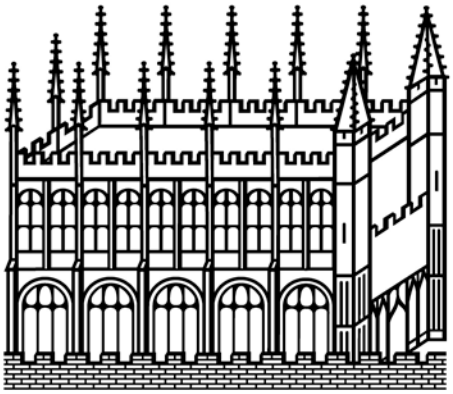

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Basil Netherby

A.C. Benson

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BASIL NETHERBY

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BY

A. C. BENSON

AUTHOR OF
"THE ISLES OF SUNSET," "WATERSPRINGS"
"THE HILL OF TROUBLE," ETC. ETC.

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BASIL NETHERBY

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It was five o'clock in the afternoon of an October day that Basil Netherby's letter arrived. I remember that my little clock had just given its warning click, when the footsteps came to my door; and just as the clock began to strike, came a hesitating knock. I called out, "Come in," and after some fumbling with the handle there stepped into the room I think the shyest clergyman I have ever seen. He shook hands like an automaton, looking over his left shoulder; he would not sit down, and yet he looked about the room, as he stood, as if wondering why the ordinary civility of a chair was not offered him; he spoke in a husky voice, out of which he endeavoured at intervals to cast some viscous obstruction by loud hawkings; and when, after one of these interludes, he caught my eye, he went a sudden pink in the face.

However, the letter got handed to me; and I gradually learnt from my visitor's incoherent talk that it was from my friend Basil Netherby; and that he was well, remarkably well, quite a different man from what he had been when he came to Treheale; that he himself (Vyvyan was his name) was curate of St. Sibby. Treheale was the name of the house where Mr. Netherby lived. The letter had been most important, he thought, for Mr. Netherby had asked him as he was going up to town to convey the letter himself and to deliver it without fail into Mr. Ward's own hands. He could not, however, account (here he turned away from me, and hummed, and beat his fingers on the table) for the extraordinary condition in which he was compelled to hand it me, as it had never, so far as he knew, left his own pocket; and presently with a gasp Mr. Vyvyan was gone, refusing all proffers of entertainment, and falling briskly down—to judge from the sounds which came to me—outside my door.

I, Leonard Ward, was then living in rooms in a little street out of Holborn—a poor place enough. I was organist of St. Bartholomew's, Holborn; and I was trying to do what is described as getting up a connection in the teaching line. But it was slow work, and I must confess that my prospects did not appear to me very cheerful. However, I taught one of the Vicar's little daughters, and a whole family, the children of a rich tradesman in a neighbouring street, the piano and singing, so that I contrived to struggle on.

Basil Netherby had been with me at the College of Music. His line was composing. He was a pleasant, retiring fellow, voluble enough and even rhetorical in tête-à-tête talk with an intimate; but dumb in company, with an odd streak of something—genius or eccentricity—about him which made him different from other men. We had drifted into an intimacy, and had indeed lodged together for some months. Netherby used to show me his

works—mostly short studies—and though I used to think that they always rather oddly broke down in unexpected places, and though he was inaccurate in technique, yet there was always an air of aiming high about them, an attempt to realise the ideal.

He left the College before I did, saying that he had learnt all he could learn and that now he must go quietly into the country somewhere and work all alone—he should do no good otherwise. I heard from him fitfully. He was in Wales, in Devonshire, in Cornwall; and then some three months before the day on which I got the letter, the correspondence had ceased altogether; I did not know his address, and was always expecting to hear from him.

I took up the letter from the place where Mr. Vyvyan had laid it down; it was a bulky envelope; and it was certainly true that, as Mr. Vyvyan had said, the packet was in an extraordinary condition. One of the corners was torn off, with a ragged edge that looked

like the nibbling of mice, and there were disagreeable stains both on the front and the back, so that I should have inferred that Mr. Vyvyan's pocket had been filled with raspberries—the theory, though improbable, did not appear impossible. But what surprised me most was that near each of the corners in front a rough cross of ink was drawn, and one at the back of the flap.

I had little doubt, however, that Mr. Vyvyan had, in a nervous and absent mood, harried the poor letter into the condition in which I saw it, and that he had been unable to bring himself to confess to the maltreatment.

I tore the letter open—there fell out several pages of MS. music, and a letter in which Basil, dating from "*Treheale,*" and writing in a bold firm hand—bolder and firmer, I thought, than of old—said that he had been making a good deal of progress and working very hard (which must account for his silence), and he ventured to enclose some of

his last work which he *hoped* I would like, but he wanted a candid opinion. He added that he had got quarters at a delightful farmhouse, not far from Grampound. That was all.

Stay! That was not all. The letter finished on the third side; but, as I closed it, I saw written on the fourth page, very small, in a weak loose hand, and as if scribbled in a ferocious haste, as a man might write (so it came oddly into my head) who was escaped for a moment from the vigilance of a careful gaoler, a single sentence. "Vyvyan will take this; and for God's sake, dear Leonard, if you would help a friend who is on the edge (I dare not say of what), come to me to-morrow, UNINVITED. You will think this very strange, but do not mind that—only come—*unannounced,* do you see. . . ."

The line broke off in an unintelligible flourish. Then on each corner of the last page had been scrawled a cross, with the same

ugly and slovenly haste as the crosses on the envelope.

My first thought was that Basil was mad; my next thought that he had drifted into some awkward situation, fallen under some unfortunate influence—was perhaps being blackmailed—and I knew his sensitive character well enough to feel sure that whatever the trouble was it would be exaggerated ten times over by his lively and apprehensive mind. Slowly a situation shaped itself. Basil was a man, as I knew, of an extraordinary austere standard of morals, singularly guileless, and innocent of worldly matters.

Someone, I augured, some unscrupulous woman, had, in the remote spot where he was living, taken a guileful fancy to my poor friend, and had doubtless, after veiled overtures, resolved on a bolder policy and was playing on his sensitive and timid nature by some threat of nameless disclosures, some vile and harrowing innuendo.

I read the letter again—and still more clear

did it seem to me that he was in some strange durance, and suffering under abominable fears. I rose from my chair and went to find a time-table, that I might see when I could get to Grampound, when again a shuffling footstep drew to my door, an uncertain hand knocked at the panel, and Mr. Vyvyan again entered the room. This time his confusion was even greater, if that were possible, than it had previously been. He had forgotten to give me a further message; and he thereupon gave me a filthy scrap of paper, nibbled and stained like the envelope, apologised with unnecessary vehemence, uttered a strangled cough and stumbled from the room.

It was difficult enough to decipher the paper, but I saw that a musical phrase had been written on it; and then in a moment I saw that it was a phrase from an old, extravagant work of Basil's own, a *Credo* which we had often discussed together, the grim and fantastic accompaniment of the sentence " He descended into hell."

This came to me as a message of even greater urgency, and I hesitated no longer. I sat down to write a note to the father of my family of pupils, in which I said that important business called me away for two or three days. I looked out a train, and found that by catching the 10 o'clock limited mail I could be at Grampound by 6 in the morning. I ordered a hasty dinner and I packed a few things into a bag, with an oppressive sense of haste. But, as generally happens on such occasions, I found that I had still two or three hours in hand; so I took up Netherby's music and read it through carefully.

Certainly he had improved wonderfully in handling; but what music it was! It was like nothing of which I had ever even dreamed. There was a wild, intemperate voluptuousness about it, a kind of evil relish of beauty which gave me a painful thrill. To make sure that I was not mistaken, owing to the nervous tension which the strange event

had produced in me, I put the things in my pocket and went out to the house of a friend, Dr. Grierson, an accomplished and critical musician who lived not far away.

I found the great man at home smoking leisurely. He had a bird-like demeanour, like an ancient stork, as he sat blinking through spectacles astride of a long pointed nose. He had a slight acquaintance with Netherby, and when I mentioned that I had received some new music from him, which I wished to submit to him, he showed obvious interest. "A promising fellow," he said, "only of course too transcendental." He took the music in his hand; he settled his spectacles and read. Presently he looked up; and I saw in the kind of shamefaced glance with which he regarded me that he had found something of the same incomprehensible sensuality which had so oddly affected myself in the music. "Come, come," he said rather severely, "this is very strange stuff—this won't do at all, you know. We must just hear

this!" He rose and went to his piano; and peering into the music, he played the pieces deliberately and critically.

Heard upon the piano, the accent of subtle evil that ran through the music became even more obvious. I seemed to struggle between two feelings—an overpowering admiration, and a sense of shame at my own capacity for admiring it. But the great man was still more moved. He broke off in the middle of a bar and tossed the music to me.

"This is filthy stuff," he said. "I should say to you—burn it. It is clever, of course —hideously, devilishly clever. Look at the interlacing of those parts there—look at that progression—F sharp against F natural, you observe" (and he added some technical details with which I need not trouble my readers).

He went on: "But the man has no business to think of such things. I don't like it. Tell him from me that it won't do. There must be some reticence in art, you know—and there

is none here. Tell Netherby that he is on the wrong tack altogether. Good heavens," he added, "how could the man write it? He used to be a decent sort of fellow."

It may seem extravagant to write thus of music, but I can only say that it affected me as nothing I had ever heard before. I put it away and we tried to talk of other things; but we could not get the stuff out of our heads. Presently I rose to go, and the Doctor reiterated his warnings still more emphatically. "The man is a criminal in art," he said, "and there must be an end once and for all of this: tell him it's abominable!"

I went back; caught my train; and was whirled sleepless and excited to the West. Towards morning I fell into a troubled sleep, in which I saw in tangled dreams the figure of a man running restlessly among stony hills. Over and over again the dream came to me; and it was with a grateful heart, though very weary, that I saw a pale light of dawn in the east, and the dark trees and copses along

the line becoming more and more defined, by swift gradations, in the chilly autumn air.

It was very still and peaceful when we drew up at Grampound station. I enquired my way to Treheale; and I was told it was three or four miles away. The porter looked rather enquiringly at me; there was no chance of obtaining a vehicle, so I resolved to walk, hoping that I should be freshened by the morning air.

