upon the water, and a stiff breeze carried her along the surface of the waves without your rocking, and pitching, and tossing, like an old wash-tub at a mill-tail, as I have had the misfortune to sail in more than once afore.

No, no, we were well laden, and well pleased, and weighed anchor with light hearts and a hearty cheer.

Away we went down the river, and soon rounded the North Foreland, and stood out in the Channel. The breeze was a steady and stiff one, and carried us through the water as though it had been made for us.

"Jack," said I to a messmate of mine, as he stood looking at the skies, then at the sails, and finally at the water, with a graver air than I thought was at all consistent with the occasion or circumstances.

"Well," he replied.

"What ails you? You seem as melancholy as if we were about to cast lots who should be eaten first. Are you well enough?"

"I am hearty enough, thank Heaven," he said, "but I don't like this breeze."

"Don't like the breeze!" said I; "why, mate, it is as good and kind a breeze as ever filled a sail. What would you have, a gale?"

"No, no; I fear that."

"With such a ship, and such a set of hearty able seamen, I think we could manage to weather out the stiffest gale that ever whistled through a yard."

"That may be; I hope it is, and I really believe and think so."

"Then what makes you so infernally mopish and melancholy?"

"I don't know, but can't help it. It seems to me as though there was something hanging over us, and I can't tell what."

"Yes, there are the colours, Jack, at the masthead they are flying over us with a hearty breeze."

"Ah! ah!" said Jack, looking up at the colours, and then went away without saying anything more, for he had some piece of duty to perform.

I thought my messmate had something on his mind that caused him to feel sad and uncomfortable, and I took no more notice of it; indeed, in the course of a day or two he was as merry as any of the rest, and had no more melancholy that I could perceive, but was as comfortable as anybody.

We had a gale off the coast of Biscay, and rode it out without the loss of a spar or a yard; indeed, without the slightest accident or rent of any kind.

"Now, Jack, what do you think of our vessel?" said I.

"She's like a duck upon water, rises and falls with the waves, and doesn't tumble up and down like a hoop over stones."

"No, no; she goes smoothly and sweetly; she is a gallant craft, and this is her first voyage, and I predict a prosperous one."

"I hope so," he said.

Well, we went on prosperously enough for about three weeks; the ocean was as calm and as smooth as a meadow, the breeze light but good, and we stemmed along majestically over the deep blue waters, and passed coast after coast, though all around was nothing but the apparently pathless main in sight.

Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood Volume I

"A better sailer I never stepped into," said the captain one day; "it would be a pleasure to live and die in such a vessel."

Well, as I said, we had been three weeks or thereabouts, when one morning, after the sun was up and the decks washed, we saw a strange man sitting on one of the water-casks that were on deck, for, being full, we were compelled to stow some of them on deck.

You may guess those on deck did a little more than stare at this strange and unexpected apparition. By jingo, I never saw men open their eyes wider in all my life, nor was I any exception to the rule. I stared, as well I might; but we said nothing for some minutes, and the stranger looked calmly on us, and then cocked his eye with a nautical air up at the sky, as if he expected to receive a twopenny-post letter from St. Michael, or a billet doux from the Virgin Mary.

"Where has he come from?" said one of the men in a low tone to his companion, who was standing by him at that moment.

"How can I tell?" replied his companion. "He may have dropped from the clouds; he seems to be examining the road; perhaps he is going back."

The stranger sat all this time with the most extreme and provoking coolness and unconcern; he deigned us but a passing notice, but it was very slight.

He was a tall, spare man — what is termed long and lathy — but he was evidently a powerful man. He had a broad chest, and long, sinewy arms, a hooked nose, and a black, eagle eye. His hair was curly, but frosted by age; it seemed as though it had been tinged with white at the extremities, but he was hale and active otherwise to judge from appearances.

Notwithstanding all this, there was a singular repulsiveness about him that I could not imagine the cause, or describe; at the same time there was an air of determination in his wild and singular-looking eyes, and over their whole there was decidedly an air and an appearance so sinister as to be positively disagreeable.

"Well," said I, after we had stood some minutes, "where did you come from, shipmate?"

He looked at me and then up at the sky, in a knowing manner.

"Come, come, that won't do; you have none of Peter Wilkin's wings, and couldn't come on the aerial dodge; it won't do; how did you get here?"

He gave me an awful wink, and made a sort of involuntary movement, which jumped him up a few inches, and he bumped down again on the water-cask.

"That's as much as to say," thought I, "that he's sat himself on it."

"I'll go and inform the captain," says I, "of this affair; he'll hardly believe me when I tell him, I am sure."

So saying, I left the deck and went to the cabin, where the captain was at breakfast, and related to him what I had seen respecting the stranger. The captain looked at me with an air of disbelief, and said, —

"What? — do you mean to say there's a man on board we haven't seen before?"

"Yes, I do, Captain, I never saw him afore, and he's sitting beating his heels on the water-cask on deck."

"The devil!"

"He is, I assure you, sir; and he won't answer any questions."

"I'll see to that. I'll see if I can't make the lubber say something, providing his tongue's not cut out. But how came he on board? Confound it, he can't be the devil, and dropped from the moon."

"Don't know, captain," said I. "He is evil-looking enough, to my mind, to be the father of evil, but it's ill bespeaking attentions from that quarter at any time."

"Go on, lad: I'll come up after you."

I left the cabin, and I heard the captain coming up after me. When I got on deck, I saw he had not moved from the place where I left him. There was a general commotion among the crew when they heard of the occurrence, and all crowded round him, save the man at the helm who had to remain at his post.

The captain now came forward, and the men fell a little back as he approached.

For a moment the captain stood silent, attentively examining the stranger, who was excessively cool, and stood the scrutiny with the same unconcern that he would had the captain been looking at his watch.

"Well, my man," said the captain, "how did you come here?"

"I'm part of the cargo," he said, with an indescribable leer.

"Part of the cargo be d — — d!" said the captain, in sudden rage, for he thought the stranger was coming his

jokes too strong, "I know you are not in the bills of lading."

"I'm contraband," replied the stranger; "and my uncle's the great cham of Tartary."

The captain stared, as well he might, and did not speak for some minutes; all the while the stranger kept kicking his heels against the water-casks and squinting up at the skies; it made us feel very queer.

"Well, I must confess you are not in the regular way of trading."

"Oh, no," said the stranger; "I am contraband — entirely contraband."

"And how did you come on board?"

At this question the stranger again looked curiously up at the skies, and continued to do so for more than a minute; he then turned his gaze upon the captain.

"No, no," said the captain: "Eloquent dumb show won't do with me; you didn't come, like Mother Shipton, upon a birch broom. How did you come on board my vessel?"

"I walked on board," said the stranger.

"You walked on board; and where did you conceal yourself?"

"Below."

"Very good; and why didn't you stay below altogether?"

"Because I wanted fresh air. I'm in a delicate state of health, you see; it doesn't do to stay in a confined place too long."

"Confound the binnacle!" said the captain; it was his usual oath when anything bothered him, and he could not make it out. "Confound the binnacle! — what a delicate-looking animal you are. I wish you had stayed where you were; your delicacy would have been all the same to me. Delicate, indeed!"

"Yes, very," said the stranger, coolly.

There was something so comic in the assertion of his delicateness of health, that we should have all laughed; but we were somewhat scared, and had not the inclination.

"How have you lived since you came on board?" inquired the captain.

"Very indifferently."

"But how? What have you eaten? and what have you drank?"

"Nothing; I assure you. All I did while I was below was — "

"What?"

"Why, I sucked my thumbs like a polar bear in its winter quarters."

And as he spoke the stranger put his two thumbs into his mouth, and extraordinary thumbs they were, too, for each would have filled an ordinary man's mouth.

"These," said the stranger, pulling them out, and gazing at them wistfully, and with a deep sigh he continued,

—

"These were thumbs at one time; but they are nothing now to what they were."

"Confound the binnacle!" muttered the captain to himself, and then he added, aloud, —

"It's cheap living, however, but where are you going to, and why did you come aboard?"

"I wanted a cheap cruise, and I am gong there and back."

"Why, that's where we are going," said the captain.

"Then we are brothers," exclaimed the stranger, hopping off the water-cask like a kangaroo, and bounding toward the captain, holding out his hand as though he would have shaken hands with him.

"No, no," said the captain; "I can't do it."

"Can't do it!" exclaimed the stranger, angrily. "What do you mean?"

"That I can't have anything to do with contraband articles; I am a fair trader, and do all above board. I haven't a chaplain on board, or he should offer up prayers for your preservation, and the recovery of your health, which seems so delicate."

"That be — "

"The strange didn't finish the sentence; he merely screwed his mouth up into an incomprehensible shape, and puffed out a lot of breath, with some force, and which sounded very much like a whistle; but, oh, what thick breath he had, it was as much like smoke as anything I ever saw, and so my shipmate said.

"I say, captain," said the stranger, as he saws him pacing the deck.

"Well."

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"Just send me up some beef and biscuit, and some coffee royal — be sure it's royal, do you hear, because I'm partial to brandy, it's the only good thing there is on earth."

I shall not easily forget the captain's look as he turned towards the stranger, and gave his huge shoulders a shrug, as much as to say, —

"Well, I can't help it now; he's here, and I can't throw him overboard."

The coffee, beef, and biscuit were sent him, and the stranger seemed to eat them with great gout, and drank the coffee with much relish, and returned the things saying,

"Your captain is an excellent cook; give him my compliments."

I thought the captain would think that was but a left-handed compliment, and look more angry than pleased, but no notice was taken of it.

It was strange, but this man had impressed upon all in the vessel some singular notion of his being more than he should be — more than a mere mortal, and not one endeavored to interfere with him; the captain was a stout and dare devil a fellow as you would well meet with, yet he seemed tacitly to acknowledge more than he would say, for he never after took any further notice of the stranger nor he of him.

They had barely any conversation, simply a civil word when they first met, and so forth; but there was little or no conversation of any kind between them.

The stranger slept upon deck, and lived upon deck entirely; he never once went below after we saw him, and his own account of being below so long.

This was very well, but the night-watch did not enjoy his society, and would have willingly dispensed with it at that hour so particularly lonely and dejected upon the broad ocean, and perhaps a thousand miles away from the nearest point of land.

At this dread and lonely hour, when no sound reaches the ear and disturbs the wrapt stillness of the night, save the whistling of the wind through the cordage, or an occasional dash of water against the vessel's side, the thoughts of the sailor are fixed on far distant objects — his own native land and the friends and loved ones he has left behind him.

He then thinks of the wilderness before, behind, and around him; of the immense body of water, almost in places bottomless; gazing upon such a scene, and with thoughts as strange and indefinite as the very boundless expanse before him it is no wonder if he should become superstitious; the time and place would indeed unbidden, conjure up thoughts and feelings of a fearful character and intensity.

The stranger at such times would occupy his favourite seat upon the water cask and looking up at the sky and then on the ocean, and between whiles he would whistle a strange, wild, unknown melody.

The flesh of the sailors used to creep up in knots and bumps when they heard it; the wind used to whistle as an accompaniment and pronounce fearful sounds to their ears.

The wind had been highly favourable from the first, and since the stranger had been discovered it had blown fresh, and we went along at a rapid rate, stemming the water, and dashing the spray off from the bows, and cutting the water like a shark.

This was very singular to us, we couldn't understand it, neither could the captain, and we looked very suspiciously at the stranger, and wished him at the bottom, for the freshness of the wind now became a gale, and yet the ship came through the water steadily, and away we went before the wind, as if the devil drove us; and mind I don't mean to say he didn't.

The gale increased to a hurricane, and though we had not a stitch of canvass out, yet we drove before the gale as if we had been shot out of the mouth of a gun.

The stranger still sat on the water casks, and all night long he kept up his infernal whistle. Now, sailors don't like to hear any one whistle when there's such a gale blowing over their heads — it's like asking for more; but he would persist, and the louder and stronger the wind blew, the louder he whistled.

At length there came a storm of rain, lightning, and wind. We were tossed mountains high, and the foam rose over the vessel, and often entirely over our heads, and the men were lashed to their posts to prevent being washed way.

But the stranger still lay on the water casks, kicking his heels and whistling his infernal tune, always the same. He wasn't washed away nor moved by the action of the water; indeed, we heartily hoped and expected to see both him and the water cask floated overboard at every minute; but, as the captain said, —

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"Confound the binnacle! the old water tub seems as if it were screwed on to the deck, and won't move off and he on the top of it."

There was a strong inclination to throw him overboard, and the men conversed in low whispers, and came round the captain, saying, --

"We have come, captain, to ask you what you think of this strange man who has come so mysteriously on board?"

"I can't tell you what to think, lads; he's past thinking about -- he's something above my comprehension altogether, I promise you."

"Well, then, we are thinking much of the same thing, captain."

"What do you mean?"

"That he ain't exactly one of our sort."

"No, he's no sailor, certainly; and yet, for a land lubber, he's about as rum a customer as ever I met with."

"So he is, sir."

"He stands salt water well; and I must say that I couldn't lay a top of those water casks in that style very well."

"Nor nobody amongst us, sir."

"Well, then, he's in nobody's way, is he? -- nobody wants to take his berth, I suppose?"

The men looked at each other somewhat blank; they didn't understand the meaning at all -- far from it; and the idea of any one's wanting to take the stranger's place on the water casks was so outrageously ludicrous that at any other time they would have considered it a devilish good joke and have never ceased laughing at it.

He paused some minutes, and then one of them said, --

"It isn't that we envy him his berth, captain, 'cause nobody else could live there for a moment. Any one amongst us that had been there would have been washed overboard a thousand times over."

"So they would," said the captain.

"Well, sir, he's more than us."

"Very likely; but how can I help that?"

"We think he's the main cause of all this racket in the heavens -- the storm and hurricane; and that, in short, if he remains much longer we shall all sink."

"I am sorry for it. I don't think we are in any danger, and had the strange being any power to prevent it, he would assuredly do so, lest he got drowned."

"But we think if he were thrown over board all would be well."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, captain, you may depend upon it he's the cause of all the mischief. Throw him over board and that's all we want."

"I shall not throw him overboard, even if I could do such a thing; and I am by no means sure of anything of the kind."

"We do not ask it, sir."

"What do you desire?"

"Leave to throw him over board -- it is to save our own lives."

"I can't let you do any such thing; he's in nobody's way."

"But he's always a whistling. Only hark now, and in such a hurricane as this, it is dreadful to think of it. What else can we do, sir? -- he's not human."

At this moment, the stranger's whistling came clear upon their ears; there was the same wild, unearthly notes as before, but the cadences were stronger, and there was a supernatural clearness in all the tones.

"There now," said another, "he's kicking the water cask with his heels."

"Confound the binnacle!" said the captain; "it sounds like short peals of thunder. Go and talk to him, lads."

"And if that won't do, sir, may we -- "

"Don't ask me any questions. I don't think a score of the best men that were ever born could move him."

"I don't mind trying," said one.

Upon this the whole of the men moved to the spot where the water casks were standing and the stranger lay.

There he was, whistling like fury, and, at the same time, beating his heels to the tune against the empty casks. We came up to him, and he took no notice of us at all, but kept on in the same way.

"Hilloa!" shouted one.

"Hilloa!" shouted another.

No notice, however, was taken of us, and one of our number, a big, herculean fellow, an Irishman, seized him by the leg, either to make him get up, or, as we thought, to give him a lift over our heads into the sea. However, he had scarcely got his fingers round the calf of the leg, when the stranger pinched his leg so tight against the water cask, that he could not move, and was as effectually pinned as if he had been nailed there. The stranger, after he had finished a bar of the music, rose gradually to a sitting posture, and without the aid of his hands, and looking the unlucky fellow in the face, he said, —

"Well, what do you want?"

"My hand," said the fellow.

"Take it then," he said.

He did take it, and we saw that there was blood on it.

The stranger stretched out his left hand, and taking him by the breech, he lifted him, without any effort, upon the water-cask beside him.

We all stared at this, and couldn't help it; and we were quite convinced we could not throw him over board but he would probably have no difficulty in throwing us over board.

"Well, what do you want?" he again exclaimed to us all.

We looked at one another, and had scarce courage to speak; at length I said, —

"We wish you to leave off whistling."

"Leave off whistling!" he said. "And why should I do anything of the kind?"

Because it brings the wind."

"Ha! ha! why that's the very reason I am whistling, to bring the wind."

"But we don't want so much."

"Pho! pho! you don't know what's good for you — it's a beautiful breeze, and not a bit too stiff."

"It's a hurricane."

"Nonsense."

"But it is."

"Now you see how I'll prove you are wrong in a minute. You see my hair, don't you?" he said, after he took off his cap. "Very well, look now."

He got up on the water-cask, and stood bolt upright; and running his fingers through his hair, made it all stand straight on end.

"Confound the binnacle!" said the captain, "if ever I saw the like."

"There," said the stranger, triumphantly, "don't tell me there's any wind to signify; don't you see, it doesn't even move one of my grey hairs; and if it blew as hard as you say, I am certain it would move a hair."

"Confound the binnacle!" muttered the captain as he walked away. "D — n the cabouse, if he ain't older than I am — he's too many for me and everybody else."

"Are you satisfied?"

What could we say? — we turned away and left the place, and stood at our quarters — there was no help for it — we were compelled to grin and abide by it.

As soon as we had left the place he put his cap on again and sat down on the watercasks, and then took leave of his prisoner, whom he set free, and there lay at full length on his back, with his legs hanging down. Once more he began to whistle most furiously, and beat time with his feet.

For full three weeks did he continue at this game night and day, without any interruption, save such as he required to consume enough coffee royal, junk and biscuit, as would have served three hearty men.

Well, about that time, one night the whistling ceased and he began to sing — oh! it was singing — such a voice! Gog and Magog in Guildhall, London, when they spoke were nothing to him — it was awful; but the wind calmed down to a fresh and stiff breeze. He continued at this game for three whole days and nights, and on the fourth it ceased, and when we went to take his coffee royal to him he was gone.

We hunted about everywhere, but he was entirely gone, and in three weeks after we safely cast anchor, having performed our voyage in a good month under the usual time; and had it been an old vessel she would have leaked and started like a tub from the straining; however, we were glad enough to get in, and were curiously inquisitive

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as to what was put in our vessel to come back with, for as the captain said, —

"Confound the binnacle! I'll have no more contraband articles if I can help it."

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Chapter XXVI. THE MEETING AT MOONLIGHT IN THE PARK. -- THE TURRET WINDOW IN THE HALL. -- THE LETTERS.

The old admiral showed such a strong disposition to take offence at Charles if he should presume, for a moment, to doubt the truth of the narrative than was thus communicated to him, that the latter would not anger him by so doing, but confined his observations upon it to saying that he considered it was very wonderful, and very extraordinary, and so on, which very well satisfied the old man.

The day was now, however, getting far advanced, and Charles Holland began to think of his engagement with the vampyre. He read and read the letter over and over again, but he could not come to a correct conclusion as to whether it intended to imply that he, Sir Francis Varney, would wish to fight him at the hour and place mentioned, or merely give him a meeting as a preliminary step.

He was rather, on the whole, inclined to think that some explanation would be offered by Varney, but at all events he persevered in his determination of going well armed, lest anything in the shape of treachery should be intended.

As nothing of any importance occurred now in the interval of time till nearly midnight, we will at once step to that time, and our readers will suppose it to be a quarter to twelve o'clock at night, and young Charles Holland on the point of leaving the house, to keep his appointment by the pollard oak, with the mysterious Sir Francis Varney.

He placed his loaded pistols conveniently in his pocket, so that at a moment's notice he could lay hands on them, and then wrapping himself up in a travelling cloak he had brought with him to Bannerworth Hall, he prepared to leave his chamber.

The moon still shone, although now somewhat on the wane, and although there were certainly many clouds in the sky they were but of a light fleecy character, and very little interrupted the rays of light that came from the nearly full disc of the moon.

From his window he could not perceive the spot in the park where he was to meet Varney, because the room in which he was occupied not a sufficiently high place in the house to enable him to look over a belt of trees that stopped the view. From almost any of the upper windows the pollard oak could be seen.

It so happened now that the admiral had been placed in a room immediately above the one occupied by his nephew, and, as his mind was full of how he should manage with regard to arranging the preliminaries of the duel between Charles and Varney on the morrow, he found it difficult to sleep; and after remaining in bed about twenty minutes, and finding that each moment he was only getting more and more restless, he adopted a course which he always did under such circumstances.

He rose and dressed himself again, intending to sit up for an hour and then turn into bed and try a second time to get to sleep. But he had no means of getting a light, so he drew the heavy curtain from before the window, and let in as much of the moonlight as he could.

This window commanded a most beautiful and extensive view, for from it the eye could carry completely over the tops of the tallest trees, so that there was no interruption whatever to the prospect, which was as extensive as it was delightful.

Even the admiral, who never would confess to seeing much beauty in scenery where water formed not a large portion of it, could not resist opening his window and looking out, with a considerable degree of admiration, upon wood and dale, as they were illuminated by the moon's rays, softened, and rendered, if anything, more beautiful by the light vapours, though which they had to struggle to make their way.

Charles Holland, in order to avoid the likelihood of meeting with any one who would question him as to where he was going, determined upon leaving his room by the balcony, which, as we are aware, presented ample facilities for his so doing.

He cast a glance at the portrait in the panel before he left the apartment, and then saying --

"For you, dear Flora, for you I essay this meeting with the fearful original of that portrait," he immediately opened his window, and stepped out on to the balcony.

Young and active as was Charles Holland, to descend from that balcony presented to him no difficulty

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whatever, and he was, in a very few moments, safe in the garden of Bannerworth Hall.

He never thought, for a moment, to look up, or he would, in an instant, have seen the white head of his old uncle, as it was projected over the sill of the window of his chamber.

The drop of Charles from the balcony of his window, just made sufficient noise to attract the admiral's attention, and, then, before he could think of making any alarm, he saw Charles walking hastily across a grass plot, which was sufficiently in the light of the moon to enable the admiral at once to recognise him, and leave no sort of doubt as to his positive identity.

Of course, upon discovering that it was Charles, the necessity for making an alarm no longer existed, and, indeed, not knowing what it was that had induced him to leave his chamber, a moment's reflection suggested to him the propriety of not even calling to Charles, lest he should defeat some discovery which he might be about to make.

"He has heard something, or seen something," thought the admiral, "and is gone to find out what it is. I only wish I was with him; but up here I can do nothing at all, that's quite clear."

Charles, he saw, walked very rapidly, and like a man who has some fixed destination which he wishes to reach as quickly as possible.

When he dived among the trees which skirted one side of the flower gardens, the admiral was more puzzled than ever, and he said --

"Now where on earth is he off to? He is fully dressed and has his cloak about him."

After a few moments' reflection he decided that, having seen something suspicious, Charles must have got up, and dressed himself, to fathom it.

The moment this idea became fairly impressed upon his mind, he left his bedroom, and descended to where one of the brothers he knew was sitting up, keeping watch during the night. It was Henry who was so on guard; and when the admiral came into the room, he uttered an expression of surprise to find him up, for it was now some time past twelve o'clock.

"I have come to tell you that Charles has left the house," said the admiral.

"Left the house?"

"Yes; I saw him just now go across the garden."

"And you are sure it was he?"

"Quite sure. I saw him by the moonlight cross the green plot."

"Then you may depend he has seen or heard something, and gone alone to find out what it is rather than give any alarm."

"That is just what I think."

"It must be so. I will follow him, if you can show me exactly which way he went."

"That I can easily. And in case I should have made any mistake, which it is not at all likely, we can go to his room first and see if it is empty."

"A good thought, certainly, that will at once put an end to all doubt upon the question."

They both immediately proceeded to Charles's room, and then the admiral's accuracy of identification of his nephew was immediately proved by finding that Charles was not there, and that the window was wide open.

"You see I am right," said the admiral.

"You are," cried Henry; "but what have we here?"

"Where?"

"Here on the dressing-table. Here are no less than three letters, all laid as if on purpose to catch the eye of the first one who might enter the room."

"Indeed!"

"You perceive them?"

Henry held them to the light, and after a moment's inspection of them, he said, in a voice of much surprise, --

"Good God! what is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning of what?"

"The letters are addressed to parties in the house here. Do you not see?"

"To whom?"

"One to Admiral Bell -- "

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"The deuce!"

"Another to me, and the third to my sister Flora. There is some new mystery here."

The admiral looked at the superscription of one of the letters which was handed to him in silent amazement. Then he cried, --

"Set down the light, and let us read them."

Henry did so, and then they simultaneously opened the epistles which were severally addressed to them. There was a silence, as of the very grave, for some moments, and then the old admiral staggered to a seat, as he exclaimed, --

"Am I dreaming -- am I dreaming?"

"Is this possible?" said Henry, in a voice of deep emotion, as he allowed the note addressed to him to drop on to the floor.

"D -- n it, what does yours say?" cried the old admiral in a louder tone.

"Read it -- what says yours?"

"Read it -- I am amazed."

The letters were exchanged, and read by each with the same breathless attention they had bestowed upon their own; after which, they both looked at each other in silence, pictures of amazement, and the most absolute state of bewilderment.

Not to keep our readers in suspense, we at once transcribe each of these letters.

The one to the admiral contained these words, --

"MY DEAR UNCLE,

"Of course you will perceive the prudence of keeping this letter to yourself, but the fact is, I have now made up my mind to leave Bannerworth Hall.

"Flora Bannerworth is not now the person she was when first I knew her and loved her. Such being the case, and she having altered, not I, she cannot accuse me of fickleness.

"I still love the Flora Bannerworth I first knew, but I cannot make my wife one who is subject to the visitations of a vampyre.

"I have remained here long enough now to satisfy myself that this vampyre business is no delusion. I am quite convinced that it is a positive fact, and that, after death, Flora will herself become one of the horrible existences known by that name.

"I will communicate to you from the first large city on the continent whither I am going, at which I make any stay, and in the meantime, make what excuses you like at Bannerworth Hall, which I advise you to leave as quickly as you can, and believe me to be, my dear uncle, yours truly, "CHARLES HOLLAND

Henry's letter was this: --

"MY DEAR SIR,

"If you calmly and dispassionately consider the painful and distressing circumstances in which your family are placed, I am sure that, far from blaming me for the step which this note will announce to you I have taken, you will be the first to give me credit for acting with an amount of prudence and foresight which was highly necessary under the circumstances.

"If the supposed visits of the vampyre to your sister Flora had turned out, as at first I hoped they would, a delusion, and been in any satisfactory manner explained away I should certainly have felt pride and pleasure in fulfilling my engagement to that young lady.

"You must, however, yourself feel that the amount of evidence in favour of a belief that an actual vampyre has visited Flora, enforces a conviction of its truth.

"I cannot, therefore, make her my wife under such very singular circumstances.

"Perhaps you may blame me for not taking at once advantage of the permission given me to forego my engagement when first I came to your house; but the fact is, I did not then in the least believe in the existence of the vampyre, but since a positive conviction of that most painful fact has now forced itself upon me, I beg to decline the honour of an alliance which I had at one time looked forward to with the most considerable satisfaction.

"I shall be on the continent as fast as conveyances can take me, therefore, should you entertain any romantic notions of calling me to an account for a course of proceeding I think perfectly and fully justifiable, you will not

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find me.

"Accept my assurances of my respect of yourself and pity for your sister, and believe me to be, my dear sir, your sincere friend, "CHARLES HOLLAND."

These two letters might well make the admiral stare at Henry Bannerworth, and Henry stare at him.

An occurrence so utterly and entirely unexpected by both of them, was enough to make them doubt the evidence of their own senses. But there were the letters, as a damning evidence of the outrageous fact, and Charles Holland was gone.

It was the admiral who first recovered from the stunning effect of the epistles, and he, with a gesture of perfect fury, exclaimed, --

"The scoundrel! -- the cold-blooded villain! I renounce him for ever! he is no nephew of mine; he is some d -- d imposter! Nobody with a dash of my family blood in his veins would have acted so to save himself from a thousand deaths."

"Who shall we trust now," said Henry, "when those whom we take to our inmost hearts deceive us thus? This is the greatest shock I have yet received. If there be a pang greater than another, surely it is to be found in the faithlessness and heartlessness of one we loved and trusted."

"He is a scoundrel!" roared the admiral. "D -- n him, he'll die on a dunghill, and that's too good a place for him. I cast him off -- I'll find him out, and old as I am, I'll fight him -- I'll wring his neck, the rascal, and as for poor dear Miss Flora, God bless her! I'll -- I'll marry her myself and make her an admiral. -- I'll marry her myself. Oh, that I should be uncle to such a rascal!"

"Calm yourself," said Henry, "no one can blame you."

"Yes, you can; I had no right to be his uncle, and I was an old fool to love him."

The old man sat down, and his voice became broken with emotion as he said, --

"Sir, I tell you I would have died willingly rather than this should have happened. This will kill me now, -- I shall die now of shame and grief."

Tears gushed from the admiral's eyes, and the sight of the noble old man's emotion did much to calm the anger of Henry, which, although he said but little, was boiling at his heart like a volcano.

"Admiral Bell," he said, you have nothing to do with this business; we cannot blame you for the heartlessness of another. I have but one favour to ask of you."

"What -- what can I do?"

"Say no more about him at all."

"I can't help saying something about him. You ought to turn me out of the house."

"Heaven forbid! What for?"

"Because I'm his uncle -- his d -- d old fool of an uncle, that has always thought so much of him."

"Nay, my good sir, that was a fault on the right side, and cannot discredit you. I thought him the most perfect of human beings."

"Oh, if I could but have guessed this."

"It was impossible. Such duplicity never was equalled in this world -- it was impossible to foresee it."

"Hold -- hold! did he give you fifty pounds?"

"What?"

"Did he give you fifty pounds?"

"Give me fifty pounds! Most decidedly not; what made you think of such a thing?"

"Because to-day he borrowed fifty pounds of me, he said, to lend to you."

"I never heard of the transaction until this moment."

"The villain!"

"No doubt, sir, he wanted that amount to expedite his progress abroad."

"Well, now, damme, if an angel had come to me and said 'Hilola! Admiral Bell, your nephew, Charles Holland, is a thundering rogue, I should have said 'You're a liar!'"

"This is fighting against facts, my dear sir. He is gone -- mention him no more; forget him, as I shall endeavour myself to do, and persuade my poor sister to do."

"Poor girl! what can we say to her?"

"Nothing, but give her all the letters, and let her be at once satisfied of the worthlessness of him she loved."

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"The best way. Her woman's pride will then come to her help."

"I hope it will. She is of an honourable race, and I am sure she will not condescend to shed a tear for such a man as Charles Holland has proved himself to be."

"D -- n him, I'll find him out, and make him fight you. He shall give you satisfaction."

"No, no."

"No? But he shall."

"I cannot fight with him."

"You cannot?"

"Certainly not. He is too far beneath me now. I cannot fight on honourable terms with one whom I despise as too dishonourable to contend with. I have nothing now but silence and contempt."

"I have though, for I'll break his neck when I see him, or he shall break mine. The villain! I'm ashamed to stay here, my young friend."

"How mistaken a view you take of this matter, my dear sir. As Admiral Bell, a gentleman, a brave officer, and a man of the purest and most unblemished honour, you confer a distinction upon us by your presence here."

The admiral wrung Henry by the hand, as he said, --

"To-morrow -- wait until to-morrow; we will talk over this matter to-morrow -- I cannot to-night, I have not patience; but to-morrow, my dear boy, we will have it all out. God bless you. Good night.

--

Chapter XXVII. THE NOBLE CONFIDENCE OF FLORA BANNERWORTH IN HER LOVER. -- HER OPINION OF THE THREE LETTERS. -- THE ADMIRAL'S ADMIRATION.

To describe the feelings of Henry Bannerworth on the occasion of this apparent defalcation from the path of rectitude and honour by his friend, as he had fondly imagined Charles Holland to be, would be next to impossible.

If, as we have taken occasion to say, it be a positive fact, that a noble and a generous mind feels more acutely any heartlessness of this description from one on whom it has placed implicit confidence, than the most deliberate and wicked of injuries from absolute strangers, we can easily conceive that Henry Bannerworth was precisely the person to feel most acutely the conduct whence all circumstances appeared to fix upon Charles Holland, upon whose faith, truth, and honour, he would have staked his very existence but a few short hours before.

With such a bewildered sensation that he scarcely knew where he walked or whither to betake himself, did he repair to his own chamber, and there he strove, with what energy he was able to bring to the task, to find out some excuse, if he could, for Charles's conduct. But he could find none. View it in what light he would, it presented by a picture of the most heartless selfishness it had ever been his lot to encounter.

The tone of the letters, too, which Charles had written, materially aggravated the moral delinquency of which he had been guilty; better, far better, had he not attempted an excuse at all than have attempted such excuses as were there put down in those epistles.

A more cold blooded, dishonourable proceeding could not possibly be conceived.

It would appear, that while he entertained a doubt with regard to the reality of the visitation of the vampyre to Flora Bannerworth, he had been willing to take to himself abundance of credit for the most honourable feelings, and to induce a belief in the minds of all that an exalted feeling of honour, as well as a true affection that would know no change, kept him at the feet of her whom he loved.

Like some braggart, who, when there is no danger, is a very hero, but who, the moment he feels convinced he will be actually and truly called upon for an exhibition of his much-vaunted prowess, had Charles Holland deserted the beautiful girl, who, if anything, had now certainly, in her misfortunes, a far higher claim upon his kindly feeling than before.

Henry could not sleep, although, at the request of George, who offered to keep watch for him the remainder of the night, he attempted to do so.

He in vain said to himself, "I will banish from my mind this most unworthy subject. I have told Admiral Bell that contempt is the only feeling I can now have for his nephew, and yet I now find myself dwelling upon him, and upon his conduct, with a perseverance which is a foe to my repose."

At length came the welcome and beautiful light of day, and Henry rose fevered and unrefreshed.

His first impulse now was to hold a consultation with his brother George, as to what was to be done, and George advised that Mr. Marchdale, who as yet knew nothing of the matter, should be immediately informed of it, and consulted, as being probably better qualified than either of them to come to a just, a cool, and a reasonable opinion upon the painful circumstance, which it could not be expected that either of them would be able to view calmly.

"Let it be so, then," said Henry; "Mr. Marchdale shall decide for us."

They at once sought this friend of the family, who was in his own bed-room, and when Henry knocked at the door, Marchdale opened it hurriedly, eagerly inquiring what was the matter.

"There is no alarm," said Henry. "We have only come to tell you of a circumstance which has occurred during the night, and which will somewhat surprise you."

"Nothing calamitous, I hope?"

"Vexatious; and yet, I think it is a matter upon which we ought almost to congratulate ourselves. Read those two letters, and give us your candid opinion upon them."

Henry placed in Mr. Marchdale's hands the letter addressed to himself, as well as that to the admiral.

Marchdale read them both with marked attention, but he did not exhibit in his countenance so much surprise as regret.

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When he had finished, Henry said to him, —

"Well, Marchdale, what think you of this new and extraordinary episode in our affairs?"

"My dear young friends," said Marchdale, in a voice of great emotion, "I know not what to say to you. I have no doubt but that you are both of you much astonished at the receipt of these letters, and equally so at the sudden absence of Charles Holland."

"And are not you?"

"Not so much as you, doubtless, are. The fact is, I never did entertain a favourable opinion of the young man, and he knew it. I have been accustomed to the study of human nature under a variety of aspects; I have made it a matter of deep, and I may add, sorrowful, contemplation, to study and remark those minor shades of character which commonly escape observation wholly. And, I repeat, I always had a bad opinion of Charles Holland, which he guessed, and hence he conceived a hatred to me, which more than once, as you cannot but remember, showed itself in little acts of opposition and hostility."

"You much surprise me."

"I expected to do so. But you cannot help remembering that at one time I was on the point of leaving here solely on his account."

"You were so."

"Indeed I should have done so, but that I reasoned with myself upon the subject, and subdued the impulse of the anger which some years ago, when I had not seen so much of the world, would have guided me."

"But why did you not impart to us your suspicions? We should at least, then, have been prepared for such a contingency as has occurred."

"Place yourself in my position, and then ask yourself what you would have done. Suspicion is one of those hideous things which all men would be most specially careful not only how they entertain at all, but how they give expression to. Besides, whatever may be the amount of one's own internal conviction with regard to the character of any one, there is just a possibility that one may be wrong."

"True, true."

"That possibility ought to keep any one silent who has nothing but suspicion to go upon, however cautious it may make him, as regards his dealings with the individual. I only suspected from little minute shades of character, that would peep out in spite of him, that Charles Holland was not the honourable man he would fain have had everybody believe him to be."

"And had you from the first such a feeling?"

"I had."

"It is very strange."

"Yes; and what is more strange still, is that he from the first seemed to know it; and despite a caution which I could see he always kept uppermost in his thought, he could not help speaking tartly to me at times."

"I have noticed that," said George.

"You may depend it is a fact," added Marchdale, "that nothing so much excites the deadly and desperate hatred of a man who is acting a hypocritical part, as the suspicion, well grounded or not, that another sees and understands the secret impulses of his dishonourable heart."

"I cannot blame you, or any one else, Mr. Marchdale," said Henry, "that you did not give utterance to your secret thought, but I do wish that you had done so."

"Nay, dear Henry," replied Mr. Marchdale, "believe me, I have made this matter a subject of deep thought, and have abundance of reasons why I ought not to have spoken to you upon the subject."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed I have, and not among the least important is the one, that if I had acquainted you with my suspicions, you would have found yourself in the painful position of acting a hypocritical part yourself towards this Charles Holland, for you must either have kept the secret that he was suspected, or you must have shewn it to him by your behaviour."

"Well, well, I dare say, Marchdale, you acted for the best. What shall we do now?"

"Can you doubt?"

"I was thinking of letting Flora at once know the absolute and complete worthlessness of her lover, so that she could have no difficulty in at once tearing herself from him by the assistance of the natural pride which would

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surely come to her aid, upon finding herself so much deceived."

"The test may be possible."

"You think so?"

"I do, indeed."

"Here is a letter, which of course remains unopened, addressed to Flora by Charles Holland. The admiral rather thought it would hurt her feelings to deliver her such an epistle, but I must confess I am of the contrary opinion upon that point, and think now the more evidence she has of the utter worthlessness of him who professed to love her with so much disinterested affection, the better it will be for her."

"You could not, possibly, Henry, have taken a more sensible view of the subject."

"I am glad you agree with me."

"No reasonable man could do otherwise, and from what I have seen of Admiral Bell, I am sure, upon reflection, he will be of the same opinion."

"Then it shall be so. The first shock to poor Flora may be severe, but we shall then have the consolation of knowing that it is the only one, and that in knowing the very worst, she has no more on that score to apprehend. Alas, alas! the hand of misfortune now appears to have pressed heavily upon us indeed. What in the name of all that is unlucky and disastrous, will happen next, I wonder?"

"What can happen?" said Marchdale; "I think you have now got rid of the greatest evil of all — a false friend."

"We have, indeed."

"Go, then, to Flora; assure her that in the affection of others who know no falsehood, she will find a solace from every ill. Assure her that there are hearts that will place themselves between her and every misfortune."

Mr. Marchdale was much affected as he spoke. Probably he felt deeper than he chose to express the misfortunes of that family for whom he entertained so much friendship. He turned aside his head to hide the traces of emotion which, despite even his great powers of self-command, would shew themselves upon his handsome and intelligent countenance. Then it appeared as if his noble indignation had got, for a few brief moments, the better of all prudence, and he exclaimed, —

"The villain! the worse than villain! who would, with a thousand artifices, make himself beloved by a young, unsuspecting, and beautiful girl, but then to leave her to the bitterness of regret, than she had ever given such a man a place in her esteem. The heartless ruffian!"

"Be calm, Mr. Marchdale, I pray you be calm," said George; "I never saw you so much moved."

"Excuse me," he said, "excuse me; I am much moved, and I am human. I cannot always, let me strive my utmost, place a curb upon my feelings."

"They are feelings which do you honour."

"Nay, nay, I am foolish to have suffered myself to be led away into such a hasty expression of them. I am accustomed to feel acutely and to feel deeply, but it is seldom I am so much overcome as this."

"Will you accompany us to the breakfast-room at once, Mr. Marchdale, where we will make this communication to Flora; you will then be able to judge by her manner of receiving it, what it will be best to say to her."

"Come, then, and pray be calm. The least that is said upon this painful and harassing subject, after this morning, will be the best."

"You are right — you are right."

Mr. Marchdale hastily put on his coat. He was dressed, with the exception of that one article of apparel, when the brothers came to his chamber, and then he came to the breakfast-parlour where the painful communication was to be made to Flora of her lover's faithlessness.

Flora was already seated in that apartment. Indeed, she had been accustomed to meet Charles Holland there before others of the family made their appearance, but, alas! this morning the kind and tender lover was not there.

The expression that sat upon the countenances of her brothers, and of Mr. Marchdale, was quite sufficient to convince her that something more serious than usual had occurred, and she at the moment turned very pale.

Marchdale observed this change of countenance in her, and he advanced towards her, saying, —

"Calm yourself, Flora, we have something to communicate to you, but it is a something which should excite indignation, and no other feeling, in your breast."

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"Brother, what is the meaning of this?" said Flora, turning aside from Marchdale, and withdrawing the hand which he would have taken.

"I would rather have Admiral Bell here before I say anything," said Henry, "regarding a matter in which he cannot but feel much interested personally."

"Here he is," said the admiral, who at that moment had opened the door of the breakfast room. "Here he is, so now fire away and don't spare the enemy."

"And Charles?" said Flora, "where is Charles?"

"D -- n Charles!" cried the admiral, who had not been much accustomed to control his feelings.

"Hush! hush!" said Henry; "my dear sir, hush! do not indulge now in any invectives. Flora, here are three letters; you will see that the one which is unopened is addressed to yourself. However, we wish you to read the whole three of them, and then to form your own free and unbiased opinion."

Flora looked as pale as a marble statue, when she took the letters into her hands. She let the two that were open fall on the table before her, while she eagerly broke the seal of that which was addressed to herself.

Henry, with an instinctive delicacy, beckoned every one present to the window, so that Flora had not the pain of feeling that any eyes were fixed upon her but those of her mother, who had just come into the room, while she was perusing those documents which told such a tale of heartless dissimulation.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Bannerworth, "you are ill."

"Hush! mother -- hush!" said Flora; "let me know all."

She read the whole of the letters through, and then, as the last one dropped from her grasp, she exclaimed, --

"Oh, God! oh, God! what is all that has occurred compared to this? Charles -- Charles -- Charles!"

"Flora!" exclaimed Henry, suddenly turning from the window. "Flora, is this worthy of you?"

"Heaven now support me!"

"Is this worthy of the name you bear, Flora? I should have thought, and I did hope, that woman's pride would have supported you."

"Let me implore you," added Marchdale, "to summon indignation to your aid, Miss Bannerworth."

"Charles -- Charles -- Charles!" she again exclaimed, as she wrung her hands despairingly.

"Flora, if anything could add a sting to my already irritated feelings," said Henry, "this conduct of yours would."

"Henry -- brother, what mean you? Are you mad?"

"Are you, Flora?"

"God, I wish now that I was."

"You have read those letters, and yet you call upon the name of him who wrote them with frantic tenderness."

"Yes, yes," she cried; "frantic tenderness is the word. It is with frantic tenderness I call upon his name, and ever will. -- Charles! Charles! -- dear Charles!"

"This surpasses all belief," said Marchdale.

"It is the frenzy of grief," added George; "but I did not expect it of her. Flora -- Flora, think again."

"Think -- think -- the rush of thought distracts. Whence came these letters? -- where did you find these most disgraceful forgeries?"

"Forgeries!" exclaimed Henry; and he staggered back, as if some one had struck him a blow.

"Yes, forgeries!" screamed Flora. "What has become of Charles Holland? Has he been murdered by some secret enemy, and then these most vile fabrications made up in his name? Oh, Charles, Charles, are you lost to me for ever?"

"Good God!" said Henry; "I did not think of that."

"Madness! -- madness!" cried Marchdale.

"Hold!" shouted the admiral. "Let me speak to her."

He pushed every one aside, and advanced to Flora. He seized both her hands in his own, and in a tone of voice that was struggling with feeling, he cried, --

"Look at me, my dear; I'm an old man -- old enough to be your grandfather, so you needn't mind looking at me steadily in the face. Look at me, I want to ask you a question."

Flora raised her beautiful eyes, and looked the old weather-beaten admiral full in the face.

Oh! what a striking contrast did those two persons present to each other. That young and beautiful girl, with

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her small, delicate, childlike hands clasped, and completely hidden in the huge ones of the old sailor, the white, smooth skin contrasted with his wrinkled, hardened features.

"My dear," he cried, "you have read those — those d — — d letters, my dear?"

"I have, sir."

"And what do you think of them?"

"They were not written by Charles Holland, your nephew."

A choking sensation seemed to come over the old man, and he tried to speak, but in vain. He shook the hands of the young girl violently, until he saw that he was hurting her, and then, before she could be aware of what he was about, he gave her a kiss on the cheek, as he cried, —

"God bless you — God bless you! You are the sweetest, dearest little creature that ever was, or that ever will be, and I'm a d — — d old fool, that's what I am. These letters were not written by my nephew, Charles. He is incapable of writing them, and, d — n me, I shall take shame to myself as long as I live for ever thinking so."

"Dear sir," said Flora, who somehow or another did not seem at all offended at the kiss which the old man had given her; "dear sir, how could you believe, for one moment, that they came from him? There has been some desperate villainy on foot. Where is he? — oh, find him, if he be yet alive. If they who have thus striven to steal from him that honour, which is the jewel of his heart, have murdered him, seek them out, sir, in the sacred name of justice, I implore you."

"I will — I will. I don't renounce him; he is my nephew still — Charles Holland — my own dear sister's son; and you are the best girl, God bless you, that ever breathed. He loved you — he loves you still; and if he's above ground, poor fellow, he shall yet tell you himself he never saw those infamous letters."

"You — you will seek for him?" sobbed Flora, and the tears gushed from her eyes. "Upon you, sir, who, as I do, feel assured of his innocence, I alone rely. If all the world say he is guilty, we will not think so."

"I'm d — — d if we do."

Henry had sat down by the table, and, with his hands clasped together, seemed in an agony of thought.

He was now roused by a thump on the back by the admiral, who cried, —

"What do you think, now, old fellow? D — n it, things look a little different now."

"As God is my judge," said Henry, holding up his hands, "I know not what to think, but my heart and feeling all go with you and with Flora, in your opinion of the innocence of Charles Holland."

"I knew you would say that, because you could not possibly help it, my dear boy. Now we are all right again, and all we have got to do is to find out which way the enemy has gone, and then give chase to him."

"Mr. Marchdale, what do you think of this new suggestion," said George to that gentleman.

"Pray, excuse me," was his reply; "I would much rather not be called upon to give an opinion."

"Why, what do you mean by that?" said the admiral.

"Precisely what I say, sir."

"D — n me, we had a fellow once in the combined fleets, who never had an opinion till after something had happened, and then he always said that was just what he thought."

"I was never in the combined, or any other fleet, sir," said Marchdale coldly.

"Who the devil said you were?" roared the admiral.

Marchdale merely hawed.

"However," added the admiral, "I don't care, and never did, for anybody's opinion, when I know I am right. I'd back this dear girl here for opinions, and good feelings, and courage to express them, against all the world, I would, any day. If I was not the old hulk I am, I would take a cruise in any latitude under the sun, if it was only for the chance of meeting with just such another."

"Oh, lose no time!" said Flora. "If Charles is not to be found in the house, lose no time in searching for him, I pray you; seek him, wherever there is the remotest probability he may chance to be. Do not let him think he is deserted."

"Not a bit of it," cried the admiral. "You make your mind easy, then, my dear. If he's above ground, we shall find him out, you may depend upon it. Come along master Henry, you and I will consider what had best be done in this uncommonly ugly matter."

Henry and George followed the admiral from the breakfast-room, leaving Marchdale there, who looked serious and full of melancholy thought.

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It was quite clear that he considered Flora had spoken from the generous warmth of her affection as regarded Charles Holland, and not from the conviction which reason would have enforced her to feel.

When he was now alone with her and Mrs. Bannerworth, he spoke in a feeling and affectionate tone regarding the painful and inexplicable events which had transpired.

Chapter XXVIII. MR. MARCHDALE'S EXCULPATION OF HIMSELF. -- THE SEARCH THROUGH THE GARDENS. -- THE SPOT OF THE DEADLY STRUGGLE. -- THE MYSTERIOUS PAPER.

It was, perhaps, very natural that, with her feelings towards Charles Holland, Flora should shrink from every one who seemed to be of a directly contrary impression, and when Mr. Marchdale now spoke, she showed but little inclination to hear what he had to say in explanation.

The genuine and unaffected manner, however, in which he spoke, could not but have its effect upon her, and she found herself compelled to listen, as well as, to a great extent, approve of the sentiments that fell from his lips.

"Flora," he said, "I beg that you will here, in the presence of your mother, give me a patient hearing. You fancy that, because I cannot join so glibly as the admiral in believing that these letters are forgeries, I must be your enemy."

"Those letters," said Flora, "were not written by Charles Holland."

"That is your opinion."

"It is more than an opinion. He could not write them."

"Well, then, of course, if I felt inclined, which Heaven alone knows I do not, I could not hope successfully to argue against such a conviction. But I do not wish to do so. All I want to impress upon you is, that I am not to be blamed for doubting his innocence; and, at the same time, I wish to assure you that no one in this house would feel more exquisite satisfaction than I in seeing it established."

"I thank you for so much," said Flora; "but as, to my mind, his innocence has never been doubted, it needs to me no establishing."

"Very good. You believe these letters forgeries."

"I do."

"And that the disappearance of Charles Holland is enforced, and not of his own free will?"

"I do."

"Then you may rely upon my unremitting exertions night and day to find him; and any suggestions you can make, which is likely to aid in the search shall, I pledge myself, be fully carried out."

"I thank you, Mr. Marchdale."

"My dear," said the mother, "rely on Mr. Marchdale."

"I will rely on any one who believes Charles Holland innocent of writing those odious letters, mother -- I rely upon the admiral. He will aid me heart and hand."

"And so will Mr. Marchdale."

"I am glad to hear it."

"And yet doubt it, Flora," said Marchdale, dejectedly. "I am very sorry that such should be the case; I will not, however, trouble you any further, nor, give me leave to assure you, will I relax in my honest endeavours to clear up this mystery."

So saying, Mr. Marchdale bowed, and left the room, apparently more vexed than he cared to express at the misconstruction which had been put upon his conduct and motives. He at once sought Henry and the admiral, to whom he expressed his most earnest desire to aid in attempting to unravel the mysterious circumstances which had occurred.

"This strongly-expressed opinion of Flora," he remarked, "is of course amply sufficient to induce us to pause before we say one word more that shall in any way sound like a condemnation of Mr. Holland. Heaven forbid that it should."

"No," said the admiral; "don't."

"I do not intend."

"I would not advise anybody."

"Sir, if you use that as a threat -- "

"A threat?"

"Yes; I must say, it sounded marvelously like one."

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"Oh, dear, no — quite a mistake. I consider that every man has a fair right to the enjoyment of his opinion. All I have to remark is, that I shall, after what has occurred, feel myself called upon to fight anybody who says those letters were written by my nephew."

"Indeed, sir."

"Ah, indeed."

"You will permit me to say such is a strange mode of allowing every one the free enjoyment of his opinion."

"Not at all."

"Whatever pains and penalties may be the result, Admiral Bell, of differing with so infallible authority as yourself, I shall do so whenever my judgment induces me."

"You will?"

"Indeed I will."

"Very good. You know all the consequences."

"As to fighting you, I should refuse to do so."

"Refuse?"

"Yes; most certainly."

"Upon what ground?"

"Upon the ground that you were a madman."

"Come," now interposed Henry, "let me hope that, for my sake as well as for Flora's, this dispute will proceed no further."

"I have not courted it," said Marchdale. "I have much temper, but I am not a stick or a stone."

"D — —e, if I don't think," said the admiral, "you are a bit of both."

"Mr. Henry Bannerworth," said Marchdale, "I am your guest, and but for the duty I feel in assisting in the search for Mr. Charles Holland, I should at once leave your house."

"You need not trouble yourself on my account," said the admiral; "if I find no clue to him in the neighbourhood for two or three days, I shall be off myself."

"I am going," said Henry, rising, "to search the garden and adjoining meadows; if you two gentlemen choose to come with me, I shall of course be happy of your company; if, however, you prefer remaining here to wrangle, you can do so."

This had the effect, at all events, of putting a stop to the dispute for the present, and both the admiral and Mr. Marchdale accompanied Henry on his search. The search was commenced immediately under the balcony of Charles Holland's window, from which the admiral had seen him emerge.

There was nothing particular found there, or in the garden. Admiral Bell pointed out accurately the route he had seen Charles take across the grass plot just before he himself left his chamber to seek Henry.

Accordingly, this route was now taken, and it led to a low part of the garden wall, which any one of ordinary vigour could easily have surmounted.

"My impression is," said the admiral, "that he got over here."

"The ivy appears to be disturbed," remarked Henry.

"Suppose we mark the spot, and then go round to the other side?" suggested George.

This was agreed to; for, although the young might have chosen rather to clamber over the wall than go round, it was doubtful if the old admiral could accomplish such a feat.

The distance round, however, was not great, and as they had cast over the wall a handful of flowers from the garden to mark the precise spot, it was easily discoverable.

The moment they reached it, they were panic-stricken by the appearances which it presented. The grass was for some yards round about completely trodden up, and converted into mud. There were deep indentations of feet-marks in all directions, and such abundance of evidence that some most desperate struggle had recently taken place there, that the most sceptical person in the world could not have entertained any doubt upon the subject.

Henry was the first to break the silence with which they each regarded the broken ground.

"This is conclusive to my mind," he said, with a deep sigh. "Here has poor Charles been attacked."

"God keep him!" exclaimed Marchdale, "and pardon me my doubts — I am now convinced."

The old admiral gazed about him like one distracted. Suddenly he cried —

"They have murdered him. Some fiends in the shape of men have murdered him, and Heaven only knows for

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what."

"It seems but too probably," said Henry. "Let us endeavour to trace the footsteps. Oh! Flora, Flora, what terrible news this will be to you."

"A horrible supposition comes across my mind," said George. "What if he met the vampyre?"

"It may have been so," said Marchdale, with a shudder. "It is a point which we could endeavour to ascertain, and I think we may do so."

"How?"

"By some inquiry as to whether Sir Francis Varney was from home at midnight last night."

"True; that might be done."

"The question, suddenly put to one of his servants, would, most probably, be answered as a thing of course."

"It would."

"Then it shall be decided upon. And now, my friend, since you have some of you thought me luke-warm in this business, I pledge myself that, should it be ascertained that Varney was from home at midnight last evening, I will defy him personally, and meet him hand to hand."

"Nay, nay," said Henry, "leave that course to younger hands."

"Why so?"

"It more befits me to be his challenger."

"No, Henry. You are differently situated to what I am."

"How so?"

"Remember, that I am in the world a lone man; without ties or connexions. If I lose my life, I compromise no one by my death; but you have a mother and a bereaved sister to look to who will deserve your care."

"Hilloa," cried the admiral, "what's this?"

"What?" cried each, eagerly, and they pressed forward to where the admiral was stooping to the ground to pick up something which was nearly completely trodden into the grass.

He with some difficulty raised it. It was a small slip of paper, on which was some writing, but it was so much covered with mud as not to be legible.

"If this be washed," said Henry, "I think we shall be able to read it clearly."

"We can soon try that experiment," said George. "And as the footsteps, by some mysterious means, show themselves nowhere else but in this one particular spot, any further pursuit of inquiry about here appears useless."

"Then we will return to the house," said Henry, "and wash the mud from this paper."

"There is one important point," remarked Marchdale, "which appears to me we have all overlooked."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"What may that be?"

"It is this. Is any one here sufficiently acquainted with the handwriting of Mr. Charles Holland to come to an opinion upon the letters?"

"I have some letters from him," said Henry, "which we received while on the continent, and I dare say Flora has likewise."

"Then they should be compared with the alleged forgeries."

"I know his handwriting well," said the admiral. "The letters bear so strong a resemblance to it that they would deceive anybody."

"Then you may depend," remarked Henry, "some most deep-laid and desperate plot is going on."

"I begin," added Marchdale, "to dread that such must be the case. What say you to claiming the assistance of the authorities, as well as offering a large reward for any information regarding Mr. Charles Holland?"

"No plan shall be left untried, you may depend."

They had now reached the house, and Henry having procured some clean water, carefully washed the paper which had been found among the trodden grass. When freed from the mixture of clay and mud which had obscured it, they made out the following words, —

" — it be so well. At the next full moon seek a convenient spot, and it can be done. The signature is, to my apprehension, perfect. The money which I hold, in my opinion, is much more in amount than you imagine, must be ours; and as for — "

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Here the paper was torn across, and no further words were visible upon it.

Mystery seemed now to be accumulating upon mystery; each one, as it showed itself darkly, seeming to bear some remote relation to what preceded it; and yet only confusing it the more.

That this apparent scrap of a letter had dropped from some one's pocket during the fearful struggle, of which there were such ample evidences, was extremely probably; but what it related to, by whom it was written, or by whom dropped, were unfathomable mysteries.

In fact, no one could give an opinion upon these matters at all; and after a further series of conjectures, it could only be decided, that unimportant as the scrap of paper appeared now to be, it should be preserved in case it should, as there was a dim possibility that it might, become a connecting link in some chain of evidence at another time.

"And here we are," said Henry, "completely at fault, and knowing not what to do."

"Well, it is a hard case," said the admiral, "that, with all the will in the world to be up and doing something, we are lying here like a fleet of ships in a calm, as idle as possible."

"You perceive we have no evidence to connect Sir Francis Varney with this affair, either nearly or remotely," said Marchdale.

"Certainly not," replied Henry.

"But yet, I hope you will not lose sight of the suggestion I proposed, to the effect of ascertaining if he were from home last night."

"But how is that to be carried out?"

"Boldly."

"How boldly?"

"By going at once, I should advise, to his house, and asking the first one of his domestics you may happen to see."

"I will go over," cried George; "on such occasions as these one cannot act upon ceremony."

He seized his hat, and without waiting for a word from any one approving or condemning his going, off he went.

"If," said Henry, "we find that Varney has nothing to do with the matter, we are completely at fault."

"Completely," echoed Marchdale.

"In that case, admiral, I think we ought to defer to your feelings upon the subject and do whatever you suggest should be done."

"I shall offer a hundred pound reward to any one who can and will bring any news of Charles."

"A hundred pounds is too much," said Marchdale.

"Not at all; and while I am about it, since the amount is made a subject of discussion, I shall make it two hundred, and that may benefit some rascal who is not so well paid for keeping the secret as I will pay him for disclosing it."

"Perhaps you are right," said Marchdale.

"I know I am, as I always am."

Marchdale could not forbear a smile at the opinionated old man, who thought no one's opinion upon any subject at all equal to his own; but he made no remark and only waited, as did Henry, with evident anxiety for the return of George.

The distance was not great, and George certainly performed his errand quickly, for he was back in less time than they had thought he could return in. The moment he came into the room, he said, without waiting for any inquiry to be made of him, —

"We are at fault again. I am assured that Sir Francis Varney never stirred from home after eight o'clock last evening."

"D — n it, then," said the admiral, "let us give the devil his due. He could not have had any hand in this business."

"Certainly not."

"From whom, George, did you get your information?" asked Henry, in a desponding tone.

"From, first of all, one of his servants, whom I met away from the house, and then from one whom I saw at the house."

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"There can be no mistake, then?"

"Certainly none. The servants answered me at once, and so frankly that I cannot doubt it."

The door of the room was slowly opened, and Flora came in. She looked almost the shadow of what she had been but a few weeks before. She was beautiful, but she almost realised the poet's description of one who had suffered much, and was sinking into an early grave, the victim of a broken heart: — "She was more beautiful than death, And yet as sad to look upon." Her face was of a marble paleness, and as she clasped her hands, and glanced from face to face, to see if she could gather hope and consolation from the expression of any one, she might have been taken for some exquisite statue of despair.

"Have you found him?" she said. "Have you found Charles?"

"Flora, Flora," said Henry, as he approached her.

"Nay, answer me; have you found him? You went to seek him. Dead or alive, have you found him?"

"We have not, Flora."

"Then I must seek him myself. None will search for him as I will search; I must myself seek him. 'Tis true affection that can alone be successful in such a search."

"Believe me, dear Flora, that all has been done which the shortness of the time that has elapsed would permit. Further measures will now immediately be taken. Rest assured, dear sister, that all will be done that the utmost zeal can suggest."

"They have killed him! they have killed him!" she said mournfully. "Oh, God, they have killed him! I am not now mad, but the time will come when I must surely be maddened. The vampyre has killed Charles Holland — the dreadful vampyre!"

"Nay, now, Flora, this is frenzy."

"Because he loved me has he been destroyed. I know it, I know it. The vampyre has doomed me to destruction. I am lost, and all who loved me will be involved in one common ruin on my account. Leave me all of you to perish. If, for iniquities done in our family, some one must suffer to appease the divine vengeance, let that one be me, and only me."

"Hush, sister, hush!" cried Henry. "I expected not this from you. The expressions you use are not your expressions. I know you better. There is abundance of divine mercy, but no divine vengeance. Be calm, I pray you."

"Calm! calm!"

"Yes. Make an exertion of that intellect we all know you to possess. It is too common a thing with human nature, when misfortune overtakes it, to imagine that such a state of things is specially arranged. We quarrel with Providence because it does not interfere with some special miracle in our favour; forgetting that, being denizens of this earth, and members of a great social system, we must be subject occasionally to the accidents which will disturb its efficient working."

"Oh, brother, brother!" she exclaimed, as she dropped into a seat, "you have never loved."

"Indeed!"

"No; you have never felt what it was to hold your being upon the breath of another. You can reason calmly, because you cannot know the extent of feeling you are vainly endeavouring to combat."

"Flora, you do me less than justice. All I wish to impress upon your mind is, that you are not in any way picked out by Providence to be specially unhappy — that there is no perversion of nature on your account."

"Call you that hideous vampyre form that haunts me no perversion of ordinary nature?"

"What is natural," said Marchdale.

"Cold reasoning to one who suffers as I suffer. I cannot argue with you; I can only know that I am most unhappy — most miserable."

"But that will pass away, sister, and the sun of your happiness may smile again."

"Oh, if I could but hope!"

"And wherefore should you deprive yourself of that poorest privilege of the most unhappy?"

"Because my heart tells me to despair."

"Tell it you won't, then," cried Admiral Bell. "If you had been at sea as long as I have, Miss Bannerworth, you would never despair of anything at all."

"Providence guarded you," said Marchdale.

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"Yes, that's true enough, I dare say. I was in a storm once off Cape Ushant, and it was only through Providence, and cutting away the mainmast myself, that we succeeded in getting into port."

"You have one hope," said Marchdale to Flora, as he looked in her wan face.

"One hope?"

"Yes. Recollect you have one hope."

"What is that?"

"You think that, by removing from this place, you may find that peace which is here denied you."

"No, no, no."

"Indeed. I thought that such was your firm conviction."

"It was; but circumstances have altered."

"How?"

"Charles Holland has disappeared here, and here must I remain to seek for him."

"True he may have disappeared here," remarked Marchdale; "and yet that may be no argument for supposing him still here."

"Where, then, is he?"

"God knows how rejoiced I should be if I were able to answer your question."

"I must seek him, dead or alive! I must see him before I bid adieu to this world, which has now lost all its charms for me."

"Do not despair," said Henry; "I will go to the town now at once, to make known our suspicions that he has met with some foul play. I will set every means in operation that I possibly can to discover him. Mr. Chillingworth will aid me, too; and I hope that not many days will elapse, Flora, before some intelligence of a most satisfactory nature shall be brought to you on Charles Holland's account."

"Go, go, brother; go at once."

"I go now at once."

"Shall I accompany you?" said Marchdale.

"No. Remain here to keep watch over Flora's safety while I am gone; I can alone do all that can be done."

"And don't forget to offer the two hundred pounds reward," said the admiral, "to any one who can bring us news of Charles, on which we can rely."

"I will not."

"Surely — surely something must result from that," said Flora, as she looked in the admiral's face, as if to gather encouragement in her dawning hopes from its expression.

"Of course it will, my dear," he said. "Don't you be downhearted; you and I are of one mind in this affair, and of one mind we will keep. We won't give up our opinions for anybody."

"Our opinions," she said, "of the honour and honesty of Charles Holland. That is what we will adhere to."

"Of course we will."

"Ah, sir, it joys me, even in the midst of this, my affliction, to find one at least who is determined to do him full justice. We cannot find such contradictions in nature as that mind, full of noble impulses, should stoop to such a sudden act of selfishness as those letters would attribute to Charles Holland. It cannot — cannot be."

"You are right, my dear. And now, Master Henry, you be off, will you, if you please."

"I am off now. Farewell, Flora, for a brief space."

"Farewell, brother; and Heaven speed you on your errand."

"Amen to that," cried the admiral; "and now, my dear, if you have got half an hour to spare, just tuck your arm under mine, and take a walk with me in the garden, for I want to say something to you."

"Most willingly," said Flora.

"I would not advise you to stray far from the house, Miss Bannerworth," said Marchdale.

"Nobody asked you for advice," said the admiral. "D — —e, do you want to make out that I ain't capable of taking care of her?"

"No, no; but — "

"Oh, nonsense! Come along, my dear; and if all the vampyres and odd fish that were ever created were to come across our path, we would settle them somehow or another. Come along, and don't listen to anybody's croaking."

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Chapter XXIX. A PEEP THOROUGH AN IRON GRATING. -- THE LONELY PRISONER IN HIS DUNGEON. -- THE MYSTERY.

Without forestalling the interest of our story, or recording a fact in its wrong place, we now call our readers' attention to a circumstance which may, at all events, afford some food for conjecture.

Some distance from the Hall, which, from time immemorial, had been the home and the property of the Bannerworth family, was an ancient ruin known by the name of Monks' Hall.

It was conjectured that this ruin was the remains of some one of those half monastic, half military buildings which, during the middle ages, were so common in almost every commanding situation in every county of England.