Presently a lane struck off from the main road, which led up a wooded valley, with a swift stream rushing along; in one or two places the chimney of a deserted mine with desolate rubbish-heaps stood beside the road. At one place a square church-tower, with pinnacles, looked solemnly over the wood. The road rose gradually. At last I came to a little hamlet, perched high up on the side of the valley. The scene was incomparably beautiful; the leaves were yellowing fast, and I could see a succession of wooded ridges, with a long line of moorland closing the view.

The little place was just waking into quiet activity. I found a bustling man taking down shutters from a general shop which was also the post-office, and enquired where Mr. Netherby lived. The man told me that he was in lodgings at Treheale—"the big house itself, where Farmer Hall lives now; if you go straight along the road," he added, "you will pass the lodge, and Treheale lies up in the wood."

I was by this time very tired—it was now nearly seven—but I took up my bag again and walked along a road passing between high hedges. Presently the wood closed in again, and I saw a small plastered lodge with a thatched roof standing on the left among some firs. The gate stood wide open, and the road which led into the wood was grass-grown, though with deep ruts, along which heavy laden carts seemed to have passed recently.

The lodge seemed deserted, and I accordingly struck off into the wood. Presently the

undergrowth grew thicker, and huge sprawling laurels rose in all directions. Then the track took a sudden turn; and I saw straight in front of me the front of a large Georgian house of brown stone, with a gravel sweep up to the door, but all overgrown with grass.

I confess that the house displeased me strangely. It was substantial, homely, and large; but the wood came up close to it on all sides, and it seemed to stare at me with its shuttered windows with a look of dumb resentment, like a great creature at bay.

I walked on, and saw that the smoke went up from a chimney to the left. The house, as I came closer, presented a front with a stone portico, crowned with a pediment. To left and right were two wings which were built out in advance from the main part of the house, throwing the door back into the shadow.

I pulled a large handle which hung beside the door, and a dismal bell rang somewhere

in the house—rang on and on as if unable to cease; then footsteps came along the floor within, and the door was slowly and reluctantly unbarred.

There stood before me a little pale woman with a timid, downcast air. "Does Mr. Netherby live here?" I said.

"Yes; he lodges here, sir."

"Can I see him?" I said.

"Well, sir, he is not up yet. Does he expect you?"

"Well, not exactly," I said, faltering; "but he will know my name—and I have come a long way to see him."

The woman raised her eyes and looked at me, and I was aware, by some swift intuition, that I was in the presence of a distressed spirit, labouring under some melancholy prepossession.

"Will you be here long?" she asked suddenly.

"No," I said; "but I shall have to stay the night, I think. I travelled all last night,

and I am very tired; in fact I shall ask to sit down and wait till I can see Mr. Netherby."

She seemed to consider a moment, and then led me into the house. We entered a fine hall, with stone flags and pillars on each side. There hung, so far as I could see in the half-light, grim and faded portraits on the walls, and there were some indistinct pieces of furniture, like couched beasts, in the corners. We went through a door and down a passage and turned into a large rather bare room, which showed, however, some signs of human habitation. There was a table laid for a meal.

An old piano stood in a corner, and there were a few books lying about; on the walls hung large pictures in tarnished frames. I put down my bag, and sat down by the fire in an old armchair, and almost instantly fell into a drowse. I have an indistinct idea of the woman returning to ask if I would like some breakfast, or wait for Mr. Netherby. I said hastily that I would wait, being in the

oppressed condition of drowsiness when one's only idea is to get a respite from the presence of any person, and fell again into a heavy sleep.

I woke suddenly with a start, conscious of a movement in the room. Basil Netherby was standing close beside me, with his back to the fire, looking down at me with a look which I can only say seemed to me to betoken a deep annoyance of spirit. But seeing me awake, there came on to his face a smile of a reluctant and diplomatic kind. I started to my feet, giddy and bewildered, and shook hands.

"My word," he said, "you sleep sound, Ward. So you've found me out? Well, I'm very glad to see you; but what made you think of coming? and why didn't you let me know? I would have sent something to meet you."

I was a good deal nettled at this ungenial address, after the trouble to which I had put myself. I said, "Well, really, Basil, I think

that is rather strong. Mr. Vyvyan called on me yesterday with a letter from you, and some music; and of course I came away at once."

"Of course," he said, looking on the ground—and then added rather hastily, "Now, how did the stuff strike you? I have improved, I think. And it is really very good of you to come off at once to criticise the music—*very* good of you," he said with some emphasis; "and, man, you look wretchedly tired—let us have breakfast."

I was just about to remonstrate, and to speak about the postscript, when he looked at me suddenly with so peculiar and disagreeable a glance that the words literally stuck in my throat. I thought to myself that perhaps the subject was too painful to enter upon at once, and that he probably wished to tell me at his own time what was in the background.

We breakfasted; and now that I had leisure to look at Basil, I was surprised beyond

measure at the change in him. I had seen him last a pale, rather haggard youth, loose-limbed and untidy. I saw before me a strongly-built and firmly-knit man, with a ruddy colour and bronzed cheek. He looked the embodiment of health and well-being. His talk, too, after the first impression of surprise wore off, was extraordinarily cheerful and amusing. Again and again he broke out into loud laughter—not the laughter of an excited or hectic person, but the firm, brisk laugh of a man full to the brim of good spirits and health.

He talked of his work, of the country-people that surrounded him, whose peculiarities he seemed to have observed with much relish; he asked me, but without any appearance of interest, what I thought about his work. I tried to tell him what Dr. Grierson had said and what I had felt; but I was conscious of being at a strange disadvantage before this genial personality. He laughed loudly at our criticisms. "Old Grierson," he

said, "why, he is no better than a clergyman's widow; he would stop his ears if you read Shakespeare to him. My dear man, I have travelled a long way since I saw you last; I have found my tongue—and what is more, I can say what I mean, and as I mean it. Grierson indeed! I can see him looking shocked, like a pelican with a stomach-ache."

This was a felicitous though not a courteous description of our friend, but I could find no words to combat it; indeed, Basil's talk and whole bearing seemed to carry me away like a swift stream; and in my wearied condition I found that I could not stand up to this radiant personality.

After breakfast he advised me to have a good sleep; and he took me, with some show of solicitude, to a little bedroom which had been got ready for me. He unpacked my things and told me to undress and go to bed, that he had some work to do that he was anxious to finish, and that after luncheon we would have a stroll together.

I was too tired to resist, and fell at once into a deep sleep. I rose a new man; and finding no one in Basil's room, I strolled out for a moment on to the drive, and presently saw the odd and timid figure of Mrs. Hall coming along, in a big white flapping sort of sun-bonnet, with a basket in her hand. She came straight up to me in a curious, resolute sort of way, and it came into my mind that she had come out for the very purpose of meeting me.

I praised the beauty of the place, and said that I supposed she knew it well. "Yes," she said; adding that she was born in the village and her mother had been as a girl a servant at Treheale. But she went on to tell me that she and her husband had lived till recently at a farm down in the valley, and had only been a year or so in the house itself. Old Mr. Heale, the last owner, had died three or four years before, and it had proved impossible to let the house. It seemed that when the trustees gave up all idea of being

able to get a tenant, they had offered it to the Halls at a nominal rent, to act as caretakers. She spoke in a cheerless way, with her eyes cast down and with the same strained look as of one carrying a heavy burden. "You will have heard of Mr. Heale, perhaps?" she said with a sudden look at me.

"No," I said; "I know nothing about the place. Who was Mr. Heale?"

"The old Squire, sir," she said; "but I think people here are unfair to him. He lived a wild life enough, but he was a kind gentleman in his way—and I have often thought it was not his fault altogether. He married soon after he came into the estate—a Miss Tregaskis from down to St. Erne—and they were very happy for a little; but she died after they had been married a couple of years, and they had no child; and then I think Mr. Heale went nearly mad—nothing went right after that. Mr. Heale shut himself up a good deal among his books—he was a very clever

gentleman—and then he got into bad ways; but it was the sorrow in his heart that made him bad—and we must not blame people too much, must we?" She looked at me with rather a pitiful look.

"You mean," I said, "that he tried to forget his grief, and did not choose the best way to do it."

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Hall simply. "I think he blamed God for taking away what he loved, instead of trusting Him; and no good comes of that. The people here got to hate him—he used to spoil the young people, sir—you know what I mean—and they were afraid of seeing him about their houses. I remember, sir, as if it were yesterday, seeing him in the lane to St. Sibby. He was marching along, very upright, with his white hair—it went white early—and he passed old Mr. Miles, the churchwarden, who had been a wild young man too, but he found religion with the Wesleyans, and after that was very hard on everyone.

"It was the first time they had met since Mr. Miles had become serious; and Mr. Heale stopped in his pleasant way, and held out his hand to Mr. Miles; who put his hands behind him and said something—I was close to them—which I could not quite catch, but it was about fellowship with the works of darkness; and then Mr. Miles turned and went on his way; and Mr. Heale stood looking after him with a curious smile on his face—and I have pitied him ever since. Then he turned and saw me; he always took notice of me—I was a girl then; and he said to me,

"'There, Mary, you see that. I am not good enough, it seems, for Mr. Miles. Well, I don't blame him; but remember, child, that the religion which makes a man turn his back on an old friend is not a good religion'; but I could see he was distressed, though he spoke quietly—and as I went on he gave a sigh which somehow stays in my mind. Perhaps, sir, you would like to look at his picture; he

was painted at the same time as Mrs. Heale in the first year of their marriage."

I said I should like to see it, and we turned to the house. She led me to a little room that seemed like a study. There was a big bookcase full of books, mostly of a scientific kind; and there was a large kneehole table much dotted with inkspots. "It was here," she said, "he used to work, hour after hour." On the wall hung a pair of pictures—one, that of a young woman, hardly more than a girl, with a delightful expression, both beautiful and good. She was dressed in some white material, and there was a glimpse of sunlit fields beyond.

Then I turned to the portrait of Mr. Heale. It represented a young man in a claret-coloured coat, very slim and upright. It showed a face of great power, a big forehead, clear-cut features, and a determined chin, with extraordinarily bright large eyes; evidently the portrait of a man of great physical and mental force, who would do whatever he took

in hand with all his might. It was very finely painted, with a dark background of woods against a stormy sky.

I was immensely struck by the picture; and not less by the fact that there was an extraordinary though indefinable likeness to Mrs. Hall herself. I felt somehow that she perceived that I had noticed this, for she made as though to leave the room. I could not help the inference that I was compelled to draw. I lingered for a moment looking at the portrait, which was so lifelike as to give an almost painful sense of the presence of a third person in the room. But Mrs. Hall went out, and I understood that I was meant to follow her.

She led the way into their own sitting-room, and then with some agitation she turned to me. "I understand that you are an old friend of Mr. Netherby's, sir," she said.

"Yes," I said; "he is my greatest friend."

"Could you persuade him, sir, to leave this

place?" she went on. "You will think it a strange thing to say—and I am glad enough to have a lodger, and I like Mr. Netherby—but do you think it is a good thing for a young gentleman to live so much alone?"

I saw that nothing was to be gained by reticence, so I said, "Now, Mrs. Hall, I think we had better speak plainly. I am, I confess, anxious about Mr. Netherby. I don't mean that he is not well, for I have never seen him look better; but I think that there is something going on which I don't wholly understand."

She looked at me suddenly with a quick look, and then, as if deciding that I was to be trusted, she said in a low voice, "Yes, sir, that is it; this house is not like other houses. Mr. Heale—how shall I say it?—was a very determined gentleman, and he used to say that he never would leave the house—and—you will think it very strange that I should speak thus to a stranger—I don't think he has left it."

We stood for a moment silent, and I knew that she had spoken the truth. While we thus stood, I can only say what I felt—I became aware that we were not alone; the sun was bright on the woods outside, the clock ticked peacefully in a corner, but there was something unseen all about us which lay very heavily on my mind. Mrs. Hall put out her hands in a deprecating way, and then said in a low and hurried voice, "He would do no harm to me, sir—we are too near for that" —she looked up at me, and I nodded; "but I can't help it, can I, if he is different with other people? Now, Mr. Hall is not like that, sir—he is a plain good man, and would think what I am saying no better than madness; but as sure as there is a God in Heaven, Mr. Heale is *here*—and though he is too fine a gentleman to take advantage of my talk, yet he liked to command other people, and went his own way too much."

While she spoke, the sense of oppression which I had felt a moment before drew off

all of a sudden; and it seemed again as though we were alone.

"Mrs. Hall," I said, "you are a good woman; these things are very dark to me, and though I have heard of such things in stories, I never expected to meet them in the world. But I will try what I can do to get my friend away, though he is a wilful fellow, and I think he will go his own way too." While I spoke I heard Basil's voice outside calling me, and I took Mrs. Hall's hand in my own. She pressed it, and gave me a very kind, sad look. And so I went out.

We lunched together, Basil and I, off simple fare; he pointed with an air of satisfaction to a score which he had brought into the room, written out with wonderful precision. "Just finished," he said, "and you shall hear it later on; but now we will go and look round the place. Was there ever such luck as to get a harbourage like this? I have been here two months and feel like staying

for ever. The place is in Chancery. Old Heale of Treheale, the last of his stock—a rare old blackguard—died here. They tried to let the house, and failed, and put Farmer Hall in at last. The whole place belongs to a girl ten years old. It is a fine house—we will look at that to-morrow; but to-day we will walk round outside. By the way, how long can you stay?"

"I must get back on Friday at latest," I said. "I have a choir practice and a lesson on Saturday."

Basil looked at me with a good-natured smile. "A pretty poor business, isn't it?" he said. "I would rather pick oakum myself. Here I live in a fine house, for next to nothing, and write, write, write—there's a life for a man."

"Don't you find it lonely?" said I.

"Lonely?" said Basil, laughing loud. "Not a bit of it. What do I want with a pack of twaddlers all about me? I tread a path among the stars—and I have the best

of company, too." He stopped and broke off suddenly.

"I shouldn't have thought Mrs. Hall very enlivening company," I said. "By the way, what an odd-looking woman! She seems as if she were frightened."

At that innocent remark Basil looked at me suddenly with the same expression of indefinable anger that I had seen in his face at our first meeting; but he said nothing for a moment. Then he resumed: "No, I want no company but myself and my thoughts. I tell you, Ward, if you had done as I have done, opened a door into the very treasure-house of music, and had only just to step in and carry away as much as one can manage at a time, you wouldn't want company."

I could make no reply to this strange talk; and he presently took me out. I was astonished at the beauty of the place. The ground fell sharply at the back, and there was a terrace with a view over a little valley, with

pasture-fields at the bottom, crowned with low woods—beyond, a wide prospect over uplands, which lost themselves in the haze. The day was still and clear; and we could hear the running of the stream below, the cooing of doves and the tinkling of a sheep-bell. To the left of the house lay large stables and barns, which were in the possession of the farmer.

We wandered up and down by paths and lanes, sometimes through the yellowing woods, sometimes on open ground, the most perfect views bursting upon us on every side, everything lying in a rich still peace, which came upon my tired and bewildered mind like soft music.

In the course of our walk we suddenly came upon a churchyard surrounded by a low wall; at the farther end, beyond the graves, stood a small church consisting of two aisles, with a high perpendicular tower. "St. Sibby," said Basil, "whether he or she I know not, but no doubt a very estimable person. You

would like to look at this? The church is generally open."

We went up a gravel path and entered the porch; the door was open, and there was an odd, close smell in the building. It was a very plain place, with the remains of a rood-loft, and some ancient woodwork; but the walls were mildewed and green and the place looked neglected.

"Vyvyan is a good fellow," said Basil, looking round, "but he is single-handed here; the Rector is an invalid and lives at Penzance, and Vyvyan has a wretched stipend. Look here, Leonard; here is the old Heale vault." He led me into a little chapel near the tower, which opened on to the church by a single arch. The place was very dark; but I could see a monument or two of an ancient type and some brasses. There were a couple of helmets on iron supports and the remains of a mouldering banner. But just opposite to us was a tall modern marble monument on the wall. "That is old Heale's monument,"

said Basil, "with a long, pious inscription by the old rector. Just look at it—did you ever see such vandalism?"

I drew near—then I saw that the monument had been defaced in a hideous and horrible way. There were deep dints in the marble, like the marks of a hammer; and there were red stains over the inscription, which reminded me in a dreadful way of the stains on the letter given me by Vyvyan.

"Good Heavens!" I said, "what inconceivable brutality! Who on earth did this?"

"That's just what no one can find out," said Basil, smiling. "But the inscription was rather too much, I confess—look at this: '*who discharged in an exemplary way the duties of a landowner and a Christian.*' Old Heale's idea of the duties of a landowner was to screw as much as he could out of his farmers—and he had, moreover, some old ideas, which we may call feudal, about his relations with the more attractive of his

tenants: he was a cheerful old boy—and as to the Christian part of it, well, he had about as much of that, I gather, as you take up on a two-pronged fork. Still, they might have left the old man alone. I daresay he sleeps sound enough in spite of it all." He stamped his foot on the pavement as he did so, which returned a hollow sound. "Are you inside?" said Basil, laughingly; "perhaps not at home?"

"Don't talk like that," I said to Basil, whose levity seemed to me disgusting.

"Certainly not, my boy," he said, "if you don't like it. I daresay the old man can look after himself." And so we left the church.

We returned home about four o'clock. Basil left me on the terrace and went into the house to interview Mrs. Hall on the subject of dinner. I hung for a time over the balustrade, but, getting chilly and still not feeling inclined to go in, I strolled to the farther end of the terrace, which ran up to the wood. On reaching the end, I found a stone seat;

and behind it, between two yews, a little dark sinister path led into the copse.

I do not know exactly what feeling it was which drew me to enter upon the exploration of the place; the path was slippery and overgrown with moss, and the air of the shrubbery into which it led was close and moist, full of the breath of rotting leaves. The path ran with snakelike windings, so that at no point was it possible to see more than a few feet ahead. Above, the close boughs held hands as if to screen the path from the light. Then the path suddenly took a turn to the left and went straight to the house.

Two yews flanked the way and a small flight of granite steps, slimy and mildewed, led up to a little door in the corner of the house—a door which had been painted brown, like the colour of the stone, and which was let into its frame so as to be flush with the wall. The upper part of it was pierced with a couple of apertures like eyes filled with glass to give light to the passage within. The steps

had evidently not been trodden for many months, even years; but upon the door, near the keyhole, were odd marks looking as if scratched by the hoofs of some beast—a goat, I thought—as if the door had been impatiently struck by something awaiting entrance there.

I do not know what was the obsession which fell on me at the sight of this place. A cold dismay seemed to spring from the dark and clutch me; there are places which seem so soaked, as it were, in malign memories that they give out a kind of spiritual aroma of evil. I have seen in my life things which might naturally seem to produce in the mind associations of terror and gloom. I have seen men die; I have seen a man writhe in pain on the ground from a mortal injury; but I never experienced anything like the thrill of horror which passed through my shuddering mind at the sight of the little door with its dark eye-holes.

I went in chilly haste down the path and

came out upon the terrace, looking out over the peaceful woods. The sun was now setting in the west among cloud-fiords and bays of rosy light. But the thought of the dark path lying like a snake among the thickets dwelt in my mind and poisoned all my senses.

Presently I heard the voice of Basil call me cheerfully from the corner of the house. We went in. A simple meal was spread for us, half tea, half dinner, to which we did full justice. But afterwards, though Basil was fuller than ever, so it seemed to me, of talk and laughter, I was seized with so extreme a fatigue that I drowsed off several times in the course of our talk, till at last he laughingly ordered me to bed.

I slept profoundly. When I awoke, it was bright day. My curtains had been drawn, and the materials for my toilette arranged while I still slept. I dressed hastily and hurried down, to find Basil awaiting me.