At a period of history when the church arrogated to itself an amount of political power which the intelligence of the spirit of the age now denies to it, and when its members were quite ready to assert at any time the truth of their doctrines by the strong arm of power, such buildings as the one, the old grey ruins of which were situated near Bannerworth Hall, were erected.

Ostensibly for religious purposes, but really as a stronghold for defence, as well as for aggression, this Monks' Hall, as it was called, partook quite as much of the character of a fortress, as of an ecclesiastical building.

The ruins covered a considerable extent of ground, but the only part which seemed successfully to have resisted the encroaches of time, at least to a considerable extent, was a long hall in which the jolly monks no doubt feasted and caroused.

Adjoining to this hall, were the walls of other parts of the building, and at several places there were small, low, mysterious-looking doors that led, heaven knows where, into some intricacies and labyrinths beneath the building, which no one had, within the memory of man, been content to run the risk of losing himself in.

It was related that among these subterranean passages and arches there were pitfalls and pools of water; and whether such a statement was true or not, it certainly acted as a considerable damper upon the vigour of curiosity.

This ruin was so well known in the neighbourhood, and had become from earliest childhood so familiar to the inhabitants of Bannerworth Hall, that one would as soon expect an old inhabitant of Ludgate-hill to make some remark about St. Paul's, as any of them to allude to the ruins of Monks' Hall.

They never now thought of going near to it, for in infancy they had sported among its ruins, and it had become one of those familiar objects which, almost, from that very familiarity, cease to hold a place in the memories of those who know it so well.

It is, however, to this ruin we would now conduct our readers, premising that what we have to say concerning it now, is not precisely in the form of a connected portion of our narrative.

* * * * *

It is evening -- the evening of that first day of heart loneliness to poor Flora Bannerworth. The lingering rays of the setting sun are gilding the old ruins with a wondrous beauty. The edges of the decayed stones seem now to be tipped with gold, and as the rich golden refulgence of light gleams upon the painted glass which still adorned a large window of the hall, a flood of many-coloured beautiful light was cast within, making the old flag-stones, with which the interior was paved, look more like some rich tapestry, laid down to do honour to a monarch.

So picturesque and so beautiful an aspect did the ancient ruin wear, that to one with a soul to appreciate the romantic and the beautiful, it would have amply repaid the fatigue of a long journey now to see it.

And as the sun sank to rest, the gorgeous colours that it cast upon the mouldering wall, deepened from an appearance of burnished gold to a crimson hue, and from that again the colour changed to a shifting purple, mingling with the shadows of the evening, and so gradually fading away into absolute darkness.

The place is as silent as the tomb -- a silence far more solemn than could have existed, had there been no remains of a human habitation; because even these time-worn walls were suggestive of what once had been; and the wrapt stillness which now pervaded them brought with them a melancholy feeling for the past.

There was not even the low hum of insect life to break the stillness of these ancient ruins.

And now the last rays of the sun are gradually fading away. In a short time all will be darkness. A low gentle wind is getting up, and beginning slightly to stir the tall blades of grass that have shot up between some of the old

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stones. The silence is broken, awfully broken, by a sudden cry of despair; such a cry as might come from some imprisoned spirit, doomed to waste an age of horror in a tomb.

And yet it was scarcely to be called a scream, and not all a groan. It might have come from some one on the moment of some dreadful sacrifice, when the judgment had not sufficient time to call courage to its aid, but involuntarily had induced that sound which might not be repeated.

A few startled birds flew from odd holes and corners about the ruins, to seek some other place of rest. The owl hooted from a corner of what had once been a belfry, and a dreamy-looking bat flew out from a cranny and struck itself headlong against a projection.

Then all was still again. Silence resumed its reign, and if there had been a mortal ear to drink in that sudden sound, the mind might well have doubted if fancy had not more to do with the matter than reality.

From out a portion of the ruins that was enveloped in the deepest gloom, there now glides a figure. It is of gigantic height, and it moves along with a slow and measured tread. An ample mantle envelops the form, which might well have been taken for the spirit of one of the monks who, centuries since, had made that place their home.

It walked the whole length of the ample hall we have alluded to, and then, at the window from which had streamed the long flood of many coloured light, it paused.

For more than ten minutes this mysterious looking figure there stood.

At length there passed something on the outside of the window, that looked like the shadow of a human form.

Then the tall, mysterious, apparition-looking man turned, and sought a side entrance to the hall.

Then he paused, and, in about a minute, he was joined by another who must have been he who had so recently passed the stained glass window on the outer side.

There was a friendly salutation between these two beings, and they walked to the centre of the hall, where they remained for some time in animated conversation.

From the gestures they used, it was evident that the subject of their discourse was one of deep and absorbing interest to both. It was one, too, upon which, after a time, they seemed a little to differ, and more than once they each assumed attitudes of mutual defiance.

This continued until the sun had so completely sunk, that twilight was beginning sensibly to wane, and then gradually the two men appeared to have come to a better understanding, and whatever might be the subject of their discourse, there was some positive result evidently arrived at now.

They spoke in lower tones. They used less animated gestures than before; and, after a time, they both walked slowly down the hall towards the dark spot from whence the first tall figure had so mysteriously emerged. * * * *

There is a dungeon — damp and full of the most unwholesome exhalations — deep under ground it seems, and, in its excavations, it would appear as if some small land springs had been liberated, for the earthen floor was one continued extent of moisture.

From the roof, too, came perpetually the dripping of water, which fell with sullen, startling splashes in the pool below.

At one end, and near to the roof, — so near that to reach it, without the most efficient means from the inside, was a matter of positive impossibility — is a small iron grating, and not much larger than might be entirely obscured by any human face than might be close to it from the outside of the dungeon.

That dreadful abode is tenanted. In one corner, on a heap of straw, which appears freshly to have been cast into the place, lies a hopeless prisoner.

It is no great stretch of fancy to suppose, that it is from his lips came the sound of terror and of woe that had disturbed the repose of that lonely spot.

The prisoner is lying on his back; a rude bandage round his head, on which were numerous spots of blood, would seem to indicate that he had suffered personal injury in some recent struggle. His eyes were open. They were fixed desparingly, perhaps unconsciously, upon that small grating which looked into the upper world.

That grating slants upwards, and looks to the west, so that any one confined in that dreary dungeon might be tantalized, on a sweet summer's day, by seeing the sweet blue sky, and occasionally the white clouds flitting by in that freedom which he cannot hope for.

The carol of a bird, too, might reach him there. Alas! sad remembrance of life, and joy, and liberty.

But now all is deepening gloom. The prisoner sees nothing — hears nothing; and the sky is not quite dark.

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That small grating looks like a strange light-patch in the dungeon wall.

Hark! some footstep sounds upon his ear. The creaking of a door follows -- a gleam of light shines into the dungeon, and the tall mysterious-looking figure in the cloak stands before the occupant of that wretched place.

Then comes in the other man, and he carries in his hand writing materials. He stoops to the stone couch on which the prisoner lies, and offers him a pen, as he raises him partially from the miserable damp pallet.

But there is no speculation in the eyes of that oppressed man. In vain the pen is repeatedly placed in his grip, and a document of some length, written on parchment, is spread out before him to sign. In vain is he held up now by both of the men, who have thus mysteriously sought him in his dungeon; he has not power to do as they would wish him. The pen falls from his nerveless grasp, and, with a deep sigh, when they cease to hold him up, he falls heavily back upon the stone couch.

Then the two men looked at each other for about a minute silently; after which he who was the shorter of the two raised one hand, and, in a voice of such concentrated hatred and passion as was horrible to hear, he said, --

"D -- n!"

The reply of the other was a laugh; and then he took the light from the floor, and motioned the one who seemed so little able to control his feelings of bitterness and disappointment to leave the place with him.

With a haste and vehemence, then, which showed how much angered he was, the shorter man of the two now rolled up the parchment, and placed it in a breast-pocket of his coat.

He cast a withering look of intense hatred on the form of the nearly-unconscious prisoner, and then prepared to follow the other.

But when they reached the door of the dungeon, the taller man of the two paused, and appeared for a moment or two to be in deep thought; after which he handed the lamp he carried to his companion, and approached the pallet of the prisoner.

He took from his pocket a small bottle, and, raising the head of the feeble and wounded man, he poured some portion of the contents into his mouth, and watched him swallow it.

The other looked on in silence, and then they both slowly left the dreary dungeon. * * * *

The wind rose, and the night had deepened into the utmost darkness. The blackness of a night, unilluminated by the moon, which would not now rise for some hours, was upon the ancient ruins. All was calm and still, and no one would have supposed that aught human was within those ancient, dreary looking walls.

Time will show who it was who lay in that unwholesome dungeon, as well as who were they who visited him so mysteriously, and retired again with feelings of such evident disappointment with the document it seemed of such importance, at least to one of them, to get that unconscious man to sign.

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Chapter XXX. THE VISIT OF FLORA TO THE VAMPYRE. -- THE OFFER. -- THE SOLEMN ASSEVERATION.

Admiral Bell had, of course, nothing particular to communicate to Flora in the walk he induced her to take with him in the gardens of Bannerworth Hall, but he could talk to her upon a subject which was sure to be a welcome one, namely, Charles Holland.

And not only could he talk to her of Charles, but he was willing to talk of him in the style of enthusiastic commendation which assimilated best with her own feelings. No one but the honest old admiral, who was as violent in his likes and his dislikes as any one could possibly be, could just then have conversed with Flora Bannerworth to her satisfaction of Charles Holland.

He expressed no doubts whatever concerning Charles's faith, and to his mind, now that he had got that opinion firmly fixed in his mind, everybody that held a contrary one he at once denounced as a fool or a rogue.

"Never you mind, Miss Flora," he said; "you will find, I dare say, that all will come right eventually. D -- n me! the only thing that provokes me in the whole business is, that I should have been such an old fool as for a moment to doubt Charles."

"You should have known him better, sir."

"I should, my dear, but I was taken by surprise, you see, and that was wrong, too, for a man who has held a responsible command."

"But the circumstances, dear sir, were of a nature to take everyone by surprise."

"They were, they were. But now, candidly speaking, and I know I can speak candidly to you; do you really think this Varney is the vampyre?"

"I do."

"You do? Well, then, somebody must tackle him, that's quite clear; we can't put up with his fancies always."

"What can be done?"

"Ah, that I don't know, but something must be done, you know. He wants this place; Heaven only knows why or wherefore he has taken such a fancy to it; but he has done so, that is quite clear. If it had a good sea view, I should not be so much surprised; but there's nothing of the sort, so it's no way at all better than any other shore-going stupid sort of house, that you can see nothing but land from."

"Oh, if my brother would but make some compromise with him to restore Charles to us and take the house, me might yet be happy."

"D -- n it! then you still think that he has a hand in spiriting away Charles?"

"Who else could do so?"

"I'll be hanged if I know. I do feel tolerably sure, and I have good deal of reliance upon your opinion, my dear; I say, I do feel tolerably sure: but, if I was d -- d sure, now, I'd soon have it out of him."

"For my sake, Admiral Bell, I wish now to extract one promise from you."

"Say your say, my dear, and I'll promise you."

"You will not then expose yourself to the danger of any personal conflict with that most dreadful man, whose powers of mischief we do not know, and therefore cannot well meet or appreciate."

"Whew! is that what you mean?"

"Yes; you will, I am sure, promise me so much."

"Why, my dear, you see the case is this. In affairs of fighting, the less ladies interfere the better."

"Nay, why so?"

"Because -- because, you see, a lady has no reputation for courage to keep up. Indeed, it's rather the other way, for we dislike a bold woman as much as we hold in contempt a cowardly man."

"But if you grant to us females that in consequence of our affections, we are not courageous, you must likewise grant how much we are doomed to suffer from the dangers of those whom we esteem."

"You would be the last person in the world to esteem a coward."

"Certainly. But there is more true courage often in not fighting than in entering into a contest."

"You are right enough there, my dear."

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"Under ordinary circumstances, I should not oppose your carrying out the dictates of your honour, but now, let me entreat you not to meet this dreadful man, if man he can be called, when you know not how unfair the contest may be."

"Unfair?"

"Yes. May he not have some means of preventing you from injuring him, and of overcoming you, which no mortal possesses?"

"He may."

"Then the supposition of such a case ought to be sufficient ground for at once inducing you to abandon all idea of meeting with him."

"My dear, I'll consider of this matter."

"Do so."

"There is another thing, however, which now you will permit me to ask of you as a favour."

"It is granted ere it is spoken."

"Very good. Now you must not be offended with what I am going to say, because, however it may touch that very proper pride which you, and such as you, are always sure to possess, you are fortunately at all times able to call sufficient judgment to your aid to enable you to see what is really offensive and what is not."

"You alarm me by such a preface."

"Do I? then here goes at once. Your brother Henry, poor fellow, has enough to do, has he not, to make all ends meet."

A flush of excitement came over Flora's cheek as the old admiral thus bluntly broached a subject of which she already knew the bitterness to such a spirit as her brother's.

"You are silent," continued the old man; "by that I guess I am not wrong in my supposition; indeed it is hardly a supposition at all, for Master Charles told me as much, and no doubt he had it from a correct quarter."

"I cannot deny it, sir."

"Then don't. It ain't worth denying, my dear. Poverty is no crime, but, like being born a Frenchman, it's a d — — d misfortune."

Flora could scarcely refuse a smile, as the nationality of the old admiral peeped out even in the midst of his most liberal and best feelings.

"Well," he continued, "I don't intend that he shall have so much trouble as he has had. The enemies of his king and his country shall free him from his embarrassments."

"The enemies?"

"Yes; who else?"

"You speak in riddles, sir."

"Do I? Then I'll soon make the riddles plain. When I went to sea I was worth nothing — as poor as a ship's cat after the crew had been paid off for a month. Well, I began fighting away as hard and fast as I could, and the more I fought, and the more hard knocks I gave and took, the more money I got."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; prize after prize we hauled into port, and at last the French vessels wouldn't come out of their harbours."

"What did you do then?"

"What did we do then? Why what was the most natural thing in the whole world for us to do, we did."

"I cannot guess."

"Well, I am surprised at that. Try again."

"Oh, yes; I can guess now. How could I have been so dull? You went and took them out."

"To be sure we did — to be sure we did, my dear; that's how we managed them. And, do you see, at the end of the war I found myself with lots of prize money, all wrung from old England's enemies, and I intend that some of it shall find its way to your brother's pocket; and you see that will bear out just what I said, that the enemies of his king and his country shall free him from his difficulties — don't you see?"

"I see your noble generosity, admiral."

"Noble fiddlesticks! Now I have mentioned this matter to you, my dear, and I don't so much mind talking to you about such matters as I should to your brother, I want you to do me the favour of managing it all for me."

"How, sir?"

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"Why, just this way. You must find out how much money will free your brother just now from a parcel of botherations that beset him, and then I will give it to you, and you can hand it to him, you see, so I need not say anything about it; and if he speaks to me on the subject at all, I can put him down at once by saying, 'avast there, it's no business of mine.'"

"And can you, dear admiral, imagine that I could conceal the generous source from where so much assistance came?"

"Of course; it will come from you. I take a fancy to make you a present of a sum of money; you do with it as you please — it's yours, and I have no right and no inclination to ask you what use you put it to."

Tears gushed from the eyes of Flora as she tried to utter some word, but could not. The admiral swore rather fearfully, and pretended to wonder much what on earth she could be crying for. At length, after the first gush of feeling was over, she said, —

"I cannot accept of so much generosity, sir — I dare not."

"Dare not!"

"No; I should think meanly of myself were I to take advantage of the boundless munificence of your nature."

"Take advantage! I should like to see anybody take advantage of me, that's all."

"I ought not to take the money of you. I will speak to my brother, and well I know how much he will appreciate the noble, generous offer, my dear sir."

"Well, settle it your own way, only remember I have a right to do what I like with my own money."

"Undoubtedly."

"Very good. Then as that is undoubted, whatever I lend to him, mind I give to you, so it's as broad as it's long, as the Dutchman said, when he looked at the new ship that was built for him, and you may as well take it yourself you see, and make no more fuss about it."

"I will consider," said Flora, with much emotion — "between this time and the same hour to-morrow I will consider, sir, and if you can find any words more expressive of heartfelt gratitude than others, pray imagine that I have used them with reference to my own feelings towards you for such an unexampled offer of friendship."

"Oh, bother — stuff."

The admiral now at once changed the subject, and began to talk of Charles — a most grateful theme to Flora, as may well be supposed. He related to her many little particulars connected with him which all tended to place his character in a most amiable light, and as her ear drank in the words of commendation of him she loved, what sweeter music could there be to her than the voice of that old weather-beaten rough-spoken man.

"The idea," he added, to a warm eulogium he had uttered concerning Charles — "the idea that he could write those letters my dear, is quite absurd."

"It is, indeed. Oh, that we could know what had become of him!"

"We shall know. I don't think but what he's alive. Something seems to assure me that we shall some of these days look upon his face again."

"I am rejoiced to hear you say so."

"We will stir heaven and earth to find him. If he were killed, do you see, there would have been some traces of him now at hand; besides, he would have been left lying where the rascals attacked him."

Flora shuddered.

"But don't you fret yourself. You may depend that the sweet little cherub that sits up aloft has looked after him."

"I will hope so."

"And now, my dear, Master Henry will soon be home, I am thinking, and as he has quite enough disagreeables on his own mind to be able to spare a few of them, you will take the earliest opportunity, I am sure, of acquainting him with the little matter we have been talking about, and let me know what he says."

"I will — I will."

"That's right. Now, go in doors, for there's a cold air blowing here, and you are a delicate plant rather just now — go in and make yourself comfortable and easy. The worst storm must blow over at last."

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Chapter XXXI. SIR FRANCIS VARNEY AND HIS MYSTERIOUS VISITOR. -- THE STRANGE CONFERENCE.

Sir Francis Varney is in what he calls his own apartment. It is night, and a dim and uncertain light from a candle which had been long neglected, only serves to render obscurity more perplexing. The room is a costly one. One replete with all the appliances of refinement and luxury which the spirit and genius of the age could possibly supply him with, but there is upon his brow the marks of corroding care, and little does that most mysterious being seem to care for all the rich furnishings of that apartment in which he sits.

His cadaverous-looking face is even paler and more death-like-looking than usual; and, if it can be conceived possible that such a one can feel largely interested in human affairs, to look at him, we could well suppose that some interest of no common magnitude was at stake.

Occasionally, too, he muttered some unconnected words, no doubt mentally filling up the gaps which rendered the sentences incomplete, and being unconscious, perhaps, that he was giving audible utterance to any of his dark and secret meditations.

At length he rose, and with an anxious expression of countenance, he went to the window, and looked out into the darkness of the night. All was still, and not an object was visible. It was that pitchy darkness without, which, for some hours, when the moon is late in lending her reflected beams, comes over the earth's surface.

"It is near the hour," he muttered "it is now very near the hour; surely he will come, and yet I know not why I should fear him, although I seem to tremble at the thought of his approach. He will surely come. Once a year -- only once does he visit me, and then 'tis but to take the price which he has compelled me to pay for that existence, which but for him had been long since terminated. Sometimes I devoutly wish it were."

With a shudder he returned to the seat he had so recently left, and there for some time he appeared to meditate in silence.

Suddenly now, a clock, which was in the hall of that mansion he had purchased, sounded the hour loudly.

"The time has come," said Sir Francis. "The time has come, he will surely soon be here. Hark! hark!"

Slowly and distinctly he counted the strokes of the clock, and, when they had ceased, he exclaimed, with sudden surprise --

"Eleven! But eleven! How have I been deceived. I thought the hour of midnight was at hand."

He hastily consulted the watch he wore, and then he indeed found, that whatever he had been looking forward to with dread for some time past, as certain to ensue, at or about twelve o'clock, had yet another hour in which to prey upon his imagination.

"How could I have made so grievous an error?" he exclaimed. "Another hour of suspense and wonder as to whether that man be among the living or the dead. I have thought of raising my hand against his life, but some strange mysterious feeling has always staid me; and I have let him come and go freely, while an opportunity might well have served me to put such a design into execution. He is old, too -- very old, and yet he keeps death at a distance. He looked pale, but far from unwell or failing, when last I saw him. Alas! a whole hour yet to wait. I would that this interview were over."

That extremely well known and popular disease called the fidgets, now began, indeed, to torment Sir Francis Varney. He could not sit -- he could not walk, and, somehow or another, he never once seemed to imagine that from the wine cup he should experience any relief, although, upon a side table, there stood refreshments of that character. And thus some more time passed away, and he strove to cheat it of its weariness by thinking of a variety of subjects; but as the fates would have it, there seemed not one agreeable reminiscence in the mind of that most inexplicable man, and the more he plunged into the recesses of memory the more uneasy, not to say almost terrified, he looked and became. A shuddering nervousness came across him, and, for a few moments, he sat as if he were upon the point of fainting. By a vigorous effort, however, he shook this off, and then placing before him the watch, which now indicated about the quarter past eleven, he strove with a calmer aspect to wait the coming of him whose presence, when he did come, would really be a great terror, since the very thought beforehand produced so much hesitation and dismay.

In order too, if possible, then to further withdraw himself from a too painful consideration of those terrors,

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which in due time the reader will be acquainted with the cause of, he took up a book, and plunging into its contents, he amused his mind for a time with the following brief narrative: —

The wind howled round the gable ends of Bridport House in sudden and furious gusts, while the inmates sat by the fire-side, gazing in silence upon the blazing embers of the huge fire that shed a red and bright light all over the immense apartment in which they all sat.

It was an ancient looking place, very large, and capable of containing a number of guests. Several were present.

An aged couple were seated in tall high straight-backed chairs. They were the owners of that lordly mansion, and near them sat two young maidens of surpassing beauty; they were dissimilar and yet there was a slight likeness, but of totally different complexions.

The one had tresses of raven black; eyebrows, eyelashes, and eyes were all of the same hue; she was a beautiful and proud-looking girl, her complexion clear, with the hue of health upon her cheeks, while a smile played around her lips. The glance of the eye was sufficient to thrill through the whole soul.

The other maiden was altogether different; her complexion altogether fairer — her hair of sunny chestnut, and her beautiful hazel eyes were shaded by long brown eyelashes, while a playful smile also lit up her countenance. She was the younger of the two.

The attention of the two young maidens had been directed to the words of the aged owner of the house, for he had been speaking a few moments before. There were several other persons present, and at some little distance were many of the domestics who were not denied the privilege of warmth and rest in the presence of their master.

These were not the times, when if servants sat down, they were deemed idle; but the daily task done, then the evening hour was spent by the fire-side.

"The wind howls and moans," said an aged domestic, "in an awful manner. I have never heard the like."

"It seems as though some imprisoned spirit was waiting for the repose that had been denied on earth," said the old lady, as she shifted her seat and gazed steadily on the fire.

"Ay," said her aged companion, "it is a windy night, and there will be a storm before long, or I'm mistaken."

"It was just such a night as that my son Henry left his home," said Mrs. Bradley, "just such another — only it had the addition of sleet and rain."

The old man sighed at the mention of his son's name, a tear stood in the eyes of the maidens, while one looked silently at the other, and seemed to exchange glances.

"I would that I might again see him before my body seeks its final home in the cold remorseless grave."

"Mother," said the fairest of the two maidens, "do not talk thus, let us hope that we yet may have many years of happiness together."

"Many, Emma?"

"Yes, mamma, many."

"Do you know that I am very old, Emma, very old indeed, considering what I have suffered, such a life of sorrow and ill health is at least equal to thirty years added to my life."

"You may have deceived yourself, aunt," said the other maiden; "at all events, you cannot count upon life as certain, for the strongest often go first, while those who seem much more likely to fall, by care, as often live in peace and happiness."

"But I lead no life of peace and happiness, while Henry Bradley is not here; besides, my life might be passed without me seeing him again."

"It is now two years since he was here last," said the old man,

"This night two years was the night on which he left."

"This night two years?"

"Yes."

"It was this night two years," said one of the servant men, "because old Dame Poutlet had twins on that night."

"A memorable circumstance."

"And one died a twelvemonth old," said the man; "and she had a dream which foretold the event."

"Ay, ay."

"Yes, and moreover she's had the same dream again last Wednesday was a week," said the man.

"And lost the other twin?"

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"Yes sir, this morning."

"Omens multiply," said the aged man; "I would that it would seem to indicate the return of Henry to his home."

"I wonder where he can have gone to, or what he could have done all this time; probably he may not be in the land of the living."

"Poor Henry," said Emma.

"Alas, poor boy! We may never see him again — it was a mistaken act of his, and yet he knew not otherwise how to act or escape his father's displeasure."

"Say no more — say no more upon that subject; I dare not listen to it. God knows I know quite enough," said Mr. Bradley; "I knew not he would have taken my words so to heart as he did."

"Why," said the old woman, "he thought you meant what you said."

There was a long pause, during which all gazed at the blazing fire, seemingly wrapt in their own meditation.

Henry Bradley, the son of the aged couple, had apparently left that day two years, and wherefore had he left the home of his childhood? wherefore had he, the heir to large estates, done this?

He had dared to love without his father's leave, and had refused the offer his father made him of marrying a young lady whom he had chosen for him, but whom he could not love. It was as much a matter of surprise to the father that the son should refuse, as it was to the son that his father should contemplate such a match.

"Henry," said the father, "you have been thought of by me. I have made proposals for marrying you to the daughter of our neighbour, Sir Arthur Onslow."

"Indeed, father!"

"Yes; I wish you to go there with me to see the young lady."

"In the character of a suitor?"

"Yes," replied the father, "certainly; it's high time you were settled."

"Indeed, I would rather not go, father; I have no intention of marrying just yet. I do not desire to do so."

This was an opposition that Mr. Bradley had not expected from his son, and which his imperious temper could ill brook, and with a darkened brow he said, —

"It is not much, Henry, that I trespass upon your obedience; but when I do so, I expect that you will obey me."

"But, father, this matter affects me for my whole life."

"That is why I have deliberated so long and carefully over it."

"But it is not unreasonable that I should have a voice in the affair, father, since it may render me miserable."

"You shall have a voice."

"Then I say no to the whole regulation," said Henry, decisively.

"If you do so you forfeit my protection, much more favour; but you had better consider over what you have said. Forget it, and come with me."

"I cannot."

"You will not?"

"No, father; I cannot do as you wish me; my mind is fully made up upon that matter."

"And so is mine. You either do as I would have you, or you leave the house, and seek your own living and you are a beggar."

"I should prefer being such," said Henry, "than to marry any young lady, and be unable to love her."

"That is not required."

"No! I am astonished! Not necessary to love the woman you marry!"

"Not at all; if you act justly towards her she ought to be grateful; and it is all that is requisite in the marriage state. Gratitude will beget love, and love in one begets love in the other."

"I will not argue with you, father, upon the matter. You are a better judge than I; you have had more experience."

"I have."

"And it would be useless to speak upon the subject; but of this I can speak — my own resolve — that I will not marry the lady in question."

The son had all the stern resolve of the father, but he had also very good reasons for what he did. He loved, and was beloved in return; and hence he would not break his faith with her whom he loved.

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To have explained this to his father would have been to gain nothing except an accession of anger, and he would have made a new demand upon his (the son's) obedience, by ordering him to discard from his bosom the image that was there indelibly engraven.

"You will not marry her whom I have chosen for your bride?"

"I cannot."

"Do not talk to me of can and can't, when I speak of will and wont. It is useless to disguise the fact. You have your free will in the matter. I shall take no answer but yes or no."

"Then, no, father."

"Good, sir; and now we are strangers."

With that Mr. Bradley turned abruptly from his son, and left him to himself.

It was the first time they had any words or difference together, and it was suddenly and soon terminated.

Henry Bradley was indignant at what had happened; he did not think his father would have acted as he had done in this instance; but he was too much interested in the fate of another to hesitate for a moment. Then came the consideration as to what he should do, now that he had arrived at such a climax.

His first thoughts turned to his mother and sister. He could not leave the house without bidding them good-bye. He determined to see his mother, for his father had left the Hall upon a visit.

Mrs. Bradley and Emma were alone when he entered their apartment, and to them he related all that had passed between himself and father.

They besought him to stay, to remain there, or at least in that neighbourhood; but he was resolved to quit the place altogether for a time, as he could do nothing there, and he might chance to do something else—where.

Upon this, they got together all the money and such jewels as they could spare which in all amounted to a considerable sum; then taking an affectionate leave of his mother and sister, Henry left the Hall — not before he had taken a long and affectionate farewell of one other who lived within those walls.

This was no other than the raven-eyed maiden who sat by the fire-side, and listened attentively to the conversation that was going on. She was his love — she, a poor cousin. For her sake he had braved all his father's anger, and attempted to seek his fortune abroad.

This done, he quietly left the Hall, without giving anyone any intimation of where he was going.

Old Mr. Bradley, when he had said so much to his son, was highly incensed at what he deemed his obstinacy; and he thought the threat hanging over him would have had a good effect; but he was amazed when he discovered that Henry had instead left the Hall, and he knew not whither.

For some time he comforted himself with the assurance that he would, he must return; but, alas! he came not, and this was the second anniversary of that melancholy day which no one more repented of and grieved for, than did poor Mr. Bradley.

"Surely, surely he will return, or let us know where he is," he said; "he cannot be in need, else he would have written to us for aid."

"No, no," said Mrs. Bradley; "it is, I fear, because he has not written, that he is in want; he would never write if he was in poverty, lest he should cause us unhappiness at his fate. Were he doing well, we should hear of it, for he would be proud of the result of his own unaided exertions."

"Well, well," said Mr. Bradley. "I can say no more; if I was hasty, so was he; it is passed. I would forgive all the past if I could but see him once again — once again!"

"How the wind howls," added the aged man; "and it's getting worse and worse."

"Yes, and the snow is coming down now in style," said one of the servants, who brought in some fresh logs which were piled up on the fire, and he shook the white flakes off his clothes.

"It will be a heavy fall before morning," said one of the men.

"Yes, it has been gathering for some days; it will be much warmer than it has been when it is all down."

"So it will — so it will."

At that moment there was a knocking at the gate, and the dogs burst into a dreadful uproar from their kennels.

"Go, Robert," said Mr. Bradley "and see who it is that knocks such a night as this; it is not fit or safe that a dog should be out in it"

The man went out, and shortly returned, saying, —

"So please you, sir, there is a traveller that has missed his way, and desires to know if he can obtain shelter

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here, or if any one can be found to guide him to the nearest inn."

"Bid him come in; we shall lose no warmth because there is one more before the fire."

The stranger entered, and said, --

"I have missed my way, and the snow comes down so thick and fast, and whirled in such eddies, that I fear, by myself, I should fall into some drift and perish before morning."

"Do not speak of it, sir," said Mr. Bradley; "such a night as this is a sufficient apology for the request you make and an inducement to me to grant it most willingly."

"Thanks," replied the stranger; "the welcome is most seasonable."

"Be seated, sir; take your seat by the ingle; it is warm."

The stranger seated himself, and seemed lost in reflection, as he gazed intently on the blazing logs. He was a robust man, with great whiskers and beard, and, to judge from his outward habiliments, he was a stout man.

Have you travelled far?"

"I have, sir."

"You appear to belong to the army, if I mistake not?"

"I do, sir."

There was a pause; the stranger seemed not inclined to speak of himself much; but Mr. Bradley continued, --

"Have you come from foreign service, sir? I presume you have."

"Yes; I have not been in this country more than six days."

"Indeed; shall we have peace think you?"

"I do so and I hope it may be so, for the sake of many who desire to return to their native land, and to those they love best."

Mr. Bradley heaved a deep sigh, which was echoed softly by all present, and the stranger looked from one to another, with a hasty glance, and then turned his gaze upon the fire.

"May I ask, sir, if you have any person whom you regard in the army -- any relative?"

"Alas! I have -- perhaps, I ought to say I had a son. I know not, however, where he is gone."

"Oh! a runaway; I see."

"Oh, no; he left because there were some family differences, and now, I would, that he were once more here."

"Oh!" said the stranger, softly, "differences and mistakes will happen now and then, when least desired."

At this moment, an old hound who had lain beside Ellen Mowbray, she who wore the coal-black tresses, lifted his head at the difference in sound that was noticed in the stranger's voice. He got up and walked up to him, and began to smell around him, and, in another moment, he rushed at him with a cry of joy and began to lick and caress him in the most extravagant manner. This was followed by a cry of joy in all present.

"It is Henry!" exclaimed Ellen Mowbray, rising and rushing into his arms. It was Henry, and he threw off the several coats he had on, as well as the large beard he wore to disguise himself.

"The meeting was a happy one. There was not a more joyful house than that within many miles around. Henry was restored to the arms of those who loved him, and, in a month, a wedding was celebrated between him and his cousin Ellen. * * * *

Sir Francis Varney glanced at his watch. It indicated but five minutes to twelve o'clock, and he sprang to his feet. Even as he did so, a loud knocking at the principal entrance to his house awakened every echo within its walls.

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Chapter XXXII. THE THOUSAND POUNDS. -- THE STRANGER'S PRECAUTIONS.

Varney moved not now nor did he speak, but, like a statue, he stood with his unearthly looking eyes rivetted upon the door of the apartment. In a few moments one of his servants came, and said --

"Sir, a person is here, who says he wants to see you. He desired me to say, that he had ridden far, and that moments were precious when the tide of life was ebbing fast."

"Yes! yes!" gasped Varney; "admit him I know him! Bring him here? It is -- an -- old friend -- of mine."

He sank into a chair, and still he kept his eyes fixed upon that door through which his visitor must come. Surely some secret of dreadful moment must be connected with him whom Sir Francis expected -- dreaded -- and yet dared not refuse to see. And now a footstep approaches -- a slow and a solemn footstep -- it pauses a moment at the door of the apartment, and then the servant flings it open, and a tall man enters. He is enveloped in the folds of a horseman's cloak, and there is the clank of spurs upon his heels as he walks into the room.

Varney rose again, but he said not a word; and for a few moments they stood opposite each other in silence. The domestic has left the room, and the door is closed, so that there was nothing to prevent them from conversing; and, yet, silent they continued for some minutes. It seemed as if each was most anxious that the other should commence the conversation first.

And yet there was nothing so very remarkable in the appearance of that stranger, which should entirely justify Sir Francis Varney, in feeling so much alarm at his presence. He certainly was a man past the prime of life; and he looked like one who had battled much with misfortune, and as if time had not passed so lightly over his brow, but that it had left deep traces of its progress.

The only thing positively bad about his countenance, was to be found in his eyes. There there was a most ungracious and sinister expression, a kind of lurking and suspicious look, as if he were always resolving in his mind some deep laid scheme, which might be sufficient to circumvent the whole of mankind.

Finding, probably, that Varney would not speak first, he let his cloak fall more loosely about him, and in a low, deep tone, he said,

"I presume I was expected?"

"You were," said Varney. "It is the day, and it is the hour."

"You are right, I like to see you so mindful. You don't improve in looks since -- "

"Hush -- hush! no more of that; can we not meet without a dreadful allusion to the past? There needs nothing to remind me of it; and your presence here now shows that you are not forgetful. Speak not of that fearful episode. Let no words combine to place it in a tangible shape to human understanding. I cannot, dare not, hear you speak of that."

"It is well," said the stranger; "as you please. Let our interview be brief. You know my errand?"

"I do. So fearful a drag upon limited means, is not likely to be readily forgotten."

"Oh, you are too ingenious -- too full of well laid schemes, and to apt and ready in their execution, to feel, as any fearful drag, the conditions of our bargain. Why do you look at me so earnestly?"

"Because," said Varney -- and he trembled as he spoke -- "because each lineament of your countenance brings me back to the recollection of the only scene in life that made me shudder, and which I cannot think of, even with the indifference of contempt. I see it all before my mind's eye, coming in frightful panoramic array, those incidents, which even to dream of, are sufficient to drive the soul to madness; the dread of this annual visit, hangs upon me like a dark cloud upon my very heart; it sits like some foul incubus, destroying its vitality and dragging me, from day to day, nearer to that tomb, from whence not as before, I can emerge."

"You have been among the dead?" said the stranger.

"I have."

"And yet are mortal?"

"Yes," repeated Varney, "yes, and yet am mortal."

"It was I that plucked you back to that world, which, to judge from your appearance, has had since that eventful period but few charms for you. By my faith you look like -- "

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"Like what I am," interrupted Varney. "This is a subject that once a year gets frightfully renewed between us. For weeks before your visit I am haunted by frightful recollections, and it takes me many weeks after you are gone, before I can restore myself to serenity. Look at me; am I not an altered man?"

"In faith you are," said the stranger. "I have no wish to press upon you painful recollections. And yet 'tis strange to me that upon such a man as you, the event to which you allude should produce so terrible an impression."

"I have passed through the agony of death," said Varney, "and have again endured the torture — for it is such — of the re-union of the body and the soul; not having endured so much, not the faintest echo of such feelings can enter into your imagination."

"There may be truth in that, and yet, like a fluttering moth round a flame, it seems to me, that when I do see you, you take a terrific kind of satisfaction in talking of the past."

"That is strictly true," said Varney; "the images with which my mind is filled are frightful. Pent up do they remain for twelve long months. I can speak to you, and you only, without disguise, and thus does it seem to me that I get rid of the uneasy load of horrible imaginings. When you are gone, and have been gone a sufficient lapse of time, my slumbers are not haunted with frightful images — I regain a comparative peace, until the time slowly comes round again, when we are doomed to meet."

"I understand you. You seem well lodged here?"

"I have ever kept my word, and sent to you, telling you where I am."

"You have, truly. I have no shadow of complaint to make against you. No one could have more faithfully performed his bond than you have. I give you ample credit for all that, and long may you live still to perform your conditions."

"I dare not deceive you, although to keep such faith I may be compelled to deceive a hundred others."

"Of that I cannot judge. Fortune seems to smile upon you; you have not as yet disappointed me."

"And will not now," said Varney. "The gigantic and frightful penalty of disappointing you, stares me in the face. I dare not do so."

He took from his pocket, as he spoke, a clasped book, from which he produced several bank notes, which he placed before the stranger.

"A thousand pounds," he said; "that is the agreement."

"It is to the very letter. I do not return to you a thousand thanks — we understand each other better than to waste time with idle compliment. Indeed I will go quite as far as to say, truthfully, that did not my necessities require this amount from you, you should have the boon, for which you pay that price at a much cheaper rate."

"Enough! enough!" said Varney. "It is strange, that your face should have been the last I saw, when the world closed upon me, and the first that met my eyes when I was again snatched back to life! Do you pursue still your dreadful trade?"

"Yes" said the stranger, "for another year, and then, with such a moderate competence as fortune has assigned me, I retire, to make way for younger and abler spirits."

"And then," said Varney, "shall you still require of me such an amount as this?"

"No; this is my last visit but one. I shall be just and liberal towards you. You are not old; and I have no wish to become the clog of your existence. As I have before told you, it is my necessity, and not my inclination, that sets the value upon the service I rendered you."

"I understand you, and ought to thank you. And in reply to so much courtesy, be assured, that when I shudder at your presence, it is not that I regard you with horror, as an individual, but it is because the sight of you awakens mournfully the remembrance of the past."

"It is clear to me," said the stranger; "and now I think we part with each other in a better spirit than we ever did before; and when we meet again, the remembrance that it is the last time, will clear away the gloom that I now find hanging over you."

"It may! it may! With what an earnest gaze you still regard me!"

"I do. It does appear to me most strange, that time should not have obliterated the effects which I thought would have ceased with their cause. You are no more the man that in my recollection you once were, than I am like a sporting child."

"And I never shall be," said Varney; "never — never again! This self-same look which the hand of death had

placed upon me, I shall ever wear. I shudder at myself, and as I oft perceive the eye of idle curiosity fixed steadfastly upon me, I wonder in my inmost heart, if even the wildest guesser hits upon the cause why I am not like unto other men?"

"No. Of that you may depend there is no suspicion; but I will leave you now; we part such friends, as men situated as we are can be. Once again shall we meet, and then farewell for ever."

"Do you leave England, then?"

"I do. You know my situation in life. It is not one which offers me inducements to remain. In some other land, I shall win the respect and attention I may not hope for here. There my wealth will win many golden opinions; and casting, as best I may, the veil of forgetfulness over my former life, my declining years may yet be happy. This money, that I have had of you from time to time, has been more pleasantly earned than all beside, wrung, as it has been, from your fears, still have I taken it with less reproach. And now, farewell!"

Varney rang for a servant to show the stranger from the house. And without another word they parted. Then, when he was alone, that mysterious owner of that costly home drew a long breath of apparently exquisite relief.

"That is over! — that is over!" he said. "He shall have the other thousand pounds, perchance, sooner than he thinks. With all expedition I will send it to him. And then on that subject I shall be at peace. I shall have paid a large sum; but that which I purchased was to me priceless. It was my life! — it was my life itself! That possession which the world's wealth cannot restore! and shall I grudge these thousands, which have found their way into this man's hands? No! 'Tis true, that existence, for me, has lost some of its most resplendent charms. 'Tis true, that I have no earthly affections, and that shunning companionship with all, I am alike shunned by all; and yet, while the life-blood still will circulate within my shrunken veins, I cling to vitality."

He passed into an inner room, and taking from a hook, on which it hung, a long, dark-coloured cloak, he enveloped his tall unearthly figure within its folds. Then, with his hat in his hand, he passed out of his house, and appeared to be taking his way towards Bannerworth Hall.

Surely it must be guilt of no common die that could oppress a man so destitute of human sympathies as Sir Francis Varney. The dreadful suspicions that hovered round him with respect to what he was, appeared to gather confirmation from every act of his existence.

Whether or not this man, to whom he felt bound to pay annually so large a sum, was in the secret, and knew him to be something more than earthly, we cannot at present declare; but it would seem from the tenor of their conversation as if such were the fact.

Perchance he had saved him from the corruption of the tomb, by placing out, on some sylvan spot, where the cold moonbeams fell, the apparently lifeless form, and now claimed so large a reward for such a service, and the necessary secrecy contingent upon it.

We say this may be so, and yet again some more natural and rational explanation may unexpectedly present itself; and there may be yet a dark page in Sir Francis Varney's life's volume, which will place him in a light of superadded terrors to our readers.

Time, and the now rapidly accumulating incidents of our tale, will soon tear aside the veil of mystery that now envelopes some of our dramatis personae.

And let us hope that in the development of those incidents we shall be enabled to rescue the beautiful Flora Bannerworth from the despairing gloom that is around her. Let us hope and even anticipate that we shall see her smile again; that the roseate hue of health will again revisit her cheeks, the light buoyancy of her step return, and that as before she may be the joy of all around her, dispensing and receiving happiness.

And, he too, that gallant fearless lover, he whom no chance of time or tide could sever from the object of his fond affections, he who listened to nothing but the dictates of his heart's best feelings, let us indulge a hope that he will have a bright reward, and that the sunshine of a permanent felicity will only seem the brighter for the shadows that for a time have obscured its glory.

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Chapter XXXIII. THE STRANGE INTERVIEW. -- THE CHASE THROUGH THE HALL.

It was with the most melancholy aspect that anything human could well bear, that Sir Francis Varney took his lonely walk, although perhaps in saying so much, probably we are instituting a comparison which circumstances scarcely empower us to do; for who shall say that singular man, around whom a very atmosphere of mystery seemed to be perpetually increasing, was human?

Averse as we are to believe in the supernatural, or even to invest humanity with any preternatural powers, the more singular facts and circumstances surrounding the existence and the acts of that man bring to the mind a kind of shuddering conviction, that if he be indeed really mortal he still must possess some powers beyond ordinary mortality, and be walking the earth for some unhallowed purposes, such as ordinary men with ordinary attributes of human nature can scarcely guess at.

Silently and alone he took his way through that beautiful tract of country, comprehending such picturesque charms of hill and dale which lay between his home and Bannerworth Hall. He was evidently intent upon reaching the latter place by the shortest possible route, and in the darkness of that night, for the moon had not yet risen, he showed no slight acquaintance with the intricacies of that locality, that he was at all enabled to pursue so undeviatingly a track as that which he took.

He muttered frequently to himself low, indistinct words as he went, and chiefly did they seem to have reference to that strange interview he had so recently had with one who, from some combination of circumstances scarcely to be guessed at, evidently exercised a powerful control over him, and was enabled to make a demand upon his pecuniary resources of rather startling magnitude.

And yet, from a stray word or two, which were pronounced more distinctly, he did not seem to be thinking in anger over that interview; but it would appear that it rather had recalled to his remembrance circumstances of a painful and a degrading nature, which time had not been able entirely to obliterate from his recollection.

"Yes, yes," he said, as he paused upon the margin of the wood, to the confines of which he, or what seemed to be he, had once been chased by Marchdale and the Bannerworths -- "yes, the very sight of that man recalls all the frightful pageantry of a horrible tragedy, which I can never -- never forget. Never can it escape my memory, as a horrible, a terrific fact; but it is the sight of this man alone that can recall all its fearful minutia to my mind, and paint to my imagination, in the most vivid colours, every, the least particular connected with that time of agony. These periodical visits much affect me. For months I dread them, and for months I am but slowly recovering from the shocks they give me. 'But once more,' he says -- 'but once more,' and then we shall not meet again. Well, well; perchance before that time arrives, I may be able to possess myself of those resources which will enable me to forestall his visit, and so at least free myself from the pang of expecting him."

He paused at the margin of the wood, and glanced in the direction of Bannerworth Hall. By the dim light which yet showed from out the light sky, he could discern the ancient gable ends, and turret-like windows; he could see the well laid out gardens, and the grove of stately firs that shaded it from the northern blasts, and, as he gazed, a strong emotion seemed to come over him, such as no one could have supposed would for one moment have possessed the frame of one so apparently unconnected with all human sympathies.

"I know this spot well," he said, "and my appearance here on that eventful occasion, when the dread of my approach induced a crime only second to murder itself, was on such a night as this, when all was so still and calm around, and when he who, at the merest shadow of my presence, rather chose to rush on death than be assured it was myself. Curses on the circumstances that so foiled me! I should have been most wealthy. I should have possessed the means of commanding the adulation of those who now hold me but cheaply: but still the time may come. I have a hope yet, and that greatness which I have ever panted for, that magician-like power over my kind, which the possession of ample means alone can give, may yet be mine."

Wrapping his cloak more closely around him, he strode forward with that long, noiseless step which was peculiar to him. Mechanically he appeared to avoid those obstacles of hedge and ditch which impeded his pathway. Surely he had come that road often, or he would not so easily have pursued his way. And now he stood by the edge of a plantation which in some measure protected from trespassers the more private gardens of the

Hall, and there he paused, as if a feeling of irresolution had come over him, or it might be, as indeed it seemed from his subsequent conduct, that he had come without any fixed intention, or if with a fixed intention, without any regular plan of carrying it into effect.

Did he again dream of intruding into any of the chambers of that mansion, with the ghastly aspect of that terrible creation with which, in the minds of its inhabitants, he seemed to be but too closely identified? He was pale, attenuated, and trembled. Could it be that so soon it had become necessary to renew the life-blood in his veins in the awful manner which it is supposed the vampyre brood are compelled to protract their miserable existence?

It might be so, and that he was even now reflecting upon how once more he could kindle the fire of madness in the brain of that beautiful girl, who he had already made so irretrievably wretched.

He leant against an aged tree, and his strange, lustrous-looking eyes seemed to collect every wandering scintillation of light that was around, and to shine with preternatural intensity.

"I must, I will," he said, "be master of Bannerworth Hall. It must come to that. I have set an existence upon its possession, and I will have it; and then, if with my own hands I displace it brick by brick and stone by stone, I will discover that hidden secret which no one but myself now dreams of. It shall be done by force or fraud, by love or by despair, I care not which; the end shall sanctify all means. Ay, even if I wade through blood to my desire, I say it shall be done."

There was a holy and a still calmness about the night much at variance with the storm of angry passion that appeared to be momentarily gathering power in the breast of that fearful man. Not the least sound came from Bannerworth Hall, and it was, only occasionally that from afar off on the night air there came the bark of some watch-dog, or the low of distant cattle. All else was mute save when the deep sepulchral tones of that man, if man he was, gave an impulse to the soft air around him. With a strolling movement as if he were careless if he proceeded in that direction or not, he still went onward toward the house, and now he stood by that little summer-house once so sweet and so dear a retreat, in which the heart-stricken Flora had held her interview with him whom she loved with a devotion unknown to meaner minds.

This spot scarcely commanded any view of the house, for so enclosed was it among evergreens and blooming flowers, that it seemed like a very wilderness of nature, upon which, with liberal hand, she had showered down in wild luxuriance her wildest floral beauties.

In and around that spot the night air was loaded with sweets. The mingled perfume of many flowers made that place seem a very paradise. But oh, how sadly at variance with that beauty and contentedness of nature was he who stood amidst such beauty! All incapable as he was of appreciating its tenderness, or of gathering the faintest moral from its glory.

"Why am I here?" he said. "Here, without fixed design or stability of purpose, like some miser who has hidden his own hoards so deeply within the bowels of the earth he cannot hope that he shall ever again be able to bring them to the light of day. I hover around this spot which I feel -- which I know -- contains my treasure, though I cannot lay my hands upon it, or exult in its glistening beauty."

Even as he spoke he cowered down like some guilty thing, for he heard a fair footstep upon the garden path. So light, so fragile was the step, that, in the light of day, the very hum of summer insects would have drowned the noise: but he heard it, that man of crime -- of unholy and awful impulses. He heard it, and he shrunk down among the shrubs and flowers till he was hidden completely from observation amid a world of fragrant essences.

Was it some one stealthily in that place even as he was, unwelcome or unknown? or was it one who had observed him intrude upon the privacy of those now unhappy precincts, and who was coming to deal upon him that death which, vampyre though he might be, he was yet susceptible of from mortal hands?

The footstep advanced, and lower down he shrunk until his coward-heart beat against the very earth itself. He knew that he was unarmed, a circumstance rare with him, and only to be accounted for by the disturbance of his mind consequent upon the visit of that strange man to his house, those presence had awakened so many conflicting emotions.

Nearer and nearer still came that light footstep, and his deep-seated fears would not let him perceive that it was not the step of caution or of treachery, but owed its lightness to the natural grace and freedom of movement of its owner.

The moon must have arisen, although obscured by clouds, through which it cast but a dim radiance, for the

night had certainly grown lighter; so that although there were no strong shadows cast, a more diffused brightness was about all things, and their outlines looked not so dancing, and confused the one with the other.

He strained his eyes in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, and then his fears for his personal safety vanished, for he saw it was a female form that was slowly advancing towards him.

His first impulse was to rise, for with the transient glimpse he got of it, he knew that it must be Flora Bannerworth; but a second thought, probably one of intense curiosity to know what could possibly have brought her to such a spot at such a time restrained him, and he was quiet. But if the surprise of Sir Francis Varney was great to see Flora Bannerworth at such a time in such a place, we have no doubt, that with the knowledge which our readers have of her, their astonishment would more than fully equal his; and when we come to consider, that since that eventful period when the sanctity of her chamber had been so violated by that fearful midnight visitant, it must appear somewhat strange that she could gather courage sufficient to wander forth alone at such an hour.

Had she no dread of meeting that unearthly being? Did the possibility that she might fall into his ruthless grasp, not come across her mind with a shuddering consciousness of its probability? Had she no reflection that each step she took, was taking her further and further from those who would aid her in all extremities? It would seem not, for she walked onward, unheeding and apparently unthinking of the presence possible or probable, of that bane of her existence.

But let us look at her again. How strange and spectral-like she moves along; there seems no speculation in her countenance but with a strange and gliding step, she walks like some dim shadow of the past in that ancient garden. She is very pale, and on her brow there is the stamp of suffering; her dress is a morning robe, she holds it lightly round her, and thus she moves forward towards that summer-house which probably to her was sanctified by having witnessed those vows of pure affection which came from the lips of Charles Holland, about whose fate there now hung so great a mystery.

Has madness really seized upon the brain of that beautiful girl? Has the strong intellect really sunk beneath the oppression to which it has been subjected? Does she now walk forth with a disordered intellect, the queen of some fantastic realm, viewing the material world with eyes that are not of earth; shunning perhaps that which she should have sought, and, perchance, in her frenzy, seeking that which in a happier frame of mind she would have shunned.

Such might have been the impression of any one who had looked upon her for a moment, and who knew the disastrous scenes through which she had so recently passed; but we can spare our readers the pangs of such a supposition. We have bespoken their love for Flora Bannerworth, and we are certain that she has it; therefore would we spare them, even for a few brief moments, from imagining that cruel destiny had done its worst, and that the fine and beautiful spirit we have so much commended had lost its power of rational reflection. No; thank Heaven, such is not the case. Flora Bannerworth is not mad, but under the strong influence of some eccentric dream, which has pictured to her mind images which have no home but in the airy realms of imagination. She has wandered forth from her chamber to that sacred spot where she had met him she loved, and heard the noblest declaration of truth and constancy that ever flowed from human lips.

Yes, she is sleeping; but, with a precision such as the somnambulist so strangely exerts, she trod the well-known paths slowly, but surely, towards that summer's bower, where her dreams had not told her lay crouching that most hideous spectre of her imagination, Sir Francis Varney. He who stood between her and her heart's best joy; he who had destroyed all hope of happiness, and who had converted her dearest affections into only so many causes of greater disquietude than the blessings they should have been to her. Oh! could she have imagined but for one moment that he was there, with what an eagerness of terror would she have flown back again to the shelter of those walls, where at least was to be found some protection from the fearful vampyre's embrace, and where she would be within hail of friendly hearts, who would stand boldly between her and every thought of harm.

But she knew it not, and onwards she went until the very hem of her garment touched the face of Sir Francis Varney.

And he was terrified — he dared not move — he dared not speak! The idea that she had died, and that this was her spirit, come to wreak some terrible vengeance upon him, for a time possessed him, and so paralysed with fear was he, that he could neither move nor speak.

It had been well if, during that trance of indecision in which his coward heart placed him, Flora had left the

place, and again sought her home; but unhappily such an impulse came not over her; she sat upon that rustic seat, where she had reposed when Charles had clasped her to his heart, and through her very dream the remembrance of that pure affection came across her, and in the tenderest and most melodious accents, she said, --

"Charles! Charles! and do you love me still? No -- no; you have not forsaken me. Save me, save me from the vampyre!"

She shuddered, and Sir Francis Varney heard her weeping.

"Fool that I am," he muttered, "to be so terrified. She sleeps. This is one of the phases which a disordered imagination oft puts on. She sleeps, and perchance this may be an opportunity of further increasing the dread of my visitation, which shall make Bannerworth Hall far too terrible a dwelling-place for her; and well I know, if she goes, they will all go. It will become a deserted house, and that is what I want. A house, too, with such an evil reputation that none but myself, who have created that reputation, will venture within its walls: -- a house, which superstition will point out as the abode of spirits -- a house, as it were, by general opinion, ceded to the vampyre. Yes, it shall be my own; fit dwelling-place for a while for me. I have sworn it shall be mine, and I will keep my oath, little such as I have to do with vows."

He rose, and moved slowly to the row entrance of the summer-house; a movement he could make, without at all disturbing Flora, for the rustic seat, on which she sat, was at its further extremity. And there he stood, the upper part of his gaunt and hideous form clearly defined upon the now much lighter sky, so that if Flora Bannerworth had not been in that trance of sleep in which she really was one glance upward would let her see the hideous companion she had, in that once much-loved spot -- a spot hitherto sacred to the best and noblest feelings, but now doomed for ever to be associated with that terrific spectre of despair.

But she was in no state to see so terrible a sight. Her hands were over her face, and she was weeping still.

"Surely, he loves me," she whispered; "he has said he loved me, and he does not speak in vain. He loves me still, and I shall again look upon his face, a Heaven to me! Charles! Charles! you will come again? Surely, they sin against the divinity of love, who would tell me that you love me not!"

"Ha!" muttered Varney, "this passion is her first, and takes a strong hold on her young heart -- she loves him -- but what are human affections to me? I have no right to count myself in the great muster-roll of humanity. I look not like an inhabitant of the earth, and yet am on it. I love no one, expect no love from any one, but I will make humanity a slave to me; and the lip-service of them who hate me in their hearts, shall be as pleasant jingling music to my ear, as if it were quite sincere! I will speak to this girl; she is not mad -- perchance she may be."

There was a diabolical look of concentrated hatred upon Varney's face, as he now advanced two paces towards the beautiful Flora.

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Chapter XXXIV. THE THREAT. -- ITS CONSEQUENCES. -- THE RESCUE, AND SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S DANGER.

Sir Francis Varney now paused again, and he seemed for a few moments to gloat over the helpless condition of her whom he had so determined to make his victim; there was no look of pity in his face, no one touch of human kindness could be found in the whole expression of those diabolical features; and if he delayed making the attempt to strike terror into the heart of that unhappy, but beautiful being, it could not be from any relenting feeling, but simply, that he wished for a few moments to indulge his imagination with the idea of perfecting his villany more effectually.

And they who would have flown to her rescue, -- they, who for her would have chanced all accidents, ay, even life itself, were sleeping, and knew not of the loved one's danger. She was alone, and far enough from the house, to be driven to that tottering verge where sanity ends, and the dream of madness, with all its terrors, commences.

But still she slept -- if that half-waking sleep could indeed be considered as any thing akin to ordinary slumber -- still she slept, and called mournfully upon her lover's name; and in tender, beseeching accents, that should have melted even the stubbornest hearts did she express her soul's conviction that he loved her still.

The very repetition of the name of Charles Holland seemed to be galling to Sir Francis Varney. He made a gesture of impatience, as she again uttered it, and then stepping forward, he stood within a pace of where she sat, and in a fearfully distinct voice he said, --

"Flora Bannerworth, awake! awake! and look upon me, although the sight blast you, and drive you to despair. Awake! awake!"

It was not the sound of the voice which aroused her from that strange slumber. It is said that those who sleep in that eccentric manner, are insensible to sounds, but that the lightest touch will arouse them in an instant; and so it was in this case, for Sir Francis Varney, as he spoke, laid upon the hand of Flora two of his cold, corpse-like looking fingers. A shriek burst from her lips, and although the confusion of her memory and conceptions was immense, yet she was awake, and the somnambulistic trance had left her.

"Help, help!" she cried. "Gracious Heavens! Where am I?"

Varney spoke not, but he spread out his long, thin arms in such a manner that he seemed almost to encircle her, while he touched her not, so that escape became a matter of impossibility, and to attempt to do so, must have been to have thrown herself into his hideous embrace.

She could obtain but a single view of the face and figure of him who opposed her progress, but, slight as that view was, it more than sufficed. The very extremity of fear came across her, and she sat like one paralysed; the only evidence of existence she gave consisting in the words, --

"The vampyre -- the vampyre!"

"Yes," said Varney, "the vampyre. You know me, Flora Bannerworth -- Varney, the vampyre; your midnight guest at that feast of blood. I am the vampyre. Look upon me well; shrink not from my gaze. You will do well not to shun me, but to speak to me in such a shape that I may learn to love you."

Flora shook as in a convulsion, and she looked as white as any marble statue.

"This is horrible!" she said. "Why does not Heaven grant me the death I pray for?"

"Hold!" said Varney. "Dress not in the false colours of the imagination that which in itself is sufficiently terrific to need none of the allurements of romance. Flora Bannerworth, you are persecuted -- persecuted by me, the vampyre. It is my fate to persecute you; for there are laws to the invisible as well as the visible creation that force even such a being as I am to play my part in the great drama of existence. I am a vampyre; the sustenance that supports this frame must be drawn from the life-blood of others."

"Oh, horror -- horror!"

"But most I do affect the young and beautiful. It is from the veins of such as thou art, Flora Bannerworth, that I would seek the sustenance I'm compelled to obtain for my own exhausted energies. But never yet, in all my long career -- a career extending over centuries of time -- never yet have I felt the soft sensation of human pity till I looked on thee, exquisite piece of excellence. Even at the moment when the reviving fluid from the gushing

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fountain of your veins was warming my heart, I pitied and I loved you. Oh, Flora! even I can now feel the pang of being what I am!"

There was a something in the tone, a touch of sadness in the manner, and a deep sincerity in those words, that in some measure disabused Flora of her fears. She sobbed hysterically, and a gush of tears came to her relief, as, in almost inaudible accents, she said, ---

"May the great God forgive even you!"

"I have need of such a prayer," exclaimed Varney --- "Heaven knows I have need of such a prayer. May it ascend on the wings of the night air to the throne of Heaven. May it be softly whispered by ministering angels to the ear of Divinity. God knows I have need of such a prayer!"

"To hear you speak in such a strain," said Flora, "calms the excited fancy, and strips even your horrible presence of some of its maddening influence."

"Hush," said the vampire, "you must hear more --- you must know more ere you speak of the matters that have of late exercised an influence of terror over you."

"But how came I here?" said Flora, "tell me that. By what more than earthly power have you brought me to this spot? If I am to listen to you, why should it not be at some more likely time and place?"

"I have powers," said Varney, assuming from Flora's words, that she would believe such arrogance --- "I have powers which suffice to bend many purposes to my will --- powers incidental to my position, and therefore is it I have brought you here to listen to that which should make you happier than you are."

"I will attend," said Flora. "I do not shudder now; there's an icy coldness through my veins, but it is the night air --- speak, I will attend you."

"I will. Flora Bannerworth, I am one who has witnessed time's mutations on man and on his works, and I have pitied neither; I have seen the fall of empires, and sighed not that high-reaching ambition was toppled in the dust. I have seen the grave close over the young and the beautiful --- those whom I have doomed by my insatiable thirst for human blood to death, long ere the usual span of life was past, but I never loved till now."

"Can such a being as you," said Flora, "be susceptible of such an earthly passion? "

"And wherefore not?"

"Love is either too much of heaven, or too much of earth to find a home with thee."

"No, Flora, no! it may be that the feeling is born of pity. I will save you --- I will save you from a continuance of the horrors that are assailing you."

"Oh! then may heaven have mercy in your hour of need."

"Amen!"

"And may you even yet know peace and joy above."

"It is a faint and straggling hope --- but if achieved, it will be through the interposition of such a spirit as thine, Flora, which has already exercised so benign an influence upon my tortured soul, as to produce the wish within my heart, to do at least one unselfish action."

"That wish," said Flora, "shall be father to the deed. Heaven has boundless mercy yet."

"For thy sweet sake, I will believe so much, Flora Bannerworth; it is a condition with my hateful race, that if we can find one human heart to love us, we are free. If, in the face of Heaven, you will consent to be mine, you will snatch me from a continuance of my frightful doom; and for your pure sake, and on your merits, shall I yet know heavenly happiness. Will you be mine?"

A cloud swept from off the face of the moon, and a slant ray fell upon the hideous features of the vampire. He looked as if just rescued from some charnel-house, and endowed for a space with vitality to destroy all beauty and harmony in nature, and drive some benighted soul to madness.

"No, no, no!" shrieked Flora, "never!"

"Enough," said Varney, "I am answered. It was a bad proposal. I am a vampyre still."

"Spare me! spare me!"

"Blood!"

Flora sank upon her knees, and uplifted her hands to heaven. "Mercy, mercy!" she said.

"Blood!" said Varney, and she saw his hideous, fang-like teeth. "Blood! Flora Bannerworth, the vampyre's motto. I have asked you to love me, and you will not --- the penalty be yours."

"No, no!" said Flora. "Can it be possible that even you, who have already spoken with judgment and

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precision, can be so unjust? you must feel that, in all respects, I have been a victim, most gratuitously — a sufferer, while there existed no just cause that I should suffer; one who has been tortured, not from personal fault, selfishness, lapse of integrity, or honourable feelings, but because you have found it necessary, for the prolongation of your terrific existence, to attack me as you have done. By what plea of honour, honesty, or justice, can I be blamed for not embracing an alternative which is beyond all human control? — I cannot love you."

"Then be content to suffer. Flora Bannerworth, will you not, even for a time, to save yourself and to save me, become mine?"

"Horrible proposition!"

"Then am I doomed yet, perhaps, for many a cycle of years, to spread misery and desolation around me; and yet I love you with a feeling which has in it more of gratefulness and unselfishness than ever yet found a home within my breast. I would fain serve you, although you cannot save me; there may yet be a chance, which shall enable you to escape from the persecution of my presence."

"Oh! glorious chance!" said Flora. "Which way can it come? tell me how I may embrace it and such grateful feelings as a heart-stricken mourner can offer to him, who has rescued her from her deep affliction, shall yet be yours."

"Hear me, then, Flora Bannerworth, while I state to you some particulars of mysterious existence, of such beings as myself, which never yet have been breathed to mortal ears."

Flora looked intently at him, and listened, while, with a serious earnestness of manner, he detailed to her something of the physiology of the singular class of beings which the concurrence of all circumstances tended to make him appear.

"Flora," he said, "it is not that I am so enamoured of an existence to be prolonged only by such frightful means, which induces me to become a terror to you or to others. Believe me, that if my victims, those whom my insatiable thirst for blood make wretched, suffer much, I, the vampyre, am not without my moments of unutterable agony. But it is a mysterious law of our nature, that as the period approaches when the exhausted energies of life require a new support from the warm, gushing fountain of another's veins, the strong desire to live grows upon us, until, in a paroxysm of wild insanity, which will recognise no obstacles, human or divine, we seek a victim."

"A fearful state!" said Flora.

"It is so; and, when the dreadful repast is over, then again the pulse beats healthfully, and the wasted energies of a strange kind of vitality are restored to us, we become calm again, but with that calmness comes all the horror, all the agony of reflection, and we suffer far more than tongue can tell."

"You have my pity," said Flora; "even you have my pity."

"I might well demand it, if such a feeling held a place within your breast. I might well demand your pity, Flora Bannerworth, for never crawled an abject wretch upon the earth's rotundity, so pitiable as I."

"Go on, go on."

"I will, and with such brief conclusions as I may. Having once attacked any human being, we feel a strange, but terribly impulsive desire again to seek that person for more blood. But I love you, Flora; the small amount of sensibility that still lingers about my preternatural existence, acknowledges in you a pure and better spirit. I would fain save you."

"Oh! tell me how I may escape the terrible infliction."

"That can only be done by flight. Leave this place, I implore you! leave it as quickly as the movement may be made. Linger not — cast not one regretful look behind you on your ancient home. I shall remain in this locality for years. Let me lose sight of you, I will not pursue you; but, by force of circumstances, I am myself compelled to linger here. Flight is the only means by which you may avoid a doom as terrific as that which I endure."