That morning we gave up to exploring the house. It was a fine old place, full from end

to end of the evidences of long and ancestral habitation. The place was full of portraits. There was a great old dining-room—Basil had had the whole house unshuttered for my inspection—a couple of large drawing-rooms, long passages, bedrooms, all full of ancient furniture and pictures, as if the family life had been suddenly suspended. I noticed that he did not take me to the study, but led me upstairs.

"This is my room," said Basil suddenly; and we turned into a big room in the left-hand corner of the garden-front. There was a big fourpost bedroom here, a large table in the window, a sofa, and some fine chairs. But what at once attracted my observation was a low door in the corner of the room, half hidden by a screen. It seemed to me, as if by a sudden gleam of perception, that this door must communicate with the door I had seen below; and presently, while I stood looking out of the great window upon the valley, I said to Basil, "And that door in the corner

—does that communicate with the little door in the wood?"

When I said this, Basil was standing by the table, bending over some MSS. He suddenly turned to me and gave me a very long, penetrating look; and then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, said, "My dear Ward, you are a very observant fellow—yes, there is a little staircase there that goes down into the shrubbery and leads to the terrace. You remember that old Mr. Heale of whom I told you—well, he had this room, and he had visitors at times whom I daresay it was not convenient to admit to the house; they came and went this way; and he too, no doubt, used the stairs to leave the house and return unseen."

"How curious!" I said. "I confess I should not care to have this room—I did not like the look of the shrubbery door."

"Well," said Basil, "I do not feel with you; to me it is rather agreeable to have the association of the room. He was a loose old

fish, no doubt, but he lived his life, and I expect enjoyed it, and that is more than most of us can claim."

As he said the words he crossed the room, and opening the little door, he said, "Come and look down—it is a simple place enough."

I went across the room, and looking in, saw a small flight of stairs going down into the dark; at the end of which the two square panes of the little shrubbery door were outlined in the shadow.

I cannot account for what happened next: there was a sound in the passage, and something seemed to rush up the stairs and past me; a strange, dull smell came from the passage; I know that there fell on me a sort of giddiness and horror, and I went back into the room with hands outstretched, like Elymas the sorcerer, seeking someone to guide me. Looking up, I saw Basil regarding me with a baleful look and a strange smile on his face.

"What was that?" I said. "Surely some-

thing came up there . . . I don't know what it was."

There was a silence; then, "My dear Ward," said Basil, "you are behaving very oddly—one would think you had seen a ghost." He looked at me with a sort of gleeful triumph, like a man showing the advantages of a house or the beauties of a view to an astonished friend. But again I could find no words to express my sense of what I had experienced. Basil went swiftly to the door and shut it, and then said to me with a certain sternness, "Come, we have been here long enough—let us go on. I am afraid I am boring you."

We went downstairs; and the rest of the morning passed, so far as I can remember, in a species of fitful talk. I was endeavouring to recover from the events of the morning; and Basil—well, he seemed to me like a man who was fencing with some difficult question. Though his talk seemed spontaneous, I felt somehow that it was that of a

weak antagonist endeavouring to parry the strokes of a persistent assailant.

After luncheon Basil proposed a walk again. We went out on a long ramble, as we had done the previous day; but I remember little of what passed. He directed upon me a stream of indifferent talk, but I laboured, I think, under a heavy depression of spirit, and my conversation was held up merely as it might have been as a shield against the insistent demands of my companion. Anyone who has been through a similar experience in which he wrestles with some tragic fact, and endeavours merely to meet and answer the sprightly suggestions of some cheerful companion, can imagine what I felt. At last the evening began to close in; we retraced our steps: Basil told me that we should dine at an early hour, and I was left alone in my own room.

I became the prey of the most distressing and poignant reflections. What I had experienced convinced me that there was some-

thing about the whole place that was uncanny and abnormal. The attitude of my companion, his very geniality, seemed to me to be forced and unnatural; and my only idea was to gain, if I could, some notion of how I should proceed. I felt that questions were useless, and I committed myself to the hands of Providence. I felt that here was a situation that I could not deal with and that I must leave it in stronger hands than my own. This reflection brought me some transitory comfort, and when I heard Basil's voice calling me to dinner, I felt that sooner or later the conflict would have to be fought out, and that I could not myself precipitate matters.

After dinner Basil for the first time showed some signs of fatigue, and after a little conversation he sank back in a chair, lit a cigar, and presently asked me to play something.

I went to the piano, still, I must confess, seeking for some possible opportunity of

speech, and let my fingers stray as they moved along the keys. For a time I extemporised and then fell into some familiar music. I do not know whether the instinctive thought of what he had scrawled upon his note to me influenced me, but I began to play Mendelssohn's anthem *Hear my prayer.* While I played the initial phrase, I became aware that some change was making itself felt in my companion; and I had hardly come to the end of the second phrase when a sound from Basil made me turn round.

I do not think that I ever received so painful a shock in my life as that which I experienced at the sight that met my eyes. Basil was still in the chair where he had seated himself, but instead of the robust personality which he had presented to me during our early interviews, I saw in a sudden flash the Basil that I knew, only infinitely more tired and haggard than I had known him in life. He was like a man who had cast aside a mask, and had suddenly appeared in his own part. He

sat before me as I had often seen him sit, leaning forward in an intensity of emotion. I stopped suddenly, wheeled round in my chair, and said, " Basil, tell me what has happened."

He looked at me, cast an agitated glance round the room—and then all on a sudden began to speak in a voice that was familiar to me of old.

What he said is hardly for me to recount. But he led me step by step through a story so dark in horrors that I can hardly bring myself to reproduce it here. Imagine an untainted spirit, entering cheerfully upon some simple entourage, finding himself little by little within the net of some overpowering influence of evil.

He told me that he had settled at Treheale in his normal frame of mind. That he had intended to tell me of his whereabouts, but that there had gradually stolen into his mind a sort of unholy influence. " At first," he said, " I resisted it," but it was accompanied

by so extraordinary an access of mental power and vigour that he had accepted the conditions under which he found himself. I had better perhaps try to recount his own experience.

He had come to Grampound in the course of his wanderings and had enquired about lodgings. He had been referred to the farmer at Treheale. He had settled himself there, only congratulating himself upon the mixture of quiet and dignity which surrounded him. He had arranged his life for tranquil study, had chosen his rooms, and had made the best disposition he could of his affairs.

"The second night," he said, "that I was here, I had gone to bed thinking of nothing but my music. I had extinguished my light and was lying quietly in bed watching the expiring glimmer of the embers on my hearth. I was wondering, as one does, weaving all kinds of fancies about the house and the room in which I found myself, lying with my head

on my hand, when I saw, to my intense astonishment, the little door in the corner of the bedroom half open and close again.

"I thought to myself that it was probably Mrs. Hall coming to see whether I was comfortable, and I thereupon said, 'Who is there?' There was no sound in answer, but presently, a moment or two after, there followed a disagreeable laughter, I thought from the lower regions of the house in the direction of the corner. 'Come in, whoever you are,' I said; and in a moment the door opened and closed, and I became aware that there was someone in the room.

"Further than that," said Basil to me in that dreadful hour, "it is impossible to go. I can only say that I became aware in a moment of the existence of a world outside of and intertwined with our own; a world of far stronger influences and powers—how far-reaching I know not—but I know this, that all the mortal difficulties and dilemmas that I had hitherto been obliged to meet melted

away in the face of a force to which I had hitherto been a stranger."

The dreadful recital ended about midnight; and the strange part was to me that our positions seemed in some fearful manner to have been now reversed. Basil was now the shrinking, timorous creature, who only could implore me not to leave him. It was in such a mood as this that he had written the letter. I asked him what there was to fear. "Everything," he said with a shocking look. He would not go to bed; he would not allow me to leave the room.

Step by step I unravelled the story, which his incoherent statement had only hinted at. His first emotion had been that of intense fright; but he became aware almost at once that the spirit who thus so unmistakably came to him was not inimical to him; the very features of the being—if such a word can be used about so shadowy a thing—appeared to wear a smile. Little by little the presence of the visitant had become habitual to Basil:

there was a certain pride in his own fearlessness, which helped him.

Then there was intense and eager curiosity; "and then, too," said the unhappy man, "the influence began to affect me in other ways. I will not tell you how, but the very necessaries of life were provided for me in a manner which I should formerly have contemned with the utmost scorn, but which now I was given confidence to disregard. The dejection, the languorous reflections which used to hang about me, gradually drew off and left me cheerful, vigorous, and, I must say it, delighting in evil imaginations; but so subtle was the evil influence, that it was not into any gross corruption or flagrant deeds that I flung myself; it was into my music that the poison flowed.

"I do not, of course, mean that evil then appeared to me, as I can humbly say it does now, *as* evil, but rather as a vision of perfect beauty, glorifying every natural function and every corporeal desire. The springs of music

rose clear and strong within me, and with the fountain I mingled from my own stores the subtle venom of the corrupted mind. How glorious, I thought, to sway as with a magic wand the souls of men; to interpret for each all the eager and leaping desires which maybe he had dully and dutifully controlled. To make all things fair—for so potent were the whispers of the spirit that talked at my ear that I believed in my heart that all that was natural in man was also permissible and even beautiful, and that it was nothing but a fantastic asceticism that forbids it; though now I see, as I saw before, that the evil that thwarts mankind is but the slime of the pit out of which he is but gradually extricating himself."

"But what *is* the thing," I said, "of which you speak? Is it a spirit of evil, or a human spirit, or what?"

"Good God!" he said, "how can I tell?" and then with lifted hand he sang in a strange voice a bar or two from Stanford's *Revenge*.

"Was he devil or man? he was devil for aught they knew."

This dreadful interlude, the very flippancy of it, that might have moved my laughter at any other time, had upon me an indescribably sickening effect. I stared at Basil. He relapsed into a moody silence with clasped hands and knotted brow. To draw him away from the nether darkness of his thoughts, I asked him how and in what shape the spirit had made itself plain to him.

"Oh, no shape at all," said he; "he is *there,* that is enough. I seem sometimes to see a face, to catch the glance of an eye, to see a hand raised to warn or to encourage; but it is all impossibly remote; I could never explain to you *how* I see him."

"Do you see him now?" I asked.

"Yes," said Basil, "a long way off—and he is running swiftly to me, but he has far to go yet. He is angry; he threatens me; he beats the air with his hands."

"But *where* is this?" I asked, for Basil's eyes were upon the ground.

"Oh, for God's sake, man, be silent," said Basil. "It is in the region of which you and others know little; but it has been revealed to me. It lies all about us—it has its capes and shadowy peaks, and a leaden sea, full of sound; it is there that I ramble with him."

There fell a silence between us. Then I said, "But, dear Basil, I must ask you this —how was it that you wrote as you did to me?"

"Oh! he made me write," he said, "and I think he over-reached himself—or my angel, that beholds the Father's face, smote him down. I was myself again on a sudden, the miserable and abject wretch whom you see before you, and knowing that I had been as a man in a dream. Then I wrote the despairing words, and guarded the letter so that he could not come near me; and then Mr. Vyvyan's visit to me—that was not by chance. I gave him the letter and he promised to bear

it faithfully—and what attempts were made to tear it from him I do not know; but that my adversary tried his best I do not doubt. But Vyvyan is a good man and could not be harmed.

"And then I fell back into the old spell; and worked still more abundantly and diligently and produced this—this accursed thing which shall not live to scatter evil abroad." As he said these words he rose, and tore the score that lay on the table into shreds and crammed the pieces in the fire. As he thrust the last pieces down, the poker he was holding fell from his hands.

I saw him white as a sheet, and trembling. "What is the matter?" I said.

He turned a terrible look on me, and said, "He is here—he has arrived."

Then all at once I was aware that there was a sort of darkness in the room; and then with a growing horror I gradually perceived that in and through the room there ran a thing like the front of a precipice, with some

dark strand at its foot on which beat a surge of phantom waves. The two scenes struggled together. At one time I could plainly see the cliff-front, close beside me—and then the lamp and the firelit room was all dimmed even to vanishing; and then suddenly the room would come back and the cliff die into a steep shadow.

But in either of the scenes Basil and I were there—he standing irresolute and despairing, glancing from side to side like a hare when the hounds close in. And once he said—this was when the cliff loomed up suddenly—"There are others with him." Then in a moment it seemed as if the room in which we sat died away altogether and I was in that other place; there was a faint light as from under a stormy sky; and a little farther up the strand there stood a group of dark figures, which seemed to consult together.

All at once the group broke and came suddenly towards us. I do not know what to call them; they were human in a sense—that

is, they walked upright and had heads and hands. But the faces were all blurred and fretted, like half-rotted skulls—but there was no sense of comparison in me. I only knew that I had seen ugliness and corruption at the very source, and looked into the darkness of the pit itself.

The forms eluded me and rushed upon Basil, who made a motion as though to seize hold of me, and then turned and fled, his arms outstretched, glancing behind him as he ran—and in a moment he was lost to view, though I could see along the shore of that formless sea something like a pursuit.

I do not know what happened after that. I think I tried to pray; but I presently became aware that I was myself menaced by danger. It seemed—but I speak in parables—as though one had separated himself from the rest and had returned to seek me. But all was over, I knew; and the figure indeed carried something which he swung and shook in his hand, which I thought was a token to

be shown to me. And then I found my voice and cried out with all my strength to God to save me; and in a moment there was the fire-lit room again, and the lamp—the most peaceful-looking room in England.

But Basil had left me; the door was wide open; and in a moment the farmer and his wife came hurrying along with blanched faces to ask who it was that had cried out, and what had happened.

I made some pitiful excuse that I had dozed in my chair and had awoke crying out some unintelligible words. For in the quest I was about to engage in I did not wish that any mortal should be with me.

They left me, asking for Mr. Netherby and still not satisfied. Indeed, Mrs. Hall looked at me with so penetrating a look that I felt that she understood something of what had happened. And then at once I went up to Basil's room. I do not know where I found the courage to do it; but the courage came.

The room was dark, and a strong wind was blowing through it from the little door. I stepped across the room, feeling my way; went down the stairs, and finding the door open at the bottom, I went out into the snake-like path.

I went some yards along it; the moon had risen now. There came a sudden gap in the trees to the left, through which I could see the pale fields and the corner of the wood casting its black shadow on the ground.

The shrubs were torn, broken, and trampled, as though some heavy thing had crashed through. I made my way cautiously down, endowed with a more than human strength—it was a steep bank covered with trees—and then in a moment I saw Basil.

He lay some distance out in the field on his face. I knew at a glance that all was over; and when I lifted him I became aware that he was in some way strangely mangled,

and indeed it was found afterwards that though the skin of his body was hardly contused, yet that almost every bone of the body was broken in fragments.

I managed to carry him to the house. I closed the doors of the staircase; and then I managed to tell Farmer Hall that Basil had had, I thought, a fall and was dead. And then my own strength failed me, and for three days and nights I lay in a kind of stupor.

When I recovered my consciousness, I found myself in bed in my own room. Mrs. Hall nursed me with a motherly care and tenderness which moved me very greatly; but I could not speak of the matter to her, until, just before my departure, she came in, as she did twenty times a day, to see if I wanted anything. I made a great effort and said, " Mrs. Hall, I am very sorry for you. This has been a terrible business, and I am afraid you won't easily forget it. You ought to leave the house, I think."

Mrs. Hall turned her frozen gaze upon me, and said, "Yes, sir, indeed, I can't speak about it or think of it. I feel as if I might have prevented it; and yet I have been over and over it in my mind and I can't see where I was wrong. But my duty is to the house now, and I shall never leave it; but I will ask you, sir, to try and find a thought of pity in your heart for *him*"—I knew she did not mean Basil—"I don't think he clearly knows what he has done; he must have his will, as he always did. He stopped at nothing if it was for his pleasure; and he did not know what harm he did. But he is in God's hands; and though I cannot understand why, yet there are things in this life which He allows to be; and we must not try to be judges—we must try to be merciful. But I have not done what I could have done; and if God gives me strength, there shall be an end of this."

A few hours later Mr. Vyvyan called to see me; he was a very different person to the

Vyvyan that had showed himself to me in Holborn.

I could not talk much with him; but I could see that he had some understanding of the case. He asked me no questions, but he told me a few details. He said that they had decided at the inquest that he had fallen from the terrace. But the doctor, who was attending me, seems to have said to Mr. Vyvyan that a fall it must have been, but a fall of an almost inconceivable character. "And what is more," the old doctor had added, "the man was neither in pain nor agitation of mind when he died." The face was absolutely peaceful and tranquil; and the doctor's theory was that he had died from some sudden seizure before the fall.

And so I held my tongue. One thing I did: it was to have a little slab put over the body of my friend—a simple slab with name and date—and I ventured to add one line, because I have no doubt in my own mind that Basil was suddenly delivered, though not

from death. He had, I supposed, gone too far upon the dark path, and he could not, I think, have freed himself from the spell; and so the cord was loosed, but loosed in mercy—and so I made them add the words:

"And in their hands they shall bear thee up."

I must add one further word. About a year after the events above recorded I received a letter from Mr. Vyvyan, which I give without further comment.

ST. SIBBY, *Dec.* 18, 189–.

"DEAR MR. WARD,

"I wish to tell you that our friend Mrs. Hall died a few days ago. She was a very good woman, one of the few that are chosen. I was much with her in her last days, and she told me a strange thing, which I cannot bring myself to repeat to you. But she sent you a message which she repeated several times, which she said you would

understand. It is simply this: 'Tell Mr. Ward I have prevailed.' I may add that I have no doubt of the truth of her words, and you will know to what I am alluding.

"The day after she died there was a fire at Treheale; Mr. Hall was absolutely distracted with grief at the loss of his wife, and I do not know quite what happened. But it was impossible to save the house; all that is left of it is a mass of charred ruins, with a few walls standing up. Nothing was saved, not even a picture. There is a wholly inadequate insurance, and I believe it is not intended to rebuild the house.

"I hope you will bear us in mind; though I know you so little, I shall always feel that we have a common experience which will hold us together. You will try and visit us some day when the memory of what took place is less painful to you. The grass is now green on your poor friend's grave; and I will only add that you will have a warm welcome here.

I am just moving into the Rectory, as my old Rector died a fortnight ago, and I have accepted the living. God bless you, dear Mr. Ward.

"Yours very sincerely,

"JAMES VYVYAN."

THE UTTERMOST FARTHING

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I

YES, Hebden Hill was the next station, the porter told me, and as the dowdy little train puffed sturdily across the wide green flat, intersected by dykes, which had once been a great bay of the sea, I watched with pleasure the low shapely bluffs, like miniature sea-cliffs, but now covered with thickets and copses, which bounded the plain to the west half a mile away, and thought how like it was to the background of an old Italian picture. It was a warm summer evening, not oppressive, as there was a fresh breeze from the sea, along which white clouds sailed lazily landward. I could see far out in the plain hamlets and solitary farms nestling among trees; and it was pleasant to see the birds, crested plovers and pearly-grey gulls, that stood motionless, all facing up the wind in the

pastures; and a lean grey heron by the old sluice-gate, poring upon the water.

And then I began to wonder how it was that I was going on so vaguely defined a visit to Hector Bendyshe, whom I knew so slightly. What exactly *did* I know about him? He was just an agreeable man, whom one was never surprised to meet at dinner, and whose talk, mildly interesting, seldom flagged. He had been at Winchester and at Oxford; he had been perhaps in the diplomatic service, and had certainly travelled a good deal. He was clearly wealthy, for he had a flat in town, and a house understood to be of an attractive kind in Sussex, at Hebden Hill. But he had done nothing particular for twenty years—he was a man of fifty—he read a good many books, he was fond of music, he was something of a connoisseur. But the more I reflected the less I seemed to know. He had no relations that I had ever heard of, and no intimate friends, though a host of acquaintances; he went everywhere and got on

with everybody. He did not seem mysterious or secretive in any way; he talked easily and frankly about his own concerns and pursuits, and indeed on most topics of general interest.