"But tell me," said Flora, after a moment's pause, during which she appeared to be endeavouring to gather courage to ask some fearful question; "tell me if it be true that those who have once endured the terrific attack of a vampyre, become themselves, after death, one of that dread race?"

"It is by such means," said Varney, "that the frightful brood increases; but, time and circumstances must aid the development of the new and horrible existence. You, however, are safe."

"Safe! Oh! say that word again."

"Yes, safe; not once or twice will the vampyre's attack have sufficient influence on your mortal frame, as to

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induce a susceptibility on your part to become coexistent with such as he. The attack must be often repeated, and the termination of mortal existence must be a consequence essential, and direct from those attacks, before such a result may be anticipated."

"Yes, yes; I understand."

"If you were to continue my victim from year to year, the energies of life would slowly waste away, and, till like some faint taper's gleam, consuming more sustenance than it received, the veriest accident would extinguish your existence, and then, Flora Bannerworth, you might become a vampyre."

"Oh! horrible! most horrible!"

"If by chance, or by design, the least glimpse of the cold moonbeams rested on your apparently lifeless remains, you would rise again and be one of us — a terror to yourself and a desolation to all around."

"Oh! I will fly from here," said Flora. "The hope of escape from so terrific and dreadful a doom shall urge me onward; if flight can save me — flight from Bannerworth Hall, I will pause not until continents and oceans divide us."

"It is well. I'm able now thus calmly to reason with you. A few short months more and I shall feel the languor of death creeping over me, and then will come that mad excitement of the brain, which, were you hidden behind triple doors of steel, would tempt me again to seek your chamber — again to seize you in my full embrace — again to draw from your veins the means of prolonged life — again to convulse your very soul with terror."

"I need no incentives," said Flora, with a shudder, "in the shape of descriptions of the past, to urge me on."

"You will fly from Bannerworth Hall?"

"Yes, yes!" said Flora, "it shall be so; its very chambers now are hideous with the recollection of scenes enacted in them. I will urge my brothers, my mother, all to leave. And in some distant clime we will find security and shelter. There even we will learn to think of you with more of sorrow than of anger — more pity than reproach — more curiosity than loathing."

"Be it so," said the vampyre; and he clasped his hands, as if with a thankfulness that he had done so much towards restoring peace at least to one, who, in consequence of his acts, had felt such exquisite despair. "Be it so; and even I will hope that the feelings which have induced so desolated and so isolated a being as myself to endeavour to bring peace to one human heart, will plead for me, trumpet-tongued, to Heaven!"

"It will — it will," said Flora.

"Do you think so?"

"I do; and I will pray that the thought may turn to certainty in such a cause."

The vampyre appeared to be much affected; and then he added, —

"Flora, you know this spot has been the scene of a catastrophe fearful to look back upon, in the annals of your family?"

"It has," said Flora. "I know to what you allude; 'tis a matter of common knowledge to all — a sad theme to me, and one I would not court."

"Nor would I oppress you with it. Your father, here, on this very spot, committed that desperate act which brought him uncalled for to the judgment seat of God. I have a strange, wild curiosity upon such subjects. Will you, in return for the good that I have tried to do you, gratify it?"

"I know not what you mean," said Flora.

"To be more explicit, then, do you remember the day on which your father breathed his last?"

"Too well — too well."

"Did you see him or converse with him shortly before that desperate act was committed?"

"No; he shut himself up for some time in a solitary chamber."

"Ha! what chamber?"

"The one in which I slept myself on the night — "

"Yes, yes; the one with the portrait — that speaking portrait — the eyes of which seem to challenge an intruder as he enters the apartment."

"The same."

"For hours shut up there!" added Varney, musingly; "and from thence he wandered to the garden, where, in this summer house, he breathed his last?"

"It was so."

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"Then, Flora, ere I bid you adieu -- "

These words were scarcely uttered, when there was a quick, hasty footstep, and Henry Bannerworth appeared behind Varney, in the very entrance of the summer-house.

"Now," he cried, "for revenge! Now, foul being, blot upon the earth's surface, horrible imitation of humanity, if mortal arm can do aught against you, you shall die!"

A shriek came from the lips of Flora, and flinging herself past Varney, who stepped aside, she clung to her brother, who made an unavailing pass with his sword at the vampyre. It was a critical moment; and had the presence of mind of Varney deserted him in the least, unarmed as he was, he must have fallen beneath the weapon of Henry. To spring, however, up the seat which Flora had vacated, and to dash out some of the flimsy and rotten wood-work at the back of the summer-house by the propulsive power of his whole frame, was the work of a moment; and before Henry could free himself from the clinging embrace of Flora, Varney, the vampyre was gone, and there was no greater chance of his capture than on the former occasion, when he was pursued in vain from the Hall to the wood, in the intricacies of which he was so entirely lost.

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Chapter XXXV. THE EXPLANATION. -- MARCHDALE'S ADVICE. -- THE PROJECTED REMOVAL, AND THE ADMIRAL'S ANGER.

This extremely sudden movement on the part of Varney was certainly as unexpected as it was decisive. Henry had imagined, that by taking possession of the only entrance to the summer-house, he must come into personal conflict with the being who had worked so much evil for him and his; and that he should so suddenly have created for himself another mode of exit, certainly never occurred to him.

"For Heaven's sake, Flora," he said, "unhand me; this is a time for action."

"But, Henry, Henry, hear me."

"Presently, presently, dear Flora; I will yet make another effort to arrest the headlong flight of Varney."

He shook her off, perhaps with not more roughness than was necessary to induce her to forego her grasp of him, but in a manner that fully showed he intended to be free; and then he sprang through the same aperture whence Varney had disappeared, just as George and Mr. Marchdale arrived at the door of the summer-house.

It was nearly morning, so that the fields were brightening up with the faint radiance of the coming day; and when Henry reached a point which he knew commanded an extensive view, he paused, and ran his eye eagerly along the landscape, with a hope of discovering some trace of the fugitive. Such, however, was not the case; he saw nothing, heard nothing of Sir Francis Varney; and then he turned, and called loudly to George to join him, and was immediately replied to by his brother's presence, accompanied by Marchdale.

Before, however, they could exchange a word, a rattling discharge of fire-arms took place from one of the windows and they heard the admiral, in a loud voice, shouting, --

"Broadside to broadside! Give it them again, Jack! Hit them between wind and water!" Then there was another rattling discharge, and Henry exclaimed, --

"What is the meaning of that firing?"

"It comes from the admiral's room," said Marchdale. "On my life, I think the old man must be mad. He has some six or eight pistols ranged in a row along the window-sill, and all loaded, so that by the aid of a match they can be pretty well discharged as a volley, which he considers the only proper means of firing upon the vampyre."

"It is so," replied George; "and, no doubt, hearing an alarm, he has commenced operations by firing into the enemy."

"Well, well," said Henry; "he must have his way. I have pursued Varney thus far, and that he has again retreated to the wood, I cannot doubt. Between this and the full light of day, let us at least make an effort to discover his place of retreat. We know the locality as well as he can possibly, and I propose now that we commence an active search."

"Come on, then," said Marchdale. "We are all armed; and I, for one, shall feel no hesitation in taking the life, if it be possible to do so, of that strange being."

"Of that possibility you doubt?" said George, as they hurried on across the meadows.

"Indeed I do, and with reason too. I'm certain that when I fired at him before I hit him; and besides, Flora must have shot him upon the occasion when we were absent, and she used your pistols Henry, to defend herself and her mother."

"It would seem so," said Henry; "and disregarding all present circumstances, if I do meet him, I will put to the proof whether he be mortal or not."

The distance was not great, and they soon reached the margin of the wood; they then separated agreeing to meet within it, at a well-spring, familiar to them all: previous to which each was to make his best endeavour to discover if any one was hidden among the bush-wood or in the hollows of the ancient trees they should encounter on their line of march.

The fact was, that Henry finding that he was likely to pass an exceedingly disturbed, restless night, through agitation of spirits, had, after tossing to and fro on his couch for many hours, wisely at length risen, and determined to walk abroad in the gardens belonging to the mansion, in preference to continuing in such a state of fever and anxiety, as he was in, in his own chamber.

Since the vampyre's dreadful visit, it had been the custom of both the brothers, occasionally, to tap at the

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chamber door of Flora, who, at her own request, now that she had changed her room, and dispensed with any one sitting up with her, wished occasionally to be communicated with by some member of the family.

Henry, then, after rapidly dressing, as he passed the door of her bedroom, was about to tap at it, when to his surprise he found it open, and upon hastily entering it he observed that the bed was empty, and a hasty glance round the apartment convinced him that Flora was not there.

Alarm took possession of him, and hastily arming himself, he roused Marchdale and George, but without waiting for them to be ready to accompany him, he sought the garden, to search it thoroughly in case she should be anywhere there concealed.

Thus it was he had come upon the conference so strangely and so unexpectedly held between Varney and Flora in the summer-house. With what occurred upon that discovery the readers are acquainted.

Flora had promised George that she would return immediately to the house, but when, in compliance with the call of Henry, George and Marchdale had left her alone, she felt so agitated and faint that she began to cling to the trellis work of the little building for a few moments before she could gather strength to reach the mansion.

Two or three minutes might thus have elapsed, and Flora was in such a state of mental bewilderment with all that had occurred, that she could scarce believe it real, when suddenly a slight sound attracted her attention, and through the gap which had been made in the wall of the summer-house, with an appearance of perfect composure, again appeared Sir Francis Varney.

"Flora," he said, quietly returning the discourse which had been broken off, "I am quite convinced now that you will be much the happier for the interview."

"Gracious Heaven!" said Flora, "whence have you come from?"

"I have never left," said Varney.

"But I saw you fly from this spot."

"You did; but it was only to another immediately outside the summer house. I had no idea of breaking off our conference so abruptly."

"Have you anything to add to what you have already stated?"

"Absolutely nothing, unless you have a question to propose to me -- I should have thought you had, Flora. Is there no other circumstance weighing heavily upon your mind, as well as the dreadful visitation I have subjected you to?"

"Yes," said Flora. "What has become of Charles Holland?"

"Listen. Do not discard all hope; when you are far from here you will meet with him again."

"But he has left me."

"And yet he will be able, when you again encounter him, so far to extenuate his seeming perfidy, that you shall hold him as untouched in honour as when first he whispered to you that he loved you."

"Oh, joy! joy!" said Flora; "by that assurance you have robbed misfortune of its sting, and richly compensated me for all that I have suffered."

"Adieu!" said the vampyre. "I shall now proceed to my own home by a different route to that taken by those who would kill me."

"But after this," said Flora, "there shall be no danger; you shall be held harmless, and our departure from Bannerworth Hall shall be so quick, that you will soon be released from all apprehension of vengeance from my brother, and I shall taste again of that happiness which I thought had fled from me for ever."

"Farewell," said the vampyre; and folding his cloak closely around him, he strode from the summer-house, soon disappearing from her sight behind the shrubs and ample vegetation with which that garden abounded.

Flora sunk upon her knees, and uttered a brief, but heartfelt, thanksgiving to Heaven for this happy change in her destiny. The hue of health faintly again visited her cheeks and as she now, with a feeling of more energy and strength than she had been capable of exerting for many days, walked towards the house, she felt all that delightful sensation which the mind experiences when it is shaking off the trammels of some serious evil which it delights now to find that the imagination has attired in far worse colours than the facts deserved.

It is scarcely necessary, after this, to say that the search in the wood for Sir Francis Varney was an unproductive one, and that the morning dawned upon the labours of the brothers and of Mr. Marchdale, without their having discovered the least indication of the presence of Varney. Again puzzled and confounded, they stood on the margin of the wood, and looked sadly towards the brightening windows of Bannerworth Hall, which were

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now reflecting with a golden radiance the slant rays of the morning sun.

"Foiled again," remarked Henry, with a gesture of impatience; "foiled again, and as completely as before. I declare that I will fight this man, let our friend the admiral say what he will against such a measure I will meet him in mortal combat; he shall consummate his triumph over our whole family by my death, or I will rid the world and ourselves of so frightful a character."

"Let us hope," said Marchdale, "that some other course may be adopted, which shall put an end to these proceedings."

"That," exclaimed Henry, "is to hope against all probability; what other course can be pursued? Be this Varney man or devil, he has evidently marked us for his prey."

"Indeed, it would seem so," remarked George; "but yet he shall find that we will not fall so easily; he shall discover that if poor Flora's gentle spirit has been crushed by these frightful circumstances, we are of a sterner mould."

"He shall," said Henry; "I for one will dedicate my life to this matter. I will know no more rest than is necessary to recruit my frame, until I have succeeded in overcoming this monster; I will seek no pleasure here, and will banish from my mind all else that may interfere with that one fixed pursuit. He or I must fall."

"Well spoken," said Marchdale; "and yet I hope that circumstances may occur to prevent such a necessity of action, and that probably you will yet see that it will be wise and prudent to adopt a milder and a safer course."

"No, Marchdale, you cannot feel as we feel. You look on more as a spectator, sympathising with the afflictions of either, than feeling the full sting of those afflictions yourself."

"Do I not feel acutely for you? I'm a lonely man in the world, and I have taught myself now to centre my affections in your family; my recollections of early years assist me in so doing. Believe me, both of you, that I am no idle spectator of your griefs, but that I share them fully. If I advise you to be peaceful, and to endeavour by the gentlest means possible to accomplish your aims, it is not that I would counsel you cowardice; but having seen so much more of the world than either of you have had time or opportunity of seeing, I do not look so enthusiastically upon matters, but, with a cooler, calmer judgment, I do not say a better, I proffer to you my counsel."

"We thank you," said Henry; "but this is a matter in which action seems specially called for. It is not to be borne that a whole family is to be oppressed by such a fiend in human shape as that Varney."

"Let me," said Marchdale, "counsel you to submit to Flora's decision in this business; let her wishes constitute the rules of action. She is the greatest sufferer, and the one most deeply interested in the termination of this fearful business. Moreover, she has judgment and decision of character; she will advise you rightly, be assured."

"That she would advise us honourably," said Henry, "and that we should feel every disposition in the world to defer to her wishes our proposition, is not to be doubted; but little shall be done without her counsel and sanction. Let us now proceed homeward, for I am most anxious to ascertain how it came about that she and Sir Francis Varney were together in that summer-house at so strange an hour."

They all three walked together towards the house, conversing in a similar strain as they went.

Chapter XXXVI. THE CONSULTATION. -- THE DUEL AND ITS RESULTS.

Independent of this interview which Flora had had with the much dreaded Sir Francis Varney, the circumstances in which she and all who were dear to her, happened at that moment to be placed, certainly required an amount of consideration, which could not be too soon bestowed.

By a combination of disagreeables, everything that could possibly occur to disturb the peace of the family seemed to have taken place at once; like Macbeth's, their troubles had truly come in battalions, and now that the serenity of their domestic position was destroyed, minor evils and annoyances which that very serenity had enabled them to hold at arm's length became gigantic, and added much to their distress.

The small income, which, when all was happiness, health and peace, was made to constitute a comfortable household, was now totally inadequate to do so -- the power to economize and to make the most of a little, had flown along with that contentedness of spirit which the harmony of circumstances alone could produce.

It was not to be supposed that poor Mrs. Bannerworth could now, as she had formerly done, when her mind was free from anxiety, attend to those domestic matters which make up the comforts of a family -- distracted at the situation of her daughter, and bewildered by the rapid succession of troublesome events which so short a period of time had given birth to, she fell into an inert state of mind as different as anything could be, from her former active existence.

It has likewise been seen how the very domestics fled from Bannerworth Hall in dismay, rather than remain beneath the same roof with a family believed to be subject to the visitations of so awful a being as a vampyre.

Among the class who occupy positions of servitude, certainly there might have been found some, who, with feelings and understanding above such considerations, would have clung sympathetically to that family in distress, which they had known under a happier aspect; but it had not been the good fortune of the Bannerworths to have such as these about them; hence selfishness had its way, and they were deserted. It was not likely, then, that strangers would willingly accept service in a family so situated, without some powerful impulse in the shape of a higher pecuniary consideration, as was completely out of the power of the Bannerworths to offer.

Thus was it, then, that most cruelly, at the very time that they had most need of assistance and of sympathy, this unfortunate family almost became isolated from their kind; and, apart from every other consideration, it would have been almost impossible for them to continue inhabitants of the Hall, with anything like comfort, or advantage.

And then, although the disappearance of Charles Holland no longer awakened those feelings of inclination at his supposed perfidy which were first produced by that event; still, view it in which way they might, it was a severe blow of fate, and after it, they one and all found themselves still less able to contend against the sea of troubles that surrounded them. The reader, too, will not have failed to remark that there was about the whole of the family that pride of independence which induced them to shrink from living upon extraneous aid; and hence, although they felt and felt truly, that when Admiral Bell, in his frank manner, offered them pecuniary assistance, that it was no idle compliment, yet with a sensitiveness such as they might well be expected to feel, they held back, and asked each other what prospect there was of emerging from such a state of things, and if it were justifiable to commence a life of dependence, the end of which was not evident or tangible.

Not withstanding, too, the noble confidence of Flora in her lover, and not withstanding that confidence had been echoed by her brothers, there would at times obtrude into the minds of the latter, a feeling of the possibility, that after all they might be mistaken; and Charles Holland might, from some sudden impulse, fancying his future happiness was all at stake, have withdrawn himself from the Hall, and really written the letters attributed to him.

We say this only obtruded itself occasionally, for all their real feelings and aspirations were the other way, although Mr. Marchdale, they could perceive, had his doubts, and they could not but confess that he was more likely to view the matter calmly and dispassionately than they.

In fact, the very hesitation with which he spoke upon the subject, convinced them of his doubts, for they attributed that hesitation to fear of giving them pain, or of wounding the prejudices of Admiral Bell, with whom he had already had words so nearly approaching to a quarrel.

Henry's visit to Mr. Chillingworth was not likely to be productive of any results beyond those of a conjectural

character. All that that gentleman could do was to express a willingness to be directed by them in any way, rather than suggest any course of conduct himself upon circumstances which he could not be expected to judge of as they who were on the spot, and had witnessed their actual occurrence.

And now we will suppose that the reader is enabled with us to look into one of the principal rooms of Bannerworth Hall. It is evening, and some candles are shedding a sickly light on the ample proportions of the once handsome apartment. At solemn consultation the whole of the family are assembled. As well as the admiral, Mr. Chillingworth, and Marchdale, Jack Pringle, too, walked in, by the sufferance of his master, as if he considered he had a perfect right to do so.

The occasion of the meeting had been a communication which Flora had made concerning her most singular and deeply interesting interview with the vampyre. The details of this interview had produced a deep effect upon the whole of the family.

Flora was there, and she looked better, calmer, and more collected than she had done for some days past.

No doubt the interview she had had with Varney in the summer-house in the garden had dispelled a host of imaginary terrors with which she had surrounded him, although it had confirmed her fully that he and he only was the dreadful being who had caused her so much misery. That interview had tended to show her that about him there was yet something human, and that there was not a danger of her being hunted down from place to place by so horrible an existence.

Such a feeling as this was, of course, a source of deep consolation; and with a firmer voice, and more of her old spirit of cheerfulness about her than she had lately exhibited, she again detailed the particulars of the interview to all who had assembled concluding by saying, --

"And this has given me hope of happier days. If it be a delusion, it is a happy one; and now that but a frightful veil of mystery still hangs over the fate of Charles Holland, how gladly would I bid adieu to this place, and all that has made it terrible. I could almost pity Sir Francis Varney, rather than condemn him."

"That may be true," said Henry, "to a certain extent, sister; but we never can forget the amount of misery he has brought upon us. It is no slight thing to be forced from our old and much-loved home, even if such proceeding does succeed in freeing us from his persecutions."

"But, my young friend," said Marchdale, "you must recollect, that through life it is continually the lot of humanity to be endeavouring to fly from great evils to those which do not present themselves to the mind in so bad an aspect. It is something, surely, to alleviate affliction, if we cannot entirely remove it."

"That is true," said Mr. Chillingworth, "to a considerable extent, but then it takes too much for granted to please me."

"How so, sir?"

"Why, certainly, to remove from Bannerworth Hall is a much less evil than to remain at Bannerworth Hall, and be haunted by a vampyre; but then that proposition takes for granted that vampyre business, which I will never grant, I repeat, again and again, it is contrary to all experience, to philosophy, and to all the laws of ordinary nature."

"Facts are stubborn things," said Marchdale.

"Apparently," remarked Mr. Chillingworth.

"Well, sir; and here we have the fact of the vampyre."

"The presumed fact. One swallow don't make a summer, Mr. Marchdale."

"This is waste of time," said Henry -- "of course, the amount of evidence that will suffice to bring conviction to one man's mind will fail in doing so to another. The question is, what are we to do?"

All eyes were turned upon Flora, as if this question was more particularly addressed to her, and it behoved her, above all others, to answer it. She did so; and in a firm, clear voice, she said, --

"I will discover the fate of Charles Holland and then leave the Hall."

"The fate of Charles Holland!" said Marchdale. "Why, really, unless that gentleman chooses to be communicative himself upon so interesting a subject, we may be a long while discovering his fate. I know that it is not a romantic view to take of the question, to suppose simply that he wrote the three letters found upon his dressing-table, and then decamped; but to my mind, it savours most wonderfully of matter-of-fact. I now speak more freely than I have otherwise done, for I am now upon the eve of my departure. I have no wish to remain here, and breed dissension in any family, or to run a tilt against anybody's prejudices." Here he looked at Admiral

Bell. "I leave this house to-night."

"You're a d --- d lubberly thief," said the admiral; "the sooner you leave it the better. Why, you bad-looking son of a gun, what do you mean? I thought we'd had enough of that."

"I fully expected this abuse," said Marchdale.

"Did you expect that?" said the admiral, as he snatched up an inkstand, and threw at Marchdale, hitting him a hard knock on the chin, and bespattering its contents on his breast. "Now I'll give you satisfaction, you lubber. D --- me, if you ain't a second Jones, and enough to sink the ship. Shiver my timbers if I sha'n't say something strong presently."

"I really," said Henry, "must protest, Admiral Bell, against this conduct."

"Protest and be d --- d."

"Mr. Marchdale may be right, sir, or he may be wrong, it's a matter of opinion."

"Oh, never mind," said Marchdale; "I look upon this old nautical ruffian as something between a fool and a madman. If he were a younger man I should chastise him upon the spot; but as it is I live in hopes yet of getting him into some comfortable lunatic asylum."

"Me into an asylum!" shouted the admiral. "Jack, did you hear that?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Farewell all of you," said Marchdale; "my best wishes be with this family. I cannot remain under this roof to be so insulted."

"A good riddance," cried the admiral. "I'd rather sail round the world with a shipload of vampyres than with such a humbugging son of a gun as you are. D --- e, you're worse than a lawyer."

"Nay, nay," cried they, "Mr. Marchdale, stay."

"Stay, stay," cried George, and Mrs. Bannerworth, likewise, said stay; but at the moment Flora stepped forward, and in a clear voice she said, ---

"No, let him go, he doubts Charles Holland; let all go who doubt Charles Holland. Mr. Marchdale, Heaven forgive you this injustice you are doing. We may never meet again. Farewell, sir!" These words were spoken in so decided a tone, that no one contradicted them. Marchdale cast a strange kind of look round upon the family circle, and in another instant he was gone.

"Huzza!" shouted Jack Pringle; "that's one good job."

Henry looked rather resentful, which the admiral could not but observe, and so, less with the devil-may-care manner in which he usually spoke, the old man addressed him.

"Hark ye, Mr. Henry Bannerworth, you ain't best pleased with me, and in that case I don't know that I shall stay to trouble you any longer; as for your friend who has just left you, sooner or later you'll find him out --- I tell you there's no good in that fellow. Do you think I've been cruising about for a matter of sixty years, and don't know an honest man when I see him. But never mind, I'm going on a voyage of discovery for my nephew, and you can do as you like."

"Heaven only knows, Admiral Bell," said Henry, "who is right and who is wrong. I do much regret that you have quarrelled with Mr. Marchdale; but what is done can't be undone."

"Do not leave us," said Flora; "let me beg of you, Admiral Bell, not to leave us; for my sake remain here, for to you I can speak freely and with confidence, of Charles, when probably I can do so to no one else. You know him well and have a confidence in him, which no one else can aspire to. I pray you, therefore, to stay with us."

"Only on one condition," said the admiral.

"Name it --- name it!"

"You think of letting the Hall go."

"Yes, yes."

"Let me have it, then, and let me pay a few years in advance. If you don't, I'm d --- d if I stay another night in the place. You must give me immediate possession, too, and stay here as my guests until you suit yourselves elsewhere. Those are my terms and conditions. Say yes, and all's right; say no, and I'm off like a round shot from a carronade. D --- me, that's the thing Jack, isn't it?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

There was a silence of some few moments after this extraordinary offer had been made, and then they spoke, saying, ---

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"Admiral Bell, your generous offer, and the feelings which dictated it, are by far too transparent for us to affect not to understand them. Your actions, Admiral -- "

"Oh, bother my actions! what are they to you? Come, now, I consider myself master of the house, d -- n you! I invite you all to dinner, or supper, or to whatever meal comes next. Mrs. Bannerworth, will you oblige me, as I'm an old fool in family affairs, by buying what's wanted for me and my guests? There's the money, ma'am. Come along, Jack, we'll take a look over our new house. What do you think of it?"

"Wants some sheathing, sir, here and there."

"Very like; but, however, it will do well enough for us; we're in port, you know. Come along."

"Ay, ay, sir."

And off went the admiral and Jack, after leaving a twenty pound note in Mrs. Bannerworth's lap.

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Chapter XXXVII. SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S SEPARATE OPPONENTS. -- THE INTERPOSITION OF FLORA.

The old admiral so completely overcame the family of the Bannerworths by his generosity and evident singlemindedness of his behaviour, that, although not one, except Flora, approved of his conduct towards Mr. Marchdale, yet they could not help liking him; and had they been placed in a position to choose which of the two they would have had remain with them, the admiral or Marchdale, there can be no question they would have made choice of the former.

Still, however, it was not pleasant to find a man like Marchdale virtually driven from the house, because he presumed to differ in opinion upon a very doubtful matter with another of its inmates. But as it was the nature of the Bannerworth family always to incline to the most generous view of subjects, the frank, hearty confidence of the old admiral in Charles Holland pleased them better than the calm and serious doubting of Marchdale.

His ruse of hiring the house of them, and paying the rent in advance, for the purpose of placing ample funds in their hands for any contingency, was not the less amiable because it was so easily seen through; and they could not make up their minds to hurt the feelings of the old man by the rejection of his generous offer.

When he had left, this subject was canvassed among them, and it was agreed that he should have his own way in the matter for the present, although they hoped to hear something from Marchdale, which would make his departure appear less abrupt and uncomfortable to the whole of the family.

During the course of this conversation, it was made known to Flora with more distinctness than under any other circumstances it would have been, that Charles Holland had been on the eve of a duel with Sir Francis Varney, previous to his mysterious disappearance.

When she became fully aware of this fact, to her mind it seemed materially to add to the suspicions previously to then entertained, that foul means had been used in order to put Charles out of the way.

"Who knows," she said, "that this Varney may not shrink with the greatest terror from a conflict with any human being, and feeling one was inevitable with Charles Holland, unless interrupted by some vigorous act of his own, he or some myrmidons of his may have taken Charles's life!"

"I do not think, Flora," said Henry, "that he would have ventured upon so desperate an act; I cannot well believe such a thing possible. But fear not; he will find, if he have really committed any such atrocity, that it will not save him."

These words of Henry, though it made no impression at the time upon Flora, beyond what they carried upon their surface, they really, however, as concerned Henry himself, implied a settled resolution, which he immediately set about reducing to practice.

When the conference broke up, night, as it still was, he, without saying anything to any one, took his hat and cloak, and left the Hall, proceeding by the nearest practicable route to the residence of Sir Francis Varney, where he arrived without any interruption of any character.

Varney was at first denied to him, but before he could leave the house, a servant came down the great staircase to say it was a mistake; and that Sir Francis was at home, and would be happy to see him.

He was ushered into the same apartment where Sir Francis Varney had before received his visitors; and there sat the now declared vampyre, looking pale and ghastly by the dim light which burned in the apartment, and, indeed, more like some spectre of the tomb than one of the great family of man.

"Be seated, sir," said Varney; "although my eyes have seldom the pleasure of beholding you within these walls, be assured you are a honoured guest."

"Sir Francis Varney," said Henry, "I came not here to bandy compliments with you; I have none to pay to you, nor do I wish to hear any of them from your lips."

"An excellent sentiment, young man," said Varney, "and well delivered. May I presume, then, without infringing too far upon your extreme courtesy, to inquire, to what circumstances I am indebted for your visit?"

"To one, Sir Francis, that I believe you are better acquainted with than you have the candour to admit."

"Indeed, sir," said Varney, coldly "you measure my candour, probably, by a standard of your own; in which case, I fear I may be no gainer; and yet that may be of itself a circumstance that should afford little food for

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surprise, but proceed, sir — since we have so few compliments to stand between us and our purpose, we shall in all due time arrive at it."

"Yes, in due time, Sir Francis Varney, and that due time has arrived. Know you any thing of my friend, Charles Holland?" said Henry, in marked accents; and he gazed on Sir Francis Varney with earnestness, that seemed to say not even a look should escape his observation.

Varney, however, returned the gaze as steadily, but coldly, as he replied in his measured accents, —

"I have heard of the young gentleman."

"And seen him?"

"And seen him too, as you, Mr. Bannerworth, must be well aware. Surely you have not come all this way, merely to make such an inquiry; but, sir, you are welcome to the answer."

Henry had something of a struggle to keep down the rising anger, at these cool taunts of Varney; but he succeeded — and then he said, —

"I suspect Charles Holland, Sir Francis Varney, has met with unfair treatment, and that he has been unfairly dealt with, for an unworthy purpose."

"Undoubtedly," said Varney, "if the gentleman you allude to, has been unfairly dealt with, it was for a foul purpose; for no good or generous object, my young sir, could be so obtained — you acknowledge so much, I doubt not?"

"I do, Sir Francis Varney; and hence the purpose of my visit here — for this reason I apply to you — "

"A singular object, supported by a singular reason. I cannot see the connection, young sir; pray proceed to enlighten me upon this matter, and when you have done that, may I presume upon your consideration, to inquire in what way I can be of any service to you?"

"Sir Francis," said Henry, his anger raising his tones — "this will not serve you — I have come to exact an account of how you have disposed of my friend; and I will have it."

"Gently, my good sir; you are aware I know nothing of your friend; his motions are his own; and as to what I have done with him; my only answer is, that he would permit me to do nothing with him, had I been so inclined to have taken the liberty."

"You are suspected, Sir Francis Varney, of having made an attempt upon the life or liberty of Charles Holland; you, in fact, are suspected of being his murderer — and, so help me Heaven! if I have not justice, I will have vengeance!"

"Young sir, your words are of grave import and ought to be coolly considered before they are uttered. With regard to justice and vengeance, Mr. Bannerworth, you may have both; but I tell you, of Charles Holland, or what has become of him, I know nothing. But wherefore do you come to so unlikely a quarter to learn something of an individual of whom I know nothing?"

"Because Charles Holland was to have fought a duel with you: but before that had time to take place, he has suddenly become missing. I suspect that you are the author of his disappearance, because you fear an encounter with a mortal man."

"Mr. Bannerworth, permit me to say, in my own defence, that I do not fear any man, however foolish he may be; and wisdom is not an attribute I find, from experience in all men, of your friend. However, you must be dreaming, sir — a kind of vivid insanity has taken possession of your mind, which distorts —

"Sir Francis Varney!" exclaimed Henry, now perfectly uncontrollable.

"Sir," said Varney, as he filled up the pause, "proceed; I am all attention. You do me honour."

"If," resumed Henry, "such was your object in putting Mr. Holland aside, by becoming personally or by proxy an assassin, you are mistaken in supposing you have accomplished your object."

"Go on, sir," said Sir Francis Varney, in a bland and sweet tone; "I am all attention; pray proceed."

"You have failed; for I now here, on this spot, defy you to mortal combat. Coward, assassin as you are, I challenge you to fight."

"You don't mean on the carpet here?" said Varney, deliberately.

"No, sir; but beneath the canopy of heaven, in the light of the day. And then, Sir Francis, we shall see who will shrink from the conflict."

"It is remarkably good, Mr. Bannerworth, and, begging your pardon, for I do not wish to give any offence, my honoured sir, it would rehearse before an audience; in short, sir, it is highly dramatic."

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"You shrink from the combat, do you? Now, indeed, I know you."

"Young man, young man," said Sir Francis, calmly, and shaking his head very deliberately, and the shadows passed across his pale face, "you know me not, if you think Sir Francis Varney shrinks from any man, much less one like yourself."

"You are a coward, and worse, if you refuse my challenge."

"I do not refuse it; I accept it," said Varney, calmly, and in a dignified manner; and then, with a sneer, he added, — "You are well acquainted with the mode in which gentlemen generally manage these matters, Mr. Bannerworth, and perhaps I am somewhat confined in my knowledge in the ways of the world, because you are your own principal and second. In all my experience, I never met with a similar case."

"The circumstances under which it is given are as unexampled, and will excuse the mode of the challenge," said Henry, with much warmth.

"Singular coincidence — the challenge and mode of it is most singular! They are well matched in that respect. Singular, did I say? The more I think of it, Mr. Bannerworth, the more I am inclined to think this positively odd."

"Early to-morrow, Sir Francis, you shall hear from me."

"In that case, you will not arrange preliminaries now? Well, well; it is very unusual for the principals themselves to do so; and yet, excuse my freedom, I presumed, as you had so far deserted the beaten track, that I had no idea how far you might be disposed to lead the same route."

"I have said all I intended to say, Sir Francis Varney; we shall see each other again."

"I may not detain you, I presume, to taste aught in the way of refreshment?"

Henry made no reply, but turned towards the door, without even making an attempt to return the grave and formal bow that Sir Francis Varney made as he saw him about to quit the apartment; for Henry saw that his pale features were lighted up with a sarcastic smile, most disagreeable to look upon as well as irritating to Henry Bannerworth.

He now quitted Sir Francis Varney's abode, being let out by a servant who had been rung for for that purpose by his master.

Henry walked homeward, satisfied that he had now done all that he could under the circumstances.

"I will send Chillingworth to him in the morning, and then I shall see what all this will end in. He must meet me, and then Charles Holland, if not discovered, shall be, at least, revenged."

There was another person in Bannerworth Hall who had formed a similar resolution. That person was a very different sort of person to Henry Bannerworth, though quite as estimable in his way.

This was no other than the old admiral. It was singular that two such very different persons should deem the same steps necessary, and both keep the secret from each other; but so it was, and, after some internal swearing, he determined upon challenging Varney in person.

"I'd send Jack Pringle, but the swab would settle the matter as shortly as if a youngster was making an entry in a log, and heard the boatswain's whistle summoning the hands to a mess, and feared he would lose his grog.

"D — n my quarters! but Sir Francis Varney, as he styles himself, sha'n't make any way against old Admiral Bell. He's as tough as a hawser, and just the sort of blade for a vampyre to come athwart. I'll pitch him end-long, and make a plank of him afore long. Cus my windpipe! what a long, lanky swab he is, with teeth fit to unpick a splice; but let me alone, I'll see if I can't make a hull of his carcass, vampyre or no vampyre.

"My nevy, Charles Holland, can't be allowed to cut away without nobody's leave or licence. No, no; I'll not stand that anyhow. 'Never desert a messmate in the time of need,' is the first maxim of a seaman, and I ain't the one as'll do so."

Thus self-communing, the old admiral marched along; until he came to Sir Francis Varney's house, at the gate of which he gave the bell what he called a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, that set it ringing with a fury, the like of which had never certainly been heard by the household.

A minute or two scarcely elapsed before the domestics hurried to answer so urgent a summons; and when the gate was opened, the servant who answered it inquired his business.

"What's that to you, snob? Is your master, Sir Francis Varney, in? because, if he be, let him know old Admiral Bell wants to speak to him. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied the servant, who had paused a few moments to examine the individual who gave this odd kind of address. In another minute word was brought to him that Sir Francis Varney would be very happy to see

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Admiral Bell.

"Ay, ay," he muttered; "just as the devil likes to meet with holy water, or as I like any water save salt water."

He was speedily introduced to Sir Francis Varney, who was seated in the same posture as he had been left by Henry Bannerworth not many minutes before.

"Admiral Bell," said Sir Francis, rising, and bowing to that individual in the most polite, calm, and dignified manner imaginable, "permit me to express the honour I feel at this unexpected visit."

"None of your gammon."

"Will you be seated. Allow me to offer you such refreshments as this poor house affords."

"D -- n all this! You know, Sir Francis, I don't want none o' this palaver. It's for all the world like a Frenchman, when you are going to give him a broadside; he makes grimaces, throws dust in your eyes, and tries to stab you in the back. Oh, no! none of that for me."

"I should say not, Admiral Bell. I should not like it myself, and I dare say you are a man of too much experience not to perceive when you are or are not imposed upon."

"Well, what is that to you? D -- n me, I didn't come here to talk to you about myself."

"Then may I presume upon your courtesy so far as to beg that you will enlighten me upon the object of your visit?"

"Yes; in pretty quick time. Just tell me where you have stowed away my nephew, Charles Holland?"

"Really, I -- "

"Hold your slack, will you, and hear me out; if he's living, let him out, and I'll say no more about it; that's liberal, you know; it ain't terms everybody would offer you."

"I must, in truth, admit they are not; and, moreover, they quite surprise even me, and I have learned not to be surprised at almost anything."

"Well, will you give him up alive? but, hark ye, you mustn't have made very queer fish of him, do ye see?"

"I hear you," said Sir Francis, with a bland smile, passing one hand gently over the other, and showing his front teeth in a peculiar manner; "but I really cannot comprehend all this; but I may say, generally, that Mr. Holland is no acquaintance of mine, and I have no sort of knowledge where he may be."

"That won't do for me," said the admiral, positively, shaking his head.

"I am particularly sorry, Admiral Bell, that it will not, seeing that I have nothing else to say."

"I see how it is; you've put him out of the way, and I'm d -- -- d if you shan't' bring him to life, whole and sound, or I'll know the reason why."

"With that I have already furnished you, Admiral Bell," quietly rejoined Varney; "anything more on that head is out of my power, although my willingness to oblige a person of such consideration as yourself, is very great; but, permit me to add, this is a very strange and odd communication from one gentleman to another. You have lost a relative, who has, very probably, taken some offence, or some notion into his head, of which nobody but himself knows anything, and you come to one yet more unlikely to know anything of him, than even yourself."

"Gammon again, now, Sir Francis Varney, or Blarney."

"Varney, if you please, Admiral Bell; I was christened Varney."

"Christened, eh?"

"Yes, christened -- were you not christened? If not, I dare say you understand the ceremony well enough."

"I should think I did; but, as for christening, a -- "

"Go on, sir."

"A vampyre! why I should as soon think of reading the burial service of a pig."

"Very possible; but what has all this to do with your visit to me?"

"This much, you lubber. Now, d -- n my carcass from head to stern, if I don't call you out."

"Well, Admiral Bell," said Varney, mildly, "in that case, I suppose I must come out; but why do you insist that I have any knowledge of your nephew, Mr. Charles Holland?"

"You were to have fought a duel with him, and now he's gone."

"I am here," said Varney.

"Ay," said the admiral, "that's as plain as a purser's shirt upon a handspike; but that's the very reason why my nevey ain't here, and that's all about it."

"And that's marvellous little, so far as the sense is concerned," said Varney, without the movement of a

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muscle.

"It is said that people of your class don't like fighting mortal men; now you have disposed of him, lest he should dispose of you."

"That is explicit, but it is to no purpose, since the gentleman in question hasn't placed himself at my disposal."

"Then, d --- e, I will; fish, flesh, or fowl, I don't care; all's one to Admiral Bell. Come fair or foul, I'm a tar for all men; a seaman ever ready to face a foe, so here goes, you lubberly moon manufactured calf."

"I hear, admiral, but it is scarcely civil, to say the least of it; however, as you are somewhat eccentric, and do not, I dare say, mean all your words imply, I am quite willing to make every allowance."

"I don't want any allowance; d --- n you and your allowance, too; nothing but allowance of grog, and a pretty good allowance, too, will do for me, and I tell you, Sir Francis Varney," said the admiral, with much wrath, "that you are a d --- d lubberly hound, and I'll fight you; yes, I'm ready to hammer away, or with anything from a pop-gun to a ship's gun; you don't come over me with your gammon, I tell you. You've murdered Charles Holland because you couldn't face him --- that's the truth of it."

"With the other part of your speech, Admiral Bell, allow me to say, you have mixed up a serious accusation --- one I cannot permit to pass lightly."

"Will you or not fight?"

"Oh, yes; I shall be happy to serve you any way that I can. I hope this will be an answer to your accusation, also."

"That's settled, then."

"Why, I am not captious, Admiral Bell, but it is not generally usual for the principals to settle the preliminaries themselves; doubtless you, in your career of fame and glory know something of the manner in which gentlemen demean themselves on these occasions."

"Oh, d --- n you! Yes, I'll send some one to do all this. Yes, yes, Jack Pringle will be the man, though Jack ain't a holiday, shore-going, smooth-spoken swab, but as good a seaman as ever trod deck or handled a boarding-pike."

"Any friend of yours," said Varney, blandly, "will be received and treated as such upon an errand of such consequence; and now our conference has, I presume, concluded."

"Yes, yes, we've done --- d --- e, no --- yes --- no. I will keel-haul you but I'll know something of my neavy, Charles Holland."

"Good day, Admiral Bell." As Varney spoke, he placed his hand upon the bell which he had near him, to summon an attendant to conduct the admiral out. The latter, who had said a vast deal more than he ever intended, left the room in a great rage, protesting to himself that he would amply avenge his nephew, Charles Holland.

He proceeded homeward, considerably vexed and annoyed that he had been treated with so much calmness, and all knowledge of his nephew denied.

When he got back, he quarrelled heartily with Jack Pringle --- made it up --- drank grog --- quarrelled --- made it up, and finished with grog again --- until he went to bed swearing he should like to fire a broadside at the whole of the French army, and annihilate it at once.

With this wish, he fell asleep.

Early next morning, Henry Bannerworth sought Mr. Chillingworth, and having found him, he said in a serious tone, ---

"Mr. Chillingworth, I have rather a serious favour to ask you, and one which you may hesitate in granting."

"It must be very serious indeed," said Mr. Chillingworth, "that I should hesitate to grant it to you; but pray inform me what it is what you deem so serious?"

"Sir Francis Varney and I must have a meeting," said Henry.

"Have you really determined upon such a course?" said Mr. Chillingworth; "You know the character of your adversary?"

"That is all settled, --- I have given a challenge, and he has accepted it; so all other considerations verge themselves into one --- and that is the when, where, and how."

"I see," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Well, since it cannot be helped on your part, I will do what is requisite for you --- do you wish anything to be done or insisted on in particular in this affair."

"Nothing with regard to Sir Francis Varney that I may not leave to your discretion. I feel convinced that he is

the assassin of Charles Holland, whom he feared to fight in duel."

"Then there remains but little else to do, but to arrange preliminaries, I believe. Are you prepared on every other point?"

"I am -- you will see that I am the challenger, and that he must now fight. What accident may turn up to save him, I fear not, but sure I am, that he will endeavour to take every advantage that may arise, and so escape the encounter."

"And what do you imagine he will do now he has accepted your challenge?" said Mr. Chillingworth; "one would imagine he could not very well escape."

"No -- but he accepted the challenge which Charles Holland sent him -- a duel was inevitable, and it seems to me to be a necessary consequence that he disappeared from amongst us, for Mr. Holland would never have shrunk from the encounter."

"There can be no sort of suspicion about that," remarked Chillingworth; "but allow me to advise you that you take care of yourself, and keep a watchful eye upon everyone -- do not be seen out alone."

"I fear not."

"Nay, the gentleman who has disappeared was, I am sure, fearless enough; but yet that has not saved him. I would not advise you to be fearful, only watchful; you have now an event awaiting upon you which it is well you should go through with, unless circumstances should so turn out, that it is needless; wherefore I say, when you have the suspicions you do entertain of this man's conduct, beware, be cautious, and vigilant."

"I will do so -- in the mean time, I trust myself confidently in your hands -- you know all that is necessary."

"This affair is quite a secret from all of the family?"

"Most certainly so, and will remain so -- I shall be at the Hall."

"And there I will see you -- but be careful not to be drawn into any adventure of any kind -- it is best to be on the safe side under all circumstances."

"I will be especially careful, be assured, but farewell; see Sir Francis Varney as early as you can, and let the meeting be as early as you can, and thus diminish the chance of accident."

"That I will attend to. Farewell for the present."

Mr. Chillingworth immediately set about the conducting of the affair thus confided to him; and that no time might be lost, he determined to set out at once for Sir Francis Varney's residence.

"Things with regard to this family seem to have gone on wild of late," thought Mr. Chillingworth; "this may bring affairs to a conclusion, though I had much rather they had come to some other. My life for it, there is a juggle or a mystery, somewhere; I will do this, and then we shall see what will come of it; if this Sir Francis Varney meets him -- and at this moment I can see no reason why he should not do so -- it will tend much to deprive him of the mystery about him; but if, on the other hand, he refuse -- but then that's all improbable, because he has agreed to do so. I fear however, that such a man as Varney is a dreadful enemy to encounter -- he is cool and unruffled -- and that gives him all the advantage in such affairs; but Henry's nerves are not bad, though shaken by these untoward events; but time will show -- I would it were all over."

With these thoughts and feelings strangely intermixed, Mr. Chillingworth set forward for Sir Francis Varney's house. * * * *

Admiral Bell slept soundly enough, though, towards morning, he fell into a strange dream, and thought he was yard arm and yard arm with a strange fish -- something of the mermaid species.

"Well," exclaimed the admiral, after a customary benediction of his eyes and limbs, "what's to come next? may I be spliced to a shark if I understand what this is all about. I had some grog last night, but then grog, d'y'see, is a seaman's native element, as the newspapers say, though I never read 'em now, it's such a plague."

He lay quiet for a short time, considering in his own mind what was best to be done and what was the proper course to pursue and why he should dream.

"Hilloa, hilloa, hil -- loa Jack a-hoy! a-hoy!" shouted the admiral, as a sudden recollection of his challenge came across his memory; "Jack Pringle a-hoy? d -- n you, where are you? -- you're never at hand when you are wanted. Oh, you lubber, -- a-hoy!"

"A-hoy!" shouted a voice, as the door opened, and Jack thrust his head in; "what cheer, messmate? what ship is this?"

"Oh, you lubberly -- "

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The door was shut in a minute, and Jack Pringle disappeared.

"Hilloa, Jack Pringle, you don't mean to say you'll desert your colours, do you, you dumb dog?"

"Who, says I'll desert the ship as she's sea-worthy?"

"Then why do you go away?"

"Because I won't be called lubberly, I'm as good a man as ever swabbed a deck, and don't care who says to the contrary. I'll stick to the ship as long as she's sea-worthy," said Jack.

"Well, come here, and just listen to the log, and be d --- d to you."

"What's the orders now, admiral?" said Jack, "though, as we are paid off ---"

"There, take that, will you?" said Admiral Bell, as he flung a pillow at Jack, being the only thing in the shape of a missile within reach.

Jack ducked, and the pillow produced a clatter in the washhand-stand among the crockery, as Jack said, ---

"There's a mutiny in the ship, and hark how the cargo clatters; will you have it back again?"

"Come, will you? I've been dreaming, Jack."

"Dreaming! what's that?"

"Thinking of something when you are asleep, you swab."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack; "never did such a thing in my life --- ha, ha, ha! what's the matter now?"

"I'll tell you what's the matter, Jack Pringle, you are becoming mutinous, and I won't have it; if you don't hold your jaw and draw in your slacks, I'll have another second."

"Another second! what's in the wind, now?" said Jack. "Is this the dream?"

"If ever I dream when I'm alongside a strange craft, then it is a dream; but old Admiral Bell ain't the man to sleep when there's any work to be done."

"That's uncommon true," said Jack, turning a quid.

"Well, then, I'm to fight."

"Fight!" exclaimed Jack. "Avast, there, I don't see where's the enemy --- none o' that gammon; Jack Pringle can fight, too, and will lay alongside his admiral, but he don't see the enemy anywhere."

"You don't understand these things, so I'll tell you. I have had a bit of talk with Sir Francis Varney, and I am going to fight him."

"What the wamphigher?" remarked Jack, parenthetically.

"Yes."

"Well, then," resumed Jack, "then we shall see another blaze, at least afore we die; but he's an odd fish --- one of Davy Jones's sort."

"I don't care about that; he may be anything he likes; but Admiral Bell ain't a-going to have his nephew burned and eaten, and sucked like don't know what, by a vampyre, or by any other confounded land-shark."

"In course," said Jack, "we ain't a-going to put up with nothing of that sort, and if so be as how he has put him out of the way, why it's our duty to send him arter him, and square the board."

"That's the thing, Jack; now you know you must go to Sir Francis Varney and tell him you come from me."

"I don't care if I goes on my own account," said Jack.

"That won't do; I've challenged him, and I must fight him."

"In course you will," returned Jack; "and, if he blows you away, why I'll take your place, and have a blaze myself."

The admiral gave a look at Jack of great admiration, and then said, ---

"You are a d --- d good seaman, Jack, but he's a knight, and might say no to that; but do you go to him, and tell him that you come from me to settle the when and the where this duel is to be fought."

"Single fight?" said Jack.

"Yes; consent to any thing that is fair," said the admiral, "but let it be as soon as you can. Now do you understand what I have said?"

"Yes, to be sure; I ain't lived all these years without knowing your lingo."

"Then go at once; and don't let the honour of Admiral Bell and old England suffer, Jack. I'm his man, you know, at any price."

"Never fear," said Jack; "you shall fight him, at any rate. I'll go and see he don't back out, the warmint."

"Then go along, Jack; and mind don't you go blazing away like a fire ship, and letting everybody know what's

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going on, or it'll be stopped."

"I'll not spoil sport," said Jack, as he left the room, to go at once to Sir Francis Varney, charged with the conducting of the important cartel of the admiral. Jack made the best of his way with becoming gravity and expedition until he reached the gate of the admiral's enemy.

Jack rang loudly at the gate; there seemed, if one might judge by his countenance, a something on his mind, that Jack was, almost another man. The gate was opened by the servant, who inquired what he wanted there.

"The wamphigher."

"Who?"

"The wamphigher."

The servant frowned, and was about to say something uncivil to Jack, who looked at him very hard, and then said, —

"Oh, may be you don't know him, or won't know him by that name: I wants to see Sir Francis Varney."

"He's at home," said the servant; "who are you?"

"Show me up, then. I'm Jack Pringle, and I'm come from Admiral Bell; I'm the admiral's friend, you see, so none of your black looks."

The servant seemed amazed, as well as rather daunted, at Jack's address; he showed him, however, into the hall, where Mr. Chillingworth had just that moment arrived, and was waiting for an interview with Varney.

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Chapter XXXVIII. MARCHDALE'S OFFER. -- THE CONSULTATION AT BANNERWORTH HALL. -- THE MORNING OF THE DUEL.

Mr. Chillingworth was much annoyed to see Jack Pringle in the hall and Jack was somewhat surprised at seeing Mr. Chillingworth there at that time in the morning; they had but little time to indulge in their mutual astonishment, for a servant came to announce that Sir Francis Varney would see them both.

Without saying anything to the servant or each other, they ascended the staircase, and were shown into the apartment where Sir Francis Varney received them.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Francis, in his usual bland tone, "you are welcome."

"Sir Francis," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I have come upon matters of some importance; may I crave a separate audience?"

"And I too," said Jack Pringle; "I come as the friend of Admiral Bell, I want a private audience; but, stay, I don't care a rope's end who knows who I am, or what I come about; say you are ready to name time and place, and I'm as dumb as a figurehead; that is saying something, at all events; and now I'm done."

"Why, gentlemen," said Sir Francis, with a quiet smile, "as you have both come upon the same errand, and as there may arise a controversy upon the point of precedence, you had better be both present, as I must arrange this matter myself upon due inquiry."

"I do not exactly understand this," said Mr. Chillingworth; "do you, Mr. Pringle? perhaps you can enlighten me?"

"If," said Jack, "as how you came here upon the same errand as I, and I as you, why we both come about fighting Sir Francis Varney."

"Yes," said Sir Francis; "what Mr. Pringle says, is, I believe correct to a letter. I have a challenge from both your principals, and am ready to give you both the satisfaction you desire, provided the first encounter will permit me the honour of joining in the second. You, Mr. Pringle, are aware of the chances of war?"

"I should say so," said Jack, with a wink and a nod of a familiar character. "I've seen a few of them."

"Will you proceed to make the necessary agreement between you both gentlemen? My affection for the one equals fully the good will I bear the other, and I cannot give a preference in so delicate a matter; proceed gentlemen."

Mr. Chillingworth looked at Jack, and Jack Pringle looked at Mr. Chillingworth, and then the former said, —

"Well, the admiral means fighting, and I am come to settle the necessities; pray let me know what are your terms, Mr. What-d'ye-call'em."

"I am agreeable to anything that is at all reasonable — pistols, I presume?"

"Sir Francis Varney," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I cannot consent to carry on this office, unless you can appoint a friend who will settle these matters with us — myself, at least."

"And I too," said Jack Pringle; "we don't want to bear down an enemy. Admiral Bell ain't the man to do that, and if he were, I'm not the man to back him in doing what isn't fair or right; but he won't do it."

"But, gentlemen, this must not be; Mr. Henry Bannerworth must not be disappointed, and Admiral Bell must not be disappointed. Moreover, I have accepted the two cartels, and I am ready and willing to fight; — one at a time, I presume!"

"Sir Francis, after what you have said, I must take upon myself, on the part of Mr. Henry Bannerworth, to decline meeting you, if you cannot name a friend with whom I can arrange this affair."

"Ah!" said Jack Pringle, "that's right enough. I recollect very well when Jack Mizen fought Tom Foremast, they had their seconds. Admiral Bell can't do anything in the dark. No, no, d — —e! all must be above board."

"Gentlemen," said Sir Francis Varney, "you see the dilemma I am in. Your principals have both challenged me. I am ready to fight any one, or both of them, as the case may be. Distinctly understand that; because it is a notion of theirs that I will not do so, or that I shrink from them; but I am a stranger in this neighbourhood, and have no one whom I could call upon to relinquish so much, as they run the risk of doing by attending me to the field."

"Then your acquaintances are no friends, d — —e!" said Jack Pringle, spitting through his teeth into the bars of

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a beautifully polished grate. "I'd stick to anybody — the devil himself, leave alone a vampyre — if so be as how I had been his friend and drunk from the same can. They are a set of lubbers."

"I have not been here long enough to form any such friendships, Mr. Chillingworth; but can confidently rely upon your honour and that of your principal, and will freely and fairly meet him."

"But, Sir Francis, you forget the fact, in thus acting, myself for Mr. Bannerworth, and this person for Admiral Bell, we do much, and have our own characters at stake; lives and fortunes. These may be small, but they are everything to us. Allow me to say, on my own behalf, that I will not permit my principal to meet you unless you can name a second as is usual with gentlemen on such occasions."

"I regret, while I declare to you my entire willingness to meet you, that I cannot comply through utter inability to do so, with your request. Let this to forth to the world as I have stated it, and let it be an answer to any aspersions that may be uttered as to my unwillingness to fight."

There was a pause of some moments. Mr. Chillingworth was resolved that, come what would, he would not permit Henry to fight, unless Sir Francis Varney himself should appoint a friend and then they I could meet upon equal terms.

Jack Pringle whistled, and spit, and chewed and turned his quid — hitched up his trousers, and looked whistfully from one to the other, as he said, —

"So then it's likely to be no fight at all, Sir Francis What's—o'—name?"

"It seems like it, Mr. Pringle," replied Varney, with a with meaning smile; "unless I you can be more complaisant towards myself, and kindly towards the admiral."

"Why, not exactly that," said Jack; "it's a pity to stop a good play in the beginning, just because some little thing is wrong in the tackling."

"Perhaps your skill and genius may enable us to find some medium course that we may pursue with pleasure and profit. What say you, Mr. Pringle?"

"All I know about genius, as you call it, is the Flying Dutchman, or some such odd, out o' the way fish. But, as I said, I am not one to spoil sport, nor more is the admiral. Oh, no, we is all true men and good."

"I believe it," said Varney, bowing politely.

"You needn't keep your figure—head on the move; I can see you just as well. Howsoever, as I was saying, I don't like to spoil sport, and sooner than both parties should be disappointed, my principal shall become your second, Sir Francis."

"What, Admiral Bell!" exclaimed Varney, lifting his eyebrows with surprise.

"What, Charles Holland's uncle!" exclaimed Mr. Chillingworth, in accents of amazement.

"And why not?" said Jack, with great gravity. "I will pledge my word — Jack Pringle's word — that Admiral Bell shall be second to Sir Francis Varney, during his scrimmage with Mr. Henry Bannerworth. That will let the matter go on; there can be no back—out then, eh?" continued Jack Pringle, with a knowing nod at Chillingworth as he spoke.

"That will, I hope, remove your scruples, Mr. Chillingworth," said Varney, with a courteous smile.

"But will Admiral Bell do this?"

"His second says so, and has, I daresay, influence enough with him to induce that person to act in conformity with his promise."

"In course he will. Do you think he would be the man to hang back? Oh, no; he would be the last to leave Jack Pringle in the lurch — no. Depend upon it, Sir Francis, he'll be as sure to do what I say, as I have said it."

"After that assurance, I cannot doubt it," said Sir Francis Varney; "this act of kindness will, indeed, lay me under a deep and lasting obligation to Admiral Bell, which I fear I shall never be able to pay."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said Jack Pringle; "the admiral will credit all, and you can pay off old scores when his turn comes in the field."

"I will not forget," said Varney; "he deserves every consideration; but now, Mr. Chillingworth, I presume that we may come to some understanding respecting this meeting, which you were so kind as to do me the honour of seeking."

"I cannot object to its taking place. I shall be most happy to meet your second in the field, and arrange with him."

"I imagine that, under the circumstances, that it will be barely necessary to go to that length of ceremony."

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Future interviews can be arranged later; name the time and place, and after that we can settle all the rest on the ground."

"Yes," said Jack; "it will be time enough, surely, to see the admiral when we are upon the ground. I'll warrant the old buffer is a true brick as ever was; there's no flinching about him."

"I am satisfied," said Varney.

"And I also," said Chillingworth; "but, understand, Sir Francis, any fault for seconds makes the meeting a blank."

"I will not doubt Mr. Pringle's honour so much as to believe it possible."

"I'm d — — d," said Jack, "if you ain't a trump-card, and no mistake; it's a great pity as you is a wamphigher."

"The time, Mr. Chillingworth?"

"To-morrow, at seven o'clock?" replied that gentleman.

"The place, sir?"

"The best place that I can think of is a level meadow half-way between here and Bannerworth Hall; but that is your privilege, Sir Francis Varney."

"I waive it, and am much obliged to you for the choice of the spot; it seems of the best character imaginable. I will be punctual."

"I think we have nothing further to arrange now," said Mr. Chillingworth. "You will meet with Admiral Bell."

"Certainly. I believe there is nothing more to be done; this affair is very satisfactorily arranged, and much better than I anticipated."

"Good morning, Sir Francis," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Good morning."

"Adieu," said Sir Francis, with a courteous salutation. "Good day, Mr. Pringle, and commend me to the admiral, whose services will be of infinite value to me."

"Don't mention it," said Jack; "the admiral's the man as'd lend any body a helping hand in case of distress like the present; and I'll pledge my word — Jack Pringle's too, as that he'll do what's right, and give up his turn to Mr. Henry Bannerworth; cause you see he can have his I turn arterwards, you know — it's only waiting awhile."

"That's all," said Sir Francis.

Jack Pringle made a sea bow and took his leave, as he followed Mr. Chillingworth, and they both left the house together, to return to Bannerworth Hall.

"Well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I am glad that Sir Francis Varney has got over the difficulty of having no seconds; for it would not be proper or safe to meet a man without a friend with him."

"It ain't the right thing," said Jack, hitching up his trousers; "but I was afeard as how he would back out, and that would be just the wrong thing for the admiral; he'd go raving mad."

They had got but very few paces from Sir Francis Varney's house, when they were joined by Marchdale.

"Ah," he said, as he came up, "I see you have been to Sir Francis Varney's, if I may judge from the direction whence you're coming, and your proximity."

"Yes, we have," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I thought you had left these parts?"

"I had intended to do so," replied Marchdale; "but second thoughts are some times best, you know."

"Certainly."

"I have so much friendship for the family at the hall, that notwithstanding I am compelled to be absent from the mansion itself, yet I cannot quit the neighbourhood while there are circumstances of such a character hanging about them. I will remain, and see if there be not something arising, in which I may be useful to them in some matter."

"It is very disinterested of you; you will remain here for some time, I suppose?"

"Yes, undoubtedly; unless, as I do not anticipate, I should see any occasion to quit my present quarters."

"I tell you what it is," said Jack Pringle; "if you had been here half-an-hour earlier, you could have seconded the wamphigher."

"Seconded!"

"Yes, we're here to challenge."

"A double challenge?"

"Yes; but in confiding this matter to you, Mr. Marchdale, you will make no use of it to the exploding of this

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affair. By so doing you will seriously damage the honour of Mr. Henry Bannerworth."

"I will not, you may rely upon it; but Mr. Chillingworth, do I not see you in the character of a second?"

"You do, sir."

"To Mr. Henry?"

"The same, sir."

"Have you reflected upon the probable consequences of such an act, should any serious mischief occur?"

"What I have undertaken, Mr. Marchdale, I will go through with; the consequences I have duly considered, and yet you see me in the character of Mr. Henry Bannerworth's friend."

"I am happy to see you as such, and I do not think Henry could find a worthier. But this is beside the question. What induced me to make the remark was this, -- had I been at the hall, you will admit that Henry Bannerworth would have chosen myself, without any disparagement to you, Mr. Chillingworth."

"Well sir, what then?"

"Why I am a single man, I can live, reside and go any where; one country will suit me as well as another. I shall suffer no loss, but as for you, you will be ruined in every particular; for if you go in the character of a second, you will not be excused; for all the penalties incurred your profession of surgeon will not excuse you."

"I see all that, sir."

"What I propose is, that you should accompany the parties to the field, but in your own proper character of surgeon, and permit me to take that of second to Mr. Bannerworth."

"This cannot be done, unless by Mr. Henry Bannerworth's consent," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"Then I will accompany you to Bannerworth Hall, and see Mr. Henry, whom I will request to permit me to do what I have mentioned to you."

Mr. Chillingworth could not but admit the reasonableness of this proposal, and it was agreed they should return to Bannerworth Hall in company.

Here they arrived in a very short time after, and entered together.

"And now," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I will go and bring our two principals, who will be as much astonished to find themselves engaged in the same quarrel, as I was to find myself sent on a similar errand to Sir Francis with our friend Mr. John Pringle."

"Oh, not John -- Jack Pringle, you mean," said that individual.

Chillingworth now went in search of Henry, and sent him to the apartment where Mr. Marchdale was with Jack Pringle, and then he found the admiral waiting the return of Jack with impatience.

"Admiral" he said, "I perceive you are unwell this morning."

"Unwell be d -- d," said the admiral, starting up with surprise. "Who ever heard that old Admiral Bell looked ill just afore he was going into action? I say it's a scandalous lie."

"Admiral, admiral, I didn't say you were ill; only you looked ill -- a -- a little nervous, or so. Rather pale, eh? Is it not so?"

"Confound you, do you think I want to be physicked? I tell you, I have not a little but a great inclination to give you a good keelhauling. I don't want a doctor just yet."

"But it may not be so long, you know, admiral; but there is Jack Pringle a--waiting you below. Will you go to him? There is a particular reason; he has something to communicate from Sir Francis Varney, I believe."

The admiral gave a look of some amazement at Mr. Chillingworth, and then he said, muttering to himself, --

"If Jack Pringle should have betrayed me -- but, no; he could not do that, he is too true. I'm sure of Jack; and how did that son of a gallipot hint about the odd fish I sent Jack to?"

Filled with a dubious kind of belief which he had about something he had heard of Jack Pringle, he entered the room, where he met Marchdale, Jack Pringle, and Henry Bannerworth. Immediately afterwards, Mr. Chillingworth entered the apartment.

"I have," said he, "been to Sir Francis Varney, and there had an interview with him, and with Mr. Pringle; when I found we were both intent upon the same object, namely, an encounter with the knight by our principals."

"Eh?" said the admiral.

"What!" exclaimed Henry; "had he challenged you, admiral?"

"Challenged me!" exclaimed Admiral Bell, with a round oath. "I -- however -- since it comes to this, I must admit I challenged him."

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"That's what I did," said Henry Bannerworth, after a moment's thought; "and I perceive we have both fallen into the same line of conduct."

"That is the fact," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Both Mr. Pringle and I went there to settle the preliminaries, and we found an insurmountable bar to any meeting taking place at all."

"He wouldn't fight, then?" exclaimed Henry. "I see it all now."

"Not fight!" said Admiral Bell with a sort of melancholy disappointment. "D — n the cowardly rascal! Tell me, Jack Pringle, what did the long horse—marine—looking slab say to it? He told me he would fight. Why he ought to be made to stand sentry over the wind."

"You challenged him in person, too, I suppose?" said Henry.

"Yes, confound him! I went there last night."

"And I too."

"It seems to me," said Marchdale, "that this affair has been not indiscreetly conducted; but somewhat unusually and strangely, to say the least of it."

"You see," said Chillingworth, "Sir Francis was willing to fight both Henry and the admiral, as he told us."

"Yes," said Jack; "he told us he would fight us both, if so be as his light was not doused in the first brush."

"That was all that was wanted," said the admiral. "We could expect no more."

"But then he desired to meet you without any second; but, of course, I would not accede to this proposal. The responsibility was too great and too unequally borne by the parties engaged in the rencontre."

"Decidedly," said Henry; "but it is unfortunate — very unfortunate."