How then had my visit come about? I was myself a so-called literary man, who lived, not very prosperously, in rooms in town, reviewing, writing literary articles, putting together an occasional book, and enabled by my small earnings and a little private income to exist in tolerable comfort. I was just over forty, and the artistic ambitions I had once had, had long vanished; but I was more than content with my life, and my interest in other people was stronger than ever. The unexpected things that happened, the strange contrasts and contradictions of character, the amazing inconsistency of human beings and their intricate relations, so utterly different from and so much richer than the helpless conventional traditions of fiction—all this had kept alive in me a sense of romance in life which

amply atoned for a career which had been disappointing and even humiliating.

I had met Bendyshe at dinner some time in May. I had walked away with him, and he had asked me to his rooms. They were well furnished and comfortable, but with a certain austerity that took my fancy. Our talk had turned somehow on psychical things, in which I was a good deal interested; and before we had talked ten minutes I became aware that Bendyshe had dropped the mask of amiable levity which characterised his habitual conversation, and was speaking seriously and drily, but with a profound sense of conviction, which was quite unlike anything I had ever heard from him.

Suddenly he turned to me, a little sternly, I thought, and said, "But perhaps you are not interested in these things?"

"Yes and no," I said, "but to tell the truth, I am a little surprised to find that *you* are."

"Well," he said, "I don't wonder at that.

You see, it has become of late rather a hobby of mine. I will tell you why some day, if you care to know. But tell me one thing: why do you say 'Yes and no'?"

"Because," I said, "in the first place I think that ordinary talk about psychical things is such fearful twaddle. It seems to me a scientific affair; but when foolish people talk about it, it's all a mixture of feeble sentiment and weak imagination."

"That's so," he said; "but if you feel about it like that, why don't you look into it?"

"Because the sort of experiments people try," I said, "such as séances and trances and automatic writing, seem to me more sickening still, like drug-taking; it's like deliberately playing with the ugliest part of one's mind, the part that deals in fear. I don't want to wake that up—I want to think it is not there; and, moreover, I am so much interested in people as I see and know them that I don't want to explore the unknown."

"You want to live in a fool's paradise, in

fact," said Bendyshe; and I could see from the pallor of his face and his distended nostrils that I had angered him; but he controlled himself. "No," he added, "I ought not to say that—it was rude and stupid! I apologise."

"No, please don't do that," I said; "it was my fault. What I said was very crude; it was like talking to a man of science about 'stinks' or to an actor about his 'patter'—the insolence of the amateur: that's unpardonable."

"Well, but I *really* want to know," he said rather gravely. "I agreed with you up to a certain point; but what you said amounted to this, that you are so much interested in people when they are alive that you don't take any interest in what happens to them after they are dead?"

"Yes," I said, "that is quite fair. I am immensely interested in what I can see and observe and infer in people. It seems to me dramatic, exciting, sometimes very beautiful.

But I'm a homeless man and a bachelor, and I don't get very near to them. I only see the polite side of life; and when people disappear, as they unhappily do, and I can't follow them further, why, I turn back to what I can see and know."

"I understand perfectly," he said; "but it's just the other way with me. People seem to me so amazing, so incredibly fine at times and so unutterably low at others, that I can't believe it all begins and ends here, and I find myself consumed by the most intense curiosity, to use rather a feeble word, to know what the next act is. It seems to me all like a big rehearsal for something, full of trivial, grotesque, and annoying things—two people playing nap, a girl eating a sandwich as she waits for her cue—but the play is going on all the time, and everybody has his part. I feel that I *must* know what is behind it all, if it can be known. I'm not exaggerating when I say that I have thought many times of putting a pistol to my head in order to

find out what does happen; but I doubt if it can be found out that way."

He was silent for a little; musing inwardly. I watched him as he sat. He was a tall lean man, finely formed and modelled. He had close, crisply curling black hair, a little grizzled. His forehead was high, his eyebrows black, and he had large dark eyes which it seemed to me I had never seen fully opened before. He was clean-shaven, and his nose, straight and clean-cut, came down on a short upper lip; but the under-lip was full, and the chin perhaps a little large for symmetry. He had a slightly worn air, but his face, which was hardly marked by wrinkles, had a fresh colour like that of a man who lived much in the open air. If anything his expression was a little judicial; but when I had seen him on previous occasions, his prevailing expression was one of tolerant good-humour and friendliness. It had never occurred to me that he could be formidable, and indeed my impression had been that, if anything, he over-valued serenity

and equanimity. There was nothing ascetic or scholarly about him. His hands were large and mobile, and had, I thought, more expression than his face; and his dress had a touch of negligence about it which became him well.

I had never thought him a particularly interesting man, because he never gave himself away or appeared to have any preferences. But now I had seen something very different, something alert, passionate, even terrifying.

But when he began to talk again, his mood had changed, and he was his old wary and kindly self.

"By the way," he said, "what do you generally do in the summer?"

"Oh, I stay about a little," I said; "but I have to stick pretty close to my work, you know. I'm a literary hack, and I have to be waiting on the stand in case of a call. If I happen to be in funds, I go to a quiet hotel somewhere—I rather like exploring the

country; old houses and churches are the next most interesting things to people. But I generally end by being a little bored."

"I wish you would come down and stay with me for a week or two," he said. "I have got rather a nice old house in Sussex, and it is a pleasant country. It is very quiet, and you could work if you wanted to, or wander about. I should like to talk this matter over with you."

"Thank you very much," I said; "I should enjoy it immensely. Where did you say it was?"

"Hebden Hill," he said. "Not very far from Ashford—it's a biggish village. I'll drop you a line."

II

THAT was at the end of May. I heard nothing more for a month and began to think he had forgotten all about it, or that he was perhaps sorry that he had shown me the inner side of himself. But at the end of June I had a note asking me to go down on July the 7th, and an hour or two later a wire. "Am unexpectedly alone, and should be glad to see you to-morrow Thursday if you can manage it but don't alter arrangements. Would meet the train arriving 6.30. Hope you can stay a fortnight."

It seemed to me a little peremptory perhaps? No, I had no engagements, and I was glad to get out of the heat of London, so I wired an acceptance, packed my books and papers, and went; and now that I was embarked I began to have a curious feeling that I was in for an adventure of some kind, not very pleasant.

However, I arrived in the summer twi-

light. Bendyshe was on the platform to meet me, and I could see from the civility of the officials that he was not only an important personage, but a highly popular one. He had a pleasant word for everybody, and he introduced me formally to the station-master, saying gravely, "It's very important that my friend Mr. Hartley should form a good impression of the place; you know, he writes in all the papers, and could make our fortunes by a paragraph."

"Indeed, sir?" said the delighted station-master. "I'm sure you're very welcome to Hebden Hill, sir. We're old-fashioned, but going ahead a bit nowadays."

Bendyshe had a good car waiting. The station was at the bottom of the hill; and he motored me swiftly up a steep irregular street of red-brick and timbered houses with pleasant gardens—a most comfortable and homely place. At the top of the hill we turned into a small square or piazza, with five or six substantial eighteenth-century

houses. Fronting the west end of the church was a long mellow brick wall with big gate-posts and a gate of fine ironwork. Behind this there appeared a handsome façade; a brick Georgian mansion with a pediment, a solid pillared doorway, seven windows above and three on each side of the door, and a round window in the pediment. It was evidently the chief mansion of the village. The windows had old heavy casements painted white, and the house was flanked at each end by fine old sycamores.

"Here we are," said Bendyshe. "It's called the Manor-house, but it's not my idea of a manor-house at all!"

Inside appeared a white-painted, marble-flagged hall, heavily panelled and pillared, with two mahogany doors on each side and a broad balustraded staircase ascending under an arch at the end. It was all a little bare. There were a few portraits and some solid Chippendale chairs. A venerable and portly butler met us.

"Perhaps you would like to stroll round before you go and dress?" said Bendyshe. "It's a good thing to get one's bearings clear at once."

He showed me first a room to the left of the front door, a small dining-room panelled with dark oak. Here there were more portraits, and a fine Italian bust of a young man in red porphyry, evidently a masterpiece. The next room was a little library almost lined with books, with a big French window which opened on to the garden. "This is *your* room," said Bendyshe, "and you can have it entirely to yourself to work in. My own study is upstairs."

The door to the right of the front door led to a smoking-room, a comfortable place with a few red leather arm-chairs and some old dark landscape pictures in oil. "This is everybody's room," said Bendyshe. "That other door leads to the back regions; but now we'll have a look at the garden."

We went out through a door under the

stairs. I could not restrain an exclamation of delight. We came out into a portico supported by pillars extending along the whole centre of the house, between two flanking shallow wings; it was paved with black-and-white marble, and furnished with some comfortable oak seats and tables.

The garden was not large, but beautifully designed. On each side it was walled, and shielded from intrusive eyes by a row on either hand of sycamores, fine old trees. The lawn was perfectly plain, but for a fine leaden statue of a youth with clasped hands looking upwards towards the house—a most enchanting piece of work. At the far end, sheltered by a low wall, was a great flower-border, blazing with colour; and as we drew near, I could see that the ground fell rapidly—to a tiny park with clumps of trees on either hand, and beyond, a magnificent view of a great green plain with low wooded ridges and blue shadowy hills to the right, while a mile or

two to the left we could see a wide expanse of sea.

I said something feeble about the wonderful beauty of the place, and its magnificence.

"Well, that's rather a tall word,'" said Bendyshe. "It isn't a big house really, and the domain extends to about fifty acres. But it is cleverly designed, and makes the best use of every inch of earth and sky."

"Has it been long in your family?" I said.

"No, indeed," said Bendyshe; "I bought it just as it stands, furniture and all, from the last member of an old family—the Faulkners—that had come to hopeless grief. It was in an awful state—the house almost ruinous, the park full of weeds and thorn bushes. No one would look at it. But I heard of it by what we call accident, just when I wanted a house, about fifteen years ago, and saw its possibilities. I got it very cheap, and I really have not spent much money upon it. But I have got uncommonly fond

of it, and feel as if I had lived here all my life, and a little more."

The light was beginning to fade as we went back to the house, which I found was all lit by electric light, carefully subdued and shaded. We went upstairs. There was a corridor above the hall, only not so wide, with three doors on either side, and one to the right, close to the head of the stairs; and these I must describe with some particularity.

The first door on the left as we came up—the staircase had turned round to the right, so that we were facing in the direction of the front door—led to two staircases, one going up to the attics and one descending to the offices. The second door on the left led to Bendyshe's bedroom, a very bare place, with a press or two and a few books; then came a bathroom with a door from the bedroom, and opposite the door, another door led into Bendyshe's study, which communicated with the corridor by what was the third door on the left.

The study was entirely filled with books, had a big table covered with papers, and two very uncompromising oak writing-chairs. A room less luxurious I have seldom seen. It had no ornament but a single picture, a very beautiful portrait of a girl, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with an expression of the most perfect naturalness and simplicity, and full of animation and delight. The room had two windows, one looking out to the church, the other down towards the village.

We went out again into the corridor. The door opposite Bendyshe's study was my bedroom, one window of which looked towards the church, and the other out on the great sycamore by the corner of the house. A little bathroom was attached. The room was furnished with great comfort, and had some fine water-colours. Returning down the corridor, the two other doors opened into bedrooms similar to mine, each with a bathroom, and at the end, close to the head of the stairs, the remaining door led into another bedroom,

which looked out on to the garden. But this room was wholly unfurnished, just a bare-boarded, white-panelled place, with that peculiar and unpleasant staleness that develops in an unventilated sun-baked room.

"I don't like this room," said Bendyshe. "It was the room, to tell you the truth, in which the scoundrel from whose heirs I bought the property came to his miserable end. It's a squalid story; and as for the room, well, I think there is something sinister about it. What do you feel? Yet it's a pity not to use it, because it has the finest view in the house!"

"I don't know," said I; "I think that the best way to exorcise disagreeable associations is not to fasten things up, but to let in a new current of pleasant usage."

"Yes," said Bendyshe; "if I had children, I should make this their schoolroom—then it would be all right!"

An hour later we dined—a well-appointed

meal, though a simple one, very promptly served.

"I don't know what you feel," he said to me, "but it always seems to me rather uncivilised to dawdle over food." He himself ate rapidly, but with appetite, and drank a glass or two of wine. After dinner we withdrew to the smoking-room. Bendyshe was in his familiar mood, full of little anecdotes and reminiscences. When we had established ourselves with coffee and cigars, he said, "Now let me first say how glad I am to see you here. I have a notion that we agree, more than perhaps appeared the other night, about that matter we spoke of; and I think you can help me very much, if you are disposed to do so. I think you are a fair-minded man and impartial. Would you mind telling me exactly where you stand? Or perhaps you are tired and would like to defer it? To-morrow night, I ought to say, the parson, Fortescue by name, is coming to dine, a very interesting and remarkable man,

so that if you would like to leave it alone, we must wait till the day after to-morrow—the evening is the only time to talk seriously about things."

"I should like to start at once," I said. "But tell me, what did you mean by saying I could be of use to you?"

"Why," said Bendyshe, "living alone, as I do, and with but few people to talk things over with, one gets into a tangle. I generally have a visitor or two here, because solitude unadulterated is not a wholesome thing. But they are not the sort of people I can really talk to; and just now I have got hold of some new material—I am always collecting materials—and it doesn't seem to fit in with my ideas. But the point is this—how much and how little do you believe?"

"Oh," I said, "my position is a simple one. It's all just a question of evidence. Any materials ought to be rigidly scrutinised—one mustn't either accept or dismiss evidence

summarily—and then one may begin to draw conclusions."

"Yes," said Bendyshe; "that's very much what I believe. But it's uncommonly hard to trace these psychical stories to their source. I have tried to unravel a good many, and it gives one a deplorable opinion of the value of human evidence. But," he went on, "before we begin, I must tell you in as few words as I can how I came to set to work. I don't like to talk about it—it's like tearing open an old wound—but I must make this plain. Some twenty-five years ago I became engaged to a girl, the daughter of a parson; you saw her picture, perhaps, in my room. You must take it on trust from me that she was a wonderful creature, and gave me not only a new view of life, but something to live for.

"We arranged everything. We were to have lived in London, and I was actually thinking of standing for Parliament, when just a month before our marriage she caught diph-

theria and died within the week. I can't tell you what an appalling catastrophe it was for me. It had seemed to me that her love was the one thing I had been waiting for all my life, the one thing that had given me a reason for living. You see, I was an only son, entirely trusted and indulged by my parents, and with plenty of money about and no motive for exerting myself.

"The thing very nearly drove me mad. A week before she had been with me, answering every question I had asked of life, and giving me the very water of life to drink. And now she was gone without a word. The last time I saw her she didn't even know me. She was in torture and half-unconscious. And there was nothing left, not a glance or a sign or the faintest message to me whom she loved best, or to any other human being—and there were many that loved her. It was so utterly unlike her, and yet there it was. Her parents were what is called 'wonderful.' They had

a strong religious faith, and it helped them through."

Bendyshe stopped with a kind of gasp, gripped the arms of his chair, and abandoned himself for a minute to a paroxysm of misery. "It all comes over me again," he said. "Don't look at me—I shall be all right in a minute."

Presently he went on in a low voice: "I hardly know what I did. I travelled, I did some exploration, I courted death, but it never came near me. But I never had the smallest sense of contact with her, or even of any thought coming from beyond.

"Then I came back and tried to occupy myself in many ways—what is called social service. But I'm a hopeless individualist, and I don't care about my fellow-men simply as such, and I was taken in many times.

"Then I started this work, and it began to seem to me the one thing worth doing—to find out, if I could, whether there was any

possible contact with the spirits of the dead, whether they existed at all. I had all kinds of sickening experiences, but could find nothing definite.

"And I never could cross the threshold, though I came to believe that, under certain obscure conditions, living minds could communicate direct with each other, apart from material agencies. And then the case seemed worse to me than ever, because it all seemed to depend upon material existence as a necessary condition."

Then after a moment's pause, he went on slowly and rather wearily:

"And what makes things even worse is this. There are a good many stories of appearances which seem to have some element of truth about them. But most of these are connected with horrible and tragic occurrences—crimes, murders, solitary imprisonments, as if (supposing for a moment the things to be true) it were a punishment of some kind to have to return to the earth and

to re-enact the scenes of desperation and wickedness. And even the unhappy victims of such outrages seem condemned to the same fate; as if the only motive force that could bring one back were fear and indelible horror, reconstructing incidents which one would give anything to forget, but cannot.

"If there were stories of spirits returning to earth to revive gratefully scenes of happiness and love, delightful experiences of youth and friendship and ingenuous aspiration, when the heart was full of hope and joy, it would be different; but no spirits ever seem to think of this. Are they ungrateful? Have they forgotten?"

"Religious people would perhaps say," I said, "that the happiness of the farther world was so great, that a blest spirit would never care to return to these half-lit skies, and to the memory of joys that were always shadowed by some fear of loss and separation."

"But this is an utterly selfish and in-

different business," said Bendyshe. "We should despise it in a living human being. And even if it were so, have they no wish to comfort the hearts that ache with the memories of perished happiness? No; if the spirits of even the blest are so drugged and intoxicated with delight that they have no room for remembrance or tenderness, it is a more ghastly business still."

We sat for a little while in silence. "I expect it's about time to go to bed?" he said. "I ought not to go on soliloquising like this." He escorted me to my room, and said another friendly word about my visit, adding, "Breakfast at nine—please ask for anything you want. Hope you'll sleep well; and you will find some good bedside-books there if you want them."

I was soon in bed, and I fell asleep in a mood of pleasurable anticipation. This was going to be a novel experience, I felt sure, and Bendyshe's theories interested me; and almost immediately, so it seemed, I woke from

a dreamless sleep, with old Bartlett the butler in my room, coughing deferentially, and asking if I would have a cup of tea, and whether I would have a hot or cold bath, and if there was anything else I required.

III

THAT morning at breakfast I found Bendyshe in a cheerful and eminently commonplace mood. He told me stories about the village and the people and the country-side. I asked some questions about one of the portraits, an old, rugged-looking man with prominent eyes and upstanding hair.

"'*What the dickens!*' I call him," said Bendyshe, smiling. "But we'll leave all that to the Vicar, who is coming to dinner this evening—he knows far more about the house and the family than I do. He has been here thirty years—in fact his wife, now dead, was connected in some way with the Faulkners."

After breakfast I went off to do some writing, but I did very little, and my mind ran with curious persistency on what Bendyshe had told me on the previous night. He did not look like a man who had ever had a great shock or had passed through tragic

experiences; indeed, his preoccupation with psychical matters seemed to me still a little unaccountable, and inconsistent with the fact that he evidently lived a busy and active life, and took a considerable share in local business.

He came and fetched me out about noon, and we strolled to the church and village. He had a word for all the people he met; he called the boys and girls by their Christian names; his hat went off to any woman. We met an old man hobbling along with two sticks.

"Why, Mr. Barry," said Bendyshe, "I'm glad to see you about again. Feeling better? You look quite your old self again."

"Thank you kindly, sir—yes, I'm better, Mr. Bendyshe, but feeling powerful giddy at times!"

"Ah, that'll soon pass off in the open air," said Bendyshe. "Now, shall I step in this evening for a bit of a gossip, Mr. Barry? I always get the news of the place from you. Hartley, this is Mr. Barry; I call him the

father of the place. He will be a hundred and one years old in January next—isn't that so?"

Mr. Barry chuckled. "Don't you believe Mr. Bendyshe, sir," he said to me with a smile. "He will have his joke; 'tis only eighty-eight I am, last Febbery!"

So Bendyshe went on—but not for a moment did it seem an assumed heartiness, rather the natural overflowing of a neighbourly geniality; while a word of sympathy which he said to an old lady in rusty black was both tender and straightforward. With the children he was entirely delightful, with mysterious jests and allusions.

I said something about this. "Oh, yes," he said, "a child likes to share a secret with a grown-up person, a secret which no one else knows. I'm not sure we don't all like it," he added with a smile; "a secret's rather an explosive thing." We went to the church, a fine, ancient place which had evidently been carefully restored; one aisle was full of

monuments to the Faulkner family, from a knight in armour in a canopied niche to a weeping nymph by Chantrey. "Fancy throwing away an inheritance like that," he said, as we looked at the old tombs; "but the whole history of the family is a steady process of climbing down. I'll show you the remains of their old mansion, about half a mile away, one of these days. The Vicar thinks it is the doom of sacrilege, but that's rather too business-like a view for me!"