"Very," said the admiral — "very. What a rascally thing it is there ain't another rogue in the country to keep him in countenance."

"I thought it was a pity to spoil sport" said Jack Pringle. "It was a pity a good intention should be spoiled, and I promised the wamphigher that if as how he would fight, you should second him and you'd meet him to do so."

"Eh! who? I?" exclaimed the admiral, in some perplexity.

"Yes; that is the truth," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Mr. Pringle said you would do so, and he then and there pledged his word that you should meet him on the ground and second him on it."

"Yes," said Jack. "You must do it. I knew you would not spoil sport, and that there had better be a fight than no fight. I believe you'd sooner see a scrimmage than none, and so it's all arranged."

"Very well," said the admiral; "I only I wish Mr. Henry Bannerworth had been his second; I think I was entitled to the first meeting."

"No," said Jack, "you warn't, for Mr. Chillingworth was there first; first come first served, you know."

"Well, well, I mustn't grumble at another other man's luck; mine'll come in turn; but it had better be so than a disappointment altogether; I'll be second to this Sir Francis Varney; he shall have fair play, as I'm an admiral; but, d — e he shall fight — yes, yes, he shall fight."

"And to this conclusion I would come," said Henry, "I wish him to fight; now I will take care that he shall not have any opportunity of putting me on one side quietly."

"There is one thing," observed Marchdale, "that I wished to propose. After what has passed, I should not have returned, had I not some presentiment that something was going forward in which I could be useful to my friend."

"Oh!" said the admiral, with a huge twist of his countenance.

"What I was about to say was this, — Mr. Chillingworth has much to lose as he is situated, and I nothing as I am placed; I am chained down to no spot of earth. I am above following a profession — my means, I mean, place me above the necessity. Now, Henry, allow me to be your second in this affair; allow Mr. Chillingworth to attend in his professional capacity; he may be of service — of great service to one of the principals; whereas, if he go in any other capacity, he will inevitably have his own safety to consult."

"That is most unquestionably true," said Henry, "and, to my mind, the best plan that can be proposed. What say you, Admiral Bell, will you act with Mr. Marchdale in this affair?"

"Oh, I! — Yes — certainly — I don't care. Mr. Marchdale is Mr. Marchdale, I believe, and that's all I care about. If we quarrel to-day, and have anything to do to-morrow, in course, to-morrow I can put off my quarrel for next day; it will keep, — that's all I have to say at present."

"Then this is a final arrangement?" said Mr. Chillingworth.

"It is."

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"But, Mr. Bannerworth, in resigning my character of second to Mr. Marchdale, I only do so because it appears and seems to be the opinion of all present that I can be much better employed in another capacity."

"Certainly, Mr. Chillingworth; and I cannot but feel that I am under the same obligations to you for the readiness and zeal with which you have acted."

"I have done what I have done," said Chillingworth, -- "because I believed it was my duty to do so."

"Mr. Chillingworth has undoubtedly acted most friendly and efficiently this affair," said Marchdale; "and he does not relinquish the part for the purpose of escaping a friendly deed, but to perform one in which he may act in a capacity that no one else can."

"That is true," said the admiral.

"And now," said Chillingworth, "you are to meet to-morrow morning in the meadow at the bottom of the valley, half way between here and Sir Francis Varney's house, at seven o'clock in the morning."

More conversation passed among them, and it was agreed that they should meet early the next morning, and that, of course, the affair should be kept a secret. Marchdale for that night should remain in the house, and the admiral should appear as if little or nothing was the matter; and he and Jack Pringle retired, to talk over in private all the arrangements.

Henry Bannerworth and Marchdale also retired, and Mr. Chillingworth, after a time, retired, promising to be with them in time for the meeting next morning.

Much of that day was spent by Henry Bannerworth in his own apartment, in writing documents and letters of one kind and another; but at night he had not finished, for he had been compelled to be about, and in Flora's presence, to prevent anything from being suspected.

Marchdale was much with him, and in secret examined the arms, ammunition, and bullets, and saw all was right for the next morning; and when he had done, he said, --

"Now, Henry, you must permit me to insist that you take some hours' repose, else you will scarcely be as you ought to be."

"Very good," said Henry. "I have just finished, and can take your advice."

After many thoughts and reflections, Henry Bannerworth fell into a deep sleep, and slept several hours in calmness and quietude, and at an early hour he awoke, and saw Marchdale sitting by him.

"Is it time, Marchdale? I have not overslept myself, have I?"

"No; time enough -- time enough," said Marchdale. "I should have let you sleep longer, but I should have awakened you in good time."

It was now the grey light of morning, and Henry arose and began to prepare for the encounter. Marchdale stole to Admiral Bell's chamber, but he and Jack Pringle were ready.

Few words were spoken, and those few were in a whisper, and the whole party left the Hall in as noiseless a manner as possible. It was a mild morning, and yet it was cold at that time of the morning, just as day is beginning to dawn in the east. There was, however, ample time to reach the rendezvous.

It was a curious party that which was now proceeding towards the spot appointed for the duel, the result of which might have so important an effect on the interests of those who were to be engaged in it.

It would be difficult for us to analyse the different and conflicting emotions that filled the breasts of the various individuals composing that party -- the hopes and fears -- the doubts and surmises that were given utterance to; though we are compelled to acknowledge that though to Henry, the character of the man he was going to meet in mortal fight was of a most ambiguous and undefined nature, and though no one could imagine the means he might be endowed with for protection against the arms of man -- Henry, as we said, strode firmly forward with unflinching resolution. His heart was set on recovering the happiness of his sister, and he would not falter.

So far, then, we may consider that at length proceedings of a hostile character were so far clearly and fairly arranged between Henry Bannerworth and that most mysterious being who certainly, from some cause or another, had betrayed no inclination to meet an opponent in that manner which is sanctioned, bad as it is, by the usages of society.

But whether his motive was one of cowardice or mercy, remained yet to be seen. It might be that he feared himself receiving some mortal injury, which would at once put a stop to that preternatural career of existence which he affected to shudder at, and yet evidently took considerable pains to prolong.

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Upon the other hand, it is just possible that some consciousness of invulnerability on his own part, or of great power to injure his antagonist, might be the cause why he had held back so long from fighting the duel, and placed so many obstacles in the way of the usual necessary arrangements incidental to such occasions.

Now, however, there would seem to be no possible means of escape. Sir Francis Varney must fight or fly, for he was surrounded by too many opponents.

To be sure he might have appealed to the civil authorities to protect him, and to sanction him in his refusal to commit what undoubtedly is a legal offence; but then there cannot be a question that the whole of the circumstances would come out, and meet the public eye — the result of which would be, his acquisition of a reputation, as unenviable as it would be universal.

It had so happened, that the peculiar position of the Bannerworth family kept their acquaintance within extremely narrow limits, and greatly indisposed them to set themselves up as marks for peculiar observation. Once holding, as they had, a proud position in the county, and being looked upon as quite magnates of the land, they did not now court the prying eye of curiosity to look upon their poverty; but rather with a gloomy melancholy they lived apart, and repelled the advances of society by a cold reserve which few could break through.

Had this family suffered in any noble cause, or had the misfortunes which had come over them, and robbed their ancestral house of its lustre, been an unavoidable dispensation of providence, they would have borne the hard position with a different aspect; but it must be remembered, that to the faults, the vices, and the criminality of some of their race, was to be attributed their present depressed state.

It has been seen during the progress of our tale, that its action has been tolerably confined to Bannerworth Hall, its adjacent meadows, and the seat of Sir Francis Varney; the only person at any distance, knowing anything of the circumstances, or feeling any interest in them, being Mr. Chillingworth, the surgeon, who, from personal feeling, as well as from professional habit, was not likely to make a family's affairs a subject of gossip.

A change, however, was at hand — a change of a most startling and alarming character to Varney — one which he might expect, yet not be well prepared for.

This period of serenity was to pass away, and he was to become most alarmingly popular. We will not, however, anticipate, but proceed at once to detail as briefly as may be the hostile meeting.

It would appear that Varney, now that he had once consented to the definitive arrangements of a duel, shrunk not in any way from carrying them out, nor in the slightest attempted to retard arrangements which might be fatal to himself.

The early morning was one of those cloudy ones so frequently occurring in our fickle climate, when the cleverest weather prophet would find it difficult to predict what the next hour might produce.

There was a kind of dim gloominess over all objects; and as there were no bright lights there were no deep shadows — the consequence of which was a sameness of effect over the landscape, that robbed it of many of its usual beauties.

Such was the state of things when Marchdale accompanied Henry and Admiral Bell from Bannerworth Hall across the garden in the direction of the hilly wood, close to which was the spot intended for the scene of encounter.

Jack Pringle came on at a lazy pace behind with his hands in his pockets, and looking as unconcerned as if he had just come out for a morning's stroll, and scarcely knew whether he saw what was going on or not.

The curious contortion into which he twisted his countenance, and the different odd-looking lumps that appeared in it from time to time, may be accounted for by a quid of unusual size, which he seemed to be masticating with a relish quite horrifying to one unused to so barbarous a luxury.

The admiral had strictly enjoined him not to interfere on pain of being considered a lubber and no seaman for the remainder of his existence — threatened penalties which, of course, had their own weight with Jack, and accordingly he came just to see the row in as quiet a way as possible, perhaps not without a hope, that something might turn up in the shape of a *causus belli*, that might justify him in adopting a threatening attitude towards somebody.

"Now, Master Henry," said the admiral, "none of your palaver to me as we go along; recollect I don't belong to your party, you know. I've stood friend to two or three fellows in my time; but if anybody had said to me, 'Admiral Bell, the next time you go out on a quiet little shooting party, it will be as second to a vampyre,' I'd have

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said 'you're a liar.' Howsomever, d — me, here you goes, and what I mean to say is this, Mr. Henry, that I'd second even a Frenchman rather than he shouldn't fight when he's asked."

"That's liberal of you," said Henry, "at all events."

"I believe you it is," said the admiral; "so mind if you don't hit him, I'm not a-going to tell you how — all you've got to do is, to fire low; but that's no business of mine. Shiver my timbers, I oughtn't to tell you, but d — n you, hit him if you can."

"Admiral," said Henry, "I can hardly think you are even preserving a neutrality in the matter, putting aside my own partisanship as regards your own man."

"Oh! hang him. I'm not going to let him creep out of the thing on such a shabby pretence, I can tell you. I think I ought to have gone to his house this morning; only, as I said I never would cross his threshold again, I won't."

"I wonder if he'll come," said Mr. Marchdale to Henry. "After all, you know he may take to flight, and shun an encounter which, it is evident, he has entered into but tardily."

"I hope not," said Henry; "and yet I must own that your supposition has several times crossed my mind. If, however, he do not meet me, he never can appear the country, and we should, at least, be rid of him, and all his troublesome importunities concerning the Hall. I would not allow that man, on any account, to cross the threshold of my house, as its tenant or its owner."

"Why, it ain't usual," said the admiral, "to let one's house to two people at once, unless you seem quite to forget that I've taken yours. I may as well remind you of it."

"Hurra!" said Jack Pringle, at that moment.

"What's the matter with you? Who told you to hurra?"

"Enemy in the offing," said Jack, "three or four points to the sou-west."

"So he is, by Jove! dodging about among the trees. Come, now, this vampyre's a decenter fellow than I thought him. He means, after all, to let us have a pop at him."

They had now reached so close to the spot, that Sir Francis Varney, who, to all appearance, had been waiting, emerged from among the trees, rolled up in his dismal looking cloak, and, if possible, looking longer and thinner than ever he had looked before.

His face wore a singular cadaverous-looking aspect. His very lips were white, and there was a curious, pinkish-looking circle round each of his eyes, that imparted to his whole countenance a most uninviting appearance. He turned his eyes from one to the other of those who were advancing towards him, until he saw the admiral, upon which he gave such a grim and horrible smile, that the old man exclaimed, —

"I say, Jack, you lubber, there's a face for a figure-head."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Did you ever see such a d — — d grin as that in your life, in any latitude?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You did, you swab."

"I should think so."

"It's a lie, and you know it."

"Very good," said Jack; "don't you recollect when that ere iron bullet walked over your head, leaving a nice little nick, all the way off Bergen-ap-Zoom, that was the time — blessed if you didn't give just such a grin as that."

"I didn't, you rascal."

"And I say you did."

"Mutiny, by God!"

"Go to blazes!"

How far this contention might have gone, having now reached its culminating point, had the admiral and Jack been alone, it is hard to say; but as it was, Henry and Marchdale interfered, and so the quarrel was patched up for the moment, in order to give place to more important affairs.

Varney seemed to think, that after the smiling welcome he had given to his second, he had done quite enough; for there he stood, tall, and gaunt, and motionless, if we may except an occasional singular movement of the mouth, and a clap together of his teeth, at times, which was enough to make anybody jump to hear.

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"For Heaven's sake," said Marchdale, "do not let us trifle at such a moment as this. Mr. Pringle, you really had no business here."

"Mr. who?" said Jack.

"Pringle, I believe, is your name?" returned Marchdale.

"It were; but blowed if ever I was called mister before."

The admiral walked up to Sir Francis Varney, and gave him a nod that looked much more like one of defiance than of salutation, to which the vampyre replied by a low, courtly bow.

"Oh, bother!" muttered the old admiral. "If I was to double up my back bone like that, I should never get it down straight again. Well, all's right; you've come; that's all you could do, I suppose."

"I am here," said Varney, "and therefore it becomes a work of supererogation to remark that I've come."

"Oh! does it? I never bolted a dictionary, and, therefore, I don't know exactly what you mean."

"Step aside with me a moment, Admiral Bell, and I will tell you what you are to do with me after I am shot, if such should be my fate."

"Do with you! D -- -- d if I'll do anything with you."

"I don't expect you will regret me; you will eat."

"Eat!"

"Yes, and drink as usual, no doubt, notwithstanding being witness to the decease of a fellow-creature."

"Belay there; don't call yourself a fellow-creature of mine; I ain't a vampyre."

"But there's no knowing what you may be; and now listen to my instructions; for as you're my second, you cannot very well refuse to me a few friendly offices. Rain is falling. Step beneath this ancient tree, and I will talk to you."

Chapter XXXIX. THE STORM AND THE FIGHT. -- THE ADMIRAL'S REPUDIATION OF HIS PRINCIPAL.

"Well," said the admiral, when they were fairly under the tree, upon the leaves of which the pattering rain might be heard falling: "well -- what is it?"

"If your young friend Mr. Bannerworth, should chance to send a pistol-bullet through any portion of my anatomy, prejudicial to the prolongation of my existence, you will be so good as not to interfere with anything I may have about me, or to make any disturbance whatever."

"You may depend I sha'n't."

"Just take the matter perfectly easy -- as a thing of course."

"Oh! I mean d -- -- d easy."

"Ha! what a delightful thing is friendship! There is a little knoll or mound of earth midway between here and the Hall. Do you happen to know it? There is one solitary tree growing near its summit -- an oriental looking tree, of the fir tribe, which, fan-like, spreads its deep green leaves across the azure sky."

"Oh! bother it; it's a d -- -- d old tree, growing upon a little bit of a hill, I suppose you mean?"

"Precisely; only much more poetically expressed. The moon rises at a quarter past four to-night, or rather to-morrow morning."

"Does it?"

"Yes; and if I should happen to be killed, you will have me removed gently to this mound of earth, and there laid beneath this tree, with my face upwards; and take care that it is done before the moon rises. You can watch that no one interferes."

"A likely job. What the deuce do you take me for? I tell you what it is, Mr. Vampyre, or Varney, or whatever's your name, if you should chance to be hit, wherever you chance to fall, there you'll lie."

"How very unkind."

"Uncommon, ain't it?"

"Well, well, since that is your determination, I must take care of myself in another way. I can do so, and I will."

"Take care of yourself how you like, for all I care; I've come here to second you, to see that, on the honour of a seaman, if you are put out of the world, it's done in proper manner, that's all I have to do with you -- now you know."

Sir Francis Varney looked after him with a strange kind of smile, as he walked away to make the necessary preparations with Marchdale for the immediate commencement of the contest.

These were simple and brief. It was agreed that twelve paces should be measured out, six each way, from a fixed point; one six to be paced by the admiral, and the other by Marchdale; then they were to draw lots, to see at which end of this imaginary line Varney was to be placed; after this the signal for firing was to be one, two, three -- fire!

A few minutes sufficed to complete these arrangements; the ground was measured in the manner we have stated, and the combatants placed in their respective positions, Sir Francis Varney occupying the same spot where he had at first stood, namely, that nearest to the little wood, and to his own residence.

It is impossible that under such circumstances the bravest and the calmest of mankind could fail to feel some slight degree of tremour, or uneasiness; and, although we can fairly claim for Henry Bannerworth that he was as truly courageous as any right feeling Christian man could wish to be, yet when it was possible that he stood within, as it were, a hair's breadth of eternity, a strange world of sensation and emotions found a home in his heart, and he could not look altogether undaunted all on that future which might, for all he knew to the contrary, be so close at hand, as far as he was concerned.

It was not that he feared death, but that he looked with a decent gravity upon so grave a change as that from this world to the next, and hence it was that his face was pale, and that he looked all the emotion which he really felt.

This was the aspect and the bearing of a brave but not a reckless man; while Sir Francis Varney, on the other

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hand, seemed, now that he had fairly engaged in the duel, to look upon it and all its attendant circumstances with a kind of smirking satisfaction, as if he were far more amused than personally interested.

This was certainly the more extraordinary after the manner in which he had tried to evade the fight, and, at all events, was quite a sufficient proof that cowardice had not been his actuating motive in so doing.

The admiral, who stood on a level with him, could not see the sort of expression he wore, or, probably, he would have been far from well pleased; but the others did, and they found something inexpressibly disagreeable in the smirking kind of satisfaction with which the vampyre seemed to regard now the proceedings.

"Confound him," whispered Marchdale to Henry, "one would think he was quite delighted, instead as we had imagined him, not well pleased, at these proceedings; look how he grins."

"It is no matter," said Henry; "let him wear what aspect he may, it is the same to me; and, as Heaven is my judge, I here declare, if I did not think myself justified in so doing, I would not raise my hand against this man."

"There can be no shadow of a doubt regarding your justification. Have at him, and Heaven protect you."

"Amen!"

The admiral was to give the word to fire, and now he and Marchdale having stepped sufficiently on one side to be out of all possible danger from any stray shot, he commenced repeating the signal, --

"Are you ready, gentlemen? -- once."

They looked sternly at each other and each grasped his pistol.

"Twice!"

Sir Francis Varney smiled and looked around him, as if the affair were one of the most common-place description.

"Thrice!"

Varney seemed to be studying the sky rather than attending to the duel.

"Fire!" cried the admiral, and one report only struck upon the ear. It was that from Henry's pistol.

All eyes were turned upon Sir Francis Varney, who had evidently reserved his fire, for what purpose could not be devised, except a murderous one, the taking of a more steady aim at Henry. Sir Francis, however, seemed in no hurry, but smiled, significantly, and gradually raised the point of his weapon.

"Did you hear the word, Sir Francis? I gave it loud enough, I am sure. I never spoke plainer in my life; did I ever, Jack?"

"Yes, often," said Jack Pringle; "what's the use of your asking such yarns as them? you know you have done so often enough when you wanted grog."

"You d -- -- d rascal, I'll -- I'll have your back scored, I will."

"So you will, when you are afloat again, which you never will be -- you are paid off, that's certain."

"You lubberly lout, you ain't a seaman; a seaman would never mutiny against his admiral; howsomever, do you hear, Sir Francis, I'll give the matter up, if you don't pay some attention to me."

Henry looked steadily at Varney, expecting every moment to feel his bullet. Mr. Marchdale hastily exclaimed that this was not according to usage.

Sir Francis Varney took no notice, but went on elevating his weapon; when it was perpendicular to the earth he fired in the air.

"I had not anticipated this," said Marchdale, as he walked to Henry. "I thought he was taking a more deadly aim."

"And I," said Henry.

"Ay, you have escaped, Henry; let me congratulate you."

"Not so fast; we may fire again."

"I can afford to do that," he said, with a smile.

"You should have fired, sir, according to custom," said the admiral; "this is not the proper thing."

"What, fire at your friend?"

"Oh, that's all very well! You are my friend for a time, vampyre as you are and I intend you shall fire."

"If Mr. Henry Bannerworth demands another fire, I have no objection to it and will fire at him: but as it is I shall not do so, indeed, it would be quite useless for him to do so -- to point mortal weapons at me is mere child's play, they will not hurt me."

"The devil they won't," said the admiral.

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"Why, look you here," said Sir Francis Varney, stepping forward and placing his hand to his neckerchief; "look you here; if Mr. Henry Bannerworth should demand another fire, he may do so with the same bullet."

"The same bullet!" said Marchdale, stepping forward — "the same bullet! How is this?"

"My eyes," said Jack; "who'd a thought it; here's a go! wouldn't he do for a dummy — to lead a forlorn hope, or to put in among the boarders?"

"Here," said Sir Francis, handing a bullet to Henry Bannerworth — "here is the bullet you shot at me."

Henry looked at it — it was blackened by powder; and then Marchdale seized it and tried it in the pistol, but found the bullet fitted Henry's weapon.

"By heaven, it is so!" he exclaimed, stepping back and looking at Varney from top to toe in horror and amazement.

"D — —e," said the admiral, "if I understand this. Why Jack Pringle, you dog, here's a strange fish."

"Oh, no! there's plenty on 'um in some countries."

"Will you insist upon another fire, or may I consider you satisfied?"

"I shall object," said Marchdale. "Henry, this affair must go no further; it would be madness — worse than madness, to fight upon such terms."

"So say I," said the admiral. "I will not have anything to do with you, Sir Francis. I'll not be your second any longer. I didn't bargain for such a game as this. You might as well fight with the man in brass armour, at the Lord Mayor's show, or the champion at a coronation."

"Oh!" said Jack Pringle; "a man may as well fire at the back of a halligator as a wamphigher."

"This must be considered as having been concluded," said Mr. Marchdale.

"No!" said Henry.

"And wherefore not?"

"Because I have not received his fire."

"Heaven forbid you should."

"I may not with honour quit the ground without another fire."

"Under ordinary circumstances there might be some shadow of an excuse for your demand; but as it is there is none. You have neither honour nor credit to gain by such an encounter, and certainly, you can gain no object."

"How are we to decide this affair? Am I considered absolved from the accusation under which I lay, of cowardice?" inquired Sir Francis Varney, with a cold smile.

"Why, as for that," said the admiral, "I should as soon expect credit for fighting behind a wall, as with a man that I couldn't hit any more than the moon."

"Henry; let me implore you to quit this scene; if can do no good."

At this moment, a noise, as of human voices, was heard at a distance; this caused a momentary pause, and the whole party stood still and listened.

The murmurs and shouts that now arose in the distance were indistinct and confused.

"What can all this mean?" said Marchdale; "there is something very strange about it. I cannot imagine a cause for so usual an occurrence."

"Nor I," said Sir Francis Varney, looking suspiciously at Henry Bannerworth.

"Upon my honour I know neither what is the cause nor the nature of the sounds themselves."

"Then we can easily see what is the matter from yonder hillock," said the admiral; "and there's Jack Pringle, he's up there already. What's he telegraphing about in that manner, I wonder?"

The fact was, Jack Pringle, hearing the riot, had thought that if he got to the neighbouring eminence he might possibly ascertain what it was that was the cause of what he termed the "row," and had succeeded in some degree.

There were a number of people of all kinds coming out from the village, apparently armed, and shouting. Jack Pringle hitched up his trousers and swore, then took off his hat and began to shout to the admiral, as he said, —

"D — —e, they are too late to spoil the in sport. Hilloa! hurrah!"

"What's all that about, Jack?" inquired the admiral, as he came puffing along. "What's the squall about?"

"Only a few horse-marines and bumboat-women, that have been startled like a company of penguins."

"Oh! my eyes! wouldn't a whole broadside set em flying, Jack?"

"Ay; just as them Frenchmen that you murdered on board the Big Thunderer, as you called it."

"I murder them, you rascal?"

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"Yes; there was about five hundred of them killed."

"They were only shot."

"They were killed, only your conscience tells you it's uncomfortable."

"You rascal -- you villain! You ought to be keel-hauled and well payed."

"Ay; you're payed, and paid off as an old hulk."

"D -- e -- you -- you -- oh! I wish I had you on board ship, I'd make your lubberly carcass like a union jack, full of red and blue stripes."

"Oh! it's all very well; but if you don't take to your heels, you'll have all the old women in the village a whacking on you, that's all I have to say about it. You'd better port your helm and about ship, or you'll be keel-hauled."

"D -- n your -- "

"What's the matter?" inquired Marchdale, as he arrived.

"What's the cause of all the noise we have heard?" said Sir Francis; "has some village festival spontaneously burst forth among the rustics of this place?"

"I cannot tell the cause of it," said Henry Bannerworth; "but they seem to me to be coming toward this place."

"Indeed!"

"I think so too," said Marchdale.

"With what object?" inquired Sir Francis Varney.

"No peaceable one," observed Henry; "for, as far I can observe, they struck across the country, as though they would enclose something, or intercept somebody."

"Indeed! but why come here?"

"If I knew that I would have at once told the cause."

"And they appear armed with a variety of odd weapons," observed Sir Francis; "they mean an attack upon some one. Who is that man with them? he seems to be deprecating their coming."

"That appears to be Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry; "I think that is he."

"Yes," observed the admiral; "I think I know the build of that craft; he's been in our society before. I always know a ship as soon as I see it."

"Does you, though?" said Jack.

"Yes; what do you mean, eh? let me hear what you've got to say against your captain and your admiral, you mutinous dog; you tell me, I say."

"So I will; you thought you were fighting a big ship in a fog, and fired a dozen broadsides or so, and it was only the Flying Dutchman, or the devil."

"You infernal dog -- "

"Well, you know it was; it might a been our own shadow, for all I can tell. Indeed, I think it was."

"You think!"

"Yes."

"That's mutiny: I'll have no more to do with you, Jack Pringle; you're no seaman and have no respect for your officer. Now sheer off, or I'll cut your yards."

"Why, as for my yards, I'll square 'em presently if I like, you old swab; but as for leaving you, very well; you have said so, and you shall be accommodated, d -- -- e; however, it was not so when your nob was nearly rove through with a boarding pike it wasn't 'I'll have no more to do with Jack Pringle' then, it was more t'other."

"Well, then, why be so mutinous?"

"Because you aggrawates me."

The cries of the mob became more distinct as they drew nearer to the party, who began to evince some uneasiness as to their object.

"Surely," said Marchdale, "Mr. Chillingworth has not named anything respecting the duel that has taken place."

"No, no."

"But he was to have been here this morning," said the admiral. "I understood he was to be here in his own character of a surgeon, and yet I have not seen him; have any of you?"

"No," said Henry.

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"Then here he comes in the character of a conservator of the public peace," said Varney, coldly; "however, I believe that his errand will be useless since the affair is, I presume, concluded."

"Down with the vampyre!"

"Eh!" said the admiral, "eh, what's that, eh? What did they say?"

"If you'll listen they'll tell you soon enough, I'll warrant."

"May be they will, and yet I'd like to know now."

Sir Francis Varney looked significantly at Marchdale, and then waited with downcast eyes for the repetition of the words.

"Down with the vampyre!" resounded on all sides from the people who came rapidly towards them, and converging towards a centre. "Burn, destroy, and kill the vampyre! No vampyre; burn him out; down with him; kill him!"

Then came Mr. Chillingworth's voice, who, with much earnestness, endeavoured to exhort them to moderation, and to refrain from violence.

Sir Francis Varney became very pale and agitated; he immediately turned, and without taking the least notice, he made for the wood, which lay between him and his own house, leaving the people in the greatest agitation.

Mr. Marchdale was not unmoved at this occurrence, but stood his ground with Henry Bannerworth, the admiral, and Jack Pringle, until the mob came very near to them, shouting, and uttering cries of vengeance, and death of all imaginable kinds that it was possible to conceive, against the unpopular vampyre.

Pending the arrival of these infuriated town persons, we will, in a few words, state how it was that so suddenly a set of circumstances arose productive of an amount of personal danger to Varney, such as, up to that time, had seemed not at all likely to occur.

We have before stated there was but one person out of the family of the Bannerworths who was able to say anything of a positive character concerning the singular and inexplicable proceedings at the Hall; and that that person was Mr. Chillingworth, an individual not at all likely to become garrulous upon the subject.

But, alas! the best of men have their weaknesses, and we much regret to say that to Mr. Chillingworth so far in this instance forgot that admirable discretion which commonly belonged to him, as to be the cause of the popular tumult which had now reached such a height.

In a moment of thoughtlessness and confidence he told his wife. Yes, this really clever man, from whom one would not have expected such a piece of horrible indiscretion, actually told his wife all about the vampyre. But such is human nature; combined at with an amount of firmness and reasoning power, that one would have thought to be invulnerable safeguards, we find some weakness which astonishes all calculation.

Such was this of Mr. Chillingworth's. It is true, he cautioned the lady so be secret, and pointed to her the danger of making Varney the vampyre a theme for gossip; but he might as well have whispered to a hurricane to be so good is not to go on blowing so, as request Mrs. Chillingworth to keep a secret.

Of course she burst into the usual declarations of "Who was she to tell? Was she a person who went about telling things? When did she see anybody? Not she, once in a blue moon;" and then, when Mr. Chillingworth went out like the King of Otaheite, she invited the neighbours round about to come to take some tea.

Under solemn promises of secrecy, sixteen ladies that evening were made acquainted with the full and interesting particulars of the attack of the vampyre on Flora Bannerworth, and all the evidence inculcating Sir Francis Varney as the bloodthirsty individual.

When the mind comes to consider the sixteen ladies multiplied their information by about four-and-twenty each, we become quite lost in a sea of arithmetic, and feel compelled to sum up the whole by a candid assumption that in four-and-twenty hours not an individual in the whole town was ignorant of the circumstances.

On the morning before the projected duel, there was an unusual commotion in the streets. People were conversing together in little knots, and using rather violent gesticulations. Poor Mr. Chillingworth! he alone was ignorant of the causes of the popular commotion, and so he went to bed wondering that an unusual bustle pervaded the little market town, but not at all guessing its origin.

Somehow or another, however, the populace, who had determined to make a demonstration on the following morning against the vampyre, thought it highly necessary first to pay some sort of compliment to Mr. Chillingworth, and, accordingly, at an early hour, a great mob assembled outside his house, and gave three terrific applauding shouts, which roused him most unpleasantly from his sleep; and induced the greatest astonishment at

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the cause such a tumult.

Oh, that artful Mrs. Chillingworth! too well she knew what was the matter; yet she pretended to be so oblivious upon the subject.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Chillingworth as he started up in bed, "what's all that?"

"All what?" said his wife.

"All what! Do you mean to say heard nothing?"

"Well, I think I did hear a little sort of something."

"A little sort of something? It shook the house."

"Well, well; never mind; it's no business of ours."

"Yes; but it may be, though. It's all very well to say 'go to sleep.' That happens to be a thing I can't do. There's something amiss."

"Well, what's that to you?"

"Perhaps nothing; but, perhaps, everything."

Mr. Chillingworth sprang from his bed and began and began dressing, a process which he executed with considerable rapidity, which was much accelerated by two or three supplementary shouts from the people below.

Then, in a temporary lull, a loud voice shouted, —

"Down with the vampyre — down with the vampyre!"

The truth in an instant burst over the mind of Mr. Chillingworth, and, turning to his wife, he exclaimed, —

"I understand it now. You've been gossiping about Sir Francis Varney, and have caused all this tumult."

"I gossip! Well, I never! Lay it on me; it is sure to be my fault. I might have known that beforehand. I always am."

"But you must have spoken of it."

"Who have I got to speak to about it?"

"Did you, or did you not?"

"Who should I tell?"

Mr. Chillingworth was dressed, and he hastened down and entered the street with great desperation. He had a hope that he might be enabled to disperse the crowd and yet be in time keep his appointment at the duel.

His appearance was hailed with another shout, for it was considered, of course, that he had come to join in the attack on Sir Francis Varney. He found assembled a much more considerable mob than he had imagined, and to his alarm he found many armed with all sorts of weapons.

"Hurrah!" cried a great lumpy-looking fellow, who seemed half mad with the prospect of a disturbance.

"Hurrah, here's the doctor, he'll tell us all about it while we go along."

"For heaven's sake," said Mr. Chillingworth, "stop! What are you about to do all of you?"

"Burn the vampyre — burn the vampyre!"

"Hold — hold! this is folly. Let me implore you all to return to your homes, or you will get into serious trouble on this subject."

This was a piece of advice not at all likely to be adopted; and when the mob found that Mr. Chillingworth was not disposed to encourage and countenance it in its violence, it gave another loud shout of defiance, and moved off through the long straggling streets of the town in a direction towards Sir Francis Varney's house.

It is true that what were called authorities of the town had become alarmed, and were stirring, but they found themselves in such a frightful minority, that it became out of the question for them to interfere with any effect to stop the lawless proceedings of the rioters, so that the infuriated populace had it all their own way, and in a straggling, disorderly looking kind of procession they moved off, vowing vengeance as they went against Varney the vampyre.

Hopeless as Mr. Chillingworth thought it was to interfere with any degree of effect to stop the lawless proceedings of the mob, he still could not reconcile it to himself to be absent from a scene which he now felt certain had been produced by his own imprudence, so he went with the crowd, endeavouring, as he did, by every argument that could be suggested to him to induce them to abstain from the acts of violence they contemplated. He had a hope, too, that when they reached Sir Francis Varney's, finding him not within, as probably would be the case, as by the time he would have started to meet Henry Bannerworth on the ground, to fight the duel, he might induce the mob to return and forgo their meditated violence.

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And thus was it that, urged on by the multitude of persons, the unhappy surgeon was expiating, in both mind and person, the serious mistakes he had committed in trusting a secret to his wife.

Let it not be supposed that we for one moment wish to lay down a general principle as regards the confiding secrets to ladies, because from the beginning of the world it has become notorious how well they keep them, and with what admirable discretion, tact, and forethought this fairest portion of humanity conduct themselves.

We know how few Mrs. Chillingworths there are in the world, and have but to regret that our friend the doctor should, in his matrimonial adventure, have met with such a specimen.

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Chapter XL. THE POPULAR RIOT. -- SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S DANGER. -- THE SUGGESTION AND ITS RESULTS.

Such, then, were the circumstances which at once altered the whole aspect of the affairs, and, from private and domestic causes of very deep annoyance, led to public results of a character which seemed likely to involve the whole country--side in the greatest possible confusion.

But while we blame Mr. Chillingworth for being so indiscreet as to communicate the secret of such a person as Varney the vampire to his wife, we trust in a short time to be enabled to show that he made as much reparation as it was possible to make for the mischief he had unintentionally committed. And now as he struggled onward -- apparently onward -- first and foremost among the rioters, he was really doing all in his power to quell that tumult which superstition and dread had raised.

Human nature truly delights in the marvellous, and in proportion as a knowledge of the natural phenomena of nature is restricted, and unbridled imagination allowed to give the rein to fathomless conjecture, we shall find an eagerness likewise to believe the marvellous to be the truth. That dim and uncertain condition concerning vampires, originating probably as it had done in Germany, had spread itself slowly, but insidiously, throughout the whole of the civilized world.

In no country and in no clime is there not something which bears a kind of family relationship to the veritable vampire of which Sir Francis Varney appeared to be so choice a specimen.

The ghoul of eastern nations is but the same being, altered to suit habits and localities; and the sema of the Scandinavians is but the vampire of a more primitive race, and a personification of that morbid imagination which has once fancied the probability of the dead walking again among the living, with all the frightful insignia of corruption and the grave about them.

Although not popular in England, still there had been tales told of such midnight visitants, so that Mrs. Chillingworth, when she had imparted the information which she had obtained, had already some rough material to work upon in the minds of her auditors, and therefore there was no great difficulty in very soon establishing the fact.

Under such circumstances, ignorant people always do what they have heard was done by some one else before them and in an incredibly short space of time the propriety of catching Sir Francis Varney, depriving him of his vampire-like existence, and driving a stake through his body, became not at all a questionable proposition.

Alas, poor Mr. Chillingworth! as well might he have attempted King Canute's task of stemming the waves of the ocean as that of attempting to stop the crowd from proceeding to Sir Francis Varney's house.

His very presence was a sort of confirmation of the whole affair. In vain he gesticulated, in vain he begged and prayed that they would go back, and in vain he declared that full and ample justice should be done upon the vampire, provided popular clamour spared him, and he was left to more deliberate judgment.

Those who were foremost in the throng paid no attention to these remonstrances, while those who were more distant heard them not, and, for all they knew, he might be urging the crowd on to violence, instead of deprecating it.

Thus, then, this disorderly rabble now reached the house of Sir Francis Varney and loudly demanded of his terrified servants where he was to be found.

The knocking at the Hall door was prodigious, and, with a laudable desire, doubtless, of saving time, the moment one was done amusing himself with the ponderous knocker, another seized it; so that until the door was flung open by some of the bewildered and terrified men, there was no cessation whatever of the furious demand for admittance.

"Varney the vampire -- Varney the vampire!" cried a hundred voices. "Death to the vampire! Where is he? Bring him out. Varney the vampire!"

The servants were too terrified to speak for some moments, as they saw such a tumultuous assemblage seeking their master, while so singular a name was applied to him.

At length, one more bold than the rest contrived to stammer out, --

"My good people, Sir Francis Varney is not at home. He took an early breakfast, and has been out nearly an

hour."

The mob paused a moment in indecision, and then one of the foremost cried, —

"Who'd suppose they'd own he was at home! He's hiding somewhere of course; let's pull him out."

"Ah, pull him out! — pull him out!" cried many voices. A rush was made into the house, and in a very few minutes its chambers were ransacked, and all its hidden places carefully searched, with the hope of discovering the hidden form of Sir Francis Varney.

The servants felt that, with their inefficient strength, to oppose the proceedings of an assemblage which seemed to be unchecked by all sort of law or reason would be madness; they therefore only looked on, with wonder and dismay, satisfied certainly in their own minds that Sir Francis would not be found, and indulging in much conjecture as to what would be the result of such violent and unexpected proceedings.

Mr. Chillingworth hoped that time was gained, and that some sort of indication of what was going on would reach the unhappy object of popular detestation sufficiently early to enable him to provide for his own safety.

He knew he was breaking his own engagement to be present at the duel between Henry Bannerworth and Sir Francis Varney, and, as that thought recurred to him, he dreaded that his professional services might be required on one side or the other; for he knew, or fancied he knew, that mutual hatred dictated the contest; and he thought that if ever a duel had taken place which was likely to be attended with some disastrous result, that was surely the one.

But how could he leave, watched and surrounded as he was by an infuriated multitude — how could he hope but that his footsteps would be dogged, or that the slightest attempt of his to convey a warning to Sir Francis Varney, would not be the means of bringing down upon his head the very danger he sought to shield him from.

In this state of uncertainty, then, did our medical man remain, a prey to the bitterest reflections, and full of the direst apprehensions, without having the slightest power of himself to alter so disastrous a train of circumstances.

Dissatisfied with their non-success, the crowd twice searched the house of Sir Francis Varney, from the attics to the basement; and then, and not till then, did they begin reluctantly to believe that the servants must have spoken the truth.

"He's in the town somewhere," cried one. "Let's go back to the town."

It is strange how suddenly any mob will obey any impulse, and this perfectly groundless supposition was sufficient to turn their steps back again in the direction whence they came, and they had actually, in a straggling sort of column, reached half way towards the town, when they encountered a boy, whose professional pursuit consisted in tending sheep very early of a morning, and who at once informed them that he had seen Sir Francis Varney in the wood, half way between Bannerworth Hall and his own home.

This event at once turned the whole tide again, and with renewed clamours, carrying Mr. Chillingworth along with them, they now rapidly neared the real spot, where, probably, had they turned a little earlier, they would have viewed the object of their suspicion and hatred.

But, as we have already recorded, the advancing throng was seen by the parties on the ground where the duel could scarcely have been said to have been fought; and then had Sir Francis Varney dashed into the wood, which was so opportunely at hand to afford him a shelter from his enemies, and from the intricacies of which — well acquainted with them as he doubtless was, — he had every chance of eluding their pursuit.

The whole affair was a great surprise to Henry and his friends, when they saw such a string of people advancing, with such shouts and imprecations; they could not, for the life of them, imagine what could have excited such a turn out among the ordinarily industrious and quiet inhabitants of a town, remarkable rather for the quietude and steadiness of its population than for any violent outbreaks of popular feeling.

"What can Mr. Chillingworth be about," said Henry, "to bring such a mob here? has he taken leave of his senses?"

"Nay," said Marchdale; "look again; he seems to be trying to keep them back, although ineffectually, for they will not be stayed."

"D — —e," said the admiral, "here's a gang of pirates; we shall be boarded and carried before we know where we are, Jack."

"Ay ay, sir," said Jack.

"And is that all you've got to say, you lubber, when you see your admiral in danger? You'd better go and make terms with the enemy at once."

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"Really, this is serious," said Henry; "they shout for Varney. Can Mr. Chillingworth have been so mad as to adopt this means of stopping the duel?"

"Impossible," said Marchdale; "if that had been his intention, he could have done so quietly, through the medium of the civil authorities."

"Hang me!" exclaimed the admiral, "if there are any civil authorities; they talk of smashing somebody. What do they say, Jack? I don't hear quite so well as I used."

"You always was a little deaf," said Jack.

"What?"

"A little deaf, I say."

"Why, you lubberly lying swab, how dare you say so?"

"Because you was."

"You slave-going scoundrel!"

"For Heaven's sake, do not quarrel at such a time as this!" said Henry; "we shall be surrounded in a moment. Come, Mr. Marchdale, let you and I visit these people and ascertain what it is that has so much excited their indignation."

"Agreed," said Marchdale; and they both stepped forward at a rapid pace, to meet the advancing throng.

The crowd which had now approached to within a short distance of the expectant little party, was of a most motley description, and its appearance, under many circumstances, would cause considerable risibility. Men and women were mixed indiscriminately together, and in the shouting, the latter, if such a thing were possible, exceeded the former, both in discordance and energy.

Every individual composing that mob carried some weapon calculated for defence, such as flails, scythes, sickles, bludgeons, and this mode of arming caused them to wear a most formidable appearance; while the passion that superstition had called up was strongly depicted in their inflamed features. Their fury, too, had been excited by their disappointment, and it was with concentrated rage that they now pressed onward.

The calm and steady advance of Henry and Mr. Marchdale to meet the advancing throng, seemed to have the effect of retarding their progress a little, and they came to a parley at a hedge, which separated them from the meadow in which the duel had been fought.

"You seem to be advancing towards us," said Henry. "Do you seek me or any of my friends; and if so, upon what errand? Mr. Chillingworth, for Heaven's sake, explain what is the cause of all this tumult. You seem to be at the head of it."

"Seem to be," said Mr. Chillingworth, "without being so. You are not sought, nor any of your friends?"

"Who, then?"

"Sir Francis Varney," was the immediate reply.

"Indeed! and what has he done to incite popular indignation? of private wrong I can accuse him; but I desire no crowd to take up my cause or to avenge my quarrels."

"Mr. Bannerworth, it has become known, through my indiscretion, that Sir Francis Varney is suspected of being a vampyre."

"Is this so?"

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob. "Down with the vampyre! hurrah! where is he? Down with him!"

"Drive a stake through him," said a woman; "it's the only way, and the humanestest. You've only to take a hedge stake, and sharpen it a bit at one end, and char it a little in the fire so as there mayn't be no splinters to hurt, and then poke it through his stomach."

The mob gave a great shout at this humane piece of advice, and it was some time before Henry could make himself heard at all, even to those who were nearest to him. When he did succeed in so doing, he cried, with a loud voice, —

"Hear me, all of you. It is quite needless for me to inquire how you became possessed of the information that a dreadful suspicion hangs over the person of Sir Francis Varney; but if, in consequence of hearing such news, you fancy this public demonstration will be agreeable to me, or likely to relieve those who are nearest or dearest to me from the state of misery and apprehension into which they have fallen you are much mistaken."

"Hear him, hear him!" cried Mr. Marchdale; "he speaks both wisdom and truth."

"If anything," pursued Henry, "could add to the annoyance of vexation and misery we have suffered, it would

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assuredly be the being made subjects of every-day clamour."

"You hear him?" said Mr. Marchdale.

"Yes, we does," said a man; "but we comes out to catch a vampyre, for all that."

"Oh, to be sure," said the humane woman; "nobody's feelings is nothing to us. Are we to be woke up in the night with vampyres sucking bloods while we've got a stake in the country?"

"Hurrah!" shouted everybody. "Down with the vampyre! Where is he?"

"You are wrong. I assure you you are all wrong," said Mr. Chillingworth, imploringly; "there is no vampyre here, you see. Sir Francis Varney has, not only escaped, but he will take the law of all of you."

This was an argument which appeared to stagger a few, but the bolder spirits pushed them on, and a suggestion to search the wood having been made by some one who was more cunning than his neighbours, that measure was at once proceeded with, and executed in a systematic manner, which made those who knew it to be the hiding place of Sir Francis Varney tremble for his safety.

It was with a strange mixture of feeling that Henry Bannerworth waited the result of the search for the man who, but a few minutes before had been opposed to him in a contest of life or death.

The destruction of Sir Francis Varney would certainly have been an effectual means of preventing him from continuing to be the incubus he then was upon the Bannerworth family; and yet the generous nature of Henry shrank with horror from seeing even such a creature as Varney sacrificed at the shrine of popular resentment, and murdered by an infuriated populace.

He felt as great an interest in the escape of the vampyre as if some great advantage to himself had been contingent upon such an event; and, although he spoke not a word, while the echoes of the little wood were all awakened by the clamorous manner in which the mob searched for their victim, his feelings could be well read upon his countenance.

The admiral, too, without possessing probably the fine feelings of Henry Bannerworth, took an unusually sympathetic interest in the fate of the vampyre; and, after placing himself in various attitudes of intense excitement, he exclaimed, —

"D — n it, Jack, I do hope, after all, the vampyre will get the better of them. It's like a whole flotilla attacking one vessel — a lubberly proceeding at the best, and I'll be hanged if I like it. I should like to pour in a broadside into those fellows, just to let them see it wasn't a proper English mode of fighting. Shouldn't you, Jack?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I should."

"Shiver me, if I see an opportunity, if I don't let some of those rascals know what's what."

Scarcely had these words escaped the lips of the old admiral than there arose a loud shout from the interior of the wood. It was a shout of success, and seemed at the very least to herald the capture of the unfortunate Varney.

"By heaven!" exclaimed Henry, "they have him."

"God forbid!" said Mr. Marchdale; "this grows too serious."

"Bear a hand, Jack," said the admiral; "we'll have a fight for it yet; they sha'n't murder even a vampyre in cold blood. Load the pistols; and send a flying shot or two among the rascals, the moment they appear."

"No, no," said Henry; "no more violence, there has been enough — there has been enough."

Even as he spoke there came rushing from among the trees, at the corner of the wood, the figure of a man. They needed but one glance to assure them who it was. Sir Francis Varney had been seen and was flying before those implacable foes who had sought his life.

He had divested himself of his huge cloak, as well as of his low slouched hat, and, with a speed which nothing but the most absolute desperation could have enabled him to exert, he rushed onward, beating down before him every obstacle, and bounding over the meadows at a rate that, if he could have continued it for any length of time, would have set pursuit at defiance.

"Bravo!" shouted the admiral, "a stern chase is a long chase, and I wish them joy of it — d — e, Jack, did you ever see anybody get along like that?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You never did, you scoundrel."

"Yes, I did."

"When and where?"

"When you ran away off the sound."

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The admiral turned nearly blue with anger, but Jack looked perfectly imperturbable, as he added, —

"You know you ran away after the French frigates who wouldn't stay to fight you."

"Ah! that indeed. There he goes, putting on every stitch of canvas, I'll be bound."

"And there they come," said Jack, as he pointed to the corner of the wood, and some of the more active of the vampyre's pursuers showed themselves. It would appear as if the vampyre had been started from some hiding-place in the interior of the wood, and had then thought it expedient altogether to leave that retreat and make his way to some more secure one across the open country, where there would be more obstacles to his discovery than perseverance could overcome. Probably, then, among the brushwood and trees, for a few moments he had been again lost sight of, until those who were closest upon his track had emerged from among the dense foliage, and saw him scouring across the country at such headlong speed. These were but few, and in their extreme anxiety themselves to capture Varney, whose precipitate and terrified flight brought a firm conviction to their minds of his being a vampyre, they did not stop to get much of a reinforcement, but plunged on like greyhounds in his track.

"Jack," said the admiral, "this won't do. Look at that great lubberly fellow with the queer smock-frock."

"Never saw such a figure-head in my life," said Jack.

"Stop him."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The man was coming on at a prodigious rate, and Jack, with all the deliberation in the world, advanced to meet him; and when they got sufficiently close together, that in a few moments they must encounter each other, Jack made himself into as small a bundle as possible, and presented his shoulder to the advancing countryman in such a way, that he flew off it at a tangent, as if he had ran against a brick wall, and after rolling head over heels for some distance, safely deposited himself in a ditch, where he disappeared completely for a few moments from all human observation.

"Don't say I hit you," said Jack. "Curse yer, what did yer run against me for? Sarves you right. Lubbers as don't know how to steer, in course runs agin things."

"Bravo," said the admiral; "there's another of them."

The pursuers of Varney the vampyre, however, now came too thick and fast to be so easily disposed of, and as soon as his figure could be seen coursing over the meadows, and springing over road and ditch with an agility almost frightful to look upon, the whole rabble rout was in pursuit of him.

By this time, the man who had fallen into the ditch had succeeded in making his appearance in the visible world again, and as he crawled up the bank, looking a thing of mire and mud, Jack walked up to him with all the carelessness in the world, and said to him, —

"Any luck, old chap?"

"Oh, murder!" said the man, "what do you mean? who are you? where am I? what's the matter? Old Muster Fowler, the fat crowner, will set upon me now."

"Have you caught anything?" said Jack.

"Caught anything? "

"Yes; you've been in for eels, haven't you?"

"D -- n!"

"Well, it is odd to me, as some people can't go a fishing without getting out of temper. Have it your own way; I won't interfere with you;" and away Jack walked.

The man cleared the mud out of his eyes, as well as he could, and looked after him with a powerful suspicion that in Jack he saw the very cause of his mortal mishap; but, somehow or other, his immersion in the not over limpid stream had wonderfully cooled his courage, and casting one despairing look upon his begrimed apparel, and another at the last of the stragglers who were pursuing Sir Francis Varney across the fields, he thought it prudent to get home as fast he could, and get rid of the disagreeable results of an adventure which had turned out for him anything but auspicious, or pleasant.

Mr. Chillingworth, as though by a sort of impulse to be present in case Sir Francis Varney should really be run down, and with a hope of saving him from personal violence, had followed the foremost of the rioters in the wood, found it now quite impossible for him to carry on such a chase as that which was being undertaken across the fields after Sir Francis Varney.

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His person was unfortunately but ill qualified for the continuance of such a pursuit, and, although with the greatest reluctance, he at last felt himself compelled to give it up.

In making his way through the intricacies of the wood, he had been seriously incommoded by the thick undergrowth, and he had accidentally encountered several miry pools, with which he had involuntarily made a closer acquaintance than was at all conducive either to his personal appearance or comfort. The doctor's temper, though, generally speaking, one of the most even, was at last affected by his mishaps, and he could not refrain from an execration upon his want of prudence in letting his wife have a knowledge of a secret that was not his own and the producing an unlooked-for circumstance, the termination of which might be of a most disastrous nature.

Tired, therefore, and nearly exhausted by the exertions he had already taken, he emerged now along from the wood, and near the spot where stood Henry Bannerworth and his friends in consultation.

The jaded look of the surgeon was quite sufficient indication of the trouble and turmoil he had gone through, and some expressions of sympathy for his condition were dropped by Henry, to whom he replied, --

"My young friend, I deserve it all. I have nothing but my own indiscretion to thank for all the turmoil and tumult that has arisen this morning."

"But to what possible cause can we attribute such an outrage?"

"Reproach me as much as you will. I deserve it. A man may prate of his own secrets if he like, but he should be careful of those of other people. I trusted yours to another, and am properly punished."

"Enough," said Henry; "we'll say no more of that, Mr. Chillingworth. What is done cannot be undone, and we had better spend our time in reflection of how to make the best of what is, than in useless lamentation over its causes. What is to be done?"

"Nay, I know not. Have you fought the duel?"

"Yes; and, as you perceive, harmlessly."

"Thank Heaven for that."

"Nay, I had my fire, which Sir Francis Varney refused to return; so the affair had just ended, when the sound of approaching tumult came upon our ears."

"What a strange mixture," exclaimed Marchdale, "of feelings and passions this Varney appears to be. At one moment acting with the apparent greatest malignity; and another, seeming to have awakened in his mind a romantic generosity which knows no bounds. I cannot understand him."

"Nor I, indeed," said Henry; "but somehow tremble for his fate, and I seem to feel that something ought to be done to save him from the fearful consequences of popular feeling. Let us hasten to the town, and procure what assistance we may: but a few persons, well organised and properly armed, will achieve wonders against a desultory and ill-appointed multitude. There may be a chance of saving him yet, from the imminent danger which surrounds him."

"That's proper," cried the admiral. "I don't like to see anybody run down. A fair fight's another thing. Yard arm and yard arm -- stink pots and pipkins -- broadside to broadside -- and throw in your bodies, if you like, on the lee quarter; but don't do anything shabby. What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Why, I means to say as how if Varney only keeps on sail as he's been doing, that the devil himself wouldn't catch him in a gale."

"And yet," said Henry, "it is our duty to do the best we can. Let us at once to the town, and summons all the assistance in our power. Come on -- come on!"

His friends needed no further urging, but, at a brisk pace, they all proceeded by the nearest footpaths towards the town.

It puzzled his pursuers to think in what possible direction Sir Francis Varney expected to find sustenance or succour, when they saw how curiously he took his flight across the meadows. Instead of endeavouring, by any circuitous path, to seek the shelter of his own house, or to throw himself upon the care of the authorities of the town, who must, to the extent of their power, have protected him, he struck across the welds, apparently without aim or purpose, seemingly intent upon nothing but to distance his pursuers in a long chase, which might possibly tire them, or it might not, according to their or his powers of endurance.

We say this seemed to be the case, but it was not so in reality. Sir Francis Varney had a deeper purpose, and it was scarcely to be supposed that a man of his subtle genius, and, apparently, far-seeing and reflecting intellect,

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could have so far overlooked the many dangers of his position not to be fully prepared for some such contingency as that which had just now occurred.

Holding, as he did, so strange a place in society — living among men, and yet possessing so few attributes in common with humanity — he must all along have felt the possibility of drawing upon himself popular violence.

He could not wholly rely upon the secrecy of the Bannerworth family, much as they might well be supposed to shrink from giving publicity to circumstance of so fearfully strange and perilous a nature as those which had occurred amongst them. The merest accident might, at any moment, make him the town's talk. The overhearing of a few chance words by some gossiping domestic — some ebullition of anger or annoyance by some member of the family — or a communication from some friend who had been treated with confidence — might, at any time, awaken around him such a storm as that which now raged at his heels.

Varney the vampyre must have calculated this. He must have felt the possibility of such a state of things; and, as a matter of course, politicly provided himself with some place of refuge.

After about twenty minutes of hard chasing across the fields, there could be no doubt of his intentions. He had such a place of refuge; and, strange a one as it might appear, he sped towards it in as direct a line as ever a well-spiced arrow flew towards its mark.

That place of refuge, to the surprise of every one, appeared to be the ancient ruin, of which we have before spoken, and which was so well known to every inhabitant of the county.

Truly, it seemed like some act of mere desperation for Sir Francis Varney to hope there to hide himself. There remained within, of what had once been a stately pile, but a few grey crumbling walls, which the hunted hare would have passed unheeded, knowing that not for one instant could he have baffled his pursuers by seeking so inefficient a refuge.

And those who followed hard and fast upon the track of Sir Francis Varney felt so sure of their game when they saw whither he was speeding that they relaxed in their haste considerably, calling loudly to each other that the vampyre was caught at last, for he could be easily surrounded among the old ruins, and dragged from amongst its moss grown walls.

In another moment, with a wild dash and cry of exultation, he sprang out of sight, behind an angle, formed by what had been, at one time, one of the principal supports of the ancient structure.

Then, as if there was still something so dangerous about him, that only by a great number of hands could he be hoped to be secured, the infuriated peasantry gathered in a dense circle around what they considered his temporary place of refuge, and as the sun, which had now climbed above the tree tops, and dispersed, in a great measure, many of the heavy clouds of morning, shone down upon the excited group, they might have been supposed there assembled to perform some superstitious rite, which time had hallowed as an association of the crumbling ruin around which they stood.

By the time the whole of the stragglers, who had persisted in the chase, had come up, there might have been about fifty or sixty resolute men, each intent upon securing the person of one whom they felt, while in existence, would continue to be a terror to all the weaker and dearer portions of their domestic circles.

There was a pause of several minutes. Those who had come the fleetest were gathering breath, and those who had come up last were looking to their more forward companions for some information as to what had occurred before their arrival.

All was profoundly still within the ruin, and then suddenly, as if by common consent, there arose from every throat a loud shout of "Down with the vampyre! down with the vampyre! "

The echoes of that shout died away, and then all was still as before, while a superstitious feeling crept over even the boldest. It would almost seem as if they had expected some kind of response from Sir Francis Varney to the shout of defiance with which they had just greeted him; but the very calmness, repose, and absolute quiet of the ruin, and all about it, alarmed them, and they looked the one at the other as if the adventure after all were not one of the pleasantest description, and might not fall out so happily as they had expected.

Yet what danger could there be? there were they, more than half the hundred stout, strong men, to cope with one; they felt convinced that he was completely in their power; they knew the ruins could not hide him, and that five minutes time given to the task, would suffice to explore every nook and corner of them.

And yet they hesitated, while an unknown terror shook their nerves, and seemingly from the very fact that they had run down their game successfully, they dreaded to secure the trophy of the chase.

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One bold spirit was wanting; and, if it was not a bold one that spoke at length, he might be complimented as being comparatively such. It was one who had not been foremost in the chase, perchance from want of physical power, who now stood forward, and exclaimed, --

"What are you waiting for, now? You can have him when you like. If you want your wives and children to sleep quietly in their beds, you will secure the vampyre. Come on -- we all know he's here -- why do you hesitate! Do you expect me to go alone and draw him out by the ears?"

Any voice would have sufficed to break the spell which bound them. This did so; and, with one accord, and yells of imprecations, they rushed forward and plunged among the old walls of the ruin.

Less time than we have before remarked would have enabled any one to explore the tottering fabric sufficient to bring a conviction to their minds that, after all, there might have been some mistake about the matter, and Sir Francis Varney was not quite caught yet.

It was astonishing how the fact of not finding him in a moment, again roused all their angry feelings against him, and dispelled every feeling of superstitious awe with which he had been surrounded; rage gave place to the sort of shuddering horror with which they had before contemplated his immediate destruction, when they had believed him to be virtually within their very grasp.

Over and over again the ruins were searched -- hastily and impatiently by some, carefully and deliberately by others, until there could be no doubt upon the mind of every one individual, that somehow or somewhere within the shadow of those walls, Sir Francis Varney had disappeared most mysteriously.

Then it would have been a strange sight for any indifferent spectator to have seen how they shrunk, one by one, out of the shadow of those ruins; each seeming to be afraid that the vampyre, in some mysterious manner, would catch him if he happened to be the last within their sombre influence; and, when they had all collected in the bright, open space, some little distance beyond, they looked at each other and at the ruin, with dubious expressions of countenance, each, no doubt, wishing that each would suggest something of a consolatory or practicable character.

"What's to be done, now?" said one.

"Ah! that's it," said another, sententiously. "I'll be hanged if I know."

"He's given as the slip," remarked a third.

"But he can't have given us the slip," said one man, who was particularly famous for a dogmatical spirit of argumentation; "how is it possible? he must be here, and I say he is here."

"Find him, then," cried several at once.

"Oh! that's nothing to do with the argument; he's here, whether we find him or not."

One very cunning fellow laid his finger on his nose, and beckoned to a comrade to retire some paces, where he delivered himself of the following very oracular sentiment: --

"My good friend, you must know Sir Francis Varney is here or he isn't."

"Agreed, agreed."

"Well, if he isn't here it's no use troubling our heads any more about him; but, otherwise, it's quite another thing, and, upon the whole, I must say, that I rather think he is."

All looked at him, for it was evident he was big with some suggestion. After a pause, he resumed, --

"Now, my good friends, I propose that we all appear to give it up, and to go away; but that some one of us shall remain and hide among the ruins for some time, to watch, in case the vampyre makes his appearance from some hole or corner that we haven't found out."

"Oh, capital!" said everybody.

"Then you all agree to that?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good; that's the only way to nick him. Now, we'll pretend to give it up; let's all of us talk loud about going home."

They did all talk loud about going home; they swore that it was not worth the trouble of catching him, that they gave it up as a bad job; that he might go to the deuce in any way he liked, for all they cared; and then they all walked off in a body, when, the man who had made the suggestion, suddenly cried, --

"Hilloa! hilloa! -- stop! stop! you know one of us is to wait?"

"Oh, ay; yes, yes, yes!" said everybody, and still they moved on.

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"But really you know, what's the use of this? who's to wait?"

That was, indeed, a knotty question which induced a serious consultation, and ending in their all, with one accord, pitching upon the author of the suggestion, as by far the best person to hide in the ruins and catch the vampyre.

They then all set off at full speed; but the cunning fellow, who certainly had not the slightest idea of so practically carrying out his own suggestion, scampered off after them with a speed that soon brought him in the midst of the throng again, and so with fear in their looks, and all the evidences of fatigue about them, they reached the town to spread fresh and more exaggerated accounts of the mysterious conduct of Varney the vampyre.

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Chapter XLIV. VARNEY'S DANGER, AND HIS RESCUE. -- THE PRISONER AGAIN, AND THE SUBTERRANEAN VAULT.

We have before slightly mentioned to the reader, and not unadvisedly, the existence of a certain prisoner, confined in a gloomy dungeon, into whose sad and blackened recesses but few and faint glimmering rays of light ever penetrated; for, by a diabolical ingenuity, the narrow loophole which served for a window to that subterraneous abode was so constructed, that, let the sun be at what point it might, during its diurnal course, but a few reflected beams of light could ever find their way into that abode of sorrow.

The prisoner -- the same prisoner of whom we before spoke -- is there. Despair is in his looks, and his temples are still bound with those cloths, which seemed now for many days to have been sopped in blood, which has become encrusted in their folds.

He still lives, apparently incapable of movement. How he has lived so long seems to be a mystery, for one would think him scarcely in a state, even were nourishment placed to his lips, to enable him to swallow it.

It may be, however, that the mind has as much to do with that apparent absolute prostration of all sort of physical energy as those bodily wounds which he has received at the hands of the enemies who have reduced him to his present painful and hopeless situation.

Occasionally a low groan burst from his lips; it seems to come from the very bottom of his heart, and it sounds as if it would carry with it every remnant of vitality that was yet remaining to him.

Then he moves restlessly, and repeats in hurried accents the names of some who are dear to him, and far away -- some who may, perchance, be mourning him, but who know not, guess not, aught of his present sufferings.

As he thus moves, the rustle of a chain among the straw on which he lies gives an indication, that even in that dungeon it has not been considered prudent to leave him master of his own actions, lest, by too vigorous an effort, he might escape from the thralldom in which he is held.

The sound reaches his own ears, and for a few moments, in the deep impatience of his wounded spirit, he heaps malediction on the heads of those who have reduced him to his present state.

But soon a better nature seems to come over him, and gentler words fall from his lips. He preaches patience to himself -- he talks not of revenge, but of justice, and in accents of more hopefulness than he had before spoken, he calls upon Heaven to succour him in his deep distress.

Then all is still, and the prisoner appears to have resigned himself once more to the calmness of expectation or of despair; but hark! his sense of hearing, rendered doubly acute by lying so long alone in nearly darkness, and in positive silence, detects sounds which, to ordinary mortal powers of perception, would have been by far too indistinct to produce any tangible effect upon the senses.

It is the sound of feet -- on, on they come; far overhead he hears them; they beat the green earth -- that sweet, verdant sod, which he may never see again -- with an impatient tread. Nearer and nearer still; and now they pause; he listens with all the intensity of one who listens for existence; some one comes; there is a lumbering noise -- a hasty footstep; he hears some one labouring for breath -- panting like a hunted hare; his door is opened, and there totters in a man, tall and gaunt; he reels like one intoxicated; fatigue has done more than the work of inebriation; he cannot save himself and he sinks exhausted by the side of that lonely prisoner.

The captive raises himself as far as his chains will allow him; he clutches the throat of his enervated visitor.

"Villain, monster, vampyre!" he shrieks, "I have thee now;" and locked in a deadly embrace, they roll upon the damp earth, struggling for life together. *****

It is mid-day at Bannerworth Hall, and Flora is looking from the casement anxiously expecting the arrival of her brothers. She had seen, from some of the topmost windows of the Hall, that the whole neighbourhood had been in a state of commotion, but little did she guess the cause of so much tumult or that it in any way concerned her.

She had seen the peasantry forsaking their work in the fields and the gardens, and apparently intent upon some object of absorbing interest; but she feared to leave the house, for she had promised Henry that she would not do so, lest the former pacific conduct of the vampyre should have been but a new snare, for the purpose of drawing her so far from her home as to lead her into some danger when she should be far from assistance. And yet more

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than once was she tempted to forget her promise, and to seek the open country, for fear that those she loved should be encountering some danger for her sake, which she would willingly either share with them or spare them.

The solicitation, however, of her brother kept her comparatively quiet; and, moreover, since her last interview with Varney, in which, at all events, he had shown some feeling for the melancholy situation to which he had reduced her, she had been more able to reason calmly, and to meet the suggestions of passion and of impulse with a sober judgment.

About midday, then, she saw the domestic party returning -- that party, which now consisted of her two brothers, the admiral, Jack Pringle, and Mr. Chillingworth. As for Mr. Marchdale, he had given them a polite adieu on the confines of the grounds of Bannerworth Hall, stating, that although he had felt it to be his duty to come forward and second Henry Bannerworth in the duel with the vampyre, yet that circumstance by no means obliterated from his memory the insults he had received from Admiral Bell, and, therefore, he declined going to Bannerworth Hall, and bade them a very good morning.

To all this, Admiral Bell replied that he might go and be d -- d, if he liked, and that he considered him a swab and a humbug, and appealed to Jack Pringle whether he, Jack, ever saw such a sanctified looking prig in his life.

"Ay, ay," says Jack.

This answer, of course, produced the usual contention, which lasted them until they got fairly in the house, where they swore at each other to an extent that was enough to make any one's hair stand on end, until Henry and Mr. Chillingworth interfered, and really begged that they would postpone the discussion until some more fitting opportunity.

The whole of the circumstances were then related to Flora; who, while she blamed her brother much for fighting the duel with the vampyre, found in the conduct of that mysterious individual, as regarded the encounter, yet another reason for believing him to be strictly sincere in his desire to save her from the consequences of his future visits.

Her desire to leave Bannerworth Hall consequently became more and more intense, and as the admiral really now considered himself the master of the house, they offered no amount of opposition to the subject, but merely said, --

"My dear Flora, Admiral Bell shall decide all these matters, now. We know that he is our sincere friend; and that whatever he says we ought to do, will be dictated by the best possible feelings towards us."

"Then I appeal to you, sir," said Flora, turning to the admiral.

"Very good," replied the old man; "then I say -- "

"Nay, admiral," interrupted Mr. Chillingworth; "you promised me, but a short time since, that you would come to no decision whatever upon this question, until you had heard some particulars which I have to relate to you, which, in my humble opinion, will sway your judgment."

"And so I did," cried the admiral; "but I had forgotten all about it. Flora, my dear, I'll be with you in an hour or two. My friend, the doctor, here, has got some sow by the ear, and fancies it's the right one; however, I'll hear what he has got to say, first, before we come to a conclusion. So, come along, Mr. Chillingworth and let's have it out at once."

"Flora," said Henry, when the admiral had left the room, "I can see that you wish to leave the Hall."

"I do, brother; but not to go far -- I wish rather to hide from Varney than to make myself inaccessible by distance."

"You still cling to this neighbourhood?"

"I do, I do; and you know with what hope I cling to it."

"Perfectly; you still think it possible that Charles Holland may be united to you."

"I do, I do."

"You believe his faith."

"Oh, yes; as I believe in Heaven's mercy."

"And I, Flora; I would not doubt him now for worlds; something even now seems to whisper to me that a brighter sun of happiness will yet dawn upon us, and that, when the mists which at present enshroud ourselves and our fortunes pass away, they will disclose a landscape full of beauty, the future of which shall know no pangs."

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"Yes, brother," exclaimed Flora, enthusiastically; "this, after all may be but some trial, grievous while it lasts, but yet tending eventually only to make the future look more bright and beautiful. Heaven may yet have in store for us all some great happiness, which shall spring clearly and decidedly from out these misfortunes."

"Be it so, and may we ever thus banish despair by such hopeful propositions. Lean on my arm, Flora; you are safe with me. Come, dearest, and taste the sweetness of the morning air."

There was, indeed now, a hopefulness about the manner in which Henry Bannerworth spoke, such as Flora had not for some weary months had the pleasure of listening to, and she eagerly rose to accompany him into the garden, which was glowing with all the beauty of sunshine, for the day had turned out to be much finer than the early morning had at all promised it would be.

"Flora," he said, when they had taken some turns to and fro in the garden, "notwithstanding all that has happened, there is no convincing Mr. Chillingworth that Sir Francis Varney is really what to us he appears."

"Indeed!"

"It is so. In the face of all evidence, he neither will believe in vampyres at all, nor that Varney is anything but some mortal man, like ourselves, in his thoughts, talents, feelings, and modes of life; and with no more power to do any one an injury than we have."

"Oh, would that I could think so!"

"And I; but, unhappily, we have by far too many and too conclusive evidences to the contrary."

"We have, indeed, brother."

"And though, while we respect the strength of mind in our friend which not allow him, even almost at the last extremity, to yield to what appear to be stern facts, we may not ourselves be so obdurate but may feel that we know enough to be convinced."

"You have no doubt, brother?"

"Most reluctantly, I must confess, that I feel compelled to consider Varney as something more than mortal."

"He must be so."

"And now, sister, before we leave the place which has been a home to us from earliest life, let us for a few moments consider if there be any possible excuse for the notion of Mr. Chillingworth, to the effect that Sir Francis Varney wants possession of the house for some purpose more inimical to our peace and prosperity than any he has yet attempted."

"Has he such an opinion?"

"He has."

"'Tis very strange."

"Yes, Flora; he seems to gather from all the circumstances, nothing but an overwhelming desire on the part of Sir Francis Varney to become the tenant of Bannerworth Hall."

"He certainly wishes to possess it."

"Yes; but can you, sister, in the exercise of any possible, amount of fancy, imagine any motive for such an anxiety beyond what he alleges?"

"Which in merely that he is fond of old houses."

"Precisely so. That is the reason, and the only one that can be got from him. Heaven only knows if it is the true one."

"It may be brother."

"As you say, it may; but there is a doubt, nevertheless, Flora. I much rejoice that you have had an interview with this mysterious being, for you have certainly, since that time, been happier and more composed than I ever hoped to see you again."

"I have indeed."

"It is sufficiently perceivable."

"Somehow, brother, since that interview, I have not had the same sort of dread of Sir Francis Varney which before made the very sound of his name a note of terror to me. His words, and all he said to me during that interview which took place so strangely between us, indeed I know not, tended altogether rather to make him, to a certain extent, an object of my sympathies rather than my abhorrence."

"That is very strange."

"I own that it is strange, Henry; but when we come for but a brief moment to reflect upon the circumstances

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which have occurred, we shall, I think, be able to find cause even to pity Varney the vampyre."

"How?"

"Thus, brother. It is said — and well may I who have been subject to an attack of such a nature tremble to repeat the saying — that those who have been once subject to the visitations of a vampyre, are themselves in a way to become one of the dreadful and maddening fraternity."

"I have heard so much, sister," replied Henry.

"Yes; and therefore who knows but that Sir Francis Varney may, at one time, have been as innocent as we are ourselves of the terrible and fiendish propensity which now makes him a terror and a reproach to all who know him, or are in any way obnoxious to his attacks."

"That is true."

"There may have been a time — who shall say there was not — when he, like me, would have shrunk with a dread as great as any one could have experienced, from the contamination of the touch even of a vampyre."

"I cannot, sister, deny the soundness of your reasoning," said Henry, with a sigh; "but still I do not see anything, even from a full conviction that Varney is unfortunate, which should induce us to tolerate him."

"Nay, brother, I said not tolerate. What I mean is, that even with the horror and dread we must naturally feel at such a being we may afford to mingle some amount of pity, which shall make us rather seek to shun him, than to cross his path with a resolution of doing him an injury."

"I perceive well, sister, what you mean. Rather than remain here, and make an attempt to defy Sir Francis Varney, you would fly from him, and leave him undisputed master of the field."

"I would — I would."

"Heaven forbid that I or any one would thwart you. You know well Flora, how dear you are to me; you know well that your happiness has ever been to us all a matter which has assumed the most important of shapes, as regarded our general domestic policy. It is not, therefore, likely now, dear sister, that we should thwart you in your wish to remove from here."

"I know, Henry, all you would say," remarked Flora, as a tear started to her eyes. "I know well all you think and, in your love for me, I likewise know well I rely for ever. You are attached to this place, as, indeed, we all are, by a thousand pleasant associations; but listen to me further, Henry, I do not wish to wander far."

"Not far, Flora?"

"No. Do I not still cling to a hope that Charles may yet appear? and if he do so, it will assuredly be in this neighbourhood, which he knows is native and most dear to us all."

"True."

"Then do I wish to make some sort of parade, in the way of publicity, of our leaving the Hall."

"Yes, yes."

"And yet not go far. In the neighbouring town, for example, surely we might find some means of living entirely free from remark or observation as to who or what we were."

"That, sister, I doubt. If you seek for that species of solitude which you contemplate, it is only to be found in a desert."

"A desert?"

"Yes; or in a large city."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, Flora; you may well believe me, that it is so. In a small community you can have no possible chance of evading an amount of scrutiny which would very soon pierce through any disguise you could by any possibility assume."

"Then there is no resource. We must go far."

"Nay, I will consider for you, Flora; and although, as a general principle, what I have said I know to be true, yet some more special circumstance may arise that may point a course that, while it enables us, for Charles Holland's sake, to remain in this immediate neighbourhood, yet will procure to us all the secrecy we may desire."

"Dear — dear brother," said Flora, as she flung herself upon Henry's neck, "you speak cheeringly to me, and, what is more, you believe in Charles's faithfulness and truth."

"As Heaven is my judge, I do."

"A thousand, thousand thanks for such an assurance. I know him too well to doubt, for one moment, his faith.

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Oh, brother! could he — could Charles Holland, the soul of honour, the abode of every noble impulse that can adorn humanity — could he have written those letters? No, no! perish the thought!"

"It has perished."

"Thank God!"

"I only, upon reflection, wonder how, misled for the moment by the concurrence of a number of circumstances, I could ever have suspected him."

"It is like your generous nature, brother, to say so; but you know as well as I, that there has been one here who has, far from feeling any sort of anxiety to think as well as possible of poor Charles Holland, has done all that in him lay to take the worst view of his mysterious disappearance, and induce us to do the like."

"You allude to Mr. Marchdale?"

"I do."

"Well, Flora, at the same time that I must admit you have cause for speaking of Mr. Marchdale as you do, yet when we come to consider all things, there may be found for him excuses."

"May there?"

"Yes, Flora; he is a man, as he himself says, past the meridian of life, and the world is a sad as well as a bad teacher, for it soon — too soon, alas! deprives us of our trusting confidence in human nature."

"It may be so; but yet, he, knowing as he did very little of Charles Holland, judged him hastily and harshly."

"You rather ought to say, Flora, that he did not judge him generously."

"Well, be it so."

"And you must recollect, when you say so, that Marchdale did not love Charles Holland."

"Why, now," said Flora, while there flashed across her cheek, for a moment, a heightened colour, "you are commencing to jest with me, and, therefore, we will say no more. You know, dear Henry, all my hopes, my wishes, and my feelings, and I shall therefore leave my future destiny in your hands, to dispose of as you please. Look yonder!"

"Where?"

"There. Do you see the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth walking among the trees?"

"Yes, yes; I do now."

"How very serious and intent they are upon the subject of their discourse. They seem quite lost to all surrounding objects. I could not have imagined any subject than would so completely have absorbed the attention of Admiral Bell."

"Mr. Chillingworth had something to relate to him or to propose, of a nature which, perchance, has had the effect of enchaining all his attention — he called him from the room."

"Yes; I saw that he did. But see, they come towards us, and now we shall, probably, hear what is the subject-matter of their discourse and consultation."

"We shall."

Admiral Bell had evidently seen Henry and his sister, for now, suddenly, as if not from having for the first moment observed them, and, in consequence, broken off their private discourse, but as if they arrived at some point in it which enabled them to come to a conclusion to be communicative, the admiral came towards the brother and sister.

"Well," said the bluff old admiral, when they were sufficiently near to exchange words, "well, Miss Flora, you are looking a thousand times better than you were."

"I thank you, admiral, I am much better."

"Oh, to be sure you are; and you will be much better still, and no sort of mistake. Now, here's the doctor and I have both been agreeing upon what is best for you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, to be sure. Have we not, doctor?"

"We have, admiral."

"Good; and what, now, Miss Flora, do you suppose it is?"

"I really cannot say."

"Why, it's a change of air, to be sure. You must get away from here as quickly as you can, or there will be no peace for you."

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"Yes," added Mr. Chillingworth, advancing; "I am quite convinced that change of scene and change of place, and habits, and people, will tend more to your recovery than any other circumstances. In the most ordinary cases of indisposition we always find that the invalid recovers much sooner away from the scene of his indisposition, than by remaining in it, even though its general salubrity be much greater than the place to which he may be removed."

"Good," said the admiral.

"Then we are to understand," said Henry with a smile, "that we are no longer to be your guests, Admiral Bell?"

"Belay there!" cried the admiral; "who told you to understand any such thing, I should like to know?"

"Well, but we shall look upon this house as yours, now; and, that being the case, if we remove from it, of course we cease to be your guests any longer."

"That's all you know about it. Now, hark ye. You don't command the fleet, so don't pretend to know what the admiral is going to do. I have made money by knocking about some of the enemies of old England, and that's the most gratifying manner in the world of making money so far as I am concerned."

"It is an honourable mode."

"Of course it is. Well, I am going to — what the deuce do you call it?"

"What?"

"That's just what I want to know. Oh, I have it now. I am going to what the lawyers call invest it."

"A prudent step, admiral, and one which it is to be hoped, before now, has occurred to you."

"Perhaps it has and perhaps it hasn't; however, that's my business, and no one's else's. I am going to invest my spare cash in taking houses; so, as I don't care a straw where the houses may be situated, you can look out for one somewhere that will suit you, and I'll take it; so, after all, you will be my guests there just the same as you are here."

"Admiral," said Henry, "it would be imposing upon a generosity as rare as it is noble, were we to allow you to do so much for us as you contemplate."

"Very good."

"We cannot — we dare not."

"But I say you shall. So you have had your say, and I have had mine, after which, if you please, Master Henry Bannerworth, I shall take upon myself to consider the affair as altogether settled. You can commence operations as soon as you like. I know that Miss Flora, here — bless her sweet eyes — don't want to stay at Bannerworth Hall any longer than she can help it."

"Indeed I was urging upon Henry to remove," said Flora; "but yet I cannot help feeling with him, admiral, that we are imposing upon your goodness."

"Go on imposing, then."

"But — "

"Psha! Can't a man be imposed upon if he likes? D — n it, that's a poor privilege for an Englishman to be forced to make a row about. I tell you I like it. I will be imposed upon, so there's an end of that; and now let's come in and see what Mrs. Bannerworth has got ready for luncheon."

* * * * *

It can hardly be supposed that such a popular ferment as had been created in the country town, by the singular reports concerning Varney the vampyre, should readily, and without abundant satisfaction, subside.

An idea like that which had lent so powerful an impulse to the popular mind, was one far easier to set going than to deprecate or extinguish. The very circumstances which had occurred to toil the excited mob, in their pursuit of Sir Francis Varney, were of a nature to increase the popular superstition concerning him, and to make him and his acts appear in still more dreadful colours.

Mobs do not reason very closely and clearly; but the very fact of the frantic flight of Sir Francis Varney from the projected attack of the infuriated multitude, was seized hold of as proof positive of the reality of his vampyre-like existence.

Then, again, had he not disappeared in the most mysterious manner? Had he not sought refuge where no human being would think of seeking refuge, namely, in that old, dilapidated ruin, where when his pursuers were so close upon his track, he had succeed in eluding their grasp with a facility which looked as if he had vanished

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into thin air, or as if the very earth had opened to receive him bodily within its cold embraces?

It is now to be wondered at, that the few who fled so precipitately from the ruin, lost nothing of the wonderful story they had to tell, in the carrying it from that place to the town. When they reached their neighbours, they not only told what had really occurred, but they added to it all their own surmises, and the fanciful creation of all their own fears, so that before mid-day, and about the time when Henry Bannerworth was conversing so quietly in the gardens of the Hall with his beautiful sister, there was an amount of popular ferment in the town, of which they had no conception. All business was suspended, and many persons, now that once the idea had been started concerning the possibility that a vampyre might have been visiting some of the houses in the place, told how, in the dead of the night, they had heard strange noises. How children had shrieked from no apparent cause -- doors opened and shut without human agency; and windows rattled that never had been known to rattle before.

Some, too, went so far as to declare that they had been awakened out of their sleep by noises incidental to an effort made to enter their chambers; and others had seen dusky forms of gigantic proportions outside their windows, tampering with their fastenings, and only disappearing when the light of day mocked all attempts at concealment.

These tales flew from mouth to mouth, and all listened to them with such an eager interest, that none thought it worth while to challenge their inconsistencies, or to express a doubt of their truth, because they had not been mentioned before.

The only individual, and he was a remarkably clever man, who made the slightest remark upon the subject of a practical character, hazarded a suggestion that made confusion worse confounded.

He knew something of vampyres. He had travelled abroad, and had heard of them in Germany, as well as in the east, and, to a crowd of wondering and aghast listeners, he said, --

"You may depend upon it, my friends, this has been going on for some time; there have been several mysterious and sudden deaths in the town lately; people have wasted away and died nobody knew how or wherefore."

"Yes -- yes," said everybody.

"There was Miles, the butcher; you know of how fat was -- and then how fat he wasn't."

A general assent was given to the proposition; and then, elevating one arm in an oratical manner, the clever fellow continued, --

"I have not a doubt that Miles, the butcher, and every one else who has died suddenly lately, have been victims of the vampyre; and what's more, they'll all be vampyres, and come and suck other people's blood, till at last the whole town will be a town of vampyres."

"But what's to be done?" cried one, who trembled so excessively that he could scarcely stand under his apprehension.

"There is but one plan -- Sir Francis Varney must be found, and put out of the world in such a manner that he can't come back to it again; and all those who are dead that we have any suspicion of, should be taken up out of their graves and looked at, to see if they're rotting or not; if they are it's all right; but, if they look fresh and much as usual, you may depend they're vampyres, and no mistake."

This was a terrific suggestion thrown amongst a mob. To have caught Sir Francis Varney and immolated him at the shrine of popular fury, they would not have shrunk from; but a desecration of the graves of those whom they had known in life was a matter which, however much it had to recommend it, even the boldest stood aghast at, and felt some qualms of irresolution. There are many ideas, however, which, like the first plunge into a cold bath, are rather uncomfortable for the moment; but which, in a little time, we become so familiarized with, that they become stripped of their disagreeable concomitants, and appear quite pleasing and natural.

So in was with this notion of exhuming the dead bodies of those townspeople who had recently died from what was called a decay of nature, and such other failures of vitality as bore not the tangible name of any understood disease.

From mouth to mouth the awful suggestion spread like wildfire, until at last it grew into such a shape that it almost seemed to become a duty, at all events, to have up Miles the butcher, and see how he looked. There is, too, about human nature a natural craving curiosity concerning everything connected with the dead. There is not a man of education or of intellectual endowment who would not travel many miles to look upon the exhumation of the remains of some one famous in his time, whether for his vices, his virtues, his knowledge, his talents, or his

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heroism; and, if this feeling exist in the minds of the educated and refined in a sublimated shape, which lends to it grace and dignity, we may look for it among the vulgar and the ignorant, taking only a grosser and meaner form, in accordance with their habits of thought. The rude materials of which the highest and noblest feelings of educated minds are formed, will be found amongst the most grovelling and base; and so this vulgar curiosity, which, combined with other feelings, prompted an ignorant and illiterate mob to exhume Miles, the once fat butcher, in a different form tempted the philosophic Hamlet to moralise upon the skull of Yorick.

And it was wonderful to see how, when these people had made up their minds to carry out the singularly interesting, but, at the same, fearful, suggestion, they assumed to themselves a great virtue in so doing — told each other what an absolute necessity, there was, for the public good; that it should be done; and then, with loud shouts and cries concerning the vampyre, they proceeded in a body to the village church-yard, where had been lain, with a hope of reposing in peace, the bones of their ancestors.

A species of savage ferocity now appeared to have seized upon the crowd, and the people, in making up their minds to do something which was strikingly at variance with all their preconceived notions of right and wrong, appeared to feel that it was necessary, in order that they might be consistent, to cast off many of the decencies of life, and to become riotous and reckless. As they proceeded toward the graveyard, they amused themselves by breaking the windows of the tax-gatherers, and doing what passing mischief they could to the habitations of all who held any official situation or authority.

This was something like a proclamation of war against those who might think it their duty to interfere with the lawless proceedings of an ignorant multitude. A public house or two, likewise, en route, was sacked of some of its inebriating contents, so that, what with the madness of intoxication, and the general excitement consequent upon the very nature of the business which took them to the churchyard, a more wild and infuriated multitude than that which paused at two iron gates which led into the sanctuary of that church could not be imagined.

Those who have never seen a mob placed in such a situation as to have cast off all moral restraint whatever, at the same time that it finds there is no physical power to cope with it, can form no notion of the mass of terrible passions which lie slumbering under what, in ordinary cases, have appeared harmless bosoms but which now run riot, and overcome every principle of restraint. It is a melancholy fact, but, nevertheless, a fact, despite its melancholy, that, even in a civilised country like this, with a generally well-educated population, nothing but a well-organized physical force keeps down, from the commission of the most outrageous offenses, hundreds and thousands of persons.

We have said that the mob paused at the iron gates of the churchyard, but it was more a pause of surprise than one of vacillation, because they saw that those iron gates were closed, which had not been the case within the memory of the oldest among them.

At the first building of the church, and the enclosure of its graveyard, two pairs of these massive gates had been presented by some munificent patron; but, after a time, they hung idly upon their hinges, ornamental certainly, but useless, while a couple of turnstiles, to keep cattle from straying within the sacred precincts, did duty instead, and established, without trouble, the regular thoroughfare, which long habit had dictated as necessary, through the place of sepulture.

But now those gates were closed, and for once were doing duty. Heaven only knows how they had been moved upon their rusty and time-worn hinges. The mob, however, was checked for the moment, and it was clear that the ecclesiastical authorities were resolved to attempt something to prevent the desecration of the tombs.

Those gates were sufficiently strong to resist the first vigorous shake which was given to them by some of the foremost among the crowd, and then one fellow started the idea that they might be opened from the inside, and volunteered to clamber over the wall to do so.

Hoisted up upon the shoulders of several, he grasped the top of the wall, and raised his head above its level, and then something of a mysterious nature rose up from the inside, and dealt him such a whack between the eyes, that down he went sprawling among his coadjutors. Now, nobody had seen how this injury had been inflicted, and the policy of those in the garrison should have been certainly to keep up the mystery, and leave the invaders in ignorance of what sort of person it was that had so foiled them. Man, however, is prone to indulge in vain glorification, and the secret was exploded by the triumphant waving of the long staff of the beadle, with the gilt knob at the end of it, just over the parapet of the wall, in token of victory.

"It's Waggles! it's Waggles!" cried everybody; "it's Waggles, the beadle!"

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"Yes," said a voice from within, "it's Waggles, the beadle; and he thinks as he had yer there rather; try it again. The church isn't in danger; oh, no. What do you think of this?"

The staff was flourished more vigorously than ever, and in the secure position that Waggles occupied it seemed not only impossible to attack him, but that he possessed wonderful powers of resistance, for the staff was long and the knob was heavy.

It was a boy who hit upon the ingenious expedient of throwing up a great stone, so that it just fell inside the wall, and hit Waggles a great blow on the head.

The staff was flourished more vigorously than ever, and the mob, in the ecstasy at the fun which was going on, almost forgot the errand which had brought them. Perhaps after all the affair might have passed off jestingly, had not there been some really mischievous persons among the throng who were determined that such should not be the case, and they incited the multitude to commence an attack upon the gates, which in a few moments must have produced their entire demolition.

Suddenly, however, the boldest drew back, and there was a pause, as the well-known form of the clergyman appeared advancing from the church door, attired in full canonicals.

"There's Mr. Leigh," said several; "how unlucky he should be here."

"What is this?" said the clergyman, approaching the gates. "Can I believe my eyes when I see before me those who compose the worshippers at this church armed, and attempting to enter for the purpose of violence to this sacred place! Oh! let me beseech you, lose not a moment, but return to your homes, and repent of that which you have already done. It is not yet too late; listen, I pray you, to the voice of one with whom you have so often joined in prayer to the throne of the Almighty, who is now looking upon your actions."

This appeal was heard respectfully, but it was evidently very far from suiting the feelings and the wishes of those to whom it was addressed; the presence of the clergyman was evidently an unexpected circumstance, and the more especially too as he appeared in that costume which they had been accustomed to regard with a reverence almost amounting to veneration. He saw the favourable effect he had produced, and anxious to follow it up, he added, --

"Let this little ebullition of feeling pass away, my friends; and, believe me, when I assure you upon my sacred word, that whatever ground there may be for complaint or subject for inquiry, shall be fully and fairly met; and that the greatest exertions shall be made to restore peace and tranquillity to all of you."

"It's all about the vampyre!" cried one fellow. "Mr. Leigh, how should you like a vampyre in the pulpit?"

"Hush, hush! can it be possible that you know so little of the works of that great Being whom you all pretend to adore, as to believe that he would create any class of beings of a nature such as those you ascribe to that terrific word? Oh, let me pray of you to get rid of these superstitions -- alike disgraceful to yourselves and afflicting to me."

The clergyman had the satisfaction of seeing the crowd rapidly thinning from before the gates, and he believed his exhortations were having all the effect he wished. It was not until he heard a loud shout behind him and, upon hastily turning, saw that the churchyard had been scaled at another place by some fifty or sixty persons, that his heart sunk within him, and he began to feel that what he had dreaded would surely come to pass.

Even then he might have done something in the way of pacific exertion, but for the interference of Waggles, the beadle, who spoilt everything.

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Chapter XLV. THE OPEN GRAVES. -- THE DEAD BODIES. -- A SCENE OF TERROR.

We have said Waggles spoilt everything, and so he did, for before Mr. Leigh could utter a word more, or advance a few steps towards the rioters, Waggles charged them staff in hand, and there soon ensued a riot of a most formidable description.

A kind of desperation seemed to have seized the beadle, and certainly, by his sudden and unexpected attack, he achieved wonders. When, however, a dozen hands got hold of the staff, and it was wrenched from him, and he was knocked down, and half-a-dozen people rolled over him, Waggles was not near the man he had been, and he would have been very well content to have lain quiet where he was; this however, he was not permitted to do for two or three, who had felt what a weighty instrument of warfare a parochial staff was, lifted him bodily from the ground, and canted him over the wall, without much regard to whether he fell on a hard or a soft place on the other side.

This feat accomplished, no further attention was paid to Mr. Leigh, who, finding that his exhortations were quite unheeded, retired into the church with an appearance of deep affliction about him, and locked himself in the vestry.

The crowd now had entire possession -- without even the sort of control that an exhortation assumed over them -- of the burying-ground, and soon in a dense mass were these desperate and excited people collected round the well-known spot where lay the mortal remains of Miles, the butcher.

"Silence!" cried a loud voice, and every one obeyed the mandate, looking towards the speaker, who was a tall, gaunt-looking man, attired in a suit of faded black, and who now pressed forward to the front of the throng.

"Oh!" cried one, "it's Fletcher, the ranter. What does he do here?"

"Hear him! hear him!" cried others; "he won't stop us."

"Yes, hear him," cried the tall man, waving his arms about like the sails of a windmill. "Yes, hear him. Sons of darkness; you're all vampyres, and are continually sucking the life-blood from each other. No wonder that the evil one has power over you all. You're as men who walk in the darkness when the sunlight invites you, and you listen often to the words of humanity when those of a diviner origin are offered to your acceptance. But there shall be miracles in the land, and even in this place, set apart with a pretended piety that is in itself most damnable, you shall find an evidence of the true light; and the proof that those who will follow me the true path to glory shall be found here within this grave. Dig up Miles, the butcher!"

"Hear, hear, hear, hurra!" said everybody. "Mr. Fletcher's not such a fool, after all. He means well."

"Yes, you sinners," said the ranter, "and if you find Miles, the butcher, decaying -- even as men are expected to decay whose mortal tabernacles are placed within the bowels of the earth -- you shall gather from that a great omen, and a sign that if you follow me you seek the Lord; but if you find him looking fresh and healthy, as if the warm blood was still within his veins, you shall take that likewise as a signification that what I say to you shall be as the Gospel, and that by coming to the chapel of the Little Boozlehum, ye shall achieve great salvation."

"Very good," said a brawny fellow, advancing with a spade in his hand; "you get out of the way, and I'll soon have him up. Here goes like blue blazes!"

The first shovelful of earth he took up, he cast over his head into the air, so that it fell in a shower among the mob, which of course raised a shout of indignation; and, as he continued so to dispose of the superfluous earth, a general row seemed likely to ensue. Mr. Fletcher opened his mouth to make a remark, and, as that feature of his face was rather a capacious one, a descending lump of mould, of a clayey consistency, fell into it, and got so wedged among his teeth, that in the process of extracting it he nearly brought some of those essential portions of his anatomy with it.

This was a state of things that could not last long, and he who had been so liberal with his spadesful of mould was speedily disarmed, and yet he was a popular favourite, and had done the thing so good-humouredly, that nobody touched him. Six or eight others, who had brought spades and pickaxes, now pushed forward to the work, and in an incredibly short space of time the grave of Miles, the butcher, seemed to be very nearly excavated.

Work of any kind or nature whatever, is speedily executed when done with a wish to get through it; and never,

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perhaps, within the memory of man, was a grave opened in that churchyard with such a wonderful celerity. The excitement of the crowd grew intense — every available spot from which a view of the grave could be got, was occupied; for the last few minutes scarcely a remark had been uttered, and when, at last, the spade of one of those who were digging, struck upon something that sounded like wood, you might have heard a pin drop, and each one there present drew his breath more shortly than before.

"There he is," said the man, whose spade struck upon the coffin.

Those few words broke the spell, and there was a general murmur, while every individual present seemed to shift his position in his anxiety to obtain a better view of what was about to ensue.

The coffin now having been once found, there seemed to be an increased impetus given to the work; the earth was thrown out with a rapidity that seemed almost the quick result of the working of some machine; and those closest to the grave's brink crouched down, and, intent as they were upon the progress of events, heeded not the damp earth that fell upon them, nor the frail brittle and humid remains of humanity that occasionally rolled to their feet. It was, indeed, a scene of intense excitement — a scene which only wanted a few prominent features in its foreground of a more intellectual and higher cast than composed the mob, to make it a fit theme for a painter of the highest talent.

And now the last few shovelfuls of earth that hid the top of the coffin were cast from the grave, and that narrow house which contained the mortal remains of him who was so well known, while in life, to almost every one then present, was brought to the gaze of eyes which never had seemed likely to have looked upon him again.

The cry was now for ropes, with which to raise the cumbrous mass; but these were not to be had, no one thought of providing himself with such appliances, so that by main strength, only, could the coffin be raised to the brink.

The difficulty of doing this was immense, for there was nothing tangible to stand upon; and even when the mould from the sides was sufficiently cleared away, that the handles of the coffin could be laid hold of, they came away immediately in the grasp of those who did so.

But the more trouble that presented itself to the accomplishment of the designs of the mob, the more intent that body seemed upon carrying out to the full extent their original designs.

Finding it quite impossible by bodily strength to raise the coffin of the butcher from the position in which it had got embedded by excessive rains, a boy was hastily despatched to the village for ropes, and never did boy run with such speed before, for all his own curiosity was excited in the issue of an adventure, that to his young imagination was appallingly interesting.

As impatient as mobs usually are, they had not time, in this case, for the exercise of that quality of mind before the boy came back with the necessary means of exerting quite a different species of power against the butcher's coffin.

Strong ropes were slid under the inert mass, and twenty hands at once plied the task of raising that receptacle of the dead from what had been presumed to be its last resting-place. The ropes strained and creaked, and many thought that they would burst asunder sooner than raise the coffin of the defunct butcher.

It is singular what reasons people find for backing their opinion.

"You may depend he's a vampyre," said one, "or it wouldn't be so difficult to get him out of the grave."

"Oh, there can be no mistake about that," said one; "when did a natural Christian's coffin stick in the mud in that way?"

"Ah, to be sure," said another; "I knew no good would come of his goings on; he never was a decent sort of man like his neighbours, and many queer things have been said of him that I have no doubt are true enough, if we did but know the rights of them."

"Ah, but," said a young lad, thrusting his head between the two who were talking, "if he is a vampyre, how does he get out of his coffin of a night with all that weight of mould a top of him?"

One of the men considered for a moment, and then finding no rational answer occur to him, he gave the boy a box on the ear, saying, —

"I should like to know what business that is of yours? Boys, now—a—days, ain't like the boys in my time; they think nothing now of putting their spoke in grown-up people's wheels, just as if their opinions were of any consequence."

Now by a vigorous effort, those who were tugging at the ropes succeeded in moving the coffin a little, and

that first step was all the difficulty, for it was loosened from that adhesive soil in which it lay, and now came up with considerable facility.

There was a half shout of satisfaction at this result, while some of the congregation turned pale, and trembled at the prospect of the sight which was about to present itself; the coffin was dragged from the grave's brink fairly among the long rank grass that flourished in the churchyard, and then they all looked at it for a time, and the men who had been most earnest in raising it wiped the perspiration from their brows, and seemed to shrink from the task of opening that receptacle of the dead now that it was fairly in their power so to do.

Each man looked anxiously in his neighbours' face, and several audibly wondered why somebody else didn't open the coffin.

"There's no harm in it," said one; "if he's a vampyre, we ought to know it; and, if he ain't, we can't do any hurt to a dead man."

"Oughten't we to have the service for the dead?" said one.

"Yes," said the impertinent boy who had before received the knock on the head, "I think we ought to have that read, back-wards."

This ingenious idea was recompensed by a great many kicks and cuffs, which ought to have been sufficient to have warned him of the great danger of being a little before his age in wit.

"Where's the use of shirking the job?" cried he who had been so active in shoveling the mud upon the multitude; "why, you cowardly sneaking set of humbugs, you're half afraid, now."

"Afraid -- afraid!" cried everybody; "who's afraid?"

"Ah, who's afraid?" said a little man, advancing, and assuming an heroic attitude; "I always notice, if anybody's afraid, it's some big fellow, with more bones than brains."

At this moment, the man to whom this reproach was more particularly leveled, raised a horrible shout of terror, and cried out, in frantic accents, --

"He's a-coming -- he's a-coming!"

The little man fell at once into the grave, while the mob, with one accord, turned tail, and fled in all directions, leaving him alone with the coffin. Such a fighting, and kicking, and scrambling ensued to get over the wall of the grave-yard, that this great fellow, who had caused all the mischief, burst into such peals of laughter that the majority of the people became aware that it was a joke, and came creeping back, looking as sheepish as possible.

Some got up very faint sorts of laugh, and said "very good," and swore they saw what big Dick meant from the first, and only ran to make the others run.

"Very good," said Dick. "I'm glad you enjoyed it, that's all. My eye, what a scampering there was among you. Where's my little friend, who was so infernally cunning about bones and brains?"

With some difficulty the little man was extricated from the grave, and then, oh, for the consistency of a mob! they all laughed at him; those very people who, heedless of all the amenities of existence, had been trampling upon each other and roaring with terror, actually had the impudence to laugh at him, and call him a cowardly little rascal, and say it served him right.

But such is popularity!

"Well, if nobody won't open the coffin," said big Dick, "I will, so here goes. I knowed the old fellow when he was alive and many a time he's d -- -- d me and I d -- -- d him, so I ain't a-going to be afraid of him now he's dead. We was very intimate you see, 'cos we was the two heaviest men in the parish; there's a reason for every thing."

"Ah, Dick's the fellow to do it," cried a number of persons; "there's nobody like Dick for opening a coffin; he's the man as don't care for nothing."

"Ah, you snivelling curs," said Dick, "I hate you. If it warn't for my own satisfaction, and all for to prove why my old friend, the butcher, as weighed seventeen stone, and stood six feet two and-a-half on his own sole, I'd see you all jolly well -- "

"D -- -- d first," said the boy; "open the lid, Dick, let's have a look."

"Ah, you're a rum un," said Dick, "arter my own heart. I sometimes thinks as you must be a nevy, or some sort of relation of mine. Howsomdever, here goes. Who'd thought that I should ever had a look at old fat and thunder again? -- that's what I used to call him; and then he used to request me to go down below, where I needn't turn round to light my blessed pipe."

"Hell — we know," said the boy; "why don't you open the lid, Dick?"

"I'm a going," said Dick; "kim up."

He introduced the corner of a shovel between the lid and the coffin, and giving it a sudden wrench, he loosened it all down one side.

A shudder pervaded the multitude, and, popularly speaking, you might have heard a pin drop in that crowded churchyard at that eventful moment.

Dick then proceeded to the other side, and executed the same manoeuvre.

"Now for it," he said; "we shall see him in a moment, and we'll think; we seed him still."

"What a lark!" said the boy.

"You hold yer jaw, will yer? Who axed you for a remark, blow yer? What do you mean by squatting down there, like a cock-sparrow, with a pain in his tail, hanging yer head, too, right over the coffin? Did you never hear of what they call a fluvifium, coming from the dead, yer ignorant beast, as is enough to send nobody to blazes in a minute? Get out of the way of the cold meat, will yer!"

"A what, do you say, Dick?"

"Request information from the extreme point of my elbow."

Dick threw down the spade, and laying hold of the coffin-lid with both hands, he lifted it off, and flung it on one side.

There was a visible movement and an exclamation among the multitude. Some were pushed down, in the eager desire of those behind to obtain a sight of the ghastly remains of the butcher; those at a distance were frantic, and the excitement was momentarily increasing.

They might all have spared themselves the trouble, for the coffin was empty — there was no dead butcher, nor any evidence of one ever having been there, not even the grave-clothes; the only thing in all in the receptacle of the dead was a brick. Dick's astonishment was so intense that his eyes and mouth kept opening together to such an extent, that it seemed doubtful when they would reach their extreme point of elongation. He then took up the brick and looked at it curiously, and turned it over and over, examined the ends and the sides with a critical eye, and at length he said, —

"Well, I'm blowed, here's a transmogrification; he's consolidated himself into a blessed brick — my eye, here's a curiosity."

"But you don't mean to say that's the butcher, Dick?" said the boy.

Dick reached over, and gave him a tap on the head with the brick.

"There!" he said, "that's what I calls ocular demonstration. Do you believe it now, you blessed infidel? What's more natural? He was an out-and-out brick while he was alive; and he's turned to a brick now he's dead."

"Give it to me, Dick," said the boy; "I should like to have that brick, just for the fun of the thing."

"I'll see you turned into a pantile first. I sha'n't part with this here, it looks too blessed sensible; it's gaining on me every minute as a most remarkable likeness, d — — d if it ain't."

By this time the bewilderment of the mob had subsided; now that there was no dead butcher to look upon, they fancied themselves most grievously injured; and; somehow or other, Dick, notwithstanding all his exertions in their service, was looked upon in the light of a showman, who had promised some startling exhibition and then had disappointed his auditors.

The first intimations he had of popular vengeance was a stone thrown at him, but Dick's eye happened to be upon the fellow who threw it, and collaring him in a moment, he dealt him a cuff on the side of the head, which confused his faculties for a week.

"Hark ye," he then cried, with a loud voice, "don't interfere with me; it won't go down. There's something wrong here; and, as one of yourselves, I'm as much interested in finding out what it is as any of you can possibly be. There seems to be some truth in this business; our old friend, the butcher, you see, is not in his grave; where is he then?"

The mob, looked at each other and none attempted to answer the question.

"Why, of course, he's the vampyre," said Dick, "and you may all of you expect to see him, in turn, come into your bed-room windows with a burst, and lay hold of you like a million and a half of leeches rolled into one."

There was a general expression of horror, and then Dick continued, —

"You'd better all of you go home; I shall have no hand in pulling up any more of the coffins — this is a dose

for me. Of course you can do what you like."

"Pull them all up!" cried a voice; "pull them all up! Let's see how many vampyres there are in the churchyard."

"Well, it's no business of mine," said Dick; "but I wouldn't, if I was you."

"You may depend," said one, "that Dick knows something about it, or he wouldn't take it so easy."

"Ah! down with him," said the man who had received the box on the ears; "he's perhaps a vampyre himself."

The mob made a demonstration towards him, but Dick stood his ground, and they paused again.

"Now, you're a cowardly set," he said; "because you're disappointed, you want to come upon me. Now, I'll just show what a little thing will frighten you all again and I warn beforehand it will, so you sha'n't say you didn't know it, and were taken by surprise."

The mob looked at him, wondering what he was going to do. "Once! twice! thrice!" he said, and then he flung the brick up into the air an immense height, and shouted "heads," in a loud tone.

A general dispersion of the crowd ensued, and the brick fell in the centre of a very large circle indeed.

"There you are again," said Dick; "why, what a nice set you are!"

"What fun!" said the boy. "It's a famous coffin, this, Dick," and he laid himself down in the butcher's last resting place. "I never was in a coffin before — it's snug enough."

"Ah, you are a rum 'un," said Dick; "you're such an inquiring genius, you is; you'll get your head in a some hole one day, and not be able to get it out again and then I shall see you a kicking. Hush! lay still — don't say anything."

"Good again," said the boy; "what shall I do?"

"Give a sort of a howl and a squeak, when they all come back again."

"Won't I!" said the boy; "a pop on the lid."

"There you we," said Dick; "d — — d if I don't adopt you, and bring you up to the science of nothing."

"Now, listen to me, good people all," added Dick; "I have really got something to say to you."

At this intimation the people slowly gathered again round the grave. "Listen," said Dick, solemnly; "it strikes me there's some tremendous do going on."

"Yes, there is," said several who were foremost.

"It won't be long before you'll all of you be most d — nably astonished; but let me beg of all you not to accuse me of having anything to do with it, provided I tell you all I know."

"No, Dick; we won't — we won't — we won't."

"Good; then, listen. I don't know anything, but I'll tell you what I think, and that's as good. I don't think that this brick is the butcher; but I think, that when you least expect it — hush! come it little closer."

"Yes, yes; we are closer."

"Well, then, I say, when you least expect it, and when you ain't dreaming of such a thing, you'll hear something of my old friend as is dead and gone, that will astonish you all."

Dick paused, and he gave the coffin a slight kick, as intimation to the boy that he might as well be doing his part in the drama, upon which that ingenious young gentleman set up such a howl, that even Dick jumped, so unearthly did it sound within the confines of that receptacle of the dead.

But if the effect upon him was great, what must it have been upon those whom it took completely unaware? For a moment or two they seemed completely paralysed, and then they frightened the boy, for the shout of terror that rose from so many throats at once was positively alarming.

This jest of Dick's was final, for, before three minutes had elapsed, the churchyard was clear of all human occupants save himself and the boy, who had played his part so well in the coffin.

"Get out," said Dick; "it's all right — we've done 'em at last; and now you may depend upon it they won't be in a hurry to come here again. You keep you own counsel, or else somebody will serve you out for this. I don't think you're altogether averse to a bit of fun, and if you keep yourself quiet you'll have the satisfaction of hearing what's said about this affair in every pothouse in the village, and no mistake."

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Chapter XLVI. THE PREPARATIONS FOR LEAVING BANNERWORTH HALL, AND THE MYSTERIOUS CONDUCT OF THE ADMIRAL AND MR. CHILLINGWORTH.

It seemed now, that, by the concurrence of all parties, Bannerworth Hall was to be abandoned; and, notwithstanding Henry was loth — as he had, indeed, from the first shown himself — to leave the ancient abode of his race, yet, as not only Flora, but the admiral and his friend Mr. Chillingworth seemed to be of opinion that it would be a prudent course to adopt, he felt that it would not become him to oppose the measure.

He, however, now made his consent to depend wholly upon the full and free acquiescence of every member of the family.

"If," he said, "there be any among us who will say to me 'Continue to keep open the house in which we have passed so many happy hours, and let the ancient home of our race still afford a shelter to us' I shall feel myself bound to do so; but if both my mother and my brother agree to a departure from it, and that its hearth shall be left cold and desolate, be it so. I will not stand in the way of any unanimous wish or arrangement."

"We may consider that, then, as settled," said the admiral, "for I have spoken to your brother, and he is of our opinion. Therefore, my boy, we may all be off as soon as we can conveniently get under weigh."

"But my mother?"

"Oh, there, I don't know. You must speak to her yourself. I never, if I can help it, interfere with the women folks."

"If she consent, then I am willing."

"Will you ask her?"

"I will not ask her to leave, because I know, then, what answer she would at once give; but she shall hear the proposition, and I will leave her to decide upon it, unbiassed in her judgment by any stated opinion of mine upon the matter."

"Good. That'll do; and the proper way to put it, too. There's no mistake about that, I can tell you."

Henry, although he went through the ceremony of consulting his mother, had no sort of doubt before he did so that she was sufficiently aware of the feelings and wishes of Flora to be prepared to yield a ready assent to the proposition of leaving the Hall.

Moreover, Mr. Marchdale had, from the first, been an advocate of such a course of proceeding, and Henry well knew how strong an influence he had over Mrs. Bannerworth's mind, in consequence of the respect in which she held him as an old and valued friend.

He was, therefore, prepared for what his mother said, which was, —

"My dear Henry, you know that the wishes of my children, since they have been grown up and capable of coming to a judgment for themselves, have ever been laws to me. If you, among you all, agree to leave this place, do so."

"But will you leave it freely, mother?"

"Most freely I go with you all; what is it that has made this house and all its appurtenances pleasant in my eyes, but the presence in it of those who are so dear to me? If you all leave it, you take with you the only charms it ever possessed; so it becomes in itself as nothing. I am quite ready to accompany you all anywhere, so that we do but keep together."

"Then, mother, we may consider that as settled."

"As you please."

"It is scarcely as I please. I must confess that I would fain have clung with a kind of superstitious reverence to this ancient abiding-place of my race, but it may not be so. Those, perchance, who are more practically able to come to correct conclusions, in consequence of their feelings not being sufficiently interested to lead them astray, have decided otherwise; and, therefore, I am content to leave."

"Do not grieve at it, Henry. There has hung a cloud of misfortune over us all since the garden of this house became the scene of an event which we can none of us remember but with terror and shuddering."

"Two generations of our family must live and die before the remembrance of that circumstance can be

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obliterated. But we will think of it no more."

There can no doubt but that the dreadful circumstance to which both Mrs. Bannerworth and Henry alluded, was the suicide of the father of the family in the gardens which before has been hinted at in the course of this narration, as being a circumstance which had created a great sensation at the time, and cast a great gloom for many months over the family.

The reader will, doubtless, too, recollect that, at his last moments, this unhappy individual was said to have uttered some incoherent words about some hidden money, and that the rapid hand of death alone seemed to prevent him from being explicit upon that subject, and left it merely a matter of conjecture.

As years had rolled on, this affair, even as a subject of speculation, had ceased to occupy the minds of any of the Bannerworth family, and several of their friends, among whom was Mr. Marchdale, were decidedly of the opinion that the apparently pointed and mysterious words uttered, were but the disordered wanderings of an intellect already hovering on the confines of eternity.

Indeed, far from any money, of any amount, being a disturbance to the last moments of the dissolute man, whose vices and extravagances had brought his family to such ruin, it was pretty generally believed that he had committed suicide simply from a conviction of the impossibility of raising any more supplies of cash, to enable him to carry on the career which he had pursued for so long.

But to resume.

Henry at once communicated to the admiral what his mother had said, and then the whole question regarding the removal being settled in the affirmative, nothing remained to be done but to set about it as quickly as possible.

The Bannerworths lived sufficiently distant from the town to be out of earshot of the disturbances which were then taking place; and so completely isolated were they from all sort of society, that they had no notion of the popular disturbance which Varney the vampyre had given rise to.

It was not until the following morning that Mr. Chillingworth, who had been home in the meantime, brought word of what had taken place, and that great commotion was still in the town, and that the civil authorities, finding themselves by far too weak to contend against the popular will, had sent for assistance to a garrison town, some twenty miles distant.

It was a great grief to the Bannerworth family to hear these tidings, not that they were in any way, except as victims, accessory to creating the disturbance about the vampyre, but it seemed to promise a kind of notoriety which they might well shrink from, and which they were just the people to view with dislike.

View the matter how we like, however, it is not to be considered as at all probably that the Bannerworth family would remain long in ignorance of what a great sensation they had created unwittingly in the neighbourhood.

The very reasons which had induced their servants to leave their establishment, and prefer throwing themselves completely out of place, rather than remain in so ill-omened a house, were sure to be bruited abroad far and wide.

And that, perhaps, when they came to consider of it, would suffice to form another good and substantial reason for leaving the Hall, and seeking a refuge in obscurity from the extremely troublesome sort of popularity incidental to their peculiar situation.

Mr. Chillingworth felt uncommonly chary of telling them all that had taken place; although he was well aware that the proceedings of the riotous mob had not terminated with the little disappointment at the old ruin, to which they had so effectually chased Varney the vampyre, but to lose him so singularly when he got there.

No doubt he possessed the admiral with the uproar that was going on in the town, for the latter did hint a little of it to Henry Bannerworth.

"Hilloa!" he said to Henry, as he saw him walking in the garden; "it strikes me if you or your ship's crew continue in these latitudes, you'll get as notorious as the Flying Dutchman in the southern ocean."

"How do you mean?" said Henry.

"Why, it's a sure going proverb to say, that a nod's as good as a wink; but, the fact is, it's getting rather too well known to be pleasant, that a vampyre has struck up a rather close acquaintance with your family. I understand there's a precious row in the town."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; bother the particulars, for I don't know them; but, hark ye, by to-morrow I'll have found a place for you

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to go to, so pack up the sticks, get all your stores ready to clear out, and make yourself scarce from this place."

"I understand you," said Henry; "we have become the subject of popular rumour; I've only to beg of you, admiral, that you'll say nothing of this to Flora; she has already suffered enough, Heaven knows; do not let her have the additional affliction of thinking that her name is made familiar in every pothouse in the town."

"Leave me alone for that," said the admiral. "Do you think I'm an ass?"

"Ay, ay," said Jack Pringle, who came in at that moment, and thought the question was addressed to him.

"Who spoke to you, you bad-looking horse-marine?"

"Me a horse-marine! didn't you ask a plain question of a fellow, and get a plain answer?"

"Why, you son of a bad looking gun, what do you mean by that? I tell you what it is, Jack; I've let you come sneaking too often on the quarter-deck, and now you come poking your fun at your officers, you rascal!"

"I poking fun!" said Jack; "couldn't think of such a thing. I should just as soon think of your making a joke as me."

"Now, I tell you what it is, I shall just strike you off the ship's books, and you shall just go and cruise by yourself; I've done with you."

"Go and tell that to the marines, if you like," said Jack. "I ain't done with you yet, for a jolly long watch. Why, what do you suppose would become of you, you great babby, without me? Ain't I always a conveying you from place to place, and steering you through all sorts of difficulties?"

"D -- n your impudence!"

"Well, then, d -- n yours."

"Shiver my timbers!"

"Ay, you may do what you like with your own timbers."

"And you won't leave me?"

"Sartingly not."

"Come here, then?"

Jack might have expected a gratuity, for he advanced with alacrity.

"There," said the admiral, as he laid his stick across his shoulders; "that's your last month's wages; don't spend it all at once."

"Well, I'm d -- -- d!" said Jack; "who'd have thought of that? -- he's turning rumgumptious, and no mistake. Howsomedever, I must turn it over in my mind, and be even with him, somehow -- I owes him one for that. I say, admiral."

"What now, you lubber?"

"Nothing; turn that over in your mind;" and away Jack walked, not quite satisfied, but feeling, at least, that he had made a demonstration of attack.

As for the admiral, he considered that the thump he had given Jack with the stick, and it was no gentle one, as a decided balancing of accounts up to that period, and as he remained likewise master of the field, he was upon the whole very well satisfied.

These last few words which had been spoken to Henry by Admiral Bell, more than any others, induced him to hasten his departure from Bannerworth Hall; he had walked away when the altercation between Jack Pringle and the admiral began, for he had seen sufficient of those wordy conflicts between those originals to be quite satisfied that neither of them meant what he said of a discouraging character towards the other, and that far from there being any unfriendly feeling contingent upon those little affairs, they were only a species of friendly sparring, which both parties enjoyed extremely.

Henry went direct to Flora, and he said to her, --

"Since we are all agreed upon the necessity, or, at all events, upon the expediency of a departure from the Hall, I think, sister, the sooner we carry out that determination the better and the pleasanter for us all it will be. Do you think you could remove so hastily as to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! That is soon indeed."

"I grant you that it is so; but Admiral Bell assures me that he will have everything in readiness, and a place provided for us to go to by then."

"Would it be possible to remove from a house like this so very quickly?"

"Yes, sister. If you look around you, you will see that a great portion of the comforts you enjoy in this

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mansion belong to it as a part of its very structure, and are not removable at pleasure; what we really have to take away is very little. The urgent want of money during our father's lifetime induced him, as you may recollect even, at various times to part with much that was ornamental, as well as useful, which was in the Hall. You will recollect that we seldom returned from those little continental tours which to us were so delightful, without finding some old familiar objects gone, which, upon inquiry, we found had been turned into money, to meet some more than usually pressing demand."

"That is true, brother; I recollect well."

"So that, upon the whole, sister, there is little to remove."

"Well, well, be it so. I will prepare our mother for this sudden step. Believe me, my heart goes with it; and as a force of vengeful circumstances have induced us to remove from this home, which was once so full of pleasant recollections, it is certainly better, as you say, that the act should be at once consummated, than left hanging in terror over our minds."

"Then I'll consider that as settled," said Henry.

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Chapter XLVII. THE REMOVAL FROM THE HALL. -- THE NIGHT WATCH, AND THE ALARM.

Mrs. Bannerworth's consent having been already given to the removal, she said at once, when appealed to, that she was quite ready to go at any time her children thought expedient.

Upon this, Henry sought the admiral, and told him as much, at the same time adding, --

"My sister feared that we should have considerable trouble in the removal, but I have convinced her that such will not be the case, as we are by no means overburdened with cumbrous property."

"Cumbrous property," said the admiral, "why, what do you mean? I beg leave to say, that when I took the house, I took the table and chairs with it. D -- n it, what good do you suppose an empty house is to me?"

"The tables and chairs?"

"Yes. I took the house just as it stands. Don't try and bamboozle me out of it. I tell you, you've nothing to move but yourselves and immediate personal effects."

"I was not aware, admiral, that that was your plan."

"Well, then, now you are, listen to me. I've circumvented the enemy too often not to know how to get up a plot. Jack and I have managed it all. To-morrow evening, after dark, and before the moon's got high enough to throw any light, you and your brother, and Miss Flora and your mother, will come out of the house, and Jack and I will lead you where you're to go to. There's plenty of furniture where you're a-going, and so you will get off free, without anybody knowing anything about it."

"Well, admiral, I've said it before, and it is the unanimous opinion of us all, that everything should be left to you. You have proved yourself too good a friend to us for us to hesitate at all in obeying your commands. Arrange everything, I pray you, according to your wishes and feelings, and you will find there shall be no cavilling on our parts."

"That's right; there's nothing like giving a command to some one person. There's no good done without. Now I'll manage it all. Mind you, seven o'clock to-morrow evening everything is to be ready, and you will all be prepared to leave the Hall."

"It shall be so."

"Who's that giving such a thundering ring at the gate?"

"Nay, I know not. We have few visitors and no servants, so I must e'en be my own gate porter."

Henry walked to the gate, and having opened it, a servant in a handsome livery stepped a pace or two into the garden.

"Well," said Henry.

"Is Mr. Henry Bannerworth within, or Admiral Bell?"

"Both," cried the admiral. "I'm Admiral Bell, and this is Mr. Henry Bannerworth. What do you want with us, you d -- d gingerbread-looking flunkey?"

"Sir, my master desires his compliments -- his very best compliments -- and he wants to know how you are after your flurry."

"What?"

"After your -- a -- a -- flurry and excitement."

"Who is your master?" said Henry.

"Sir Francis Varney."

"The devil!" said the admiral; "if that don't beat all the impudence I ever came near. Our flurry! Ah! I like that fellow. Just go and tell him -- "

"No, no," said Henry, interposing, "send back no message. Say to your master, fellow, that Mr. Henry Bannerworth feels that not only has he no claim to Sir Francis Varney's courtesy, but that he should rather be without it."

"Oh, ha!" said the footman, adjusting his collar; "very good. This seems a d -- d, old-fashioned, outlandish place of yours. Any ale?"

"Now, shiver my hulks!" said the admiral.

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"Hush! hush!" said Henry; "who knows but there may be a design in this? We have no ale."

"Oh, ah! dem! — dry as dust, by God! What does the old commodore say? Any message, my ancient Greek?"

"No, thank you," said the admiral; "bless you, nothing. What did you give for that waistcoat, d — n you? Ha! ha! you're a clever fellow."

"Ah! the old gentleman's ill. However, I'll take back his compliments, and that he's much obliged at Sir Francis's condescension. At the same time, I suppose I may place in my eye what I may get out of either of you, without hindering me seeing my way back. Ha! ha! Adieu — adieu."

"Bravo!" said the admiral; "that's it; go it — now for it. D — n it, it is a do!"

The admiral's calmness during the latter part of the dialogue arose from the fact that, over the flunkey's shoulder, and at some little distance off, he saw Jack Pringle taking off his jacket, and rolling up his sleeves in that deliberate sort of way that seemed to imply a determination of setting about some species of work that combined the pleasant with the useful.

Jack executed many nods to and winks at the livery-servant, and jerked his thumb likewise in the direction of a pump near at hand, in a manner that spoke as plainly as possible, that John was to be pumped upon.

And now the conference was ended, and Sir Francis's messenger turned to go; but Jack Pringle bothered him completely, for he danced round him in such a singular manner, that, turn which way he would, there stood Jack Pringle, in some grotesque attitude, intercepting him; and so he edged him on, till he got him to the pump.

"Jack," said the admiral.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Don't pump on that fellow now."

"Ay, ay, sir; give us a hand."

Jack laid hold of him by the two ears, and holding him under the pump, kicked his shins until he completely gathered himself beneath the spout. It was in vain that he shouted, "Murder! help! fire! thieves!" Jack was inexorable and the admiral pumped.

Jack turned the fellow's head about in a very scientific manner, so as to give him a fair dose of hydropathic treatment, and in a few minutes, never was human being more thoroughly saturated with moisture than was Sir Francis Varney's servant. He had left off hallooing for aid, for he found that whenever he did so, Jack held his mouth under the spout, which was decidedly unpleasant; so, with a patience that looked like heroic fortitude, he was compelled to wait until the admiral was tired of pumping.

"Very good," at length he said. "Now, Jack, for fear this fellow catches cold, be so good as to get a horsewhip, and see him off the premises with it."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack. "And I say, old fellow, you can take back all our blessed compliments now, and say you've been flurried a little yourself; and if so be as you came here as dry as dust, d — — e, you go back as wet as a mop. Won't it do to kick him out, sir?"

"Very well — as you please, Jack."

"Then here goes;" and Jack proceeded to kick the shivering animal from the garden with a vehemence that soon convinced him of the necessity of getting out of it as quickly as possible.

How it was that Sir Francis Varney, after that fearful race he had had, got home again across the fields, free from all danger, and back to his own house, from whence he sent so cool and insolent a message, they could not conceive.

But such must certainly be the fact; somehow or another, he had escaped all danger, and, with a calm insolence peculiar to the man, he had no doubt adopted the present mode of signifying as much to the Bannerworths.

The insolence of his servant was, no doubt, a matter of pre-arrangement with that individual, however he might have set about it con amore. As for the termination of the adventure, that, of course, had not been at all calculated upon; but, like most tools of other people's insolence or ambition, the insolence of the underling had received both his own punishment and his master's.

We know quite enough of Sir Francis Varney to feel assured that he would rather consider it as a good jest than otherwise of his footman, so that with the suffering he endured at the Bannerworths', and the want of sympathy he was likely to find a home, that individual had certainly nothing to congratulate himself upon but the melancholy reminiscence of his own cleverness.

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But were the mob satisfied with what had occurred in the churchyard? They were not, and that night was to witness the perpetration of a melancholy outrage, such as the history of the time presents no parallel to.

The finding of a brick in the coffin of the butcher, instead of the body of that individual, soon spread as a piece of startling intelligence all over the place; and the obvious deduction that was drawn from the circumstance, seemed to be that the deceased butcher was unquestionably a vampyre, and out upon some expedition at the very time when his coffin was searched.

How he had originally got out of that receptacle for the dead was certainly a mystery; but the story was none the worse for that. Indeed, an ingenious individual found a solution for that part of the business, for, as he said, nothing was more natural, when anybody died who was capable of becoming a vampyre, than for other vampyres who knew it to dig him up, and lay him out in the cold beams of the moonlight, until he acquired the same sort of vitality they themselves possessed, and joined their horrible fraternity.

In lieu of a better explanation — and, after all, it was no bad one — this theory was generally received, and, with a shuddering horror, people asked themselves, if the whole of the churchyard were excavated, how many coffins would be found tenantless by the dead which had been supposed, by simpleminded people, to inhabit them.

The presence, however, of a body of dragoons, towards evening, effectually prevented any renewed attack upon the sacred precincts of the churchyard, and it was a strange and startling thing to see that country town under military surveillance, and sentinels posted at its principal buildings.

This measure smothered the vengeance of the crowd, and insured, for a time, the safety of Sir Francis Varney; for no considerable body of persons could assemble for the purpose of attacking his house again, without being followed; so such a step was not attempted.

It had so happened, however, than on that very day, the funeral of a young man was to have taken place, who had put up for a time at that same inn where Admiral Bell was first introduced to the reader. He had become seriously ill, and, after a few days of indisposition, which had puzzled the country practitioners, breathed his last.

He was to have been buried in the village churchyard on the very day of the riot and confusion incidental to the exhumation of the coffin of the butcher, probably from that circumstance we may deduce the presence of the clergyman in canonicals at the period of the riot.

When it was found that so disorderly a mob possessed the churchyard, the idea of burying the stranger that day was abandoned; but still all would have gone on quietly as regarded him, had it not been for the folly of one of the chamber-maids at the tavern.

This woman, with all the love of gossip incidental to her class, had, from the first, entered so fully into all the particulars concerning vampyres, that she fairly might be considered to be a little deranged on that head. Her imagination had been so worked upon, that she was in an unfit state to think of anything else, and if ever upon anybody a stern and revolting superstition was calculated to produce dreadful effects, it was upon this woman.

The town was tolerably quiet; the presence of the soldiery had frightened some and amused others, and no doubt the night would have passed off serenely, had she not suddenly rushed into the streets, and, with bewildered accents and frantic gestures, shouted, —

"A vampyre — a vampyre — a vampyre!"

These words soon collected a crowd around her, and then, with screaming accents, which would have been quite enough to convince any reflecting person that she had actually gone distracted upon that point, she cried, —

"Come into the house — come into the house — come into the house! Look upon the dead body, that should have been in its grave; it's fresher now than on the day on which it died, and there's a colour in its cheeks. A vampyre — a vampyre — a vampyre! Heaven save us from a vampyre!"

The strange, infuriated, maniacal manner in which these words were uttered, produced an astonishingly exciting effect among the mob. Several women screamed, and some few fainted. The torch was laid again to the altar of popular feeling, and the fierce flame of superstition burnt brightly and fiercely.

Some twenty or thirty persons, with shouts and exclamations, rushed into the inn, while the woman who had created the disturbance still continued to rave, tearing her hair, and shrieking at intervals, until she fell exhausted upon the pavement.

Soon, from a hundred throats, rose that dreadful cry of "A vampyre — a vampyre!" The alarm was given throughout the whole town; the bugles of the military sounded; there was a clash of arms — the shrieks of

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women; although, the premonitory symptoms of such a riot as was not likely to be quelled without bloodshed and considerable disaster.

It is truly astonishing the effect which one weak or vicious-minded person can produce upon a multitude.

Here was a woman whose opinion would have been accounted valueless upon the most common-place subject, and whose word would not have passed for twopence, setting a whole town by the ears by force of nothing but her sheer brutal ignorance.

It is a notorious physiological fact that, after four or five days, or even a week, the bodies of many persons assume an appearance of freshness, such as might have been looked for in vain immediately after death.

It is one of the most insidious processes of that decay which appears to regret its " -- -- -- -- offensive fingers To mar the lines where beauty lingers." But what did the chamber-maid know of physiology? Probably, she would have asked if it was anything good to eat; and so, of course, having her head full of vampyres, she must needs produce so lamentable a scene of confusion, the results of which we almost sicken at detailing.

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Chapter LVIII. THE STAKE AND THE DEAD BODY.

The mob seemed from the first to have an impression that, as regarded the military force, no very serious results would arise from that quarter, for it was not to be supposed that, on an occasion which could not possibly arouse any ill blood on the part of the soldiery, or on which they could have the least personal feeling, they would like to get a bad name, which would stick to them for years to come.

It was no political riot, on which men might be supposed, in consequence of differing in opinion, to have their passions inflamed; so that, although the call of the civil authorities for military aid had been acceded to, yet it was hoped, and, indeed, almost understood by the officers, that their operations would be confined more to a demonstration of power, than anything else.

Besides, some of the men had got talking to the townspeople, and had heard all about the vampyre story, and not being of the most refined or educated class themselves, they felt rather interested than otherwise in the affair.

Under these circumstances, then, we are inclined to think, that the disorderly mob of that inn had not so wholesome a fear as it was most certainly intended they should have of the red coats. Then, again, they were not attacking the churchyard, which in the first case, was the main point in dispute, and about which the authorities had felt so very sore, inasmuch as they felt that, if once the common people found out that the sanctity of such places could be outraged with impunity, they would lose their reverence for the church; that is to say, for the host of persons who live well and get fat in this country by the trade of religion.

Consequently, this churchyard was the main point of defence, and it was zealously looked to when it need not have been done so, while the public-house where there really reigned mischief was half unguarded.

There are always in all communities, whether large or small, a number of persons who really have, or fancy they have, something to gain by disturbance. These people, of course, care not for what pretext the public peace is violated; so long as there is a row, and something like an excuse for running into other peoples's houses, they are satisfied.

To get into a public-house under such circumstances is an unexpected treat; and thus, when the mob rushed into the inn with such symptoms of fury and excitement, there went with the leaders of the disturbance a number of persons who never thought of getting further than the bar, where they attacked the spirit-taps with an alacrity which showed how great was their love for ardent compounds.

Leaving these persons behind, however, we will follow those who, with a real superstition, and a furious interest in the affair of the vampyre, made their way towards the upper chamber, determining to satisfy themselves if there were truth in the statement so alarmingly made by the woman who had created such an emotion.

It is astonishing what people will do in crowds, in comparison with the acts that they would be able to commit individually. There is usually a calmness, a sanctity, a sublimity about death, which irresistibly induces a respect for its presence, alike from the educated or from the illiterate; and let the object of the fell-destroyer's presence be whom it may, the very consciousness that death has claimed it for its own, invests it with a halo of respect, that, in life, the individual could never aspire to probably.

Let us precede these furious rioters for a few moments, and look upon the chamber of the dead — that chamber, which for a whole week, had been looked upon with a kind of shuddering terror — that chamber which had been darkened by having its sources of light closed, as if it were a kind of disrespect to the dead to allow the pleasant sunshine to fall upon the faded form.

And every inhabitant of that house, upon ascending and descending its intricate and ancient staircases, had walked with a quiet and subdued step past that one particular door.

Even the tones of voice in which they spoke to each other, while they knew that that sad remnant of mortality was in the house, was quiet and subdued, as if the repose of death was but a mortal sleep, and could be broken by rude sounds.

Ay, even some of these very persons, who now with loud and boisterous clamour, had rushed into the place, had visited the house and talked in whispers; but then they were alone and men will do in throngs acts which, individually, they would shrink from with compunction or cowardice, call it which we will.

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The chamber of death is upon the second story of the house. It is a back room, the windows of which command a view of that half garden, half farm-yard, which we find generally belonging to country inns.

But now the shutters were closed, with the exception of one small opening, that in daylight, would have admitted a straggling ray of light to fall upon the corpse. Now, however, that the sombre shades of evening had wrapped everything in gloom, the room appeared in total darkness, so that the most of those adventurers who had ventured into the place shrunk back until lights were procured from the lower part of the house, with which to enter the room.

A dim oil lamp in a niche sufficiently lighted the staircase, and, by friendly aid of its glimmering beams, they had found their way up to the landing tolerably well, and had not thought of the necessity of having lights with which to enter the apartments, until they found them in utter darkness.

These requisites, however, were speedily procured from the kitchen of the inn. Indeed, anything that was wanted was laid hold of without the least word of remark to the people of the place, as if might, from that evening forthwith, was understood to constitute right, in that town.

Up to this point no one had taken a very prominent part in the attack upon the inn, if attack it could be called; but now, the man whom chance, or his own nimbleness, made the first of the throng, assumed to himself a sort of control over his companions, and, turning to them, he said, —

"Hark ye, my friends; we'll do everything quietly and properly; so I think we'd better three or four of us go in at once, arm-in-arm."

"Psha!" cried one who had just arrived with a light; "it's your cowardice that speaks. I'll go in first; let those follow me who like, and those who are afraid may remain where they are."

He at once dashed into the room, and this immediately broke the spell of fear which was beginning to creep over the others in consequence of the timid suggestion of the man who, up to that moment, had been first and foremost in the enterprise.

In an instant the chamber was half filled with persons, four or five of whom carried lights; so that, as it was not of very large dimensions, it was sufficiently illuminated for every object in it to be clearly visible.

There was the bed, smooth and unruffled, as if waiting for some expected guest; while close by its side a coffin, supported upon tressels, over which a sheet was partially thrown, contained the sad remains of him who little expected in life that, after death, he should be stigmatised as an example of one of the ghastliest superstitions that ever found a home in the human imagination.

It was evident that some one had been in the room; and that this was the woman whose excited fancy had led her to look upon the face of the corpse there could be no doubt, for the sheet was drawn aside just sufficiently to discover the countenance.

The fact was that the stranger was unknown at the inn, or probably ere this the coffin lid would have been screwed on; but it was hoped, up to the last moment, as advertisements had been put into the county papers, that some one would come forward to identify and claim him.

Such, however, had not been the case, and so his funeral had been determined upon.

The presence of so many persons at once effectually prevented any individual from exhibiting, even if he felt, any superstitious fears about approaching the coffin; and so, with one accord, they surrounded it, and looked upon the face of the dead.

There was nothing repulsive in that countenance. The fact was that decomposition had sufficiently advanced to induce a relaxation of the muscles, and a softening of the fibres, so that an appearance of calmness and repose had crept over the face which it did not wear immediately after death.

It happened, too, that the face was full of flesh; for the death had been sudden, and there had not been that wasting away of the muscles and integuments which makes the skin cling, as it were, to the bone, when the ravages of long disease have exhausted the physical frame.

There was, unquestionably, a plumpness, a freshness, and a sort of vitality about the countenance that was remarkable.

For a few moments there was a deathlike stillness in the apartment, and then one voice broke the silence by exclaiming, —

"He's a vampyre, and has come here to die. Well he knows he'd be taken up by Sir Francis Varney, and become one of the crew."

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"Yes, yes," cried several voices at once; "a vampyre! a vampyre!"

"Hold a moment," cried one; "let us find somebody in the house who has seen him some days ago, and then we can ascertain if there's any difference in his looks."

This suggestion was agreed to, and a couple of stout men ran down stairs, and returned in a few moments with a trembling waiter, whom they had caught in the passage, and forced to accompany them.

This man seemed to think that he was to be made a dreadful example of some sort of way; and, as he was dragged into the room, he trembled, and looked as pale as death.

"What have I done, gentlemen?" he said; "I ain't a vampyre. Don't be driving a stake through me. I assure you, gentlemen, I'm only a waiter, and have been for a matter of five-and-twenty years."

"You'll be done no harm to," said one of his captors; "you've only got to answer a question that will be put to you."

"Oh, well, certainly, gentlemen; anything you please. Coming — coming, as I always say; give your orders, the waiter's in the room."

"Look upon the face of that corpse."

"Certainly, certainly — directly."

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"Seen it before! Lord bless you! yes, a dozen of times. I seed him afore he died, and I seed him after; and when the undertaker's men came, I came up with them and I seed 'em up put him in his coffin. You see I kept an eye on 'em gentlemen, 'cos I knows well enough what they is. A cousin of mine was in the trade, and he assures me as one of 'em always brings a tooth-drawing concern in his pocket, and looks in the mouth of the blessed corpse to see if there's a blessed tooth worth pulling out."

"Hold your tongue," said one; "we want none of your nonsense. Do you see any difference now in the face of the corpse to what it was some days since?"

"Well, I don't know; somehow, it don't look so rum"

"Does it look fresher?"

"Well, somehow or another, now you mention it, it's very odd, but it does."

"Enough," cried the man who had questioned him, with considerable excitement of manner. "Neighbours, are we to have our wives and our children scared to death by vampyres?"

"No — no!" cried everybody.

"Is not this, then, one of that dreadful order of beings?"

"Yes — yes; what's to be done?"

"Drive a stake through the body, and so prevent the possibility of anything in the shape of a restoration."

This was a terrific proposition; and even those who felt most strongly upon the subject, and had their fears most awakened, shrank from carrying it into effect. Others, again, applauded it, although they determined, in their own minds, to keep far enough off from the execution of the job, which they hoped would devolve upon others, so that they might have all the security of feeling that such a process had been gone through with the supposed vampyre, without being in any way committed by the dreadful act.

Nothing was easier than to procure a stake from the garden in the rear of the premises; but it was one thing to have the means at hand of carrying into effect so dreadful a proposition, and another actually to do it.

For the credit of human nature, we regret that even then, when civilisation and popular education had by no means made such rapid strides as in our times they have, such a proposition should be entertained for a moment; but so it was; and just as an alarm was given that a party of the soldiery had reached the inn, and had taken possession of the doorway with a determination to arrest the rioters, a strong hedgestake had been procured, and everything was in readiness for the perpetration of the horrible deed.

Even then those in the room, for they were tolerably sober, would have revolted, probably, from the execution of so fearful an act; but the entrance of a party of military into the lower portion of the tavern, induced those who had been making free with the strong liquors below, to make a rush up-stairs to their companions with the hope of escaping detection of the petty larceny, if they got into trouble on account of the riot.

These persons, infuriated by drink, were capable of anything, and to them, accordingly, the more sober parties gladly surrendered the disagreeable job of rendering the supposed vampyre perfectly innocuous, by driving a hedge-stake through his body — a proceeding which, it was currently believed, inflicted so much physical injury

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to the frame, as to render his resuscitation out of the question.

The cries of alarm from below, joined now to the shouts of those mad rioters, produced a scene of dreadful confusion.

We cannot, for we revolt at the office, describe particularly the dreadful outrage which was committed upon the corpse; suffice it that two or three, maddened by drink, and incited by others, plunged the hedge-stake through the body, and there left it, a sickening and a horrible spectacle to any one who might cast his eyes upon it.

With such violence had the frightful and inhuman deed been committed, that the bottom of the coffin was perforated by the stake, so that the corpse was actually nailed to its last earthly tenement.

Some asserted, that at that moment an audible groan came from the dead man, and that this arose from the extinguishment of that remnant of life which remained in him, on account of his being a vampyre, and which would have been brought into full existence, if the body had been placed in the rays of the moon, when at its full, according to the popular superstition upon that subject.

Others, again, were quite ready to swear, that at the moment the stake was used, there was a visible convulsion of all the limbs, and that the countenance, before so placid and so clam, became immediately distorted, as if with agony.

But we have done with these horrible surmises; the dreadful deed has been committed, and wild, ungovernable superstition has had, for a time, its sway over the ignorant and debased.

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Chapter XLIX. THE MOB'S ARRIVAL AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S. -- THE ATTEMPT TO GAIN ADMISSION.

The soldiery had been sent for from their principal station near the churchyard, and had advanced with some degree of reluctance to quell what they considered as nothing better nor worse than a drunken brawl at a public-house, which they really considered they ought not to be called to interfere with.

When, however, the party reached the spot, and heard what a confusion there was, and saw in what numbers the rioters were assembling, it became evident to them that the case was of a more serious complexion than they had at first imagined, and consequently they felt that their professional dignity was not so much compromised with their interference with the lawless proceedings.

Some of the constabulary of the town were there, and to them the soldiers promised they would hand what prisoners they took, at the same time that they made a distinct condition that they were not to be troubled with their custody, nor in any way further annoyed in the business beyond taking care that they did not absolutely escape, after being once secured.

This was all that the civil authorities of the town required, and, in fact, they hoped that, after making prisoners of a few of the ringleaders of the riotous proceedings, the rest would disperse, and prevent the necessity of capturing them.

Be it known, however, that both military and civil authorities were completely ignorant of the dreadful outrage against all common decency, which had been committed within the public-house.

The door was well guarded, and the question now was how the rioters were to be made to come down stairs, and be captured; and this was likely to remain a question, so long as no means were adopted to make them descend. So that, after a time, it was agreed that a couple of troopers would march up stairs with a constable, to enable him to secure any one who seemed a principal in the riot.

But this only had the effect of driving those who were in the second-floor, and saw the approach of the two soldiers, whom they thought were backed by the whole of their comrades, up a narrow staircase, to a third-floor, rather consisting of lofts than of actual rooms; but still, for the time, it was a refuge; and owing to the extreme narrowness of the approach to it, which consisted of nearly a perpendicular staircase, with any degree of tact or method, it might have been admirably defended.

In the hurry and scramble, all the lights were left behind; and when the two soldiers and constables entered the room where the corpse had lain, they became, for the first time, aware of what a horrible purpose had been carried out by the infuriated mob.

The sight was one of perfect horror, and hardened to scenes which might strike other people as being somewhat of the terrific as these soldiers might be supposed to be by their very profession, they actually sickened at the sight which the mutilated corpse presented, and turned aside with horror.

These feelings soon gave way to anger and animosity against the crowd who could be guilty of such an atrocious outrage; and, for the first time, a strong and interested vengeance against the mob pervaded the breasts of those who were brought to act against it.

One of the soldiers ran down stairs to the door, and reported the scene which was to be seen above. A determination was instantly come to, to capture as many as possible of those who had been concerned in so diabolical an outrage, and leaving a guard of five men at the door, and remainder of the party ascended the staircase, determined upon storming the last refuge of the rioters, and dragging them to justice.

The report, however, of these proceedings that were taking place at the inn, spread quickly over the whole town; and soon as large a mob of the disorderly and the idle as the place could at all afford was assembled outside the inn.

This mob appeared, for a time, inertly to watch the proceedings. It seemed rather a hazardous thing to interfere with the soldiers, whose carbines look formidable and troublesome weapons.

With true mob courage, therefore, they left the minority of their comrades, who were within the house, to their fate; and after a whispered conference from one to the other, they suddenly turned in a body, and began to make for the outskirts of the town.

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They then separated, as if by common consent, and straggled out into the open country by twos and threes, consolidating again into a mass when they had got some distance off, and clear of any exertions that could be made by the soldiery to stay them.

The cry then rose of "Down with Sir Francis Varney -- slay him -- burn his house -- death to all vampyres!" and, at a rapid pace, they proceeded in the direction of his mansion.

We will leave this mob, however, for the present, and turn our attention to those who are at the inn, and are certainly in a position of some jeopardy. Their numbers were not great, and they were unarmed; certainly, their best chance would have been to have surrendered at discretion; but that was a measure which, if the sober ones had felt inclined to, those who were infuriated and half maddened with drink would not have acceded to on any account.

A furious resistance was, therefore, fairly to be expected; and what means the soldiery were likely to use for the purpose of storming this last retreat was a matter of rather anxious conjecture.

In the case of a regular enemy, there would not, perhaps, have been much difficulty; but here the capture of certain persons, and not their destruction, was the object; and how that was to be accomplished by fair means, certainly was a question which nobody felt very competent to solve.

Determination, however, will do wonders; and although the rioters numbered over forty, notwithstanding all their desertions, and not above seventeen or eighteen soldiers marched into the inn, we shall perceive that they succeeded in accomplishing their object without any manoeuvring at all.

The space in which the rioters were confined was low, narrow, and inconvenient, as well as dark, for the lights on the staircase cast up that height but very insufficient rays.

Weapons of defence they found but very few, and yet there were some which, to do them but common credit, they used as effectually as possible.

These attics, or lofts, were used as lumber-rooms, and had been so for years, so that there was a collection of old boxes, broken pieces of furniture, and other matters, which will, in defiance of everything and everybody, collect in a house.

These were formidable means of defence, if not of offence, down a very narrow staircase, had they been used with judgment.

Some of the rioters, who were only just drunk enough to be fool-hardy, collected a few of these articles at the top of the staircase, and swore they would smash anybody who should attempt to come up to them, a threat easier uttered than executed.

And besides, after all, if their position had ever been so impregnable, they must come down eventually, or be starved out.

But the soldiers were not at liberty to adopt so slow a process of overcoming their enemy, and up the second-floor staircase they went, with a determination of making short work of the business.

They paused a moment, by word of command, on the landing, and then, after this slight pause, the word was given to advance.

Now when men will advance, in spite of anything and everything, it is no easy matter to stop them, and he who was foremost among the military would as soon thought of hesitation to ascend the narrow staircase before him, when ordered so to do, as paying the national debt. On he went, and down came a great chest, which, falling against his feet, knocked him down as he attempted to scramble over it.

"Fire," said the officer; and it appeared that he had made some arrangements as to how the order was to be obeyed, for the second man fired his carbine, and then scrambled over his prostrate comrade; after which he stooped, and the third fired his carbine likewise, and then hurried forward in the same manner.

At the first sound of the fire arms the rioters were taken completely by surprise; they had not had the least notion of affairs getting to such a length. The smell of the powder, the loud report, and the sensation of positive danger that accompanied these phenomena, alarmed them most terrifically; so that, in point of fact, with the exception of the empty chest that was thrown down in the way of the first soldier, no further idea of defence seemed in any way to find a place in the hearts of the besieged.

They scrambled one over the other in their eagerness to get as far as possible from immediate danger, which, of course, they conceived existed in the most imminent degree the nearest to the door.

Such was the state of terror into which they were thrown, that each one at the moment believed himself shot,

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and the soldiers had overcome all the real difficulties in getting possession of what might thus be called the citadel of the inn, before those men who had been so valorous a short time since recovered from the tremendous fright into which they had been thrown.

We need hardly say that the carbines were loaded, but with blank cartridges, for there was neither a disposition nor a necessity for taking the lives of these misguided people.

It was the suddenness and the steadiness of the attack that had done all the mischief to their cause; but now, ere they recovered from the surprise of having their position so completely taken by storm, they were handed down stairs, one by one, from soldier to soldier, and into the custody of the civil authorities.

In order to secure the safe keeping of so large a body of prisoners, the constables, who were in a great minority, placed handcuffs upon some of the most capable of the resistance; so what with those who were thus secured, and those who were terrified into submission, there was not a man of all the lot who had taken refuge in the attics of the public-house but was a prisoner.

At the sound of fire-arms, the women who were outside the inn had, of course, raised a prodigious clamour.

They believed directly that every bullet must have done some serious mischief to the townspeople, and it was only upon one of the soldiers, a non-commissioned officer, who was below, assuring them of the innoxious nature of the proceeding which restored anything like equanimity.

"Silence!" he cried; "what are you howling about? Do you fancy that we've nothing better to do than to shoot a parcel of fellows that are not worth the bullets that would be lodged in their confounded carcasses?"

"But we heard the gun," said a woman.

"Of course you did; it's the powder that makes the noise, not the bullet. You'll see them all brought out safe wind and limb."

This assurance satisfied the women to a certain extent, and such had been their fear that they should have had to look upon the spectacle of death, or of greivous wounds, that they were comparatively quite satisfied when they saw husbands, fathers, and brothers, only in the custody of the town officers.

And very sheepish some of the fellows looked, when they were handed down and handcuffed, and the more especially when they had been routed only by a few blank cartridges — that sixpennyworth of powder had defeated them.

They were marched off to the town gaol, guarded by the military, who now probably fancied that their night's work was over, and that the most turbulent and troublesome spirits in the town had been secured.

Such, however, was not the case, for no sooner had comparative order been restored, than common observation pointed to a dull red glare in the southern sky.

In a few more minutes there came in stragglers from the open country, shouting "Fire! fire!" with all their might.

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Chapter L. THE MOB'S ARRIVAL AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S. -- THE ATTEMPT TO GAIN ADMISSION.

All eyes were directed towards that southern sky which each moment was becoming more and more illuminated by the lurid appearance bespeaking a conflagration, which, if it was not extensive, at all events was raging fiercely.

There came, too upon the wind, which set from that direction, strange sounds, resembling shouts of triumph, combined occasionally with sharper cries, indicative of alarm.

With so much system and so quietly had this attack been made upon the house of Sir Francis Varney -- for the consequences of it now exhibited themselves more unequivocally -- that no one who had not actually accompanied the expedition was in the least aware that it had been at all undertaken, or that anything of the kind was on the tapis.

Now, however, it could be no longer kept a secret, and as the infuriated mob, who had sought this flagrant means of giving vent to their anger, saw the flames from the blazing house rising high in the heavens, they felt convinced that further secrecy was out of the question.

Accordingly, in such cries and shouts as -- but for caution's sake -- they would have indulged in from the very first, they now gave utterance to their feelings as regarded the man whose destruction was aimed at.

"Death to the vampyre! -- death to the vampyre!" was the principal shout, and it was uttered in tones which sounded like those of rage and disappointment.

But it is necessary, now that we have disposed of the smaller number of rioters who committed so serious an outrage at the inn, that we should, with some degree of method, follow the proceedings of the larger number, who went from the town towards Sir Francis Varney's.

These persons either had information of a very positive nature, or a very strong suspicion that, notwithstanding the mysterious and most unaccountable disappearance of the vampyre in the old ruin, he would now be found, as usual, at his own residence.

Perhaps one of his own servants may have thus played the traitor to him; but, however it was, there certainly was an air of confidence about some of the leaders of the tumultuous assemblage that induced a general belief that this time, at least, the vampyre would not escape popular vengeance for being what he was.

We have before noticed that these people went out of the town at different points, and did not assemble into one mass until they were at a sufficient distance off to be free from all fear of observation.

Then some of the less observant and cautious of them began to indulge in shouts of rage and defiance; but those who placed themselves foremost succeeded in procuring a halt, and one said, --

"Good friends all, if we make any noise, it can only have one effect, and that is, to warn Sir Francis Varney, and enable him to escape. If, therefore, we cannot go on quietly, I propose that we return to our homes, for we shall accomplish nothing."

This advice was sufficiently and evidently reasonable to meet with no dissension; a death-like stillness ensued, only broken by some two or three voices saying, in subdued tones, --

"That's right -- that's right. Nobody speak."

"Come on, then," said he who had given such judicious counsel; and the dark mass of men moved towards Sir Francis Varney's house, as quietly as it was possible for such an assemblage to proceed.

Indeed, saving the sound of the footsteps, nothing could be heard of them at all; and that regular tramp, tramp, tramp, would have puzzled any one listening to it from any distance to know in which direction it was proceeding.

In this way they went on until Sir Francis Varney's house was reached, and even then a whispered word to halt was given, and all eyes were bent upon the building.

From but one window out of the numerous ones with which the front of the mansion was studded did there shine the least light, and from that there came rather an uncommonly bright reflection, probably arising from a reading lamp placed close to the window.

A general impression, they knew not why exactly, seemed to pervade everybody, that in the room from whence streamed that bright light was Sir Francis Varney.

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"The vampyre's room!" said several. "The vampyre's room! That is it!"

"Yes," said he who had a kind of moral control over his comrades; "I have no doubt but he is there."

"What's to be done?" asked several.

"Make no noise whatever, but stand aside, so as not to be seen from the door when it is opened."

"Yes, yes."

"I will knock for admittance, and, the moment it is answered, I will place this stick in such a manner within, that the door cannot be closed again. Upon my saying 'Advance,' you will make a rush forward, and we shall have possession immediately of the house."

All this was agreed to. The mob shrunk close to the walls of the house, and out of immediate observation from the hall door, or from any of the windows, and then the leader advanced, and knocked loudly for admission.

The silence was now of the most complete character that could be imagined. Those who came there so bent upon vengeance were thoroughly convinced of the necessity of extreme caution, to save themselves even yet from being completely foiled.

They had abundant faith, from experience, of the resources in the way of escape of Sir Francis Varney, and not one among them was there who considered that there was any chance of capturing him, except by surprise; and when once they got hold of him, they determined he should not easily slip through their fingers.

The knock for admission produced no effect; and, after waiting three or four minutes, it was very provoking to find such a wonderful amount of caution and cunning completely thrown away.

"Try again," whispered one.

"Well, have patience; I am going to try again."

The man had the ponderous old-fashioned knocker in his hand, and was about to make another appeal to Sir Francis Varney's door, when a strange voice said, —

"Perhaps you may as well say at once what you want, instead of knocking there to no purpose."

He gave a start, for the voice seemed to come from the very door itself.

Yet it sounded decidedly human; and, upon a closer inspection, it was seen that a little wicket-gate, not larger than a man's face, had been opened from within.

This was terribly provoking. Here was an extent of caution on the part of the garrison quite unexpected. What was to be done?

"Well?" said the man who appeared at the little opening.

"Oh," said he who had knocked; "I — "

"Well?"

"I — that is to say — ahem! Is Sir Francis Varney within?"

"Well?"

"I say, is Sir Francis Varney within?"

"Well; you have said it!"

"Ah, but you have not answered it."

"No."

"Well, is he at home?"

"I decline saying; so you had better, all of you, go back to the town again, for we are well provided with all material to resist any attack you may be fools enough to make."

As he spoke, the servant shut the little square door with a bang that made his questioner jump again. Here was a dilemma!

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Chapter LI. THE ATTACK UPON THE VAMPYRE'S HOUSE. -- THE FURY OF THE ATTACK. -- THE FORCING OF THE DOORS, AND THE STRUGGLE.

A council of war was now called among the belligerents, who were somewhat taken aback by the steady refusal of the servant to admit them and their apparent determination to resist all endeavours on the part of the mob to get into and obtain possession of the house. It argued that they were prepared to resist all attempts, and it would cost some few lives to get into the vampyre's house. This passed through the minds of many as they retired behind the angle of the wall where the council was to be held.

Here they looked in each others' faces as if to gather from that the general tone of the feelings of their companions; but here they saw nothing that intimated the least idea of going back as they came.

"It's all very well, mates, to take care of ourselves, you know," began one tall, brawny fellow; "but, if we bea'n't to be sucked to death by a vampyre, why we must have the life out of him."

"Ay, so we must."

"Jack Hodge is right; we must kill him, and there's no sin in it, for he has no right to it; he's robbed some poor fellow of his life to prolong his own."

"Ay, ay, that's the way he does; bring him out, I say, then see what we will do with him."

"Yes, catch him first," said one, "and then we can dispose of him afterwards. I say, neighbours, don't you think it would be as well to catch him first?"

"Haven't we come on purpose?"

"Yes, but do it."

"Ain't we trying it?"

"You will presently, when we come to get into the house."

"Well, what's to be done?" said one; "here we are in a fix, I think, and I can't see our way out very clearly."

"I wish we could get in."

"But how is a question I don't very well see," said a large specimen of humanity.

"The best thing that can be done will be to go round and look over the whole house, and then we may come upon some part where it is far easier to get in at than by the front door."

"But it won't do for us all to go round that way," said one; "a small party only should go, else they will have all their people stationed at one point, and if we can divide them, we shall beat them because they have not enough to defend more than one point at a time; now we are numerous enough to make several attacks."

"Oh! that's the way to bother them all round; they'll give in, and then the place is our own."

"No, no," said the big countryman, "I like to make a good rush and drive all afore us; you know what ye have to do then, and you do it, ye know."

"If you can."

"Ay, to be sure, if we can, as you say; but can't we? that's what I want to know."

"To be sure we can."

"Then we'll do it, mate -- that's my mind; we'll do it. Come one, and let's have another look at the street-door."

The big countryman left the main body, and resolutely walked up to the main avenue, and approached the door, accompanied by about a dozen or less of the mob. When they came to the door, they commenced knocking and kicking most violently, and assailing it with all kinds of things they could lay their hands upon.

They continued at this violent exercise for some time -- perhaps for five minutes, when the little square hole in the door was again opened, and a voice was heard to say, --

"You had better cease that kind of annoyance."

"We want to get in."

"It will cost you more lives to do so than you can afford to spare. We are well armed, and are prepared to resist any effort you can make."

"Oh! it's all very well; but, an you won't open, why we'll make you; that's all about it."

This was said as the big countryman and his companions were leaving the avenue towards the rest of the

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body.

"Then, takes this, as an earnest of what is to follow," said the man, and he discharged the contents of a blunderbuss through the small opening, and its report sounded to the rest of the mob like the report of a field-piece.

Fortunately for the party retiring the man couldn't take any aim, else it is questionable how many of the party would have got off unwounded. As it was, several of them found stray slugs were lodged in various parts of their persons, and accelerated their retreat from the house of the vampyre.

"What luck?" inquired one of the mob to the others, as they came back; "I'm afraid you had all the honour."

"Ay, ay, we have, and all the lead too," replied a man, as he placed his hand upon a sore part of his person, which bled in consequence of a wound.

"Well, what's to be done?"

"Danged if I know," said one.

"Give it up," said another.

"No, no; have him out. I'll never give in while I can use a stick. They are in earnest and so are we. Don't let us be frightened because they have a gun or two -- they can't have many; and besides, if they have, we are too many for them. Besides, we shall all die in our beds."

"Hurrah! down with the vampyre!"

"So say I, lads. I don't want to be sucked to death when I'm a-bed. Better die like a man than such a dog's death as that, and you have no revenge then."

"No, no; he has the better of us then. We'll have him out -- we'll burn him -- that's the way we'll do it."

"Ay, so we will; only let us get in."

At that moment a chosen party returned who had been round the house to make a reconnoissance.

"Well, well," inquired the mob, "what can be done now -- where can we get in?"

"In several places."

"All right; come along then; the place is our own."

"Stop a minute; they are armed at all points, and we must make an attack on all points, else we may fail. A party must go round to the front-door, and attempt to beat it in; there are plenty of poles and things that could be used for such a purpose."

"There is, besides, a garden-door, that opens into the house -- a kind of parlour; a kitchen-door; a window in the flower-garden, and an entrance into a store-room; this place appears strong, and is therefore unguarded."

"The very point to make an attack."

"Not quite."

"Why not?"

"Because it can easily be defended, and rendered useless to us. We must make an attack upon all places but that, and, while they are being at those points, we can then enter at that place, and then you will find them desert the other places when they see us inside."

"Hurrah! down with the vampyre!" said the mob, as they listened to this advice, and appreciated the plan.

"Down with the vampyre!"

"Now, then, lads, divide, and make the attack; never mind their guns, they have but very few, and if you rush in upon them, you will soon have the guns yourselves."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the mob.

The mob now moved away in different bodies, each strong enough to carry the house. They seized upon a variety of poles and stones, and then made for the various doors and windows that were pointed out by those who had made the discovery. Each one of those who had formed the party of observation, formed a leader to the others, and at once proceeded to the post assigned him.

The attack was so sudden and so simultaneous that the servants were unprepared; and though they ran to the doors, and fired away, still they did but little good, for the doors were soon forced open by the enraged rioters, who proceeded in a much more systematic operation, using long heavy pieces of timber which were carried on the shoulder of several men, and driving with the force of battering-rams -- which, in fact, they were -- against the door.

Bang went the battering-ram, crash went the door, and the whole party rushed headlong in, carried forward by

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their own momentum and fell prostrate, engine and all, into the passage.

"Now, then, we have them," exclaimed the servants, who began to belabour the whole party with blows, with every weapon they could secure.

Loudly did the fallen men shout for assistance, and but for their fellows who came rushing in behind, they would have had but a sorry time of it.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob; "the house is our own."

"Not yet," shouted the servants.

"We'll try," said the mob; and they rushed forward to drive the servants back, and they met with a stout resistance, and as some of them had choppers and swords, there were a few wounds given, and presently bang went the blunderbuss.

Two or three of the mob reeled and fell.

This produced a momentary panic, and the servants then had the whole of the victory to themselves, and were about to charge, and clear the passage of their enemies, when a shout behind attracted their attention.

That shout was caused by an entrance being gained in another quarter, whence the servants were flying, and all was disorder.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the mob.

The servants retreated to the stairs, and here united, they made a stand, and resolved to resist the whole force of the rioters, and they succeeded in doing so, too, for some minutes. Blows were given and taken of a desperate character.

Somehow, there were no deadly blows received by the servants; there were being forced and beaten, but they lost no life; this may be accounted for by the fact that the mob used no more deadly weapons than sticks.

The servants of Sir Francis Varney, on the contrary, were mostly armed with deadly weapons, which, however, they did not use unnecessarily.

They stood upon the hall steps -- the grand staircase, with long poles or sticks, about the size of quarter-staves, and with these they belaboured those below most unmercifully.

Certainly, the mob were by no means cowards, for the struggle to close with their enemies was as great as ever, and as firm as could well be. Indeed, they rushed on with a desperation truly characteristic of John Bull, and defied the heaviest blows; for as fast as one was stricken down another occupied his place, and they insensibly pressed their close and compact front upon the servants, who were becoming fatigued and harassed.

"Fire, again," exclaimed a voice from among the servants.

The mob made no retrograde movement, but still continued to press onwards, and in another moment a loud report rang through the house, and a smoke hung over the heads of the mob.

A long groan or two escaped some of the men who had been wounded, and a still louder from those who had not been wounded, and a cry arose of, --

"Down with the vampyre -- pull down -- destroy and burn the whole place -- down with them all."

A rush succeeded, and a few more discharges took place, when a shout above attracted the attention of both parties engaged in this fierce struggle. They paused by mutual consent, to look and see what was the cause of that shout.

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Chapter LII. THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE MOB AND SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. -- THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE. -- THE WINE CELLARS.

The shout that had so discomposed the parties who were thus engaged in a terrific struggle came from a party above.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" they shouted a number of times, in a wild strain of delight. "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

The fact was, a party of the mob had clambered up a verandah, and entered some of the rooms upstairs, whence they emerged just above the landing near the spot where the servants were resisting in a mass the efforts of the mob.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob below.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob above.

There was a momentary pause, and the servants divided themselves into two bodies, and one turned to face those above, and the other those who were below.

A simultaneous shout was given by both parties of the mob, and a sudden rush was made by both bodies, and the servants of Sir Francis Varney were broken in an instant. They were instantly separated, and knocked about a good bit, but they were left to shift for themselves, the mob had a more important object in view.

"Down with the vampyre!" they shouted.

"Down with the vampyre!" shouted they, and they rushed helter skelter through the rooms, until they came to one where the door was partially open, and they could see some person very leisurely seated.

"Here he is," they cried.

"Who? who?"

"The vampyre."

"Down with him! kill him! burn him!"

"Hurrah! down with the vampyre!"

These sounds were shouted out by a score of voices, and they rushed headlong into the room.

But here their violence and headlong precipitancy were suddenly restrained by the imposing and quiet appearance of the individual who was there seated.

The mob entered the room, and there was a sight, that if it did not astonish them, at least, it caused them to pause before the individual who was seated there.

The room was filled with furniture, and there was a curtain drawn across the room, and about the middle of it there was a table, behind which sat Sir Francis Varney himself, looking all smiles and courtesy.

"Well, dang my smock--frock!" said one, "who'd ha' thought of this? He don't seem to care much about it."

"Well, I'm d -- -- d!" said another; "he seems pretty easy, at all events. What is he going to do?"

"Gentlemen," said Sir Francis Varney, rising, with the blandest of smiles, "pray, gentlemen, permit me to inquire the cause of this condescension on your part. The visit is kind."

The mob looked at Sir Francis, and then at each other, and then at Sir Francis again; but nobody spoke. They were awed by this gentlemanly and collected behaviour.

"If you honour me with this visit from pure affection and neighbourly good-will, I thank you."

"Down with the vampyre!" said one, who was concealed behind the rest, and not so much overawed, as he had not seen Sir Francis.

Sir Francis Varney rose to his full height; a light gleamed across his features; they were strongly defined then. His long front teeth, too, showed most strongly when he smiled, as he did now, and said, in a bland voice, --

"Gentlemen, I am at your service. Permit me to say you are all welcome to all I can do for you. I fear the interview will be somewhat inconvenient and unpleasant to you. As for myself, I am entirely at your service."

As Sir Francis spoke, he bowed, and folded his hands together, and stepped forwards; but, instead of coming onwards to them, he walked behind the curtain, and was immediately hid from their view.

"Down with the vampyre!" shouted one.

"Down with the vampyre!" rang through the apartment; and the mob now, not awed by the coolness and

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courtesy of Sir Francis, rushed forward, and, overturning the table, tore down the curtain to the floor; but, to their amazement, there was no Sir Francis Varney present.

"Where is he?"

"Where is the vampyre?"

"Where has he gone?"

These were cries that escaped every one's lips; and yet no one could give an answer to them.

There Sir Francis Varney was not. They were completely thunderstricken. They could not find out where he had gone to. There was no possible means of escape, that they could perceive. There was not an odd corner, or even anything that could, by any possibility, give even a suspicion that even a temporary concealment could take place.

They looked over every inch of flooring and of wainscoting; not the remotest trace could be discovered.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know," said one — "I can't see where he could have gone. There ain't a hole as big as a keyhole."

"My eye!" said one; "I shouldn't be at all surprised, if he were to blow up the whole house."

"You don't say so!"

"I never heard as how vampyres could do so much as that. They ain't the sort of people," said another.

"But if they can do one thing, they can do another."

"That's very true."

"And what's more, I never heard as how a vampyre could make himself into nothing before; yet he has done so."

"He may be in this room now."

"He may."

"My eyes! what precious long teeth he had!"

"Yes; and had he fixed one on 'em in to your arm, he would have drawn every drop of blood out of your body; you may depend upon that," said an old man.

"He was very tall."

"Yes; too tall to be any good."

"I shouldn't like him to have laid hold of me, though, tall as he is; and then he would have lifted me up high enough to break my neck, when he let me fall."

The mob routed about the room, tore everything out of its place, and as the object of their search seemed to be far enough beyond their reach, their courage rose in proportion, and they shouted and screamed with a proportionate increase of noise and bustle; and at length they ran about mad with rage and vexation, doing all the mischief that was in their power to inflict.

Then they became mischievous, and tore the furniture from its place, and broke it into pieces, and then amused themselves with breaking it up, throwing pieces at the pier-glasses, in which they made dreadful holes; and when that was gone, they broke up the frames.

Every hole and corner of the house was searched; but there was no Sir Francis Varney to be found.

"The cellars, the cellars!" shouted a voice.

"The cellars, the cellars!" re-echoed nearly every pair of lips in the whole place; in another moment, there was crushing and crowding to get down into the cellars.

"Hurray!" said one, as he knocked off the neck of the bottle that first came to hand. "Here's luck to vampyre-hunting! Success to our chase!"

"So say I, neighbour; but is that your manners to drink before your betters?"

So saying, the speaker knocked the other's elbow, while he was in the act of lifting the wine to his mouth; and thus he upset it over his face and eyes.

"D — n it!" cried the man; "how it makes my eyes smart! Dang thee! if I could see, I'd ring thy neck!"

"Success to vampyre-hunting!" said one.

"May we be lucky yet!" said another.

"I wouldn't be luckier than this," said another, as he, too, emptied a bottle. "We couldn't desire better entertainment, where the reckoning is all paid."

"Excellent!"

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"Very good!"

"Capital wine this!"

"I say, Huggins!"

"Well," said Huggins.

"What are you drinking?"

"Wine."

"What wine?"

"Danged if I know," was the reply. "It's wine, I suppose; for I know it ain't beer nor spirits; so it must be wine."

"Are you sure it ain't bottled men's blood?"

"Eh?"

"Bottled blood, man! Who knows what a vampyre drinks? It may be his wine. He may feast upon that before he goes to bed of a night, drink anybody's health, and make himself cheerful on bottled blood!"

"Oh, danged! I'm so sick; I wish I hadn't taken the stuff. It may be as you say, neighbour, and then we be cannibals."

"Or vampyres."

"There's a pretty thing to think of."

By this time some were drunk, some were partially so, and the remainder were crowding into the cellars to get their share of the wine.

The servants had now slunk away; they were no longer noticed by the rioters, who, having nobody to oppose them, no longer thought of anything, save the searching after the vampyre, and the destruction of the property. Several hours had been spent in this manner, and yet they could not find the object of their search.

There was not a room, or cupboard, or a cellar, that was capable of containing a cat, that they did not search, besides a part of the rioters keeping a very strict watch on the outside of the house and all about the grounds, to prevent the possibility of the escape of the vampyre.

There was a general cessation of active hostilities at that moment; a reaction after the violent excitement and exertion they had made to get in. Then the escape of their victim, and the mysterious manner in which he got away, was also a cause of the reaction, and the rioters looked in each others' countenances inquiringly.

Above all, the discovery of the winecellar tended to withdraw them from violent measures; but this could not last long, there must be an end to such a scene, for there never was a large body of men assembled for an evil purpose, who ever were, for any length of time, peaceable.

To prevent the more alarming effects of drunkenness, some few of the rioters, after having taken some small portion of the wine, became, from the peculiar flavour it possessed, imbued with the idea that it was really blood, and forthwith commenced an instant attack upon the wine and liquors, and they were soon mingling in one stream throughout the cellars.

This destruction was loudly declaimed against by a large portion of the rioters, who were drinking; but before they could make any efforts to save the liquor, the work of destruction had not only been begun, but was ended, and the consequence was, the cellars were very soon evacuated by the mob.

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Chapter LIII. THE DESTRUCTION OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S HOUSE BY FIRE. -- THE ARRIVAL OF THE MILITARY, AND A SECOND MOB.

Thus many moments had not elapsed ere the feelings of the rioters became directed into a different channel from that in which it had so lately flowed. When urged about the house and grounds for the vampyre, they became impatient and angry at not finding him. Many believed that he was yet about the house, while many were of opinion that he had flown away by some mysterious means only possessed by vampyres and such like people.

"Fire the house, and burn him out," said one.

"Fire the house!"

"Burn the den!" now arose in shouts from all present, and then the mob were again animated by the love of mischief that seemed to be the strongest feelings that animated them.

"Burn him out -- burn him out!" were the only words that could be heard from any of the mob. The words ran through the house like wild-fire, nobody thought of anything else, and all were seen running about in confusion. There was no want of good will on the part of the mob to the undertaking; far from it, and they proceeded in the work *con amore*. They worked together with right good will, and the result was soon seen by the heaps of combustible materials that were collected in a short time from all parts of the house.

All the old dry wood furniture that could be found was piled up in a heap, and to these were added a number of faggots, and also some shavings that were found in the cellar.

"All right!" exclaimed one man, in exultation. "Yes," replied a second; "all right -- all right! Set light to it, and he will be smoked out if not burned."

"Let us be sure that all are out of the house," suggested one of the bystanders.

"Ay, ay," shouted several; "give them all a chance. Search through the house and give them a warning."

"Very well; give me the light, and then when I come back I will set light to the fire at once, and then I shall know all is empty, and so will you too."

This was at once agreed to by all, with acclamations, and the light being handed to the man, he ascended the stairs, crying out in a loud voice, --

"Come out -- come out! the house is on fire!"

"Fire! fire! fire!" shouted the mob as a chorus, every now and then at intervals.

In about ten minutes more, there came a cry of "all right; the house is empty," from up the stairs, and the man descended in haste to the hall.

"Make haste, lads, and fire away, for I see the red coats are leaving the town."

"Hurra! hurra!" shouted the infuriated mob. "Fire -- fire -- fire the house! Burn out the vampyre! Burn down the house -- burn him out, and see if he can stand fire."

Amidst all this tumult there came a sudden blaze upon all around, for the pile had been fired.

"Hurra!" shouted the mob -- "hurra!" and they danced like maniacs round the fire; looking, in fact, like so many wild Indians, dancing round their roasting victims, or some demons at an infernal feast.

The torch had been put to twenty different places, and the flames united into one, and suddenly shot up with a velocity, and roared with a sound that caused many who were present to make a precipitate retreat from the hall. This soon became a necessary measure of self-preservation, and it required no urging to induce them to quit a place that was burning rapidly and very furiously.

"Get the poles and firewood -- get faggots," shouted some of the mob, and, lo, it was done almost by magic. They brought the faggots and wood piled up for winter use, and laid them near all the doors, and especially the main entrance. Nay, every gate or door belonging to the outhouses was brought forward and placed upon the fire, which now began to reach the upper stories.

"Hurra -- fire! Hurra -- fire!"

And a loud shout of triumph came from the mob as they viewed the progress of the flames, as they came roaring and tearing through the house doors and the windows.

Each new victory of the element was a signal to the mob for a cheer; and a hearty cheer, too, came from them.

"Where is the vampyre now?" exclaimed one.

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"Ha! where is he?" said another.

"If he be there," said the man, pointing to the flames, "I reckon he's got a warm berth of it, and, at the same time, very little water to boil in his kettle."

"Ha, ha! what a funny old man is Bob Mason; he's always poking fun; he'd joke if his wife were dying."

"There is many a true word spoken in jest," suggested another; "and, to my mind, Bob Mason wouldn't be very much grieved if his wife were to die."

"Die?" said Bob; "she and I have lived and quarrelled daily a matter of five-and-thirty years, and, if that ain't enough to make a man sick of being married, and of his wife, hang me, that's all. I say I am tired." This was said with much apparent sincerity, and several laughed at the old man's heartiness.

"It's all very well," said the old man; "it's all very well to laugh about matters you don't understand, but I know it isn't a joke — not a bit on it. I tells you what it is, neighbour, I never made but one grand mistake in all my life."

"And what was that?"

"To tie myself to a woman."

"Why, you'd get married to-morrow if your wife were to die to-day," said one.

"If I did, I hope I may marry a vampyre. I should have something then to think about. I should know what's o'clock. But, as for my old woman, lord, lord, I wish Sir Francis Varney had had her for life. I'll warrant when the next natural term of his existence came round again, he wouldn't be in no hurry to renew it; if he did, I should say that vampyres had the happy lot of managing women, which I haven't got."

"No, nor anybody else."

A loud shout now attracted their attention, and, upon looking in the quarter whence it came, they descried a large body of people coming towards them; from one end of the mob could be seen a long string of red coats.

"The red coats!" shouted one.

"The military!" shouted another.

It was plain the military who had been placed in the town to quell disturbances, had been made acquainted with the proceedings at Sir Francis Varney's house, and were now marching to relieve the place, and to save the property.

They were, as we have stated, accompanied by a vast concourse of people, who came out to see what they were going to see, and seeing the flames at Sir Francis Varney's house, they determined to come all the way, and be present.

The military, seeing the disturbance in the distance, and the flames issuing from the windows, made the best of their way towards the scene of tumult with what speed they could make.

"Here they come," said one.

"Yes, just in time to see what is done." "Yes, they can go back and say we have burned the vampyre's house down — hurra!"

"Hurra!" shouted the mob, in prolonged accents, and it reached the ears of the military.

The officer urged the men onwards, and they responded to his words, by exerting themselves to step out a little faster.

"Oh, they should have been here before this; it's no use, now, they are too late."

"Yes, they are too late."

"I wonder if the vampyre can breathe through the smoke, and live in fire," said one.

"I should think he must be able to do so, if he can stand shooting, as we know he can — you can't kill a vampyre; but yet he must be consumed, if the fire actually touches him, but not unless he can bear almost anything."

"So he can."

"Hurra!" shouted the mob, as a tall flame shot through the top windows of the house.

The fire had got the ascendant now, and no hopes could be entertained, however extravagant, of saving the smallest article that had been left in the mansion.

"Hurra!" shouted the mob with the military, who came up with them. "Hurra!" shouted the others in reply.

"Quick march!" said the officer; and then, in a loud, commanding tone, he shouted, "Clear the way, there! clear the way." "Ay, there's room enough for you," said the old Mason; "what are you making so much noise

about?"

There was a general laugh at the officer, who took no notice of the words, but ordered his men up before the burning pile, which was now an immense mass of flame.

The mob who had accompanied the military now mingled with the mob that had set the house of Sir Francis Varney on fire ere the military had come up with them.

"Halt!" cried out the officer; and the men, obedient to the word of command, halted, and drew up in a double line before the house.

There were then some words of command issued, and some more given to some of the subalterns, and a party of men, under the command of a sergeant, was sent off from the main body, to make a circuit of the house and grounds.

The officer gazed for some moments upon the burning pile without speaking; and then, turning to the next in command, he said in low tones, as he looked upon the mob, --

"We have come too late."

"Yes, much."

"The house is now nearly gutted."

"It is."

"And those who came crowding along with us are inextricably mingled with the others who have been the cause of all this mischief; there's no distinguishing them one from another."

"And if you did, you could not say who had done it, and who had not; you could prove nothing."

"Exactly."

"I shall not attempt to take prisoners, unless any act is perpetrated beyond what has been done."

"It is a singular affair."

"Very."

"This Sir Francis Varney is represented to be a courteous, gentlemanly man," said the officer.

"No doubt about it, but he's beset by a parcel of people who do not mind cutting a throat if they can get an opportunity of doing so." "And I expect they will."

"Yes, when there is a popular excitement against any man, he had better leave this part at once and altogether. It is dangerous to tamper with popular prejudices; no man who has any value for his life ought to do so. It is a sheer act of suicide."

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Chapter LIV. THE BURNING OF VARNEY'S HOUSE. -- A NIGHT SCENE. -- POPULAR SUPERSTITION.

The officer ceased to speak, and then the party whom he had sent round the house and grounds returned, and gained the main body orderly enough, and the sergeant went forward to make his report to his superior officer.

After the usual salutation, he waited for the inquiry to be put to him as to what he had seen.

"Well, Scott, what have you done?"

"I went round the premises, sir, according to your instructions, but saw no one either in the vicinity of the house, or in the grounds around it."

"No strangers, eh?"

"No, sir, none."

"You saw nothing at all likely to lead to any knowledge as to who it was that has caused this catastrophe?"

"No, sir."

"Have you learnt anything among the people who are the perpetrators of this fire?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, that will do, unless there is anything else that you can think of."

"Nothing further, sir, unless it is that I heard some of them say that Sir Francis Varney has perished in the flames."

"Good heavens!"

"So I heard, sir."

"That must be impossible, and yet why should it be so? Go back, Scott, and bring me some person who can give me some information upon this point."

The sergeant departed towards the people, who looked at him without any distrust, for he came single-handed, though they thought he came with the intention of learning what they knew of each other, and so stroll about with the intention of getting up accusations against them. But this was not the case; the officer didn't like the work well enough; he'd rather have been elsewhere.

At length the sergeant came to one man, whom he accosted, and said to him, --

"Do you know anything of yonder fire?"

"Yes; I do know it is a fire."

"Yes, and so do I."

"My friend," said the sergeant, "when a soldier asks a question he does not expect an uncivil answer."

"But a soldier may ask a question that may have an uncivil end to it."

"He may; but it is easy to say so."

"I do say so, then, now."

"Then I'll not trouble you any more."

The sergeant moved on a pace or two more, and then, turning to the mob, he said, --

"Is there any one among you who can tell me anything concerning the fate of Sir Francis Varney?"

"Burnt!"

"Did you see him burnt?"

"No; but I saw him."

"In the flames?"

"No; before the house was on fire."

"In the house?"

"Yes; and he has not been seen to leave it since, and we conclude he must have been burned."

"Will you come and say as much to my commanding officer? It is all I want."

"Shall I be detained?"

"No."

"Then I will go," said the man, and he hobbled out of the crowd towards the sergeant. "I will go and see the officer, and tell him what I know, and that is very little, and can prejudice no one."

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"Hurrah!" said the crowd, when they heard this latter assertion; for, at first, they began to be in some alarm lest there should be something wrong about this, and some of them get identified as being active in the fray.

The sergeant let the man back to the spot, where the officer stood a little way in advance of his men.

"Well, Scott," he said, "what have we here?"

"A man who has volunteered a statement, sir."

"Oh! Well, my man, can you say anything concerning all this disturbance that we have here?"

"No, sir."

"Then what did you come here for?"

"I understood the sergeant to want some one who could speak of Sir Francis Varney."

"Well?"

"I saw him."

"Where?"

"In the house."

"Exactly; but have you not seen him out of it?"

"Not since; nor any one else, I believe."

"Where was he?"

"Upstairs, where he suddenly disappeared, and nobody can tell where he may have gone to. But he has not been seen out of the house since, and they say he could not have gone bodily out if they had not seen him."

"He must have been burnt," said the officer, musingly; "he could not escape, one would imagine, without being seen by some one out of such a mob."

"Oh, dear no, for I am told they placed a watch at every hole, window, or door, however high, and they say nothing of him — not even fly out!"

"Fly out! I'm speaking of a man!"

"And I of a vampire!" said the man, carelessly.

"A vampyre! Pooh, pooh!"

"Oh no! Sir Francis Varney is a vampyre! There can be no sort of doubt about it. You have only to look at him, and you will soon be satisfied of that. See his great sharp teeth in front, and ask yourself what they are for, and you will soon find the answer. They are to make holes with in the bodies of his victims, through which he can suck their blood!"

The officer looked at the man in astonishment for a few moments, as if he doubted his own ears, and then he said, —

"Are you serious?"

"I am ready to swear to it."

"Well, I have heard a great deal about popular superstition, and thought I had seen something of it; but this is decidedly the worst case that ever I saw or heard of. You had better go home, my man, than, by your presence, countenance such a gross absurdity."

"For all that," said the man, "Sir Francis Varney is a vampyre — a blood-sucker — a human blood-sucker!"

"Get away with you," said the officer, "and do not repeat such folly before any one."

The man almost jumped when he heard the tone in which this was spoken, for the officer was both angry and contemptuous, when he heard the words of the man.

"These people," he added, turning to the sergeant, "are ignorant in the extreme. One would think we had got into the country of vampires, instead of a civilised community."

The day was going down now; the last rays of the setting sun glimmered upwards, and still shone upon the tree-tops. The darkness of night was still fast closing around them. The mob stood a motley mass of human beings, wedged together, dark and sombre, gazing upon the mischief that had been done — the work of their hands. The military stood at ease before the burning pile, and by their order and regularity, presented a contrast to the mob, as strongly by their bright gleaming arms, as by their dress and order.

The flames now enveloped the whole mansion. There was not a window or a door from which the fiery element did not burst forth in clouds, and forked flames came rushing forth with a velocity truly wonderful.

The red glare of the flames fell upon all objects around for some distance — the more especially so, as the sun had sunk, and a bank of clouds rose from beneath the horizon and excluded all his rays; there was no twilight, and

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there was, as yet, no moon.

The country side was enveloped in darkness, and the burning house could be seen for miles around, and formed a rallying-point to all men's eyes.

The engines that were within reach came tearing across the country, and came to the fire; but they were of no avail. There was no supply of water, save from the ornamental ponds. These they could only get at by means that were tedious and unsatisfactory, considering the emergency of the case.

The house was a lone one, and it was being entirely consumed before they arrived, and therefore there was not the remotest chance of saving the least article. Had they ever such a supply of water, nothing could have been effected by it.

Thus the men stood idly by, passing their remarks upon the fire and the mob.

Those who stood around, and within the influence of the red glare of the flames, looked like so many demons in the infernal regions, watching the progress of lighting the fire, which we are told by good Christians is the doom of the unfortunate in spirit, and the woefully unlucky in circumstances.

It was a strange sight that; and there were many persons who would, without doubt, have rather been snug by their own fire-side than they would have remained there; but it happened that no one felt inclined to express his inclination to his neighbour, and, consequently, no one said anything on the subject.

None would venture to go alone across the fields, where the spirit of the vampyre might, for all they knew to the contrary, be waiting to pounce upon them, and worry them.

No, no; no man would have quitted that mob to go back alone to the village; they would sooner have stood there all night through. That was an alternative that none of the number would very willingly accept.

The hours passed away, and the house that had been that morning a noble and well-furnished mansion, was now a smouldering heap of ruins. The flames had become somewhat subdued, and there was now more smoke than flames.

The fire had exhausted itself. There was now no more material that could serve it for fuel, and the flames began to become gradually enough subdued.

Suddenly there was a rush, and then a bright flame shot upward for an instant, so bright and so strong, that it threw a flash of light over the country for miles; but it it was only momentary, and it subsided.

The roof, which had been built strong enough to resist almost anything, after being burning for a considerable time, suddenly gave way, and came in with a tremendous crash, and then all was for a moment darkness.

After this the fire might be said to be subdued, it having burned itself out; and the flames that could now be seen were but the result of so much charred wood, that would probably smoulder away for a day or two, if left to itself to do so. A dense mass of smoke arose from the ruins, and blackened the atmosphere around, and told the spectators the work was done.

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Chapter LV. THE RETURN OF THE MOB AND MILITARY TO THE TOWN. -- THE MADNESS OF THE MOB. -- THE GROCER'S REVENGE.

On the termination of the conflagration, or, rather, the fall of the roof, with the loss of grandeur in the spectacle, men's minds began to be free from the excitement that chained them to the spot, watching the progress of that element which has been truly described as a very good servant, but a very bad master; and of the truth of this every one must be well satisfied.

There was now remaining little more than the livid glare of the hot and burning embers; and this did not extend far, for the walls were too strongly built to fall in from their own weight; they were strong and stout, and intercepted the little light the ashes would have given out.

The mob now began to feel fatigued and chilly. It had been standing and walking about many hours, and the approach of exhaustion could not be put off much longer, especially as there was no longer any great excitement to carry it off.

The officer, seeing that nothing was to be done, collected his men together, and they were soon seen in motion. He had been ordered to stop any tumult that he might have seen, and to save any property. But there was nothing to do now; all the property that could have been saved was now destroyed, and the mob were beginning to disperse, and creep towards their own houses.

The order was then given for the men to take close order, and keep together, and the word to march was given, which the men obeyed with alacrity, for they had no good-will in stopping there the whole of the night.

The return to the village of both the mob and the military was not without its vicissitudes; accidents of all kinds were rife amongst them; the military, however, taking the open paths, soon diminished the distance, and that, too, with little or no accidents, save such as might have been expected from the state of the fields, after they had been so much trodden down of late.

Not so the townspeople or the peasantry; for, by way of keeping up their spirits, and amusing themselves on their way home, they commenced larking, as they called it, which often meant the execution of practical jokes, and these sometimes were of a serious nature.

The night was dark at that hour, especially so when there was a number of persons traversing about, so that little or nothing could be seen.

The mistakes and blunders that were made were numerous. In one place there were a number of people penetrating a path that lead only to a hedge and deep ditch; indeed it was a brook very deep and muddy.

Here they came to a stop and endeavoured to ascertain its width, but the little reflected light they had was deceptive, and it did not appear so broad as it was.

"Oh, I can jump it," exclaimed one.

"And so an I," said another, "I have done so before, and why should I not do so now."

This was unanswerable, and as there were many present, at least a dozen were eager to jump.

"If thee can do it, I know I can," said a brawny countryman; "so I'll do it at once."

"The sooner the better," shouted some one behind, "or you'll have no room for a run, here's a lot of 'em coming up; push over as quickly as you can."

Thus urged, the jumpers at once made a rush to the edge of the ditch, and many jumped, and many more, from the prevailing darkness, did not see exactly where the ditch was, and taking one or two steps too many, found themselves up above the waist in muddy water.

Nor were those who jumped much better off, for nearly all jumped short or fell backwards into the stream, and were dragged out in a terrible state.

"Oh, lord! oh, lord!" exclaimed one poor fellow, dripping wet and shivering with cold, "I shall die! oh, the rheumatiz; there'll be a pretty winter for for me; I'm half dead."

"Hold your noise," said another, "and help me to get the mud out of my eye; I can't see."

"Never mind," added a third, "considering how you jump, I don't think you want to see."

"This comes a hunting vampyres."

"Oh, it's all a judgment; who knows but he mayh be in the air; it is nothing to laugh at as I shouldn't be

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surprised if he were; only think how precious pleasant."

"However pleasant it may be to you," remarked one, "it's profitable to a good many."

"How so?"

"Why, see the numbers of things that will be spoiled, coats torn, hats crushed, heads broken, and shoes burst. Oh, it's an ill-wind that blows nobody any good."

"So it is, but you may benefit anybody you like, so you don't do it at my expence."

In one part of a field where there were some stiles and gates, a big countryman caught a fat shopkeeper with the arms of the stile a terrible poke in the stomach; while the breath was knocked out of the poor man's stomach, and he was gasping with agony, the fellow set to laughing, and said to his companions, who were of the same class —

"I say, Jim, look at the grocer, he hasn't got any wind to spare, I'd run him for a wager, see how he gapes like a fish out of water."

The poor shopkeeper felt indeed like a fish out of water, and as he afterwards declared he felt just as if he had had a red hot clock weight thrust into the midst of his stomach and there left to cool.

However, the grocer would be revenged upon his tormentor, who had now lost sight of him, but the fat man, after a time, recovering his wind, and the pain in his stomach becoming less intense, he gathered himself up.

"My name ain't Jones," he muttered, "if I don't be one to his one for that; I'll do something that shall make him remember what it is to insult a respectable tradesman. I'll never forgive such an insult. It is dark, and that's why it is he has dared to do this."

Filled with dire thoughts and a spirit of revenge, he looked from side to side to see with what he could effect his object, but could espy nothing.

"It's shameful," he muttered; "what would I give for a little retort. I'd plaster his ugly countenance."

As he spoke, he placed his hands on some pales to rest himself, when he found that they stuck to them, the pales had that day been newly pitched.

A bright idea now struck him.

"If I could only get a handful of this stuff," he thought, "I should be able to serve him out for serving me out. I will, cost what it may; I'm resolved upon that. I'll not have my wind knocked out, and my inside set on fire for nothing. No, no; I'll be revenged on him."

With this view he felt over the pales, and found that he could scrape off a little only, but not with his hands; indeed, it only plastered them; he, therefore, marched about for something to scrape it off with.

"Ah, I have a knife, a large pocket knife, that will do, that is the sort of thing I want."

He immediately commenced feeling for it, but had scarcely got his hand into his pocket when he found there would be a great difficulty in either pushing it in further or withdrawing it altogether, for the pitch made it difficult to do either, and his pocket stuck to his hands like a glove.

"D — n it," said the grocer, "who would have thought of that! here's a pretty go, curse that fellow, he is the cause of all this; I'll be revenged upon him, if it's a year hence."

The enraged grocer drew his hand out, but was unable to effect his object in withdrawing the knife also; but he saw something shining, he stooped to pick it up, exclaiming as he did so, in a gratified tone of voice,

"Ah, here's something that will do better."

As he made a grasp at it, he found he had inserted his hand into something soft.

"God bless me! what now?"

He pulled his hand hastily away, and found that it stuck slightly, and then he saw what it was.

"Ay, ay, the very thing. Surely it must have been placed here on purpose by the people."

The fact was, he had placed his hand into a pot of pitch that had been left by the people who had been at work at pitching the pales, but had been attracted by the fire at Sir Francis Varney's, and to see which they had left their work, and the pitch was left on a smouldering peat fire, so that when Mr. Jones, the grocer, accidentally put his hand into it he found it just warm.

When he made this discovery he dabbed his hand again into the pitch-pot, exclaiming, —

"In for a penny, in for a pound."

And he endeavoured to secure as large a handful of the slippery and sticky stuff as he could, and this done he set off to come up with the big countryman who had done him so much indignity and made his stomach

uncomfortable.

He soon came up with him, for the man had stopped rather behind, and was larking, as it is called, with some men, to whom he was a companion.

He had slipped down a bank, and was partially sitting down on the soft mud. In his bustle, the little grocer came down with a slide, close to the big countryman.

"Ah — ah! my little grocer," said the countryman, holding out his hand to catch him, and drawing him towards himself, "You will come and sit down by the side of your old friend."

As he spoke, he endeavoured to pull Mr. Jones down, too; but that individual only replied by fetching the countryman a swinging smack across the face with the handful of pitch.

"There, take that; and now we are quits; we shall be old friends after this, eh? Are you satisfied? You'll remember me, I'll warrant."

As the grocer spoke, he rubbed his hands over the face of the fallen man, and then rushed from the spot with all the haste he could make.

The countryman sat a moment or two confounded, cursing, and swearing, and spluttering, vowing vengeance, believing that it was mud only that had been plastered over his face; but when he put his hands up, and found out what it was, he roared and bellowed like a town-bull.

He cried out to his companions that his eyes were pitched; but they only laughed at him, thinking he was having some foolish lark with them.

It was next day before he got home, for he wandered about all night; and it took him a week to wash the pitch off by means of grease; and ever afterwards he recollected the pitching of his face; nor did he ever forget the grocer.

Thus it was the whole party returned a long while after dark across the fields, with all the various accidents that were likely to befall such an assemblage of people.

The vampyre hunting cost many of them dear, for clothes were injured on all sides, hats lost, and shoes missing in a manner that put some of the rioters to much inconvenience. Soon afterwards, the military retired to their quarters; and the townspeople at length became tranquil, and nothing more was heard or done that night.

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Chapter LVI. THE DEPARTURE OF THE BANNERWORTHS FROM THE HALL. -- THE NEW ABODE. -- JACK PRINGLE, PILOT.

During that very evening, on which the house of Sir Francis Varney was fired by the mob, another scene, and one of a different character, was enacted at Bannerworth Hall, where the owners of that ancient place were departing from it.

It was towards the latter part of the day, that Flora Bannerworth, Mrs. Bannerworth, and Henry Bannerworth, were preparing themselves to depart from the house of their ancestors. The intended proprietor was, as we have already been made acquainted with, the old admiral, who had taken the place somewhat mysteriously, considering the way in which he usually did business.

The admiral was walking up and down the lawn before the house, and looking up at the windows every now and then; and turning to Jack Pringle, he said, --

"Jack, you dog."

"Ay -- ay sir."

"Mind you convoy these women into the right port; do you hear? and no mistaking the bearings; do you hear?"

"Ay, ay sir."

"These crafts want care; and you are pilot, commander, and all; so mind and keep your weather eye open."

"Ay, ay, sir. I knows the craft well enough, and I knows the roads, too; there'll be no end of foundering against the breakers to find where they lie."

"No, no, Jack; you needn't do that; but mind your bearings. Jack, mind your bearings."

"Never fear; I know 'em, well enough; my eyes ain't laid up in ordinary yet."

"Eh? What do you mean by that, you dog, eh?"

"Nothing; only I can see without helps to read, or glasses either; so I know one place from another."

There was now some one moving within; and the admiral, followed by Jack Pringle, entered the Hall. Henry Bannerworth was there. They were all ready to go when the coach came for them, which the admiral had ordered for them.

"Jack, you lubber; where are you?"

"Ay, ay, sir, here am I."

"Go, and station yourself up in some place where you can keep a good look-out for the coach, and come and report when you see it."

"Ay -- ay, sir," said Jack, and away he went from the room, and stationed himself up in one of the trees, that commanded a good view of the main road for some distance.

"Admiral Bell," said Henry, "here we are, trusting implicitly to you; and in doing so, I am sure I am doing right."

"You will see that," said the admiral. "All's fair and honest as yet; and what is to come, will speak for itself."

"I hope you won't suffer from any of these nocturnal visits," said Henry.

"I don't much care about them; but old Admiral Bell don't strike his colours to an enemy, however ugly he may look. No, no; it must be a better craft than his own that'll take him; and one who won't run away, but that will grapple yard-arm and yard-arm, you know."

"Why, admiral, you must have seen many dangers in your time, and be used to all kinds of disturbances and conflicts. You have had a life of experience."

"Yes; and experience has come pretty thick sometimes, I can tell you, when it comes in the shape of Frenchmen's broadsides."

"I dare say, then, it must be rather awkward."

"Death by the law," said the admiral, "to stop one of them with your head, I assure you. I dare not make the attempt myself, though I have often seen it done."

"I dare say; but here are Flora and my mother."

As he spoke, Flora and her mother entered the apartment.

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"Well, admiral, we are all ready; and, though I may feel somewhat sorry at leaving the old Hall, yet it arises from attachment to the place, and not any disinclination to be beyond the reach of these dreadful alarms."

"And I, too, shall be by no means sorry," said Flora; "I am sure it is some gratification to know we leave a friend here, rather than some others, who would have had the place, if they could have got it, by any means."

"Ah, that's true enough, Miss Flora," said the admiral; "but we'll run the enemy down yet, depend upon it. But once away, you will be free from these terrors; and now, as you have promised, do not let yourselves be seen any where at all."

"You have our promises, admiral; and they shall be religiously kept, I can assure you."

"Boat, ahoy — ahoy!" shouted Jack.

"What boat?" said the admiral, surprised; and then he muttered, "Confound you for a lubber! Didn't I tell you to mind your bearings, you dog—fish you?"

"Ay, ay, sir — and so I did."

"You did."

"Yes, here they are. Squint over the larboard bulk—heads, as they call walls, and then atween the two trees on the starboard side of the course, then straight ahead for a few hundred fathoms, when you come to a funnel as is smoking like the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and then in a line with that on the top of the hill, comes our boat."

"Well," said the admiral, "that'll do. Now go open the gates, and keep a bright look out, and if you see anybody near your watch, why douse their glim."

"Ay — ay, sir," said Jack, and he disappeared.

"Rather a lucid description," said Henry, as he thought of Jack's report to the admiral.

"Oh, it's a seaman's report. I know what he means; it's quicker and plainer than the land lingo, to my ears, and Jack can't talk any other, you see."

By this time the coach came into the yard, and the whole party descended into the court—yard, where they came to take leave of the old place.

"Farewell, admiral."

"Good bye," said the admiral. "I hope the place you are going to will be such as will please you — I hope it will."

"I am sure we shall endeavour to be pleased with it, and I am pretty sure we shall."

"Good bye."

"Farewell, Admiral Bell," said Henry.

"You remember your promises?"

"I do. Good bye, Mr. Chillingworth."

"Good bye," said Mr. Chillingworth, who came up to bid them farewell; "a pleasant journey, and may you all be the happier for it."

"You do not come with us?"

"No; I have some business of importance to attend to, else I should have the greatest pleasure in doing so. But good bye; we shall not be long apart, I dare say."

"I hope not," said Henry.

The door of the carriage was shut by the admiral, who looked round, saying, —

"Jack — Jack Pringle, where are you, you dog?"

"Here am I," said Jack.

"Where have you been to?"

"Only been for pigtail," said Jack. "I forgot it, and couldn't set sail without it."

"You dog you; didn't I tell you to mind your bearings?"

"So I will," said Jack, "fore and aft — fore and aft, admiral."

"You had better," said the admiral, who, however, relaxed into a broad grin, which he concealed from Jack Pringle.

Jack mounted the coach—box, and away it went, just as it was getting dark. The old admiral had locked up all the rooms in the presence of Henry Bannerworth; and when the coach had gone out of sight, Mr. Chillingworth came back to the Hall, where he joined the admiral.

"Well," he said, "they are gone Admiral Bell, and we are alone; we have a clear stage and no favour."

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"The two things of all others I most desire. Now, they will be strangers where they are going to, and that will be something gained. I will endeavour to do something if I get yard—arm and yard—arm with these pirates. I'll make 'em feel the weight of true metal; I'll board 'em — d — — e, I'll do everything."

"Everything that can be done."

"Ay — ay." * * * *

The coach in which the family of the Bannerworths were carried away continued its course without any let or hindrance, and they met no one on their road during the whole drive. The fact was, nearly everybody was at the conflagration at Sir Francis Varney's house.

Flora knew not which way they were going, and, after a time, all trace of the road was lost. Darkness set in, and they all sat in silence in the coach.

At length, after some time had been spent thus, Flora Bannerworth turned to Jack Pringle, and said, —

"Are we near, or have we much further to go?"

"Not very much, ma'am," said Jack. "All's right, however — ship in the direct course, and no breakers ahead — no lookout necessary; however there's a landlubber aloft to keep a look out."

As this was not very intelligible, and Jack seemed to have his own reasons for silence, they asked him no further questions; but in about three—quarters of an hour, during which time the coach had been driving through the trees, they came to a standstill by a sudden pull of the checkstring from Jack, who said, —

"Hilloa! — take in sails, and drop anchor."

"Is this the place.?"

"Yes, here we are," said Jack; "we're in port now, at all events;" and he began to sing, — "The trials and the dangers of the voyage is past," when the coach door opened, and they all got out and looked about them where they were.

"Up the garden if you please, ma'am — as quick as you can; the night air is very cold."

Flora and her mother and brother took the hint, which was meant by Jack to mean that they were not to be seen outside. They at once entered a pretty garden, and then they came to a very neat and picturesque cottage. They had no time to look up at it, as the door was immediately opened by an elderly female, who was intended to wait upon them.

Soon after, Jack Pringle and the coachman entered the passage with the small amount of luggage which they had brought with them. This was deposited in the passage, and then Jack went out again, and, after a few minutes, there was the sound of wheels, which intimated that the coach had driven off.

Jack, however, returned in a few minutes afterwards, having secured the wicket—gate at the end of the garden, and then entered the house, shutting the door carefully after him.

Flora and her mother looked over the apartments in which they were shown with some surprise. It was, in everything, such as they could wish; indeed, though it could not be termed handsomely or extravagantly furnished, or that the things were new, yet there was all that convenience and comfort could require, and some little of the luxuries.

"Well," said Flora, "this is very thoughtful of the admiral. The place will really be charming, and the garden, too, delightful."

"Mustn't be made use of just now," said Jack, "if you please, ma'am; them's the orders at present."

"Very well," said Flora, smiling. "I suppose, Mr. Pringle, we must obey them."

"Jack Pringle, if you please," said Jack. "My command's only temporary. I ain't got a commission."

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Chapter LVII. THE LONELY WATCH, AND THE ADVENTURE IN THE DESERTED HOUSE.

It is now quite night, and so peculiar and solemn a stillness reigns in and about Bannerworth Hall and its surrounding grounds, that one might have supposed it a place of the dead, deserted completely after sunset by all who would still hold kindred with the living. There was not a breath of air stirring, and this circumstance added greatly to the impression of profound repose which the whole scene exhibited.

The wind during the day had been rather of a squally character, but towards nightfall, as is often usual after a day of such a character, it had completely lulled, and the serenity of the scene was unbroken even by the faintest sigh from a wandering zephyr.

The moon rose late at that period, and as is always the case at that interval between sunset and the rising of that luminary which makes the night so beautiful, the darkness was of the most profound character.

It was one of those nights to produce melancholy reflections --- a night on which a man would be apt to review his past life, and to look into the hidden recesses of his soul to see if conscience could make a coward of him in the loneliness and stillness that breathed around.

It was one of those nights in which wanderers in the solitude of nature feel that the eye of Heaven is upon them, and on which there seems to be a more visible connection between the world and its great Creator than upon ordinary occasions.

The solemn and melancholy appear places once instinct with life, when deserted by those familiar forms and faces that have long inhabited them. There is no desert, no uninhabited isle in the far ocean, no wild, barren, pathless tract of unmitigated sterility, which could for one moment compare in point of loneliness and desolation to a deserted city.

Strip London, mighty and majestic as it is, of the busy swarm of humanity that throng its streets, its suburbs, its temples, its public edifices, and its private dwellings, and how awful would be the walk of one solitary man throughout its noiseless thoroughfares.

If madness seized not upon him ere he had been long the sole survivor of a race, he would need be cast in no common mould.

And to descend from great things to smaller --- from the huge levathian city to one mansion far removed from the noise and bustle of conventional life, we may imagine the sort of desolation that reigned through Bannerworth Hall, when, for the first time, after nearly a hundred and fifty years of occupation, it was deserted by the representatives of that family, so many members of which had lived and died beneath its roof.

The house, and everything within, without, and around it, seemed actually to sympathize with its own desolation and desertion.

It seemed as if twenty years of continued occupation could not have produced such an effect upon the ancient edifice as had those few hours of neglect and desertion.

And yet it was not as if it had been stripped of those time-worn and ancient relics of ornament and furnishing that so long had appertained to it. No, nothing but the absence of those forms which had been accustomed quietly to move from room to room, and to be met here upon a staircase, there upon a corridor, and even in some of the ancient panelled apartments, which gave it an air of dreary repose and listlessness.

The shutters, too, were all closed, and that circumstance contributed largely to the production of that gloomy effect which otherwise could not have ensued.

In fact, what could be done without attracting very special observation was done to prove to any casual observer that the house was untenanted.

But such was not really the case. In that very room where the much dreaded Varney the vampyre had made one of his dreaded appearances to Flora Bannerworth and her mother, sat two men.

It was from that apartment that Flora had discharged the pistol, which had been left to her by her brother, and the shot from which it was believed by the whole family had most certainly taken effect upon the person of the vampyre.

It was a room peculiarly accessible from the gardens, for it had long French windows opening to the very

ground, and but a stone step intervened between the flooring of the apartment and a broad gravel walk which wound round that entire portion of the house.

It was in this room, then, that two men sat in silence, and nearly in darkness.

Before them, and on a table, were several articles of refreshment, as well of defence and offence, according as their intentions might be.

There were a bottle and three glasses, and lying near the elbow of one of the men was a large pair of pistols, such as might have adorned the belt of some desperate character, who wished to instil an opinion of his prowess into his foes by the magnitude of his weapons.

Close at hand, by the same party, lay some more modern fire-arms, as well as a long dirk, with a silver mounted handle.

The light they had consisted of a large lantern, so constructed with a slide, that it could be completely obscured at a moment's notice; but now as it was placed, the rays that were allowed to come from it were directed as much from the window of the apartment, as possible, and fell upon the faces of the two men, revealing them to be Admiral Bell and Dr. Chillingworth.

It might have been the effect of the particular light in which he sat, but the doctor looked extremely pale, and did not appear at all at his ease.

The admiral, on the contrary, appeared in as placable a state of mind as possible, and had his arms folded across his breast, and his head shrunk down between his shoulders, as if he had made up his mind to something that was to last a long time, and, therefore, he was making the best of it.

"I do hope," said Mr. Chillingworth, after a long pause, "that our efforts will be crowned with success — you know, my dear sir, that I have always been of your opinion, that there was a great deal more in this matter than met the eye."

"To be sure," said the admiral, "and as to our efforts being crowned with success, why, I'll give you a toast, doctor, 'may the morning's reflection provide for the evening's amusement.'"

"Ha! ha!" said Chillingworth, faintly; "I'd rather not drink any more, and you seem, admiral, to have transposed the toast in some way. I believe it runs, 'may the evening's amusement bear the morning's reflection.'"

"Transpose the devil!" said the admiral; "what do I care how it runs? I gave you my toast, and as to that you mention, it's another one altogether, and a sneaking, shore-going one too: but why don't you drink?"

"Why, my dear sir, medically speaking, I am strongly of opinion that, when the human stomach is made to contain a large quantity of alcohol, it produces bad effects upon the system. Now, I've certainly taken one glass of this infernally strong Hollands, and it is now lying in my stomach like the red-hot heater of a tea-urn."

"Is it? put it out with another, then."

"Ay, I'm afraid that would not answer; but do you really think, admiral, that we shall effect anything by waiting here, and keeping watch and ward, not under the most comfortable circumstances, this first night of the Hall being empty."

"Well, I don't know that we shall," said the admiral; "but when you really want to steal a march upon the enemy, there is nothing like beginning betimes. We are both of opinion that Varney's great object throughout has been, by some means or another, to get possession of the house."

"Yes; true, true."

"We know that he has been unceasing in his endeavours to get the Bannerworth family out of it; that he has offered them their own price to become its tenant, and that the whole gist of his quiet and placid interview with Flora in the garden, was to supply her with a new set of reasons for urging her mother and brother to leave Bannerworth Hall, because the old ones were certainly not found sufficient."

"True, true, most true," said Mr. Chillingworth, emphatically. "You know, sir, that from the first time you broached that view of the subject to me, how entirely I coincided with you."

"Of course you did, for you are a honest fellow, and a right-thinking fellow, though you are a doctor, and I don't know that I like doctors, much better than I like lawyers — they're only humbugs in a different sort of way. But I wish to be liberal; there is such a thing as an honest lawyer, and, d — e, you're an honest doctor!"

"Of course I'm much obliged, admiral, for your good opinion. I only wish it had struck me to bring something of a solid nature in the shape of food, to sustain the waste of the animal economy during the hours we shall have to wait here."

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"Don't trouble yourself about that," said the admiral. "Do you think I'm a donkey, and would set out on a cruise without victualling my ship? I should think not. Jack Pringle will be here soon, and he has my orders to bring in something to eat."

"Well," said the doctor, "that's very provident of you, admiral, and I feel personally obliged; but tell me, how do you intend to conduct the watch?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean, if we sit here with the window fastened so as to prevent our light from being seen, and the door closed, how are we by any possibility to know if the house is attacked or not?"

"Hark'ee, my friend," said the admiral; "I've left a weak point for the enemy."

"A what, admiral?"

"A weak point. I've taken good care to secure everything but one of the windows on the ground floor, and that I've left open, or so nearly open, that it will look like the most natural place in the world to get in at. Now, just inside that window, I've placed a lot of the family crockery. I'll warrant, if anybody so much as puts his foot in, you'll hear the smash; -- and, d -- e, there it is!"

There was a long crash at this moment, followed by a succession of similar sounds, but of a lesser degree; and both the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth sprung to their feet.

"Come on," cried the former; "here'll be a precious row -- take the lantern."

"Mr. Chillingworth did so, but he did not seem possessed of a great deal of presence of mind; for, before they got out of the room, he twice accidentally put on the dark slide, and produced a total darkness.

"D -- n!" said the admiral; "don't make it wink and wink in that way; hold it up, and run after me as hard as you can."

"I'm coming, I'm coming," said Mr. Chillingworth.

It was one of the windows of a long room, containing five, fronting the garden, which the admiral had left purposely unguarded; and it was not far from the apartment in which they had been sitting, so that, probably, not half a minute's time elapsed between the moment of the first alarm, and their reaching the spot from whence it was presumed to arise.

The admiral had armed himself with one of the huge pistols, and he dashed forward, with all the vehemence of his character, towards the window, where he knew he had placed the family crockery, and where he fully expected to meet the reward of his exertion by discovering some one lying amid its fragments.

In this, however, he was disappointed; for, although there was evidently a great smash amongst the plates and dishes, the window remained closed, and there was no indication whatever of the presence of any one.

"Well, that's odd," said the admiral; "I balanced them up amazingly careful, and two of 'em edgeways -- d -- e, a fly would have knocked them down."

"Mew," said a great cat, emerging from under a chair.

"Curse you, there you are," said the admiral, "Put out the light, put out the light; here we're illuminating the whole house for nothing."

With a click went the darkening slide over the lantern, and all was obscurity.

At that instant a shrill, clear whistle came from the garden.

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Chapter LVIII. THE ARRIVAL OF JACK PRINGLE -- MIDNIGHT AND THE VAMPYRE. -- THE MYSTERIOUS HAT.

"Bless me! what is that?" said Mr. Chillingworth; "what a very singular sound."

"Hold your noise," said the admiral; "did you never hear that before?"

"No; how should I?"

"Lor, bless the ignorance of some people, that's a boatswain's call."

"Oh, it is," said Mr. Chillingworth; "is he going to call again?"

"D -- e, I tell ye it's a boatswain's call."

"Well, then, d -- e, if it comes to that," said Mr. Chillingworth, "what does he call here for?"

The admiral disdained an answer; but demanding the lantern, he opened it, so that there was sufficient glimmering of light to guide him, and then walked from the room towards the front door of the Hall.

He asked no questions before he opened it, because, no doubt, the signal was preconcerted; and Jack Pringle, for it was he indeed who had arrived, at once walked in, and the admiral barred the door with the same precision with which it was before secured.

"Well, Jack," he said, "did you see anybody?"

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack.

"Why, ye don't mean that -- where?"

"Where I bought the grub; a woman -- "

"D -- e, you're a fool, Jack."

"You're another."

"Hilloa, ye scoundrel, what d'ye mean by talking to me in that way? Is this your respect for your superiors?"

"Ship's been paid off, long ago," said Jack, "and I ain't got no superiors. I ain't a marine or a Frenchman."

"Why, you're drunk."

"I know it; put that in your eye."

"There's a scoundrel. Why, you know--nothing--lubber, didn't I tell you to be careful, and that everything depended upon secresy and caution? and didn't I tell you, above all this, to avoid drink?"

"To be sure you did."

"And yet you come here like a rum cask."

"Yes; now you've had your say, what then?"

"You'd better leave him alone," said Mr. Chillingworth; "it's no use arguing with a drunken man."

"Harkye, admiral," said Jack, steadying himself as well as he could. "I've put up with you a precious long while, but I won't no longer; you're so drunk, now, that you keeping bobbing up and down like the mizen gaff in a storm -- that's my opinion -- tol de rol."

"Let him alone, let him alone," urged Mr. Chillingworth.

"The villain," said the admiral; "he's enough to ruin everything; now, who would have thought that? but it's always been the way with him for a matter of twenty years -- he never had any judgment in his drink. When it was all smooth sailing, and nothing to do, and the fellow might have got an extra drop on board, which nobody would have cared for, he's as sober as a judge; but, whenever there's anything to do, that wants a little cleverness, confound him, he ships rum enough to float a seventy-four."

"Are you going to stand anything to drink," said Jack, "my old buffer? Do you recollect where you got your knob scuttled off Beyrout -- how you fell on your latter end and tried to recollect your church cateckis, you old brute? -- I's ashamed of you. Do you recollect the brown girl you bought for thirteen bob and a tanner, at the blessed Society Islands, and sold her again for a dollar, to a nigger seven feet two, in his natural pumps? you're a nice article, you is, to talk of marines and swabs, and shore-going lubbers, blow yer. Do you recollect the little Frenchman that told ye he'd pull your blessed nose, and I advised you to soap it? do you recollect Sall at Spithead, as you got in at a port hole of the state cabin, all but her behind?"

"Death and the devil!" said the admiral, breaking from the grasp of Mr. Chillingworth.

"Ay," said Jack, "you'll come to 'em both one of these days, old cock, and no mistake."

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"I'll have his life, I'll have his life," roared the admiral.

"Nay, nay, sir," said Mr. Chillingworth, catching the admiral round the waist. "My dear sir, recollect, now, if I may venture to advise you, Admiral Bell, there's a lot of that fiery hollands you know, in the next room; set him down to that, and finish him off. I'll warrant him, he'll be quiet enough."

"What's that you say?" cried Jack — "hollands! — who's got any? — next to rum and Elizabeth Baker, if I has an affection, it's hollands."

"Jack!" said the admiral.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Jack, instinctively.

"Come this way."

Jack staggered after him, and they all reached the room where the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth had been sitting before the alarm.

"There!" said the admiral, putting the light upon the table, and pointing to the bottle; "what do you think of that?"

"I never thinks under such circumstances," said Jack. "Here's to the wooden walls of old England!"

He seized the bottle, and, putting its neck into his mouth, for a few moments nothing was heard but a gurgling sound of the liquor passing down his throat; his head went further and further back, until, at last, over he went, chair and bottle and all, and lay in a helpless state of intoxication on the floor.

"So far, so good," said the admiral. "He's out of the way, at all events."

"I'll just loosen his neckcloth," said Mr. Chillingworth, "and then we'll go and sit somewhere else; and I should recommend that, if anywhere, we take up our station in that chamber, once Flora's, where the mysterious panelled portrait hangs, that bears so strong a resemblance to Varney, the vampyre."

"Hush!" said the admiral. "What's that?"

They listened for a moment intently; and then, distinctly, upon the gravel path outside the window, they heard a footstep, as if some person were walking along, not altogether heedlessly, but yet without any very great amount of caution or attention to the noise he might make.

"Hist!" said the doctor. "Not a word. They come."

"What do you say they for?" said the admiral.

"Because something seems to whisper me that Mr. Marchdale knows more of Varney, the vampyre, than ever he has chosen to reveal. Put out the light."

"Yes, yes — that'll do. The moon has risen; see how it streams through the chinks of the shutters."

"No, no — it's not in that direction, or our light would have betrayed us. Do you not see the beams come from that half glass-door leading to the greenhouse?"

"Yes; and there's the footstep again, or another."

Tramp, tramp came a footfall again upon the gravel path, and, as before, died away upon their listening ears.

"What do you say now," said Mr. Chillingworth — "are there not two?"

"If they were a dozen," said the admiral, "although we have lost one of our force, I would tackle them. Let's creep on through the rooms in the direction the footsteps went."

"My life on it," said Mr. Chillingworth, as they left the apartment, "if this be Varney, he makes for that apartment where Flora slept, and which he knows how to get admission to. I've studied the house well, admiral, and to get to that window any one from here outside must take a considerable round. Come on — we shall be beforehand."

"A good idea — a good idea. Be it so."

Just allowing themselves sufficient light to guide them on the way from the lantern, they hurried on with as much precipitation as the intricacies of the passage would allow, nor halted till they had reached the chamber where hung the portrait which bore so striking and remarkable a likeness to Varney, the vampyre.

They left the lamp outside the door, so that not even a straggling beam from it could betray that there were persons on the watch; and then, as quietly as foot could fall, they took up their station among the hangings of the antique bedstead, which has been before alluded to in this work as a remarkable piece of furniture appertaining to that apartment.

"Do you think," said the admiral, "we've distanced them?"

"Certainly we have. It's unlucky that the blind of the window is down."

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"Is it? By Heaven, there's a d --- d strange-looking shadow creeping over it."

Mr. Chillingworth looked almost with suspended breath. Even he could not altogether get rid of a tremulous feeling, as he saw that the shadow of a human form, apparently of very large dimensions, was on the outside, with the arms spread out, as if feeling for some means of opening the window.

It would have been easy now to have fired one of the pistols direct upon the figure; but, somehow or another, both the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth shrank from that course, and they felt much rather inclined to capture whoever might make his appearance, only using their pistols as a last resource, than gratuitously and at once to resort to violence.

"Who should you say that was?" whispered the admiral.

"Varney, the vampyre."

"D --- e, he's ill-looking adn big enough for anything --- there's a noise!"

There was a strange cracking sound at the window, as if a pane of glass was being very stealthily and quietly broken; and then the blind was agitated slightly, confusing much the shadow that was cast upon it, as if the hand of some person was introduced for the purpose of effecting a complete entrance into the apartment.

"He's coming in," whispered the admiral.

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!" said Mr. Chillingworth; "you will alarm him, and we shall lose the fruit of all the labour we have already bestowed upon the matter; but did you not say something, admiral, about lying under the window and catching him by the leg?"

"Why, yes; I did."

"Go and do it, then; for, as sure as you are a living man, his leg will be in in a minute."

"Here goes," said the admiral; "I never suggest anything which I'm unwilling to do myself."

Whoever it was that now was making such strenuous exertions to get into the apartment seemed to find some difficulty as regarded the fastenings of the window, and as this difficulty increased, the patience of the party, as well as his caution deserted him, and the casement was rattled with violence.

With a far greater amount of caution than any one from a knowledge of his character would have given him credit for, the admiral crept forward and laid himself exactly under the window.

The depth of the wood-work from the floor to the lowest part of the window-frame did not exceed above two feet; so that any one could conveniently step in from the balcony outside on to the floor of the apartment, which was just what he who was attempting to effect an entrance was desirous of doing.

It was quite clear that, be he who he might, mortal or vampyre, he had some acquaintance with the fastening of the window; for now he succeeded in moving it, and the sash was thrown open.

The blind was still an obstacle; but a vigorous pull from the intruder brought that down on the prostrate admiral; and then Mr. Chillingworth saw, by the moonlight, a tall, gaunt figure, standing in the balcony, as if just hesitating for a moment whether to get head first or feet first into the apartment.

Had he chosen the former alternative he would need, indeed, to have been endowed with more than mortal powers of defence and offence to escape capture, but his lucky star was in the ascendancy, and he put his foot in first.

He turned his side to the apartment, and, as he did so, the bright moonlight fell upon his face, enabling Mr. Chillingworth to see, without the shadow of a doubt, that it was, indeed, Varney, the vampyre, who was thus stealthily making his entrance into Bannerworth Hall, according to the calculation which had been made by the admiral upon that subject. The doctor scarcely knew whether to be pleased or not at this discovery; it was almost a terrifying one, sceptical as he was upon the subject of vampyres, and he waited breathless for the issue of the singular and perilous adventure.

No doubt Admiral Bell deeply congratulated himself upon the success which was about to crown his stratagem for the capture of the intruder, be he who he might, and he writhed with impatience for the foot to come sufficiently near him to enable him to grasp it.

His patience was not severely tried, for in another moment it rested upon his chest.

"Boarders a hoy!" shouted the admiral, and at once he laid hold of the trespasser. "Yard-arm to yard-arm. I think I've got you now. Here's a prize, doctor! he shall go away without his leg if he goes away now. Eh! what! the light --- d --- e, he has --- Doctor, the light! the light! Why what' this! --- Hilloa, there!"

Dr. Chillingworth sprang into the passage, and procured the light --- in another moment he was at the side of

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the admiral, and the lantern slide being thrown back, he saw at once the dilemma into which his friend had fallen.

There he lay upon his back, grasping, with the vehemence of an embrace that had in it much of the ludicrous, a long boot, from which the intruder had cleverly slipped his leg, leaving it as a poor trophy in the hands of his enemies.

"Why you've only pulled his boot off," said the doctor; "and now he's gone for good, for he knows what we're about, and has slipped through your fingers."

Admiral Bell sat up and looked at the boot with a rueful countenance.

"Done again!" he said.

"Yes, you are done," said the doctor; "why didn't you lay hold of the leg while you were about it, instead of the boot? Admiral, are these your tactics?"

"Don't be a fool," said the admiral; "put out the light and give me the pistols, or blaze away yourself into the garden; a chance shot may do something. It's no use running after him; a stern chase is a long chase; but fire away."

As if some parties below had heard him give his word, two loud reports from the garden immediately ensued, and a crash of glass testified to the fact that some deadly missile had entered the room.

"Murder!" said the doctor, and he fell flat upon his back. "I don't like this at all; it's all in your line, admiral, but not in mine."

"All's right, my lad," said the admiral; "now for it."

He saw lying in the moonlight the pistols which he and the doctor had brought into the room, and in another moment he, to use his own words, returned the broadside of the enemy.

"D — n it!" he said, "this puts me in mind of old times. Blaze away, you thieves, while I load; broadside to broadside. It's your turn now; I scorn to take an advantage. What the devil's that?"

Something very large and very heavy came bang against the window, sending it all into the room, and nearly smothering the admiral with the fragments. Another shot was then fired, and in came something else, which hit the wall on the opposite side of the room, rebounding from thence on to the doctor, who gave a yell of despair.

After that all was still; the enemy seemed to be satisfied that they had silenced the garrison. And it took the admiral a great deal of kicking and plunging to rescue himself from some superincumbent mass that was upon him, which seemed to him to be a considerable sized tree.

"Call this fair fighting," he shouted — "getting a man's legs and arms tangled up like a piece of Indian matting in the branches of a tree? Doctor, I say! hilloa! where are you?"

"I don't know," said the doctor; "but there's somebody getting into the balcony — now we shall be murdered in cold blood."

"Where's the pistols?"

"Fired off, of course; you did it yourself."

Bang came something else into the room, which, from the sound it made, closely resembled a brick, and after that somebody jumped clean into the centre of the floor, and then, after rolling and writhing about in a most singular manner, slowly got up, and, with various preliminary hiccups, said, —

"Come on, you lubbers, many of you as like. I'm the tar for all weathers."

"Why, d — e," said the admiral, "it's Jack Pringle."

"Yes it is," said Jack, who was not sufficiently sober to recognise the admiral's voice. "I sees as how you've heard of me. Come on, all of you."

"Why, Jack, you scoundrel," roared the admiral, "how came you here? Don't you know me? I'm your admiral, you horse-marine."

"Eh?" said Jack. "Ay — ay, sir, how came you here?"

"How came you, you villain?"

"Boarded the enemy."

"The enemy who you boarded was us; and hang me if I don't think you haven't been pouring broadsides into us, while the enemy were scudding before the wind in another direction."

"Lor!" said Jack.

"Explain, you scoundrel, directly — explain."

"Well, that's only reasonable," said Jack; and giving a heavier lurch than usual, he sat down with a great

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bounce upon the floor. "You see it's just this here, — when I was a coming of course I heard, just as I was a going, that ere as made me come all in consequence of somebody a going, or for to come, you see, admiral."

"Doctor," cried the admiral, in a great rage, "just help me out of this entanglement of branches, and I'll rid the world from an encumbrance by smashing that fellow."

"Smash yourself!" said Jack. "You know you're drunk."

"My dear admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth, laying hold of one of his legs, and pulling it very hard, which brought his face into a lot of brambles, "we're making a mess of this business."

"Murder!" shouted the admiral; "you are indeed. Is that what you call pulling me out of it? You've stuck me fast."

"I'll manage it," said Jack. "I've seed him in many a scrape, and I've seed him out. You pull me, doctor, and I'll pull him. Yo hoy!"

Jack laid hold of the admiral by the scuff of the neck, and the doctor laid hold of Jack round the waist, the consequence of which was that he was dragged out from the branches of the tree, which seemed to have been thrown into the room, and down fell both Jack and the doctor.

At this instant there was a strange hissing sound heard below the window; then there was a sudden, loud report, as if a hand-grenade had gone off. A spectral sort of light gleamed into the room, and a tall, gaunt-looking figure rose slowly up in the balcony.

"Beware of the dead!" said a voice. "Let the living contend with the living, the dead with the dead. Beware!"

The figure disappeared, as did also the strange, spectral-looking light. A deathlike silence ensued, and the cold moonbeams streamed in upon the floor of the apartment, as if nothing had occurred to disturb the wrapped repose and serenity of the scene.

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Chapter LIX. THE WARNING. -- THE NEW PLAN OF OPERATION. -- THE INSULTING MESSAGE FROM VARNEY.

So much of the night had been consumed in these operations, that by the time they were over, and the three personages who lay upon floor of what might be called the haunted chamber of Bannerworth Hall, even had they now been disposed to seek repose, would have had a short time to do so before the daylight would have streamed in upon them, and roused them to the bustle of waking existence.

It may be well believed what a vast amount of surprise came over the three persons in that chamber at the last little circumstance that had occurred in connection with the night's proceedings.

There was nothing which had preceded that, that did not resemble a genuine attack upon the premises; but about that last mysterious appearance, with its curious light, there was quite enough to bother the admiral and Jack Pringle to a considerable effect, whatever might be the effect upon Mr. Chillingworth, whose profession better enabled him to comprehend, chemically, what would produce effects that, no doubt, astonished them amazingly.

What with his intoxication and the violent exercise he had taken, Jack was again thoroughly prostrate; while the admiral could not have looked more astonished had the evil one himself appeared in propria persona and given him notice to quit the premises.

He was, however, the first to speak, and the words he spoke were addressed to Jack, to whom he said, -- "Jack, you lubber, what do you think of all that?"

Jack, however, was too far gone even to say "Ay, ay, sir;" and Mr. Chillingworth, slowly getting himself up to his feet, approached the admiral.

"It's hard to say so much, Admiral Bell," he said, "but it strikes me that whatever object this Sir Francis Varney, o Varney, the vampyre, has in coming into Bannerworth Hall, it is, at all events, of sufficient importance to induce him to go any length, and not to let even a life stand in the way of it's accomplishment."

"Well, it seems so," said the admiral; "for I'll be hanged if I can make head or tail of the fellow."

"If we value our personal safety, we shall hesitate to continue a perilous adventure, which I think can end only in defeat, if not in death."

"But we don't value our personal safety," said the admiral. "We've got into the adventure, and I don't see why we shouldn't carry it out. It may be growing a little serious; but what of that? For the sake of that young girl, Flora Bannerworth, as well as for the sake of my nephew, Charles Holland, I will see the end of this affair, let it be what it may; but mind you, Mr. Chillingworth, if one man chooses to go upon a desperate service, that's no reason why he should ask another to do so."

"I understand you," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but, having commenced the adventure with you, I am not the man to desert you in it. We have committed a great mistake."

"A mistake! how?"

"Why, we ought to have watched outside the house, instead of within it. There can be no doubt that if we had lain in wait in the garden, we should have been in a better position to have accomplished our object."

"Well, I don't know, doctor, but it seems to me that if Jack Pringle hadn't made such a fool of himself, we should have managed very well; and I don't know now how he came to behave in the manner he did."

"Nor I," said Mr. Chillingworth. "But, at all events, so far as the results goes, it is quite clear that any further watching, in this house, for the appearance of Sir Francis Varney, will now be in vain. He has nothing to do now but to keep quiet until we are tired out -- a fact, concerning which he can easily obtain information -- and then he immediately, without trouble, walks into the premises, to his own satisfaction."

"But what the deuce can he want upon the premises?"

"That question, admiral, induces me to think that we have made another mistake. We ought not to have attempted to surprise Sir Francis Varney in coming into Bannerworth Hall, but to catch him as he came out."

"Well, there's something in that," said the admiral. "This is a pretty night's business, to be sure. However, it can't be helped; it's done, and there's an end on't. And now, as the morning is near at hand, I certainly must confess I should like to get some breakfast, although I don't like that we should all leave the house together."

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"Why," said Mr. Chillingworth, "as we have now no secret to keep with regard to our being here, because the principal person we wished to keep it from is aware of it, I think we cannot do better than send at once for Henry Bannerworth, tell him of the non-success of the effort we have made in his behalf, and admit him at once into our consultation of what is next to be done."

"Agreed, agreed; I think that, without troubling him, we might have captured this Varney; but that's over now, and, as soon as Jack Pringle chooses to wake up again, I'll send him to the Bannerworths with a message."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack, suddenly; "all's right."

"Why, you vagabond," said the admiral, "I do believe you've been shamming."

"Shamming what?"

"Being drunk, to be sure."

"Lor! couldn't do it," said Jack; "I'll just tell you how it was. I wakened up and found myself shut in somewhere; and, as I couldn't get out of the door, I thought I'd try the window, and there I did get out. Well, perhaps I wasn't quite the thing, but I sees two people in the garden a looking up at this ere room; and, to be sure, I thought it was you and the doctor. Well, it warn't no business of mine to interfere, so I seed one of you climb up the balcony, as I thought, and then, after which, come down head over heels with such a run, that I thought you must have broken your neck. Well, after that you fired a couple of shots in, and then, after that, I made sure it was you, admiral."

"And what made you make sure of that?"

"Why, because you scuttled away like an empty tar-barrel in full tide."

"Confound you, you scoundrel!"

"Well, then, confound you, if it comes to that. I thought I was doing you good service, and that the enemy was here, when all the while it turned out as you was and the enemy wasn't, and the enemy was outside and you wasn't."

"But who threw such a confounded lot of things into the room?"

"Why, I did, of course; I had but one pistol, and, when I fired that off, I was forced to make up a broadside with what I could."

"Was there ever such a stupid!" said the admiral; "doctor, doctor, you talked of us making two mistakes; but you forgot a third and worse one still, and that was the bringing such a lubberly son of a seacook into the place as this fellow."

"You're another," said Jack; "and you knows it."

"Well, well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "it's no use continuing it, admiral; Jack, in his way, did, I dare say, what he considered for the best."

"I wish he'd do, then, what he considers for the worst, next time."

"Perhaps I may," said Jack, "and then you will be served out above a bit. What 'ud become of you, I wonder, if it wasn't for me? I'm as good as a mother to you, you knows that, you old babby."

"Come, come, admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth; "come down to the gardengate; it is now just upon daybreak, and the probability is that we shall not be long there before we see some of the country people, who will get us anything we require in the shape of refreshment; and as for Jack, he seems quite sufficiently recovered now to go to the Bannerworths'."

"Oh! I can go," said Jack; "as for that, the only thing as puts me out of the way is the want of something to drink. My constitution won't stand what they call temperance living, or nothing with the chill off."

"Go at once," said the admiral, "and tell Mr. Henry Bannerworth that we are here; but do not tell him before his sister or his mother. If you meet anybody on the road, send them here with a cargo of victuals. It strikes me that a good, comfortable breakfast wouldn't be at all amiss, doctor."

"How rapidly the day dawns," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, as he walked into the balcony from whence Varney, the vampire, had attempted to make good his entrance to the Hall.

Just as he spoke, and before Jack Pringle could get half way over to the garden gate, there came a tremendous ring at the bell which was suspended over it.

A view of that gate could not be commanded from the window of the haunted apartment, so that they could not see who it was that demanded admission.

As Jack Pringle was going down at any rate, they saw no necessity for personal interference; and he proved

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that there was not, by presently returning with a note which he said had been thrown over the gate by a lad, who then scampered off with all the speed he could make.

The note, exteriorly, was well got up, and had all the appearance of great care having been bestowed upon its folding and sealing.

It was duly addressed to "Admiral Bell, Bannerworth Hall," and the word "immediate" was written at one corner.

The admiral, after looking at it for some time with very great wonder, came at last to the conclusion that probably to open it would be the shortest way of arriving at a knowledge of who had sent it, and he accordingly did so.

The note was as follows: ---

"My dear sir, --- Feeling assured that you cannot be surrounded with those means and appliances for comfort in the Hall, in its now deserted condition, which you have a right to expect, and so eminently deserve, I flatter myself that I shall receive an answer in the affirmative, when I request the favour of your company to breakfast, as well as that of your learned friend, Mr. Chillingworth.

"In consequence of a little accident which occurred last evening to my own residence, I am, ad interim, until the county build it up for me again, staying at a house called Walmesley Lodge, where I shall expect you with all the impatience of one soliciting an honour, and hoping that it will be conferred upon him.

"I trust that any little difference of opinion on other subjects will not interfere to prevent the harmony of our morning's meal together.

"Believe me to be, my dear sir, with the greatest possible consideration, your very obedient, humble servant,
"FRANCIS VARNEY."

The admiral gasped again, and looked at Mr. Chillingworth, and then at the note, and then at Mr. Chillingworth again, as if he was perfectly bewildered.

"That's about the coolest piece of business," said Mr. Chillingworth, "that ever I heard of."

"Hang me," said the admiral, "if i sha'n't like the fellow at last. It is cool, and I like it because it is cool. Where's my hat? where's my stick?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Accept his invitation, to be sure, and breakfast with him; and, my learned friend, as he calls you, I hope you'll come likewise. I'll take the fellow at his word. By fair means, or by foul, I'll know what he wants here; and why he persecutes this family, for whom I have an attachment; and what hand he has in the disappearance of my nephew, Charles Holland; for, as sure as there's a Heaven above us, he's at the bottom of that affair. Where is this Walmesley Lodge?"

"Just in the neighbourhood; but --- "

"Come on, then; come on."

"But, really, admiral, you don't mean to say you'll breakfast with --- with --- "

"A vampyre? Yes, I would, and will, and mean to do so. Here, Jack, you needn't go to Mr. Bannerworth's yet. Come, my learned friend, let's take Time by the forelock."

Chapter LX. THE INTERRUPTED BREAKFAST AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S.

Notwithstanding all Mr. Chillingworth could say to the contrary, the admiral really meant to breakfast with Sir Francis Varney.

The worthy doctor could not for some time believe but that the admiral must be joking, when he talked in such a strain; but he was very soon convinced to the contrary, by the latter actually walking out and once more asking him, Mr. Chillingworth, if he meant to go with him, or not.

This was conclusive, so the doctor said, —

"Well, admiral, this appears to me rather a mad sort of freak; but, as I have begun the adventure with you, I will conclude it with you."

"That's right," said the admiral; "I'm not deceived in you, doctor; so come along. Hang these vampyres, I don't know how to tackle them, myself. I think, after all, Sir Francis Varney is more in your line than he is in mine."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, couldn't you persuade him he's ill, and wants some physic? That would soon settle him, you know."

"Settle him!" said Mr. Chillingworth; "I beg to say, that if I did give him any physic, the dose would be much to his advantage; but, however, my opinion is, that this invitation to breakfast is, after all, a mere piece of irony; and that, when we get to Walmsley Lodge, we shall not see anything of him; on the contrary, we shall probably find it's a hoax."

"I certainly should like that, but still it's worth the trying. The fellow has really behaved himself in such an extraordinary manner, that, if I can make terms with him I will; and there's one thing, you know, doctor, that I think we may say we have discovered."

"And what may that be? Is it, not to make too sure of a vampyre, even when you have him by the leg?"

"No, that ain't it, though that's a very good thing in its way; but it is just this, that Sir Francis Varney, whoever he is and whatever he is, is after Bannerworth Hall, and not the Bannerworth family. If you recollect, Mr. Chillingworth, in our conversation, I have always insisted upon that fact."

"You have; and it seems to me to be completely verified by the proceedings of the night. There, then, admiral, is the great mystery — what can he want at Bannerworth Hall that makes him take such a world of trouble, and run so many fearful risks in trying to get at it?"

"That is, indeed, the mystery; and if he really means this invitation to breakfast, I shall ask him plumply, and tell him, at the same time, that possibly his very best way to secure his object will be to be candid, vampyre as he is."

"But really, admiral, you do not still cling to that foolish superstition of believing that Sir Francis Varney is in reality a vampyre?"

"I don't know, and I can't say; if anybody was to give me a description of a strange sort of fish that I had never seen, I wouldn't take upon myself to say there ain't such a thing; nor would you, doctor, if you had really seen the many odd ones that I have encountered at various times."

"Well, well, admiral, I'm certainly not belonging to that school of philosophy which declares the impossible to be what it don't understand; there may be vampyres, and there may be apparitions, for all I know to the contrary; I only doubt these things, because I think, if they were true, that, as a phenomena of nature, they would have been by this time established by repeated instances without the possibility of doubt or cavil."

Well, there's something in that; but how far have we got to go now?"

"No further than to yon enclosure where you see those park-like looking gates, and that cedar-tree stretching its dark-green foliage so far into the road; this is Walmsley Lodge, whither you have been invited."

"And you, my learned friend, recollect that you were invited too; so that you are no intruder upon the hospitality of Varney the vampyre."

"I say, admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth, when they reached the gates, "you know it is not quite the thing to call a man a vampyre at his own breakfast-table, so just oblige me by promising not to make any such remark to Sir Francis."

"A likely thing!" said the admiral; "he knows I know what he is, and he knows I'm a plain man and a blunt

speaker; however, I'll be civil to him, and more than that I can't promise. I must wring out of him, if I can, what has become of Charles Holland, and what the deuce he really wants himself."

"Well, well; come to no collision with him, while we're his guests."

"Not if I can help it."

The doctor rang at the gate bell of Walmesley Lodge, and was in a few moments answered by a woman, who demanded their business.

"Is Sir Francis Varney here?" said the doctor.

"Oh, ah! yes," she replied; "you see his house was burnt down, for something or other — I'm sure I don't know what — by some people — I'm sure I don't know who; so, as the lodge was to let, we have took him in till he can suit himself."

"Ah! that's it, is it?" said the admiral; "tell him that Admiral Bell and Dr. Chillingworth are here."

"Very well," said the woman; "you may walk in."

"Thank ye; you're vastly obliging, ma'am. Is there anything going on in the breakfast line?"

"Well, yes; I am getting him some breakfast, but he didn't say as he expected company."

The woman opened the garden gate, and they walked up a trimly laid out garden to the lodge, which was a cottage-like structure in external appearance, although within it boasted of all the comforts of a tolerably extensive house.

She left them in a small room, leading from the hall, and was absent about five minutes; when she returned, and, merely saying that Sir Francis Varney presented his compliments, and desired them to walk up stairs, she preceded them up a handsome flight which led to the first floor of the lodge.

Up to this moment, Mr. Chillingworth had expected some excuses, for, notwithstanding all he had heard and seen of Sir Francis Varney, he could not believe that any amount of impudence would suffice to enable him to receive people as his guests, with whom he must feel that he was at such positive war.

It was a singular circumstance; and, perhaps, the only thing that matched the cool impertinence of the invitation, was the acceptance of it under the circumstances by the admiral.

Sir Francis Varney might have intended it as a jest; but if he did so, in the first instance, it was evident he would not allow himself to be beaten with his own weapons.

The room into which they were shown was a longish narrow one; a very wide door gave them admission to it, at the end nearest the staircase, and at its other extremity there was a similar door opening into some other apartments of the house.

Sir Francis Varney sat with his back towards this second door, and a table, with some chairs and other articles of furniture, were so arranged before him, that while they seemed but to be carelessly placed in the position they occupied, they really formed a pretty good barrier between him and his visitors.

The admiral, however, was too intent upon getting a sight of Varney, to notice any preparation of this sort, and he advanced quickly into the room.

And there, indeed, was the much dreaded, troublesome, persevering, and singular looking being who had caused such a world of annoyance to the family of the Bannerworths, as well as disturbing the peace of the whole district, which had the misfortune to have him as an inhabitant.

If anything, he looked thinner, taller, and paler than usual, and there seemed to be a slight nervousness of manner about him, as he slowly inclined his head towards the admiral, which was not quite intelligible.

"Well," said Admiral Bell, "you invited me to breakfast, and my learned friend; here we are."

"No two human beings," said Varney, "could be more welcome to my hospitality than yourself and Dr. Chillingworth. I pray you to be seated. What a pleasant thing it is, after the toils and struggles of this life, occasionally to sit down in the sweet companionship of such dear friends."

He made a hideous face as he spoke, and the admiral looked as if he were half inclined to quarrel at that early stage of the proceedings.

"Dear friends!" he said; "well, well — it's no use squabbling about a word or two; but I tell you what it is, Mr. Varney, or Sir Francis Varney, or whatever your d — — d name is — "

"Hold, my dear sir," said Varney — "after breakfast, if you please — after breakfast."

He rang a hand-bell as he spoke, and the woman who had charge of the house brought in a tray tolerably covered with the materials for a substantial morning's meal. She placed it upon the table, and certainly the various

articles that smoked upon it did great credit to her culinary powers.

"Deborah," said Sir Varney, in a mild sort of tone, "keep on continually bringing things to eat until this old brutal sea ruffian has satiated his disgusting appetite."

The admiral opened his eyes an enormous width, and, looking at Sir Francis Varney, he placed his two fists upon the table and drew a long breath.

"Did you address those observations to me," he said at length, "you blood-sucking vagabond?"

"Eh?" said Sir Francis Varney, looking over the admiral's head, as if he saw something interesting on the wall beyond.

"My dear admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth, "come away."

"I'll see you d --- d first!" said the admiral. "Now, Mr. Vampyre, no shuffling; did you address those observations to me?"

"Deborah," said Sir Francis Varney, in the silvery tones, "you can remove this tray and bring on the next."

"Not if I know it," said the admiral. "I came to breakfast, and I'll have it; after breakfast I'll pull your nose --- ay, if you were fifty vampyres, I'd do it."

"Dr. Chillingworth," said Varney, without paying the least attention to what the admiral said, "you don't eat, my dear sir; you must be fatigued with your night's exertions. A man of your age, you know, cannot be supposed to roll and tumble about like a fool in a pantomime with impunity. Only think what a calamity it would be if you were laid up. Your patients would all get well, you know."

"Sir Francis Varney," said Mr. Chillingworth, "we're your guests; we come here at your invitation to partake of a meal. You have wantonly attacked both of us. I need not say that by so doing you cast a far greater slur upon your own taste and judgment than you can upon us."

"Admirably spoken," said Sir Francis Varney, giving his hands a clap together that made the admiral jump again. "Now, old Bell, I'll fight you, if you think yourself aggrieved, while the doctor sees fair play."

"Old who?" shouted the admiral.

"Bell, Bell --- is not your name Bell? --- a family cognomen, I presume, on account of the infernal clack, clack, without any sense in it, that is characteristic of your race."

"You'll fight me?" said the admiral, jumping up.

"Yes, if you challenge me."

"By Jove I do; of course."

"Then I accept it; and the challenged party, you know well, or ought to know, can make his own terms in the encounter."

"Make what terms you please; I care not what they are. Only say you will fight, and that's sufficient."

"It is well," said Sir Francis Varney, in a solemn tone.

"Nay, nay," interrupted Mr. Chillingworth; "this is boyish folly."

"Hold your row," said the admiral, "and let's hear what he's got to say."

"In this mansion," said Sir Francis Varney --- "for a mansion it is, although under the unpretending name of a lodge --- in this mansion there is a large apartment which was originally fitted up by a scientific proprietor of the place, for the purpose of microscopic and other experiments, which required a darkness total and complete, such a darkness as seems as if it could be felt --- palpable, thick, and obscure as the darkness of the tomb, and I know what that is."

"The devil you do!" said the admiral. "It's damp, too, ain't it?"

"The room?"

"No; the grave."

"Oh! uncommonly, after autumnal rains. But to resume --- this room is large, lofty, and perfectly empty."

"Well?"

"I propose that we procure two scythes."

"Two what?"

"Scythes, with their long handles, and their convenient holding places."

"Well, I'll be hanged! What next do you propose?"

"You may be hanged. The next is, that with these scythes we be both of us placed in the darkened room, and the door closed, and doubly locked upon us for one hour, and that then and there we do our best each to cut the

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other in two. If you succeed in dismembering me, you will have won the day; but I hope, from my superior agility" — here Sir Francis jumped upon his chair, and sat upon the back of it — "to get the better of you. How do you like the plan I have proposed? Does it meet your wishes?"

"Curse your impudence!" said the admiral, placing his elbows upon the table, and resting his chin in astonishment upon his two hands.

"Nay," interrupted Sir Francis, "you challenged me; and, besides, you'll have an equal chance, you know that. If you succeed in striking me first, down I go; whereas, if I succeed in striking you first, down you go."

As he spoke, Sir Francis Varney stretched out his foot, and closed a small bracket, which held out the flap of the table on which the admiral was leaning, and, accordingly, down the admiral went, tea-tray and all.

Mr. Chillingworth ran to help him up, and, when they both recovered their feet, they found they were alone.

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Chapter LXI. THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER. -- THE PARTICULARS OF THE SUICIDE AT BANNERWORTH HALL.

"Hilloa where the deuce is he?" said the admiral. "Was there ever such a confounded take-in?"

"Well, I really don't know," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but it seems to me that he must have gone out of that door that was behind him. I begin, do you know, admiral, to wish -- "

"What?"

"That we had never come here at all; and I think that the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Yes; but I am not going to be hoaxed and humbugged in this way. I will have satisfaction, but not with those confounded scythes and things he talks about in the dark room. Give me broad daylight and no favour; yardarm and yardarm; broadside and broadside; hand-grenades and marling-spikes."

"Well, but that's what he won't do. Now, admiral, listen to me."

"Well, go on; what next?"

"Come away at once."

"Oh, you said that before."

"Yes; but I'm going to say something else. Look round you. Don't you think this is a large, scientific-looking room?"

"What of that?"

"Why, what if suppose it was to become as dark as the grave, and Varney was to enter with his scythe, that he talks of, and begin mowing about our legs."

"The devil! Come along!"

The door at which they entered was at this moment opened, and the old woman made her appearance.

"Please, sir," she said, "here's a Mr. Mortimer," in a loud voice. "Oh, Sir Francis ain't here! Where's he gone, gentlemen?"

"To the devil!" said the admiral. "Who may Mr. Mortimer be?"

There walked past the woman a stout, portly-looking man, well dressed, but with a very odd look upon his face, in consequence of an obliquity of vision, which prevented the possibility of knowing which way he was looking.

"I must see him," he said; "I must see him."

Mr. Chillingworth started back as if in amazement.

"Good God!" he cried, "you here?"

"Confusion!" said Mortimer; "are you Dr. -- Dr. -- "

"Chillingworth."

"The same. Hush! there is no occasion to betray -- that is, to state my secret."

"And mine, too," said Chillingworth. "But what brings you here?"

"I cannot and dare not tell you. Farewell!"

He turned abruptly, and was leaving the room; but he ran against some one at the entrance, and in another moment Henry Bannerworth, heated and almost breathless by evident haste, made his appearance.

"Hilloa! bravo!" cried the admiral; "the more the merrier! Here's a combined squadron! Why, how came you here, Mr. Henry Bannerworth?"

"Bannerworth!" said Mortimer; "is this young man's name Bannerworth?"

"Yes," said Henry. "Do you know me, sir?"

"No, no; only I -- I -- must be off. Does anyone know anything of Sir Francis Varney?"

"We did know something of him," said the admiral, "a little while ago; but he's taken himself off. Don't you do so likewise. If you've got anything to say, stop and say it, like an Englishman."

"Stuff! stuff!" said Mortimer, impatiently. "What do you all want here?"

"Why, Sir Francis Varney," said Henry, -- "and I care not if the whole world heard it -- is the persecutor of my family."

"How? in what way?"

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"He has the reputation of a vampire; he has hunted me and mine from house and home."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," cried Dr. Chillingworth; "and, by some means or another, he seems determined to get possession of Bannerworth Hall."

"Well, gentlemen," said Mortimer, "I promise you that I will inquire into this. Mr. Chillingworth, I did not expect to meet you. Perhaps the least we say to each other is, after all, the better."

"Let me ask but one question," said Dr. Chillingworth, imploringly.

"Ask it."

"Did he live after — "

"Hush! he did."

"You always told me to the contrary."

"Yes; I had an object; the game is up. Farewell; and, gentlemen, as I am making my exit, let me do so with a sentiment: — Society at large is divided into two great classes."

"And what may they be?" said the admiral.

"Those who have been hanged, and those who have not. Adieu!"

He turned and left the room; and Mr. Chillingworth sunk into a chair, and said, in a low voice, —

"It is uncommonly true; and I've found out an acquaintance among the former."

"D — n it! you seem all mad," said the admiral. "I can't make out what you are about. How come you here, Mr. Henry Bannerworth?"

"By mere accident I heard," said Henry, "that you were keeping watch and ward in the Hall. Admiral, it was cruel, and not well done of you, to attempt such an enterprise without acquainting me with it. Did you suppose for a moment that I, who had the greatest interest in this affair, would have shrunk from danger, if danger there be; or lacked perseverance, if that quality were necessary in carrying out any plan by which the safety and honour of my family might be preserved?"

"Nay, now, my young friend," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"May, sir; but I take it ill that I should have been kept out of this affair; and it should have been sedulously, as it were, kept a secret from me."

"Let him go on as he likes," said the admiral; "boys will be boys. After all, you know, doctor, it's my affair, and not yours. Let him say what he likes; where's the odds? It's of no consequence."

"I do not expect, Admiral Bell," said Henry, "that it is to you; but it is to me."

"Psha!"

"Respecting you, sir, as I do — "

"Gammon!"

"I must confess that I did expect — "

"What you didn't get; therefore, there's an end of that. Now, I tell you what, Henry, Sir Francis Varney is within this house; at least, I have reason to suppose so."

"Then," exclaimed Henry, impetuously, "I will wring from him answers to various questions which concern my peace and happiness."

"Please, gentlemen," said the woman Deborah, making her appearance, "Sir Francis Varney has gone out, and he says I'm to show you all the door, as soon as it is convenient for you all to walk out of it."

"I feel convinced," said Mr. Chillingworth, "that it will be a useless search now to attempt to find Sir Francis Varney here. Let me beg of you all to come away; and believe me that I do not speak lightly, or with a view to get you from here, when I say, that after I have heard something from you, Henry, which I shall ask you to relate to me, painful though it may be, I shall be able to suggest some explanation of many things which appear at present obscure, and to put you in a course of freeing you from difficulties which surround you, which, Heaven knows, I little expected I should have it in my power to propose to any of you."

"I will follow your advice, Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry; "for I have always found that it has been dictated by good feeling as well as correct judgment. Admiral Bell, you will oblige me much by coming away with me now and at once."

"Well," remarked the admiral, "if the doctor has really something to say, it alters the appearance of things, and, of course, I have no objection."

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Upon this, the whole three of them immediately left the place, and it was evident that Mr. Chillingworth had something of an uncomfortable character upon his mind. He was unusually silent and reserved, and, when he did speak, he seemed rather inclined to turn the conversation upon indifferent topics, than to add anything more to what he had said upon the deeply interesting one which held so foremost a place in all their minds.

"How is Flora, now," he asked of Henry, "since her removal?"

"Anxious still," said Henry; "but, I think, better."

"That is well. I perceive that, naturally, we are all three walking towards Bannerworth Hall, and, perhaps, it is as well that on that spot I should ask of you, Henry, to indulge me with a confidence such as, under ordinary circumstances, I should not at all feel myself justified in requiring of you."

"To what does it relate?" said Henry. "You may be assured, Mr. Chillingworth, that I am not likely to refuse my confidence to you, whom I have so much reason to respect as an attached friend of myself and my family."

"You will not object, likewise, I hope," added Mr. Chillingworth, "to extend that confidence to Admiral Bell; for, as you well know, a truer and more warm-hearted man than he does not exist."

"What do you expect for that, doctor?" said the admiral.

"There is nothing," said Henry, "that I could relate at all, that I should shrink from relating to Admiral Bell."

"Well, my boy," said the admiral, "and all I can reply to that is, you are quite right; for there can be nothing that you need shrink from telling me, so far as regards the fact of trusting me with it goes."

"I am assured of that."

"A British officer, once pledging his word, prefers death to breaking it. Whatever you wish kept secret in the communication you make to me, say so, and it will never pass my lips."

"Why, sir, the fact is," said Henry, "that what I am about to relate to you consists of much of secrets as of matters which would be painful to my feelings to talk of more than may be absolutely required."

"I understand you."

"Let me, for a moment," said Mr. Chillingworth, "put myself right. I do not suspect, Mr. Henry Bannerworth, that you fancy I ask you to make a recital of circumstances which must be painful to you, from any idle motive. But let me declare that I have now a stronger impulse, which induces me to wish to hear from your own lips those matters which popular rumour may have greatly exaggerated or vitiated."

"It is scarcely possible," remarked Henry, sadly, "that popular rumour should exaggerate the facts."

"Indeed!"

"No. They are, unhappily, of themselves, in their bare truthfulness, so full of all that can be grievous to those who are in any way connected with them, that there needs no exaggeration to invest them with more terror, or with more of that sadness which must ever belong to a recollection of them in my mind."

In suchlike discourse as this, the time was passed, until Henry Bannerworth and his friends once more reached the Hall, from which he, with his family, had so recently removed, in consequence of the fearful persecution to which they had been subjected.

They passed again into the garden which they all knew so well, and then Henry paused and looked around him with a deep sigh.

In answer to an inquiring glance from Mr. Chillingworth, he said, --

"Is it not strange, now, that I should have only been away from here a space of time which may be counted by hours, and yet all seems changed. I could almost fancy that years had elapsed since I had looked at it."

"Oh," remarked the doctor, "time is always by the imagination measured by the number of events which are crowded into a given space of it, and not by its actual duration. Come into the house; there you will find all just as you left it, Henry, and you can tell us your story at leisure."

"The air," said Henry, "about here is fresh and pleasant. Let us sit down in the summer-house yonder, and there I will tell you all. It has a local interest, too, connected with this tale."

This was agreed to, and, in a few moments, the admiral, Mr. Chillingworth, and Henry were seated in the same summer-house which had witnessed the strange interview between Sir Francis Varney and Flora Bannerworth, in which he had induced her to believe that he felt for the distress he had occasioned her, and was strongly impressed with the injustice of her sufferings.

Henry was silent for some few moments, and then he said, with a deep sigh, as he looked mournfully around him, --

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"It was on this spot that my father breathed his last, and hence have I said that it has a local interest in the tale I have to tell, which makes it the most fitting place in which to tell it."

"Oh?" said the admiral; "he died here, did he?"

"Yes, where you are now sitting."

"Very good; I have seen many a brave man die in my time, and I hope to see a few more; although, I grant you, the death in the heat of conflict, and fighting for our country, is a vastly different thing to some shore-going mode of leaving the world."

"Yes," said Henry, as if pursuing his own meditation, rather than listening to the admiral. "Yes, it was from this precise spot that my father took his last look at the ancient house of his race. What we can now see of it, he saw of it with his dying eyes, and many a time I have sat here and fancied the world of terrible thoughts that must at such a moment have come across his brain."

"You might well do so," said the doctor.

"You see," added Henry, "that from here the fullest view you have of any of the windows of the house is of that of Flora's room, as we have always called it, because for years she had had it as her chamber; and, when all the vegetation of summer is in its prime, and the vine which you perceive crawls over this summer-house is full of leaf and fruit, the view is so much hindered that it is difficult, without making an artificial gap in the clustering foliage, to see anything but the window."

"So I should imagine," replied Mr. Chillingworth.

"You, doctor," added Henry, "who know much of my family, need not be told what sort of man my father was."

"No, indeed."

"But you, Admiral Bell, who do not know, must be told, and, however greivous it may be to me to have to say so, I must inform you that he was not a man who would have merited your esteem."

"Well," said the admiral, "you know, my boy, that can make no difference as regards you in anybody's mind, who has got the brains of an owl. Every man's credit, character, and honour, to my thinking, is in his own most special keeping, and let your father be what he might, or who he might, I do not see that any conduct of his ought to raise upon your cheek the flush of shame, or cost you more uneasiness than ordinary good feeling dictates to the errors and feelings of a fellow creature."

"If all the world," said Henry, "would take such liberal and comprehensive views as you do, admiral, it would be much happier than it is; but such is not the case, and people are but too apt to blame one person for the evil that another has done."

"Ah, but," said Mr. Chillingworth, "it so happens that those are the people whose opinions are of the very least consequence."

"There is some truth in that," said Henry, sadly; "but, however, let me proceed; since I have to tell the tale, I could wish it over. My father, then, Admiral Bell, although a man not tainted in early life with vices, became, by the force of bad associates, and a sort of want of congeniality and sentiment that sprang up between him and my mother, plunged into all the excesses of his age.

These excesses were all of that character which the most readily lay hold strongly of an unreflecting mind, because they all presented themselves in the garb of sociality.

The wine cup is drained in the name of good fellowship; money which is wanted for legitimate purposes is squandered under the mask of a noble and free generosity; and all that the small imagination of a number of persons of perverted intellects could enable them to do, has been done, from time to time, to impart a kind of lustre to intemperance and all its dreadful and criminal consequences.

My father, having once got into the company of what he considered wits and men of spirit, soon became thoroughly vitiated. He was almost the only one of the set among whom he passed what he considered his highly convivial existence, who was really worth anything, pecuniarily speaking. There were some among them who might have been respectable men, and perchance carved their way to fortune, as well as some others who had started in life with good patrimonies; but he, my father, at the time he became associated with them, was the only one, as I say, who, to use a phrase I have heard myself from his lips concerning them, had got a feather to fly with.

The consequence of this was, that his society, merely for the sake of the animal gratification of drinking at his

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expense was courted, and he was much flattered, all of which he laid to the score of his own merits, which had been found out, and duly appreciated by these bon vivants, while he considered that the grave admonitions of his real friends proceeded from nothing in the world but downright envy and malice.

Such a state of things as this could not last very long. The associates of my father wanted money as well as wine, so they introduced him to the gaming-table, and he became fascinated with the fearful vice to an extent which predicted his own destruction and the ruin of every one who was in any way dependent upon him.

He could not absolutely sell Bannerworth Hall, unless I had given my consent, which I refused; but he accumulated debt upon debt, and from time to time stripped the mansion of all its most costly contents.

With various mutations of fortune, he continued this horrible and baneful career for a long time, until, at last, he found himself utterly and irretrievably ruined, and he came home in an agony of despair, being so weak, and utterly ruined in constitution, that he kept his bed for many days.

It appeared, however, that something occurred at this juncture which gave him actually, or all events awakened a hope that he should possess some money, and be again in a position to try his fortune at the gaming-table.

He rose, and, fortifying himself once more with the strong stimulant of wine and spirits, he left his home, and was absent for about two months.

What occurred to him during that time we none of us ever knew, but late one night he came home, apparently much flurried in manner, and seeming as if something had happened to drive him half mad.

He would not speak to any one, but he shut himself up the whole of the night in the chamber where hangs the portrait that bears so strong a resemblance to Sir Francis Varney, and there he remained till the morning, when he emerged, and said briefly that he intended to leave the country.

He was in a most fearful state of nervousness, and my mother tells me that he shook like one in an ague, and started at every little sound that occurred in the house, and glared about him so wildly that it was horrible to see him, or to sit in the same apartment with him.

She says that the whole morning passed on in this way till a letter came to him, the contents of which appeared to throw him into a perfect convulsion of terror, and he retired again to the room with the portrait, where he remained some hours, and then he emerged, looking like a ghost, so dreadfully pale and haggard was he.

He walked into the garden here, and was seen to sit down in this summer-house, and fix his eyes upon the window of that apartment.

Henry paused for a few moments, and then he added --

You will excuse me from entering upon any details of what next ensued in the melancholy history. My father here committed suicide. He was found dying, and all the words he spoke were, "The money is hidden!" Death claimed his victim, and, with a convulsive spasm, he resigned his spirit, leaving what he had intended to say hidden in the oblivion of the grave.

"That was an odd affair," said the admiral.

"It was, indeed. We have all pondered deeply, and the result was, that, upon the whole, we were inclined to come to an opinion that the words he so uttered were but the result of the mental disturbance that at such a moment might well be supposed to be ensuing in the mind, and that they related really to no foregone fact any more than some incoherent words uttered by a man in a dream might be supposed to do so."

"It may be so."

"I do not mean," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, "for one moment to attempt to dispute, Henry, the rationality of such an opinion as you have just given utterance to; but you forget that another circumstance occurred, which gave a colour to the words used by your father."

"Yes; I know to what you allude."

"Be so good as to state it to the admiral."

"I will. On the evening of that same day there came a man here, who, in seeming ignorance of what had occurred, although by that time it was well known to all the neighbourhood, asked to see my father.

"Upon being told that he was dead, he started back, either with well acted or with real surprise, and seemed to be immensely chagrined. He then demanded to know if he had left any disposition of his property; but he got no information, and departed muttering the most diabolical oaths and curses that can be imagined. He mounted his horse, for he had ridden to the Hall, and his last words were, as I am told --

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"Where, in the name of all that's damnable, can he have put the money?"

"And did you never find out who this man was?" asked the admiral.

"Never."

"It is an odd affair."

"It is," said Mr. Chillingworth, "and full of mystery. The public mind was much taken up at the time with some other matters, or it would have made the death of Mr. Bannerworth the subject of more prolific comment than it did. As it was, however, a great deal was said upon the subject, and the whole county was in a state of commotion for weeks afterwards."

"Yes," said Henry; "it so happened that about that very time a murder was committed in the neighbourhood of London, which baffled all the exertions of the authorities to discover the perpetrators of. It was the murder of Lord Lorne."

"Oh! I remember," said the admiral; "the newspapers were full of it for a long time."

"They were; and more so, as Mr. Chillingworth says, the more exciting interest which that affair created drew off public attention, in a great measure, from my father's suicide, and we did not suffer so much from public remark and from impertinent curiosity as might have been expected."

"And, in addition," said Mr. Chillingworth, and he changed colour a little as he spoke, "there was an execution shortly afterwards."

"Yes," said Henry, "there was."

"The execution of a man named Angerstein," added Mr. Chillingworth "for a highway robbery, attended with the most brutal violence."

"True; all the affairs of that period of time are strongly impressed upon my mind," said Henry; "but you do not seem well, Mr. Chillingworth."

"Oh, yes; I am quite well -- you are mistaken."

Both the admiral and Henry looked scrutinizingly at the doctor, who certainly appeared to them to be labouring under some great mental excitement, which he found it almost beyond his power to repress.

"I tell you what it is, doctor," said the admiral; "I don't pretend, and never did, to see further through a tar-barrel than my neighbours; but I can see far enough to feel convinced that you have got something on your mind, and that it somehow concerns this affair."

"Is it so?" said Henry.

"I cannot if I would," said Mr. Chillingworth; "and I may with truth add, that I would not, if I could, hide from you that I have something on my mind connected with this affair; but let me assure you it would be premature of me to tell you of it."

"Premature be d -- -- d!" said the admiral; "out with it."

"Nay, nay, dear sir; I am not now in a position to say what is passing through my mind."

"Alter your position, then, and be blown!" cried Jack Pringle, suddenly stepping forward, and giving the doctor such a push, that he nearly went through one of the sides of the summer-house.

"Why, you scoundrel!" cried the admiral, "how came you here?"

"On my legs," said Jack. "Do you think nobody wants to know nothing but yourself? I'm as fond of a yarn as anybody."

"But if you are," said Mr. Chillingworth, "you had no occasion to come against me as if you wanted to move a house."

"You said as you wasn't in a position to say something as I wanted to hear, so I thought I'd alter it for you."

"Is this fellow," said the doctor, shaking his head, as he accosted the admiral, "the most artful or stupid?"

"A little of both," said Admiral Bell -- "a little of both, doctor. He's a great fool and a great scamp."

"The same to you," said Jack; "you're another. I shall hate you presently, if you go on making yourself so ridiculous. Now, mind, I'll only give you a trial of another week or so, and if you don't be more purlite in your d -- n language, I'll leave you."

Away strolled Jack, with his hands in his pockets, towards the house, while the admiral was half choked with rage, and could only glare after him, without the ability to say a word.

Under any other circumstances than the present one of trouble, and difficulty; and deep anxiety, Henry Bannerworth might have laughed at these singular little episodes between Jack and the admiral; but his mind was

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now by far too much harassed to permit him to do so.

"Let him go, let him go, my dear sir," said Mr. Chillingworth to the admiral, who showed some signs of an intention to pursue Jack; "he no doubt has been drinking again."

"I'll turn him off the first moment I catch him sober enough to understand me," said the admiral.

"Well, well; do as you please; but now let me ask a favour of both of you."

"What is it?"

"That you will leave Bannerworth Hall to me for a week."

"What for?"

"I hope to make some discoveries connected with it which shall well reward you for the trouble."

"It's no trouble," said Henry; "and for myself, I have amply sufficient faith, both in your judgment and in your friendship, doctor, to accede to any request which you may make to me."

"And I," said the admiral. "Be it so — be it so. For one week, you say?"

"Yes — for one week. I hope, by the end of that time, to have achieved something worth the telling of; and I promise you that, if I am at all disappointed in my expecting, that I will frankly and freely communicate to you all I know and all I suspect."

"Then that's a bargain."

"It is."

"And what's to be done at once?"

"Why, nothing, but to take the greatest possible care that Bannerworth Hall is not left another hour without some one in it; and in order that such should be the case, I have to request that you two will remain here until I go to the town, and make preparations for taking quiet possession of it myself, which I will do in the course of two hours, at most."

"Don't be longer," said the admiral, "for I am so desperately hungry, that I shall certainly begin to eat somebody, if you are."

"Depend upon me."

"Very well," said Henry; "you may depend we will wait here until you come back."

The doctor at once hurried from the garden, leaving Henry and the admiral to amuse themselves as best they might, with conjectures as to what he was really about, until his return.

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Chapter LXII. THE MYSTERIOUS MEETING IN THE RUIN AGAIN. -- THE VAMPYRE'S ATTACK UPON THE CONSTABLE.

It is now necessary that we return once more to that mysterious ruin in the intricacies of which Varney, when pursued by the mob, had succeeded in finding a refuge which defied all the exertions which were made for his discovery. Our readers must be well aware, that, connected with that ruin, are some secrets of great importance to our story; and we will now, at the solemn hour of midnight, take another glance at what is doing within its recesses.

At that solemn hour it is not probable that anyone would seek that gloomy place from choice. Some lover of the picturesque certainly might visit it; but such was not the inciting cause of the pilgrimage with those who were soon to stand within its gloomy precincts.

Other motives dictated their presence in that spot -- motives of rapine; peradventure of murder itself.

As the neighbouring clocks sounded the hour of twelve, and the faint strokes were born gently on the wind to that isolated ruin, there might have been seen a tall man standing by the porch of what had once been a large doorway to some portion of the ruin.

His form was enveloped in a large cloak, which was of such ample material that he seemed well able to wrap it several times around him, and then leave a considerable portion of it floating idly in the gentle wind.

He stood as still, as calm, and as motionless as a statue, for a considerable time, before any degree of impatience began to show itself. Then he took from his pocket a large antique watch, the white face of which just enabled him to see what the time was, and, in a voice which had in it some amount of petulance and anger, he said, --

"Not come yet, and nearly half an hour beyond the time! What can have detained him? This is, indeed, trifling with the most important moments of a man's existence."

Even as he spoke, he heard, from some distance off, the sound of a short, quick footstep. He bent forwards to listen, and then, in a tone of satisfaction, he said, --

"He comes -- he comes!"

But he who thus waited for some confederate among these dim and old grey ruins, advanced not a step to meet him. On the contrary, such seemed the amount of cold-blooded caution which he possessed, that the nearer the man -- who was evidently advancing -- got to the place, the further back did he who had preceded him shrink into the shadow of the dim and rumbling walls, which had, for some years now past, seemed to bend to the passing blast, and to be on the point of yielding to the destroying hand of time.

And yet, surely he needed not have been so cautious. Who was likely, at such an hour as that, to come to the ruins, but one who sought it by appointment?

And, moreover, the manner of the advancing man should have been quite sufficient to convince him who waited, that so much caution was unnecessary; but it was a part and parcel of his nature.

About three minutes more sufficed to bring the second man to the ruin, and he, at once, and fearlessly, plunged into its recesses.

"Who comes?" said the first man, in a deep, hollow voice.

"He whom you expect," was the reply.

"Good," he said, and at once he now emerged from his hiding-place, and they stood together in the nearly total darkness with which the place was enshrouded; for the night was a cloudy one, and there appeared not a star in the heavens, to shed its faint light upon the scene below.

For a few moments they were both silent, for he who had last arrived had evidently made great exertions to reach the spot, and was breathing laboriously, while he who was there first appeared, from some natural taciturnity of character, to decline opening the conversation.

At length the second comer spoke, saying, --

"I have made some exertion to get here to my time, and yet I am beyond it, as you are no doubt aware."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, such would not have been the case; but yet, I stayed to bring you some news of importance."

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"Indeed!"

"It is so. This place, which we have now for some time had as a quiet and perfectly eligible one of meeting, is about to be invaded by one of those restless, troublesome spirits, who are never happy but when they are contriving something to the annoyance of others who do not interfere with them."

"Explain yourself more fully."

"I will. At a tavern in the town, there has happened some strange scenes of violence, in consequence of the general excitement into which the common people have been thrown upon the dreadful subject of vampyres."

"Well."

"The consequence is, that numerous arrests have taken place, and the places of confinement for offenders against the laws are now full of those whose heated and angry imaginations have induced them to take violent steps to discover the reality or the falsehood of rumours which so much affected them, their wives, and their families, that they feared to lie down to their night's repose."

The other laughed a short, hollow, restless sort of laugh, which had not one particle of real mirth in it.

"Go on -- go on," he said. "What did they do?"

"Immense excesses have been committed; but what made me, first of all, stay beyond my time, was that I overheard a man declare his intentions this night, from twelve till the morning, and for some nights to come, to hold watch and ward for the vampyre."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. He did but stay, at the earnest solicitation of his comrades, to take yet another glass, ere he came upon his expedition."

"He must be met. The idiot! what business is it of his?"

"There are always people who will make everything their business, whether it be so or not."

"There are. Let us retire further into the recesses of the ruin, and there consider as well what is to be done regarding more important affairs, as with this rash intruder here."

They both walked for some twenty paces, or so, right into the ruin, and then he who had been there first, said, suddenly, to his companion, --

"I am annoyed, although the feeling reaches no farther than annoyance, for I have a natural love of mischief, to think that my reputation has spread so widely, and made so much noise."

"Your reputation as a vampyre, Sir Francis Varney, you mean?"

"Yes; but there is no occasion for you to utter my name aloud, even here where we are alone together."

"It came out unawares."

"Unawares! Can it be possible that you have so little command over yourself as to allow a name to come from your lips unawares?"

"Sometimes."

"I am surprised."

"Well, it cannot be helped. What do you now propose to do?"

"Nay, you are my privy councillor. Have you no deep-laid, artful project in hand? Can you not plan and arrange something which may yet have the effect of accomplishing what at first seemed so very simple, but which has, from one unfortunate circumstance and another, become full of difficulty and pregnant with all sorts of dangers?"

"I must confess I have no plan."

"I listen with astonishment."

"Nay, now, you are jesting."

"When did you ever hear of me jesting?"

"Not often, I admit. But you have a fertile genius, and I have always, myself, found it easier to be the executive than to plan an elaborate course of action for others."

"Then you throw it all on me?"

"I throw a weight, naturally enough, upon the shoulders which I think the best adapted to sustain it."

"Be it so, then -- be it so."

"You are, I presume, from what you say, provided with a scheme of action which shall present better hopes of success, at less risk, I hope. Look what great danger we have already passed through."

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"Yes, we have."

"I pray you avoid that in the next campaign."

"It is not the danger that annoys and troubles me, but it is that, notwithstanding it, the object is as far off as ever from being attained."

"And not only so, but as is invariably the case under such circumstance, we have made it more difficult of execution because we have put those upon their guard thoroughly who are the most likely to oppose us."

"We have — we have."

"And placed the probability of success afar off indeed."

"And yet I have set my life upon the case, and I will stand the hazard. I tell you I will accomplish this object, or I will perish in the attempt."

"You are too enthusiastic."

"Not at all. Nothing has been ever done, the execution of which was difficult, without enthusiasm. I will do what I intend, or Bannerworth Hall shall become a heap of ruins, where fire shall do its worst work of devastation, and I will myself find a grave in the midst."

"Well, I quarrel with no man for chalking out the course he intends to pursue, but what do you mean to do with the prisoner below here?"

"Kill him."

"What?"

"I say kill him. Do you not understand me?"

"I do, indeed."

"When everything else is secured, and when the whole of that which I so much court, and which I will have, is in my possession, I will take his life, or you shall. Ay, you are just the man for such a deed. A smooth-faced, specious sort of man are you, and you like not danger. There will be none in taking the life of a man who is chained to the floor of a dungeon."

"I know not why," said the other, "you take a pleasure on this particular night, of all others, in saying all you can which you think will be offensive to me."

"Now, how you wrong me. This is the reward of confidence."

"I don't want such confidence."

"Why, you surely don't want me to flatter you."

"No; but — "

"Psha! Hark you. That admiral is the great stumbling-block in my way. I should ere this have had undisturbed possession of Bannerworth Hall but for him. He must be got out of the way somehow."

"A short time will tire him out of watching. He is one of those men of impulse who soon become wearied of inaction."

"Ay, and then the Bannerworths return to the Hall."

"It may be so."

"I am certain of it. We have been out-generalled in this matter, although I grant we did all that men could do to give us success."

"In what way would you get rid of this troublesome admiral?"

"I scarcely know. A letter from his nephew might, if well put together, get him to London."

"I doubt it. I hate him mortally. He has offended me more than once most grievously."

"I know it. He saw through you."

"I do not give him so much credit. He is a suspicious man, and a vain and a jealous one."

"And yet he saw through you. Now, listen to me. You are completely at fault, and have no plan of operations whatever in your mind. What I want you to do is, to disappear from the neighborhood for a while, and so will I. As for our prisoner here below, I cannot see what else can be done with him than — than — "

"Than what? Do you hesitate?"

"I do."

"Then what is it you were about to say?"

"I cannot but feel that all we have done, hitherto, as regards this young prisoner of ours, has failed. He has, with a determined obstinacy, set at naught, as well you know, all threats."

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"He has."

"He has refused to do one act which could in any way aid me in my objects. In fact, from the first to the last, he has been nothing but an expense and an encumbrance to us both."

"And yet, although you, as well as I, know of a marvellously ready way of getting rid of such encumbrances, I must own that I shrink with more than a feeling of reluctance from the murder of the youth."

"You contemplated it, then?" asked the other.

"No; I cannot be said to have contemplated it. That is not the proper sort of expression to use."

"What is then?"

"To contemplate a deed seems to me to have some close connexion to the will to do it."

"And you have no such wish?"

"I have no such wish, and what is more I will not do it."

"Then that is sufficient; and the only question that remains for you to consider is, what you will do. It is far easier in all enterprises to decide upon what we will not do, than upon what we will. For my own part I must say that I can perceive no mode of extricating ourselves from this involvement with anything like safety."

"Then it must be done with something like danger."

"As you please."

"You say so, and your words bear a clear enough significance; but from your tone I can guess how much you are dissatisfied with the aspect of affairs."

"Dissatisfied!"

"Yes; I say, dissatisfied. Be frank, and own that which it is in vain to conceal from me. I know you too well; arch hypocrite as you are, and fully capable of easily deceiving many, you cannot deceive me."

"I really cannot understand you."

"Then I will take care that you shall."

"How?"

"Listen. I will not have the life of Charles Holland taken."

"Who wishes to take it?"

"You."

"There, indeed, you wrong me. Unless you yourself thought that such an act was imperatively called for by the state of affairs, do you think that I would needlessly bring down upon my head the odium as well as the danger of such a deed? No, no. Let him live, if you are willing; he may live a thousand years for all I care."

"'Tis well. I am, mark me, not only willing, but I am determined that he shall live so far as we are concerned. I can respect the courage that, even when he considered that his life was at stake, enabled him to say no to a proposal which was cowardly and dishonourable, although it went far to the defeat of my own plans and has involved me in much trouble."

"Hush! hush!"

"What is it?"

"I fancy I hear a foot step."

"Indeed; that were a novelty in such a place as this."

"And yet not more than I expected. Have you forgotten what I told you when I reached here to-night after the appointed hour?"

"Truly; I had for the moment. Do you think then that the footstep which now meets our ears, is that of the adventurer who boasted that he could keep watch for the vampyre?"

"In faith do I. What is to be done with such a meddling fool?"

"He ought certainly to be taught not to be so fond of interfering with other people's affairs."

"Certainly."

"Perchance the lesson will not be wholly thrown away upon others. It may be worth while to take some trouble with the pot valiant fellow, and let him spread his news so as to stop any one else from being equally venturous and troublesome."

"A good thought."

"Shall it be done?"

"Yes; if you will arrange that which shall accomplish such a result."

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"Be it so. The moon rises."

"It does."

"Ah, already I fancy I see a brightening of the air as if the mellow radiance of the queen of night were already quietly diffusing itself throughout the realms of space. Come further within the ruins."

They both walked further among the crumbling walls and fragments of columns with which the place abounded. As they did so they paused now and then to listen, and more than once they both heard plainly the sound of certain footsteps outside the once handsome and spacious building.

Varney, the vampyre, who had been holding this conversation with no other than Marchdale, smiled as he, in a whispered voice, told the latter what to do in order to frighten away from the place the foolhardy man who thought that, by himself, he should be able to accomplish anything against the vampyre.

It was, indeed, a hair-brained expedition, for whether Sir Francis Varney was really so awful and preternatural a being as so many concurrent circumstances would seem to proclaim, or not, he was not a likely being to allow himself to be conquered by any one individual, let his powers or his courage be what they might.

What induced this man to become so venturesome we shall now proceed to relate, as well as what kind of reception he got in the old ruins, which, since the mysterious disappearance of Sir Francis Varney within their recesses, had possessed so increased a share of interest and attracted so much popular attention and speculation.

Chapter LXIII. THE GUESTS AT THE INN, AND THE STORY OF THE DEAD UNCLE.

As had been truly stated by Mr. Marchdale, who now stands out in his true colours to the reader as the confidant and abettor of Sir Francis Varney, there had assembled on that evening a curious and gossiping party at the inn where such dreadful proceedings had taken place, we have already duly and at length recorded.

It was not very likely that, on that evening, or for many and many an evening to come, the conversation in the parlour of the inn would be upon any other subject than that of the vampyre.

Indeed, the strange, mysterious, and horrible circumstances which had occurred bade fair to be gossiping stock in trade for many a year.

Never before had a subject presenting so many curious features arisen. Never, within the memory of that personage who is supposed to know everything had there occurred any circumstances in the county, or set of circumstances, which afforded such abundant scope for conjecture and speculation.

Everybody might have his individual opinion, and be just as likely to be right as his neighbours; and the beauty of the affair was, that such was the interest of the subject itself, that there was sure to be a kind of reflected interest with eery surmise that at all bore upon it.

On this particular night, when Marchdale was prowling about, gathering what news he could, in order that he might carry it to the vampyre, a more than usually strong muster of the gossips of the town took place.

Indeed, all of any note in the talking way were there, with the exception of one, and he was in the county gaol, being one of the prisoners apprehended by the military when they made the successful attack upon the lumber-room of the inn, after the dreadful desecration of the dead which had taken place.

The landlord of the inn was likely to make a good thing of it, for talking makes people thirsty; and he began to consider that a vampyre about once-a-year would be a good thing for the Blue Lion.

"It's shocking," said one of the guests; "it's shocking to think of. Only last night, I am quite sure I had such a fright that it added at least ten years to my age."

"A fright!" said several.

"I believe I speak English -- I said a fright."

"Well, but had it anything to do with the vampyre?"

"Everything."

"Oh! do tell us; do tell us all about it. How was it? Did he come to you? Go on. Well, well."

The first speaker became immediately a very important personage in the room; and, when he was that, he became at once a very important personage in his own eyes likewise; and, before he would speak another word, he filled a fresh pipe, and ordered another mug of ale.

"It's no use trying to hurry him," said one.

"No," he said, "it isn't. I'll tell you in good time what a dreadful circumstance has made me sixty-three to-day, when I was only fifty-three yesterday."

"Was it very dreadful?"

"Rather. You wouldn't have survived at all."

"Indeed!"

"No. Now listen. I went to bed at a quarter after eleven, as usual. I didn't notice anything particular in the room."

"Did you peep under the bed?"

"No, I didn't. Well, as I was a-saying, to bed I went, and I didn't fasten the door; because, being a very sound sleeper, in case there was a fire, I shouldn't hear a word of it if I did."

"No," said another. "I recollect once --"

"Be so good as to allow me to finish what I know, before you begin to recollect anything, if you please. As I was saying, I didn't lock the door, but I went to bed. Somehow or another, I did not feel at all comfortable, and I tossed about, first on one side, and then on the other; but it was all in vain; I only got, every moment, more and more fidgety."

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"And did you think of the vampyre?" said one of the listeners.

"I thought of nothing else till I heard my clock, which is on the landing of the stairs above my bed-room, begin to strike twelve."

"Ah! I like to hear a clock sound in the night," said one; "it puts one in mind of the rest of the world, and lets one know one isn't all alone."

"Very good. The striking of the clock I should not at all have objected to; but it was what followed that did the business."

"What, what?"

"Fair and softly; fair and softly. Just hand me a light, Mr. Sprigs, if you please. I'll tell you all, gentlemen, in a moment or two."

With the most provoking deliberation, the speaker re-lit his pipe, which had gone out while he was talking, and then, after a few whiffs, to assure himself that its contents had thoroughly ignited, he resumed --

"No sooner had the last sound of it died away, than I heard something on the stairs."

"Yes, yes."

"It was as if some man had given his foot a hard blow against one of the stairs; and he would have needed to have had a heavy boot on to do it. I started up in bed and listened, as you may well suppose, not in the most tranquil state of mind, and then I heard an odd, gnawing sort of noise, and then another dab upon one of the stairs."

"How dreadful!"

"It was. What to do I knew not, or what to think, except that the vampyre had, by some means, got in at the attic window, and was coming down stairs to my room. That seemed the most likely. Then there was another groan, and then another heavy step; and, as they were evidently coming towards my door, I felt accordingly, and got out of bed, not knowing hardly whether I was on my head or my heels, to try and lock my door."

"Ah, to be sure."

"Yes; that was all very well, if I could have done it; but a man in such a state of mind as I was in is not a very sharp hand at doing anything. I shook from head to foot. The room was very dark, and I couldn't, for a moment or two, collect my senses sufficient really to know which way the door lay."

"What a situation!"

"It was. Dab, dab, dab, came these horrid footsteps, and there was I groping about the room in an agony. I heard them coming nearer and nearer to my door. Another moment, and they must have reached it, when my hand struck against the lock."

"What an escape!"

"No, it was not."

"No?"

"No, indeed. The key was on the outside, and you may well guess I was not over and above disposed to open the door to get at it."

"No, no."

"I felt regularly bewildered, I can tell you; it seemed to me as if the very devil himself was coming down stairs hopping all the way upon one leg."

"How terrific!"

"I felt my senses almost leaving me; but I did what I could to hold the door shut just as I heard the strange step come from the last stair on to the landing. Then there was a horrid sound, and some one began trying the lock of my door."

"What a moment!"

"Yes, I can tell you it was a moment. Such a moment as I don't wish to go through again. I held the door as close as I could, and did not speak. I tried to cry out help and murder, but I could not; my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, and my strength was fast failing me."

"Horrid, horrid!"

"Take a drop of ale."

"Thank you. Well, I don't think this went on above two or three minutes, and all the while some one tried might and main to push open the door. My strength left me all at once; I had only time to stagger back a step or

two, and then, as the door opened, I fainted away."

"Well, well!"

"Ah, you wouldn't have said well, if you had been there, I can tell you."

"No; but what become of you. What happened next? How did it end? What was it?"

"Why, what exactly happened next after I fainted I cannot tell you; but the first thing I saw when I recovered was a candle."

"Yes, yes."

"And then a crowd of people."

"Ah, ah!"

"And then Dr. Webb."

"Gracious!"

"And Mrs. Bulk, my housekeeper. I was in my own bed, and when I opened my eyes I heard Dr. Webb say,

—
"He will be better soon. Can no one form any idea of what it is all about. Some sudden fright surely alone could have produced such an effect."

"The Lord have mercy upon me!" said I.

"Upon this everybody who had been called in got round the bed, and wanted to know what had happened; but I said not a word of it; but turning to Mrs. Bulk, I asked her how it was she found out I had fainted.

"Why, sir," says she, "I was coming up to bed as softly as I could, because I knew you had gone to rest some time before. The clock was striking twelve, and as I went past it some of my clothes, I suppose, caught the large weight, but it was knocked off, and down the stairs it rolled, going with such a lump from one to the other, and I couldn't catch it because it rolled so fast, that I made sure you would be awakened; so I came down to tell you what it was, and it was some time before I could get your room door open, and when I did I found you out of bed and insensible."

There was a general look of disappointment when this explanation was given, and one said, —

"Then it was not the vampire?"

"Certainly not."

"And, after all, only a clock weight."

"That's about it."

"Why didn't you tell us about that at first?"

"Because that would have spoiled the story."

There was a general murmur of discontent, and, after a few moments one man said, with some vivacity, —

"Well, although our friend's vampyre has turned out, after all, to be nothing but a confounded clock-weight, there's no disputing the fact about Sir Francis Varney being a vampyre, and not a clock-weight."

"Very true — very true."

"And what's to be done to rid the town of such a man?"

"Oh, don't call him a man."

"Well, a monster."

"Ah, that's more like. I tell you what, sir, if you had got a light, when you first heard the noise in your room, and gone out to see what it was, you would have spared yourself much fright."

"Ah, no doubt; it's always easy afterwards to say, if you had done this, and if you had done the other, so and so would have been the effect; but there is something about the hour of midnight that makes men tremble."

"Well," said one, who had not yet spoken, "I don't see why twelve at night should be a whit more disagreeable than twelve at day."

"Don't you?"

"Not I."

"Now, for instance, many a party of pleasure goes to that old ruin where Sir Francis Varney so unaccountably disappeared in broad daylight. But is there nay one here who would go to it alone, and at midnight?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"I would."

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"What! and after what has happened as regards the vampyre in connection with it?"

"Yes, I would."

"I'll bet you twenty shillings you won't."

"And I -- and I," cried several.

"Well, gentlemen," said the man, who certainly shewed no signs of fear, "I will go, and not only will I go and take all your bets, but, if I do meet the vampyre; then I'll do my best to take him prisoner."

"And when will you go?"

"To-night," he cried, and he sprang to his feet; "hark ye all, I don't believe one word about vampyre. I'll go at once; it's getting late, and let any one of you, in order that you may be convinced I have been to the place, give me any article, which I will hide among the ruins; and tell you where to find it to-morrow in broad daylight."

"Well," said one, "that's fair, Tom Eccles. Here's a handkerchief of mine; I should know it again among a hundred others."

"Agreed; I'll leave it in the ruins."

The wagers were fairly agreed upon; several handkerchiefs were handed to Tom Eccles; and at eleven o'clock he fairly started, through the murky darkness of the night, to the old ruin where Sir Francis Varney and Marchdale were holding their most unholy conference.

It is one thing to talk and to accept wagers in the snug parlour of an inn, and another to go alone across a tract of country wrapped in the profound stillness of night to an ancient ruin which, in addition to the natural gloom which might well be supposed to surround it, has superadded associations which are anything but of a pleasant character.

Tom Eccles, as he was named, was one of those individuals who act greatly from impulse. He was certainly not a coward, and, perhaps, really as free from superstition as most persons, but he was human, and consequently he had nerves, and he had likewise imagination.

He went to his house first before he started on his errand to the ruins. It was to get a horse-pistol which he had, and which he duly loaded and placed in his pocket. Then he wrapped himself up in a great-coat, and with the air of a man quite determined upon something desperate he left the town.

The guests at the inn looked after him as he walked from the door of that friendly establishment, and some of them, as they saw his resolved aspect, began to quake for the amount of the wagers they had laid upon his non-success.

However, it was resolved among them, that they would stay until half-past twelve, in the expectation of his return, before they separated.

To while away the time, he who had been so facetious about his story of the clock-weight, volunteered to tell what happened to a friend of his who went to take possession of some family property which he became possessed of as heir-at-law to an uncle who had died without a will, having an illegitimate family unprovided for in every shape.

"Ah! nobody cares for other people's illegitimate children, and, if their parents don't provide for them, why, the workhouse is open for them, just as if they were something different from other people."

"So they are; if their parents don't take care of them, and provide for them, nobody else will, as you say, neighbour, except when they have a Fitz put to their name, which tells you they are royal bastards, and of course unlike anybody else's."

"But go on -- let's know all about it; we sha'n't hear what he has got to say at all, at this rate."

"Well, as I was saying, or about to say, the nephew, as soon as he heard his uncle was dead, comes and claps his seal upon everything in the chouse."

"But, could he do so?" inquired one of the guests.

"I don't see what was to hinder him," replied a third. "He could do so, certainly."

"But there was a son, and, as I take it, a son's nearer than a nephew any day."

"But the son is illegitimate."

"Legitimate, or illegitimate, a son's a son; don't bother me about distinction of that sort; why, now, there was old Weatherbit -- "

"Order, order."

"Let's hear the tale."

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"Very good, gentlemen, I'll go on, if I ain't to be interrupted; but I'll say this, that an illegitimate son is no son, in the eyes of the law; or at most he's an accident, quite, and ain't what he is, and so can't inherit."

"Well, that's what I call making matters plain," said one of the guests, who took his pipe from his mouth to make room for the remark; "now that is what I likes."

"Well, as I have proved then," resumed the speaker, "the nephew was the heir, and into the house he would come. A fine affair it was too — the illegitimates looking the color of sloes; but he knew the law, and would have it put in force."

"Law's law, you know."

"Uncommonly true that, and the nephew stuck to it like a cobbler to his last — he said they should go out, and they did go out; and say what they would about their natural claims, he would not listen to them, but bundled them out and out in a pretty short space of time."

"It was trying to them, mind you, to leave the house they had been born in with very different expectations to those which now appeared to be their fate. Poor things, they looked ruefully enough, and well they might, for there was a wide world for them, and no prospect of a warm corner."

"Well, as I was saying, he had them all out, and the house clear to himself."

"Now," said he, "I have an open field and no favour. I don't care for no — Eh! what!"

"There was a sudden knocking, he thought, at the door, and went and opened it, but nothing was to be seen."

"Oh, I see — somebody next door; and if it wasn't it don't matter. There's nobody here. I'm alone, and there's plenty of valuables in the house. That is what I call very good company. I wouldn't wish for better."

He turned about, looked over room after room, and satisfied himself that he was alone — that the house was empty.

At every room he entered he paused to think over the value — what it was worth, and that he was a very fortunate man in having dropped into such a good thing."

"Ah! there's the old boy's secretary, too — his bureau — there'll be something in that that will amuse me mightily; but I don't think I shall sit up late. He was a rum old man, to say the least of it — a very odd sort of man." With that he gave himself a shrug, as if some very uncomfortable feeling had come over him.

"I'll go to bed early, and get some sleep, and then in daylight I can look after these papers. They won't be less interesting in the morning than they are now."

There was been some rum stories about the old man, and now the nephew seemed to think that he might have let the family sleep on the premises for that night; yes, at that moment he could have found it in his heart to have paid for all the expense of their keep, had it been possible to have had them back to remain the night.

But that wasn't possible, for they would not have done it, but sooner have remained in the streets all night than stay there all night, like so many house-dogs, employed by one who stepped in between them and their father's goods, which were their inheritance, but for one trifling circumstance — a mere ceremony.

The night came on, and he had lights. True it was that he had not been down stairs, only just to have a look. He could not tell what sort of a place it was; there were a good many odd sort of passages, that seemed to end nowhere, and others that did.

There were large doors; but they were all locked, and he had the keys; so he didn't mind, but secured all places that were not fastened.

He then went up stairs again, and sat down in the room where the bureau was placed.

"I'll be bound," said one of the guests, "he was in a bit of a stew, notwithstanding all his brag."

"Oh! I don't believe," said another, "that anything done that is dangerous, or supposed to be dangerous, by the bravest man, is any way wholly without some uncomfortable feelings. They may not be strong enough to prevent the thing proposed to be done from being done, but they give a disagreeable sensation to the skin."

"You have felt it, then?"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Why, at that time I slept in the churchyard for a wager, I must say I felt cold all over, as if my skin was walking about me in an uncomfortable manner."

"But you won your wager?"

"I did."

"And of course you slept there?"

"To be sure I did."

"And met with nothing?"

"Nothing, save a few bumps against the gravestones."

"Those were hard knocks, I should say."

They were, I assure you; but I lay there, and slept there, and won my wager."

"Would you do it again?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Because of the rheumatism?"

"You caught that?"

"I did; I would give ten times my wager to get rid of them. I have them very badly."

"Come, order, order — the tale; let's hear the end of that, since it has begun."

"With all my heart. Come, neighbour."

"Well, as I said, he was fidgetty; but yet he was not a man to be very easily frightened or overcome, for he was stout and bold.

When he shut himself up in the room, he took out a bottle of some good wine, and helped himself to drink; it was good old wine, and he soon felt himself warmed and comforted. He could have faced the enemy.

"If one bottle produces such an effect," he muttered, "what will two do?"

This was a question that could only be solved by trying it, and this he proceeded to do.

But first he drew a brace of long barrelled pistols from his coat pocket, and taking a powder-flask and bullets from his pocket also, he loaded them very carefully.

"There," said he, "are my bull-dogs; and rare watch-dogs they are. They never bark but they bite. Now, if anybody does come, it will be all up with them. Tricks upon travellers ain't a safe game when I have these; and now for the other bottle."

He drew the other bottle, and thought, if anything, it was better than the first. He drank it rather quick, to be sure, and then he began to feel sleepy and tired.

"I think I shall go to bed," he said; "that is, if I can find my way there, for it does seem to me as if the door was travelling. Never mind, it will make a call here again presently, and then I'll get through."

So saying, he arose. Taking the candle in his hand, he walked with a better step than might have been expected under the circumstance. True it was the candle wagged to and fro, and his shadow danced upon the wall; but still, when he got to the bed, he secured his door, put the light in a safe place, threw himself down, and was fast asleep in a few moments, or rather he fell into a doze instantaneously.

How long he remained in this state he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by a loud bang, as though something heavy had flat had fallen upon the floor — such, for instance, as a door, or anything of that sort. He jumped up, rubbed his eyes, and could even then hear the reverberations through the house.

"What is that?" he muttered; "what is that?"

He listened, and thought he could hear something moving down stairs, and for a moment he was seized with an ague fit; but recollecting, I suppose, that there were some valuables down stairs that were worth fighting for, he carefully extinguished the light that still burned, and softly crept down stairs.

When he got down stairs he thought he could hear some one scramble up the kitchen stairs, and then into the room where the bureau was. Listening for a moment to ascertain if there were more than one, and then feeling convinced there was not, he followed into the parlour, when he heard the cabinet open by a key.

This was a new miracle, and one he could not understand; and then he heard the papers begin to rattle and rustle; so, drawing out one of the pistols, he cocked it, and walked in.

The figure instantly began to jump about; it was dressed in white — in grave-clothes. He was terribly nervous, and shook so he feared to fire the pistol; but at length he did, and the report was followed by a fall and a loud groan.

This was very dreadful — very dreadful; but all was quiet, and he lit the candle again, and approached the body to examine it and ascertain if he knew who it was. A groan came from it. The bureau was open, and the figure clutched firmly a will in his hand.

The figure was dressed in grave-clothes, and he started up when he saw the form and features of his own

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uncle, the man who was dead, who somehow or other had escaped his confinement, and found his way up, here. He held his will firmly; and the nephew was so horrified and stunned, that he threw down the light, and rushed out of the room with a shout of terror, and never returned again. *****

The narrator concluded, and one of the guests said, --

"And do you really believe it?" -- "No, no -- to be sure not."

"You don't?" -- "Why should I? My friend was, out of all hand, one of the greatest liars I ever came near; and why, therefore, should I believe him? I don't, on my conscience, believe one word of it."

"It was now half-past twelve, and, as Tom Eccles came not back, and the landlord did not feel disposed to draw any more liquor, they left the inn, and retired to their separate houses in a great state of anxiety to know the fate of their respective wagers.

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Chapter LXIV. THE VAMPIRE IN THE MOONLIGHT. -- THE FALSE FRIEND.

Part of the distance being accomplished toward the old ruins, Tom Eccles began to feel that what he had undertaken was not altogether such child's-play as he had at first imagined it to be. Somehow or another, with a singular and uncomfortable sort of distinctness, there came across his mind every story that he had remembered of the wild and the wonderful. All the long-since-forgotten tales of superstition that in early childhood he had learned, came now back upon him, suggesting to his mind a thousand uncomfortable fancies of the strangest description.

It was not likely that when once a man under such circumstances, got into such a frame of mind, he would readily get out of it again, while he continued surrounded by such scenes as had first called them into existence.

No doubt, had he turned about, and faced the inn again instead of the old ruins, he would soon have shaken off these "thick-coming fancies;" but such a result was not to be expected, so long as he kept on toward the dismal place he had pledged himself to reach.

As he traversed meadow after meadow, he began to ask himself some questions, which he found that he could not answer exactly in a consolatory manner, under the present state of things.

Among these questions was the very pertinent one of, -- "It's no argument against vampyres, because I don't see the use of 'em -- is it?" This he was compelled to answer as he had put it; and when, in addition, he began to recollect that, without the shadow of a doubt, Sir Francis Varney, the supposed vampyre, had been chased across the fields to that very ruin, whither he was bound, and had then and there disappeared, he certainly found himself in a decidedly uncomfortable and most unpromising situation.

"No," he said, "no. Hang it, I won't go back now, to be made the laughing-stock of the whole town, which I should be. Come what may of it, I will go on as I have commenced; so I shall put on as stout a heart as I can."

Then, having come to this resolve, he strove might and main to banish from his mind those disagreeable reminiscences that had been oppressing him, to turn his attention to subjects of a different complexion.

During the progress of making this endeavour, which was rather futile, he came within sight of the ruins. Then he slackened his pace a little, telling himself, with a pardonable self-deceit, that it was common, ordinary caution only, which induced him to do so, and nothing at all in the shape of fear.

"Time enough," he remarked, "to be afraid, when I see anything to be afraid of, which I don't see as yet. So, as all's right, I may as well put a good face upon the matter."

He tried to whistle a tune, but it turned out only a melancholy failure; so he gave that up in despair, and walked on until he got within a hundred yards, or thereabouts, of the old ruins.

He thus proceeded, and bending his ear close to the ground, he listened attentively for several minutes. Somehow, he fancied that a strange, murmuring sound came to his ears; but he was not quite sure that it proceeded from the ruins, because it was just that sort of sound that might come from a long way off, being mellowed by distance, although, perhaps, loud enough at its source.

"Well, well," he whispered to himself, "it don't matter much, after all. Go I must, and hide the handkerchiefs somewhere, or else be laughed at, besides losing my wages. The former I don't like, and the latter I cannot afford."

Thus clinching the matter by such knock-down arguments, he walked on until he was almost within the very shadow of the ruins, and, probably, it was at this juncture that his footsteps may have been heard by Marchdale and Sir Francis Varney.

Then he paused again; but all was profoundly still, and he began to think that the strange sort of murmuring noise that he had heard must have come from far off, and not at all from any person or persons within the ruins.

"Let me see," he said to himself; "I have five handkerchiefs to hide among the old ruins somewhere, and the sooner I do so the better, because then I will get away; for, as regards staying here to watch, Heaven knows how long, for Sir Francis Varney, I don't intend to do it, upon second thoughts, and second thoughts, they say, are generally best."

With the most careful footsteps now, as if he were treading upon some fragile substance, which he feared to injure, he advanced until he was fairly within the precincts of the ancient place, which now bore so ill a

reputation.

He then made to himself much the same remark that Sir Francis Varney had made to Marchdale, with respect to the brightening up of the sky, in consequence of its being near the time for the moon to rise from the horizon, and he saw more clearly around him, although he could not find any good place to hide the handkerchiefs in.

"I must and will," he said, "hide them securely; for it would, indeed, be remarkably unpleasant, after coming here and winning my wages, to have the proofs that I had done so taken away by some chance visitor to the place."

He at length saw a tolerably large stone, which stood, in a slant position, up against one of the walls. Its size attracted him. He thought, if his strength was sufficient to move it, that it would be a good thing to do so, and to place the handkerchiefs beneath it, for at all events, it was so heavy that it could not be kicked aside, and no one, without some sort of motive to do so, beyond the mere love of labour, would set about moving it from its position.

"I may go further and fare worse," he said to himself; "so here shall all the handkerchiefs lie, to afford a proof that I have been here."

He packed them into a small compass, and then stooped to roll aside the heavy stone, when, at the moment, before he could apply his strength to that purpose, he heard some one, in his immediate neighbourhood, say, — "Hist!"

This was so sudden, and so utterly unexpected, that he not only ceased his exertions to move the stone, but he nearly fell down in his surprise.

"Hist — hist!"

"What — what," gasped Tom Eccles — "what are you?" — "Hush — hush — hush!"

The perspiration broke out upon his brow, and he leaned against the wall for support, as he managed to say, faintly, —

"Well, hush — what then?" — "Hist!"

"Well, I hear you. Where are you?" — "Near at hand. Who are you?"

"Tom Eccles. Who are you?" — "A friend. Have you seen anything?"

"No; I wish I could. I should like to see you if I could." — "I'm coming."

There was a slow and cautious footstep, and Marchdale advanced to where Tom Eccles was standing.

"Come, now," said the latter, when he saw the dusky-looking form stalking towards him; "till I know you better, I'll be obliged to you to keep off. I am well armed. Keep your distance, be you friend or foe."

"Armed!" exclaimed Marchdale, and he at once paused. — "Yes, I am."

"But I am a friend. I have no sort of objection frankly to tell you my errand. I am a friend of the Bannerworth family, and have kept watch here now for two nights, in the hopes of meeting with Varney, the vampyre."

"The deuce you have; and pray what may your name be?" — "Marchdale."

"If you be Mr. Marchdale, I know you by sight; for I have seen you with Mr. Henry Bannerworth several times. Come out from among the shadows, and let us have a look at you; but, till you do, don't come within arm's length of me. I am not naturally suspicious; but we cannot be too careful."

"Oh! certainly — certainly. The silver edge of the moon is now just peeping up from the east, and you will be able to see me well, if you step from the shadow of the wall by which you now are."

This was a reasonable enough proposition, and Tom Eccles at once acceded to it, by stepping out boldly into the partial moonlight, which now began to fall upon the open meadows, tinting the grass with a silvery refulgence, and rendering even minute objects visible. The moment he saw Marchdale he knew him, and, advancing frankly to him, he said, —

"I know you, sir, well."

"And what brings you here?" — "A wager for one thing, and a wish to see the vampyre for another."

"Indeed!" — "Yes, I must own I have such a wish, along with a still stronger one, to capture him, if possible; and, as there are now two of us, why may we not do it?"

"As for capturing him," said Marchdale, "I should prefer shooting him." — "You would?"

"I would, indeed. I have seen him once shot down, and he is now, I have no doubt, as well as ever. What were you doing with that huge stone I saw you bending over?" — "I have some handkerchiefs to hide here, as a proof that I have to-night really been to this place."

"Oh, I will show you a better spot, where there is a crevice in which you can place them with perfect safety."

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Will you walk with me into the ruins?" — "Willingly."

"It's odd enough," remarked Marchdale, after he had shown Tom Eccles where to hide the handkerchiefs, "that you and I should both be here upon so similar an errand." — "I'm very glad of it. It robs the place of its gloom, and makes it ten times more endurable than it otherwise would be. What do you propose to do if you see the vampyre?"

"I shall try a pistol bullet on him. You say you are armed?" — "Yes."

"With pistols?" — "One. Here it is."

"A huge weapon; loaded well, of course?" — "Oh, yes, I can depend upon it; but I did not intend to use it, unless assailed."

"'Tis well. What is that?" — "What — what?"

"Don't you see anything there? Come farther back. Look — look. At the corner of that wall there I am certain there is the flutter of a human garment." — "There is — there is."

"Hush! Keep close. It must be the vampyre." — "Give me my pistol. What are you doing with it?"

"Only ramming down the charge more firmly for you. Take it. If that be Varney the vampyre, I shall challenge him to surrender the moment he appears; and if he does not, I will fire upon him, and do you do so likewise." — "Well, I — I don't know."

"You have scruples?" — "I certainly have."

"Well, well — don't you fire, then, but leave it to me. There; look — look. Now have you any doubt? There he goes, in his cloak. It is — it is — — " — "Varney, by Heavens!" cried Tom Eccles.

"Surrender!" shouted Marchdale.

At the instant Sir Francis Varney sprang forward, and made off at a rapid pace across the meadows.

"Fire after him — fire!" cried Marchdale, "or he will escape. My pistol has missed fire. He will be off."

On the impulse of the moment, and thus urged by the voice and the gesture of his companion, Tom Eccles took aim as well as he could, and fired after the retreating form of Sir Francis Varney. His conscience smote him as he heard the report and saw the flash of the large pistol amid the half sort of darkness that was still around.

The effect of the shot was then to him painfully apparent. He saw Varney stop instantly; then make a vain attempt to stagger forward a little, and finally fall heavily to the earth, with all the appearance of one killed upon the spot.

"You have hit him," said Marchdale — "you have hit him. Bravo!" — "I have — hit him."

"Yes, a capital shot, by Jove!" — "I am very sorry."

"Sorry! sorry for ridding the world of such a being! What was in your pistol?" — "A couple of slugs."

"Well, they have made a lodgment in him, that's quite clear. Let's go up and finish him at once." — "He seems finished."

"I beg your pardon there. When the moonbeams fall upon him he'll get up and walk away as if nothing was the matter." — "Will he?" cried Tom, with animation — "will he?"

"Certainly he will." — "Thank God for that. Now, hark you, Mr. Marchdale: I should not have fired if you had not at the moment urged me to do so. Now, I shall stay and see if the effect which you talk of will ensue, and although it may convince me that he is a vampyre, and that there are such things, he may go off, scot free, for me."

"Go off?" — "Yes; I don't want to have even a vampyre's blood upon my hands."

"You are exceedingly delicate." — "Perhaps I am; it's my way, though. I have shot him — not you, mind; so, in a manner of speaking, he belongs to me. Now, mark you: I won't have him touched any more to-night, unless you think there's a chance of making a prisoner of him without violence."

"There he lies; you can go and make a prisoner of him at once, dead as he is; and if you take him out of the moonlight — "

"I understand; he won't recover." — "Certainly not."

"But, as I want him to recover, that don't suit me." — "Well, I cannot but honour your scruples, although I do not actually share in them; but I promise you that, since such is your wish, I will take no steps against the vampyre; but let us come up to him and see if he be really dead, or only badly wounded."

Tom Eccles hung back a little from this proposal; but upon being urged again by Marchdale, and told that he need not go closer than he chose, he consented, and the two of them approached the prostrate form of Sir Francis

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Varney, which lay upon its face in the faint moonlight, which each moment was gathering strength and power.

"He lies upon his face," said Marchdale. "Will you go and turn him over?" — "Who — I? God forbid I should touch him."

"Well — well, I will. Come on."

They halted within a couple of yards of the body. Tom Eccles would not go a step farther; so Marchdale advanced alone, and pretended to be, with great repugnance, examining for the wound.

"He is quite dead," he said; "but I cannot see the hurt." — "I think he turned his head as I fired."

"Did he? Let us see."

Marchdale lifted up the head, and disclosed such a mass of clotted-looking blood, that Tom Eccles at once took to his heels, nor stopped until he was nearly as far off as the ruins. Marchdale followed him more slowly, and when he came up to him, he said, —

"The slugs have taken effect on his face." — "I know it — I know it. Don't tell me."

"He looks horrible." — "And I am a murderer."

"Psha! You look upon this matter too seriously. Think of who and what he was, and then you will soon acquit yourself of being open to any such charge." — "I am bewildered, Mr. Marchdale, and cannot now know whether he be a vampyre or not. If he be not, I have murdered, most unjustifiably, a fellow-creature."

"Well, but if he be?" — "Why, even then I do not know but that I ought to consider myself as guilty. He is one of God's creatures if he were ten times a vampyre."

"Well, you really do take a serious view of the affair." — "Not more serious than it deserves."

"And what do you mean to do?" — "I shall remain here to await the result of what you tell me will ensue, if he be a real vampyre. Even now the moonbeams are full upon him, and each moment increasing in intensity. Think you he will recover?"

"I do indeed." — "Then here will I wait."

"Since that is your resolve, I will keep you company. We shall easily find some old stone in the ruins which will serve us for a seat, and there at leisure we can keep our eyes upon the dead body, and be able to observe if it make the least movement."

This plan was adopted, and they sat down just within the ruins, but in such a place that they had a full view of the dead body, as it appeared to be, of Sir Francis Varney, upon which the sweet moonbeams shone full and clear.

Tom Eccles related how he was incited to come upon his expedition, but he might have spared himself that trouble, as Marchdale had been in a retired corner of the inn parlour before he came to his appointment with Varney, and heard the business for the most part proposed.

Half-an-hour, certainly not more, might have elapsed; when suddenly Tom Eccles uttered an exclamation, partly of surprise and partly of terror, —

"He moves; he moves!" he cried. "Look at the vampyre's body."

Marchdale affected to look with an all-absorbing interest, and there was Sir Francis Varney, raising slowly one arm with the hand outstretched towards the moon, as if invoking that luminary to shed more of its beams upon him. Then the body moved slowly, like some one writhing in pain, and yet unable to move from the spot on which it lay. From the head to the foot, the whole frame seemed to be convulsed, and now and then as the ghastly object seemed to be gathering more strength, the limbs were thrown out with a rapid and a frightful looking violence.

It was truly to one, who might look upon it as a reality and no juggle, a frightful sight to see, and although Marchdale, of course, tolerably well preserved his equanimity, only now and then, for appearance sake, affecting to be wonderfully shocked, poor Tom Eccles was in such a state of horror and fright that he could not, if he would, have flown from the spot, so fascinated was he by the horrible spectacle.

This was a state of things which continued for many minutes, and then the body showed evident symptoms of so much returning animation, that it was about to rise from its gory bed and mingle once again with the living.

"Behold!" said Marchdale — "behold!" — "Heaven have mercy upon us!"

"It is as I said; the beams of the moon have revived the vampyre. You perceive now that there can be no doubt." — "Yes, yes, I see him; I see him."

Sir Francis Varney now, as if with a great struggle, rose to his feet, and looked up at the bright moon for some moments with such an air and manner that it would not have required any very great amount of imagination to

conceive that he was returning to it some sort of thanksgiving for the good that it had done to him.

He then seemed for some moments in a state of considerable indecision as to which way he should proceed. He turned around several times. Then he advanced a step or two towards the house, but apparently his resolution changed again, and casting his eyes upon the ruins, he at once made towards them.

This was too much for the philosophy as well as for the courage of Tom Eccles. It was all very well to look on at some distance, and observe the wonderful and inexplicable proceedings of the vampyre; but when he showed symptoms of making a nearer acquaintance, it was not to be borne.

"Why, he's coming here," said Tom. — "He seems so indeed," remarked Marchdale.

"Do you mean to stay?" — "I think I shall."

"You do, do you?" — "Yes, I should much like to question him, and as we are two to one I think we really can have nothing to fear."

"Do you? I'm altogether of a different opinion. A man who has more lives than a cat don't much mind at what odds he fights. You may stay if you like." — "You do not mean to say that you will desert me?"

"I don't see a bit how you call it deserting you; if we had come out together on this adventure, I would have stayed it out with you; but as we came separate and independent, we may as well go back so." — "Well, but — "

"Good morning," cried Tom, and he at once took to his heels towards the town, without staying to pay any attention to the remonstrances of Marchdale, who called after him in vain.

Sir Francis Varney, probably, had Tom Eccles not gone off so rapidly, would have yet taken another thought, and gone in another direction than that which led him to the ruins, and Tom, if he had had his senses fully about him, as well as all his powers of perception, would have seen that the progress of the vampyre was very slow, while he continued to converse with Marchdale, and that it was only when he went off at good speed that Sir Francis Varney likewise thought it prudent to do so.

"Is he much terrified?" said Varney, as he came up to Marchdale. — "Yes, most completely."

"This, then, will make a good story in the town." — "It will, indeed, and not a little enhance your reputation."

"Well, well; it don't much matter now; but if by terrifying people I can purchase for myself anything like immunity for the past, I shall be satisfied." — "I think you may now safely reckon that you have done so. This man who has fled with so much precipitation, had courage."

"Unquestionably." — "Or else he would have shrunk from coming here at all."

"True, but his courage and presence arose from his strong doubts as to the existence of such beings as vampyres." — "Yes, and now that he is convinced, his bravery has evaporated along with his doubts; and such a tale as he has now to tell, will be found sufficient to convert even the most sceptical in the town."

"I hope so." — "And yet it cannot much avail you."

"Not personally, but I must confess that I am not dead to all human passions, and I feel some desire of revenge against those dastards who by hundreds have hunted me, burnt down my house, and sought my destruction." — "That I do not wonder at."

"I would fain leave among them a legacy of fear. Such fear as shall haunt them and their children for years to come. I would wish that the name of Varney, the vampyre, should be a sound of terror for generations." — "It will be so."

"It shall." — "And now, then for a consideration of what is to be done with our prisoner. What is your resolve upon that point?"

"I have considered it while I was lying upon yon green sward waiting for the friendly moonbeams to fall upon my face, and it seems to me that there is no sort of resource but to — " — "Kill him?"

"No, no." — "What then?"

"To set him free." — "Nay, have you considered the immense hazard of doing so? Think again; I pray you think again. I am decidedly of opinion that he more than suspects who are his enemies; and in that case, you know what consequences would ensue; besides, have we not enough already to encounter? Why should we add another young, bold, determined spirit to the band which is already arrayed against us?"

"You talk in vain, Marchdale; I know to what it all tends; you have a strong desire for the death of this young man." — "No; there you wrong me. I have no desire for his death, for its own sake; but where great interests are at stake, there must be sacrifices made."

"So there must; therefore, I will make a sacrifice, and let this young prisoner free from his dungeon." — "If

such be your determination, I know well it is useless to combat with it. When do you purpose giving him his freedom?"

"I will not act so heedlessly as that your principles of caution shall blame me. I will attempt to get from him some promise that he will not make himself an active instrument against me. Perchance, too, as Bannerworth Hall, which he is sure to visit, wears such an air of desertion, I may be able to persuade him that the Bannerworth family, as well as his uncle, have left this part of the country altogether; so that, without making any inquiry for them about the neighbourhood, he may be induced to leave at once." — "That would be well."

"Good; your prudence approves of the plan, and therefore it shall be done." — "I am rather inclined to think" said Marchdale, with a slight tone of sarcasm, "that if my prudence did not approve of the plan, it would still be done."

"Most probably," said Varney, calmly. — "Will you release him tonight?"

"It is morning, now, and soon the soft grey light of day will tint the east. I do not think I will release him till sunset again now. Has he provision to last him until then?" — "He has."

"Well, then, two hours after sunset, I will come here and release him from his weary bondage, and now I must go to find some place in which to hide my proscribed head. As for Bannerworth Hall, I will yet have it in my power; I have sworn to do so, I will keep my oath." — "The accomplishment of our purpose, I regret to say, seems as far off as ever."

"Not so — not so. As I before remarked, we must disappear, for a time, so as to lull suspicion. There will then arise a period when Bannerworth Hall will neither be watched, as it is now, nor will it be inhabited, — a period before the Bannerworth family has made up its mind to go back to it, and when long watching without a result has become too tiresome to be continued at all; then we can at once pursue our object." — "Be it so."

"And now, Marchdale, I want more money." — "More money!"

"Yes; you know that I have had large demands of late." — "But I certainly had an impression that you were possessed, by the death of some one, with very ample means."

"Yes, but there is a means by which all is taken from me. I have no real resources but what are rapidly used up, so I must come upon you again." — "I have already completely crippled myself as regards money matters in this enterprise, and I do certainly hope that the fruits will not be far distant. If they be much longer delayed, I shall really not know what to do. However, come to the lodge where you have been staying, and then I will give you, to the extent of my ability, whatever sum you think your present exigencies require."

"Come on, then, at once. I would certainly, of course, rather leave this placed now, before daybreak. Come on, I say, come on."

Sir Francis Varney and Marchdale walked for some time in silence across the meadows. It was evident that there was not between these associates the very best of feelings. Marchdale was always smarting under an assumption of authority over him, on the part of Sir Francis Varney, while the latter scarcely cared to conceal any portion of the contempt with which he regarded his hypocritical companion.

Some very strong band of union, indeed, must surely bind these two strange persons together! It must be something of a more than common nature which induces Marchdale not only to obey the behests of his mysterious companion, but to supply him so readily with money as we perceive he promises to do.

And as regards Varney, the vampyre, he, too, must have some great object in view to induce him to run such a world of risk, and to take so much trouble as he was doing with the Bannerworth family.

What his object is, and what is the object of Marchdale, will, now that we have progressed so far in our story, soon appear, and then much that is perfectly inexplicable, will become clear and distinct, and we shall find that some strong human motives are at the bottom of it all.

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Chapter LXV. VARNEY'S VISIT TO THE DUNGEON OF THE LONELY PRISONER IN THE RUINS.

Evident it was that Marchdale was not near so scrupulous as Sir Francis Varney, in what he chose to do. He would, without hesitation, have sacrificed the life of that prisoner in the lonely dungeon, whom it would be an insult to the understanding of our readers, not to presume that they had, long ere this, established in their minds to be Charles Holland.

His own safety seemed to be the paramount consideration with Marchdale, and it was evident that he cared for nothing in comparison with that object.

It says much, however, for Sir Francis Varney, that he did not give in to such a blood-thirsty feeling, but rather chose to set the prisoner free, and run all the chances of the danger to which he might expose himself by such a course of conduct, than to insure safety, comparatively, by his destruction.

Sir Francis Varney is evidently a character of strangely mixed feelings. It is quite evident that he has some great object in view, which he wishes to accomplish almost at any risk; but it is equally evident, at the same time, that he wishes to do so with the least possible injury to others, or else he would never have behaved as he had done in his interview with the beautiful and persecuted Flora Bannerworth, or now suggested the idea of setting Charles Holland free from the dreary dungeon in which he had so long been confined.

We are always anxious and willing to give every one credit for the good that is in them; and, hence, we are pleased to find that Sir Francis Varney, despite his singular, and apparently preternatural capabilities, has something sufficiently human about his mind and feelings, to induce him to do as little injury as possible to others in the pursuit of his own objects.

Of the two, vampyre as he is, we prefer him much to the despicable and hypocritical Marchdale, who, under the pretence of being the friend of the Bannerworth family, would freely have inflicted upon them the most deadly injuries.

It was quite clear that he was most dreadfully disappointed that Sir Francis Varney, would not permit him to take the life of Charles Holland, and it was with a gloomy and dissatisfied air that he left the ruins to proceed towards the town, after what we may almost term the altercation he had had with Varney the vampyre upon that subject.

It must not be supposed that Sir Francis Varney, however, was blind to the danger which must inevitably accrue from permitting Charles Holland once more to obtain his liberty.

What the latter would be able to state would be more than sufficient to convince the Bannerworths, and all interested in their fortunes, that something was going on of a character, which, however supernatural as it might seem to be, still seemed to have some human and ordinary objects for its ends.

Sir Francis Varney thought over all this before he proceeded, according to his promise, to the dungeon of the prisoner; but it would seem as if there was considerable difficulty, even to an individual of his long practice in all kinds of chicanery and deceit, in arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, as to a means of making Charles Holland's release a matter of less danger to himself, than it would be likely to be, if, unfettered by obligation, he was at once set free.

At the solemn hour of midnight, while all was still, that is, to say, on the night succeeding the one, on which he had held the interview with Marchdale, we have recorded, Sir Francis Varney alone sought the silent ruins. He was attired, as usual, in his huge cloak, and, indeed, the chilly air of the evening warranted such protection against its numerous discomforts.

Had any one seen him, however, upon that evening, they would have observed an air of great doubt, and irresolution upon his brow, as if he were struggling with some impulses which he found it extremely difficult to restrain.

"I know well," he muttered, as he walked among the shadow of the ruins, "that Marchdale's reasoning is coldly and horribly correct, when he says that there is danger in setting this youth free; but, I am about to leave this place, and not to show myself for some time, and I cannot reconcile myself to inflicting upon him the horror of a death by starvation, which must ensue."

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It was a night of more than usual dullness, and, as Sir Francis Varney removed the massy stone, which hid the narrow and tortuous entrance to the dungeons, a chilly feeling crept over him, and he could not help supposing, that even then Marchdale might have played him false, and neglected to supply the prisoner food, according to his promise.

Hastily he descended to the dungeons, and with a step, which had in it far less of caution, than had usually characterised his proceedings, he proceeded onwards until he reached that particular dungeon, in which our young friend, to whom we wished so well, had been so long confined from the beautiful and cheering light of day, and from all that his heart's best affections most cling to.

"Speak," said Sir Francis Varney, as he entered the dungeon. "If the occupant of this dread place live, let him answer one who is as much his friend as he has been his enemy."

"I have no friend," said Charles Holland, faintly; "unless it be one who would come and restore me to liberty."

"And how know you that I am not he?"

"Your voice sounds like that of one of my persecutors. Why do you not place the climax of your injuries by at once taking away my life. I should be better pleased that you would do so, than that I should wear out the useless struggle of existence in so dreary and wretched an abode as this."

"Young man," said Sir Francis Varney, "I have come to you on a greater errand of mercy than, probably, you will ever give me credit for. There is one who would too readily have granted your present request, and who would at once have taken that life of which you profess to be so wearied; but which may yet present to you some of its sunniest and most beautiful aspects."

"Your tones are friendly," said Charles; "but yet I dread some new deception. That you are one of those who consigned me by stratagem, and by brute force, to this place of duration, I am well assured, and, therefore, any good that may be promised by you, presents itself to me in a very doubtful character."

"I cannot be surprised," said Sir Francis Varney, "at such sentiments arising from your lips; but, nevertheless, I am inclined to save you. You have been detained here because it was supposed by being so, a particular object would be best obtained by your absence. That object, however, has failed, notwithstanding, and I do not feel further inclined to protract your sufferings. Have you any guess as to the parties who have thus confined you?" — "I am unaccustomed to dissemble, and, therefore, I will say at once that I have a guess."

"In what way does it tend?" — "Against Sir Francis Varney, called the vampyre."

"Does it strike you that this may be a dangerous candour?" — "It may, or it may not be; I cannot help it. I know I am at the mercy of my foes, and I do not believe that anything I can say or do will make my situation worse or better."

"You are much mistaken there. In other hands than mine, it might make it much worse; but it happens to be one of my weaknesses, that I am charged with candour, and that I admire boldness of disposition." — "Indeed! and yet can behave in the manner you have done towards me."

"Yes. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy. I am the more encouraged to set you free, because, if I procure from you a promise, which I intend to attempt, I am inclined to believe that you will keep it." — "I shall assuredly keep whatever promise I may make. Propound your conditions, and if they be such as honour and honesty will permit me to accede to, I will do so willingly and at once. Heaven knows I am weary enough of this miserable imprisonment."

"Will you promise me then, if I set you free, not to mention your suspicions that it is to Sir Francis Varney you owe this ill turn, and not to attempt any act of revenge against him as a retaliation for it." — "I cannot promise so much as that. Freedom, indeed, would be a poor boon, if I were not permitted freely to converse of some of the circumstances connected with my captivity."

"You object?" — "I do to the former of your propositions, but not to the latter. I will promise not to go at all out of my way to execute any vengeance upon you; but I will not promise that I will not communicate the circumstances of my forced absence from them, to those friends whose opinion I so much value, and to return to whom is almost as dear to me as liberty itself."

Sir Francis Varney was silent for a few moments, and then he said, in a tone of deep solemnity, —

"There are ninety-nine persons out of a hundred who would take your life for the independence of your tongue; but I am as the hundredth one, who looks with a benevolent eye at your proceedings. Will you promise me, if I remove the fetters which now bind your limbs, that you will make no personal attack upon me; for I am

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weariness of personal contention, and I will have no disposition to endure it. Will you make me this promise?" — "I will."

Without another word, but trusting implicitly to the promise which had been given to him, Sir Francis Varney produced a small key from his pocket, and unlocked with it a padlock which confined the chains about the prisoner.

With ease, Charles Holland was then enabled to shake them off, and then, for the first time, for some weeks, he rose to his feet, and felt all the exquisite relief of being comparatively free from bondage.

"This is delightful indeed," he said.

"It is," said Sir Francis Varney — "it is but a foretaste of the happiness you will enjoy when you are entirely free. You see that I have trusted you."

"You have trusted me as you might trust me, and you perceive that I have kept my word."

"You have; and since you decline to make me the promise which I would fain have from you, to the effect that you would not mention me as one of the authors of your calamity, I must trust to your honour not to attempt revenge for what you have suffered."

"That I will promise. There can be but little difficulty to any generous mind in giving up such a feeling. In consequence of your sparing me what you might still further have inflicted, I will let the past rest, and as if it had never happened really to me; and speak of it to others, but as a circumstance which I wish not to revert to, but prefer should be buried in oblivion."

"It is well; and now I have a request to make of you, which, perhaps, you will consider the hardest of all."

"Name it. I feel myself bound to a considerable extent to comply with whatever you may demand of me, that is not contrary to honourable principle."

"Then it is this, that, comparatively free as you are, and in a condition, as you are, to assert your own freedom, you will not do so hastily, or for a considerable period; in fact, I wish and expect that you should wait yet awhile, until it shall suit me to say that it is my pleasure that you shall be free."

"That is, indeed, a hard condition to a man who feels, as you yourself remark, that he can assert his freedom. It is one which I have still a hope you will not persevere in."

"Nay, young man, I think that I have treated you with generosity, to make you feel that I am not the worst of foes you could have had. All I require of you is, that you should wait here for about an hour. It is now nearly one o'clock; will you wait until you hear it strike two before you actually make movement to leave this place?"

Charles Holland hesitated for some moments, and then he said, —

"Do not fancy that I am not one who appreciates the singular trust you have reposed in me; and, however repugnant to me it may be to remain here, a voluntary prisoner, I am inclined to do so, if it be but to convince you that the trust you have reposed in me is not in vain, and that I can behave with equal generosity to you as you can to me."

"Be it so," said Sir Francis Varney; "I shall leave you with a full reliance that you will keep your word; and now, farewell. When you think of me, fancy me rather one unfortunate than criminal, and tell yourself that even Varney the vampyre had some traits in his character, which, although they might not raise your esteem, at all events did not loudly call for your reprobation."

"I shall do so. Oh! Flora, Flora, I shall look upon you once again, after believing and thinking that I had bidden you a long and last adieu. My own beautiful Flora, it is joy indeed to think that I shall look upon that face again, which, to my perception, is full of all the majesty of loveliness."

Sir Francis Varney looked coldly on while Charles uttered this enthusiastic speech.

"Remember," he said, "till two o'clock;" and he walked towards the door of the dungeon. "You will have no difficulty in finding your way out of this place. Doubtless you already perceive the entrance by which I gained admission."

"Had I been free," said Charles, "and had the use of my limbs, I should, long ere this, have worked my way to life and liberty."

"'Tis well. Good night."

Varney walked from the place, and just closed the door behind him. With a slow and stately step he left the ruins, and Charles Holland found himself once more alone, but in a much more enviable condition than for many weeks he could have called his.