I grew more astonished as the day went on to find the polite and solitary diner-out transformed here into so bustling and genial a squire. I could not fit the puzzle together; and still less did he seem to me a man who carried about, hidden in his mind, so strange and haunting an aspiration.

In the afternoon it was very hot; we went round the house and looked at the portraits. They were not particularly good, but the family likeness was strong; and the picture of the last of the Faulkner race, as a boy of

sixteen, was a graceful and beautiful thing. It represented him in riding-dress standing beside a pony, slender, blue-eyed and light-haired, with a gentle, rather wistful expression. Next to the picture was one of his mother—a woman of rare beauty and charm—and a rather commonplace portrait on the other side of his father, a burly country squire.

"It's all rather an enigma," said Bendyshe, looking thoughtfully at the portraits. "Up till that time, you see, they had been very ordinary people, moderately prosperous, but not very successful, and quite unadventurous. There doesn't seem to have been a single instance of a man of any eminence among them, not even a soldier or a bishop. One of them was an M.P., but unseated for bribery. And then just when a strain of beauty comes into the family and a touch of romance, that minute the devil comes too. It looks as if there were something in the old idea of Nemesis, as if the way to be happy was not to attract the atten-

tion of the powers above. That pretty woman was an heiress, and the boy was born wealthy; and he was certainly charming, and I believe clever too—the Vicar shall tell us all about him this evening."

I was somewhat struck by the interest which Bendyshe seemed to take in the old family. As a rule, the last thing that a new proprietor is interested in is the history of the family he has ousted. But Bendyshe seemed to wish to bring me into touch with the personalities of his predecessors, as though he desired me to draw some inference or to solve some problem. Indeed, when later in the afternoon he took me out and showed me the relics of the old Faulkner mansion, an octagonal turret and a crow-stepped gable, with a fine chimney-stack of moulded bricks, and a great dovecot, all forming part of a rather ramshackle farm, I became even more sure of this, and commented on it. Bendyshe laughed a short laugh, as though partly pleased and partly disconcerted, and said,

"Yes, don't you think it would all make rather a picturesque article?" adding with a smile, "You see, if I take you away from your work, I ought to give you some copy in exchange. But don't let me bore you. I am afraid it is rather a tiresome fancy of mine, to speculate about my predecessors."

"Oh, I'm not bored," I said—"quite the reverse. What I feel is rather that you have some idea in your mind, which you want me to perceive for myself, and that you were, so to speak, inoculating me!" Bendyshe looked at me sharply, but I somehow saw that he was not displeased.

After tea I read and wrote a little in the library. I felt rather drowsy after a day in the open air, and fell asleep in my chair, but awakened suddenly with a start, and with a strong impression that someone had entered the room softly, and as softly withdrawn. I had, too, a sensation of something chilly in the air, and a faint earthy odour such as one connects with stone-built, underground,

airless places. But it was all a momentary fancy; the flower-scented air was blowing in from the garden, and the bell of the church was ringing for Vespers. I got up and went out into the hall, and found Bendyshe with his hat on just going out of the front-door. "Was it you who caught me napping just now?" I said.

Bendyshe gave me one of his quick glances, and said, "Well, I thought you might be having forty winks"—and then added, a little shamefacedly, "The fact is, I'm going to church—the Vicar is very good about services and doesn't get much of a congregation; besides, it makes me feel cosy, as Mrs. Carlyle said of the glass of port. Do you care to come?"

"It isn't very much in my line," I said lightly, "but I'll come with pleasure—it's all part of the atmosphere; and besides, I shall get into the Vicar's good graces."

We sat in the chancel. There were only two other people present, both women. The

Vicar, a big, sanguine-faced man with a fine head of silky white hair, read evening prayer with great rapidity but with extreme reverence; and I was pleased to see never once looked in our direction. His reading of the lessons was strangely impressive; the second lesson was a chapter from the Gospel. "When the evil spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none . . ." He had lowered his voice, and read as though it was a thing almost too terrible to be mentioned, except from a sense of duty. Just before the end of the passage he shut his book and made a slight pause; and then, as though it was his own comment, looking round at us, he added, "So the last state of that man is worse than the first." And then he began the Nunc Dimittis in a tone of unmistakable relief.

When I got down before dinner, the Vicar and Bendyshe were sitting in the hall, talking in low tones. The Vicar got briskly up, and shook hands with me with great cordiality.

His face was full of animation and benevolence. Bendyshe had said something to me about his being much of a mystic; but anything less mystical I had never seen. He was alive to the finger-tips. We had an amusing evening. The Vicar made a remarkably good meal, and told a few excellent stories of a local kind, crisply and shortly, in response to a direct request from Bendyshe. I indulged in some literary gossip, and the Vicar listened to stories about some of the well-known writers of the day with childish avidity and hearty laughter. "Excellent, excellent!" I remember his saying. "I have never been able to get on with his books—rather precious, I think?—but I'll give them another try; I didn't know the old man had so much blood in him!"

IV

We settled ourselves after dinner in the smoking-room, and as soon as we were alone, Bendyshe said to the Vicar, "Now I want you to tell Hartley something about Hugh Faulkner"—adding to me, "that is the man whose portrait as a boy I showed you—and what happened when you came here. I always think it is an extraordinary story. Hartley won't make capital out of it, you know—he is quite discreet!"

"Well, then," said the Vicar, "I'll tell you. It was over thirty years ago that Hugh Faulkner—he was a distant cousin of my dear wife—offered me the living through his lawyer. I came down and looked round, but Mr. Faulkner was ill, and I could not see him. I was just thirty then, and working in a quiet country curacy; and this gave me exactly what I wanted: more work, and a chance of really getting a hold on a place—and a beauti-

ful church too—and I won't pretend that a larger income wasn't some inducement.

"Well, we settled here; and then bit by bit became aware that things were very wrong indeed in this house. Hugh Faulkner was about forty. His father and mother were both dead. He had been in the Guards, and he had done a good many wild things, and when at last he did something so outrageous that he was summarily told to send in his papers, he came down here. A less courageous man—he had plenty of courage—would have gone abroad for a bit, and waited for the thing to blow over. But he wasn't that sort. He came down here, and tried to brazen it out. But everyone knew about the scandal, and it was no use. People simply would not meet him, and were out when he called. He was cut and cold-shouldered everywhere. A few of the village people were civil to him; but he couldn't get servants, no one would accept his invitations. I've seen people in the street turn back rather

than meet him. He stuck to it for weeks and months; and I tell you, Mr. Hartley, my heart bled for that man, though one could neither like him nor trust him: but I couldn't help admiring him. He generally took no notice, but once or twice he lost his temper. I saw him with my own eyes stop and say something civil to a farmer—Pratt, by name—in the street, and the man pushed by: Faulkner went after him and screamed something into his ear—Pratt wasn't a very exemplary person, either—and the man went on white and shaking.

"One day he came to the Vicarage. I should say that I and my wife did see something of him; we went to dine there occasionally, but it was quite intolerable. He used to tell unpleasant stories, not anything to which you could take open exception, but one saw what he meant; and he had an old soldier-servant, a real ruffian, who used to giggle at the sideboard. One day he had come in to tea at the Vicarage, and he looked

tired to death. While we were at tea, a neighbouring parson and his wife called. I mentioned Faulkner's name; they made hasty excuses—they couldn't stay for tea—they had only looked in. They didn't say a word to Faulkner, who stood there with his tea-cup looking as if he was on fire within. Then he went up to the parson as he was leaving the room, and said to him in a low voice, 'So this is what you do for sinners, Mr. Hale? What is your tone with the publicans?' What made it worse was that old Hale had the reputation of being rather too good a judge of wine.

"Then he said good-bye to us and marched out. I went back with him afterwards and did my best to talk to him. We parsons see some bad things, Mr. Hartley, but I never had a worse hour. The man was possessed by devils, not by one only. He was not violent or obscene; he was simply desperate. And he told me, sitting in this very room, what some of his performances had been, and

such a catalogue I never heard. However, that is all *sub sigillo,* you know. He said, I remember, that he had carefully considered whether he could have helped behaving so, and he had decided that he could not help it, and would do just the same again under the same conditions. 'You see, I didn't make myself,' he said.

"Then he went on to say that once he had left the army he had kept clear of it all, except in one respect; but that the more he put the pillow on his desires, the more they peeped round the corner of it. He was quoting Martin Chuzzlewit, I believe?—he was a great reader, I should say—and then he asked me to tell him plainly if I thought he had a chance of putting things straight—'I'm really rather a good-natured man,' he said, with a sort of pathos. 'I hardly expect to be liked—but I want to live on decent terms with my neighbours.' I said that it would take time, and it would depend on how he behaved—but that if he spoke to people as he

had spoken to Hale at the Vicarage it was of no use expecting things to go better. 'But the man was damnably insolent!' he said, 'and I won't take that from anyone.'

"Well, we argued on, and then I tried to go a step farther—that's my trade, you know—and I wanted to see if the man felt any kind of regret for any of the things he had done. He was quieter by that time, but he told me plainly to remember that I was not in my Sunday school. I nearly lost my temper at that, but I saw that it wouldn't do to back out. So I said that I was there to help him if I could, but that I could do nothing unless I knew more or less what his feeling was. 'It's like calling in a doctor,' I said, 'and then keeping back some of your symptoms.'

"And then, Mr. Hartley, I had a look for the first and last time of my life into the soul of a very bad man. He told me that he regretted it, in a way, because he didn't like the consequences. But that if there were no consequences, he would not even regret it.

One phrase of his I remember, 'Why, I think no more of doing this and that than you think about taking a cup of tea!' He went on to say that when certain temptations came to him, he had no choice—'I really don't think I am quite responsible,' he said; 'there is nothing in my mind that even wishes to resist.' And as to feeling the need of forgiveness either from the people he had wronged or Almighty God, the idea seemed simply laughable to him; and I will only say this, that for the first and only time in my life I felt like doubting the power of God. And then at last I got away. I may add that for a month or two afterwards I was really ill. I could not sleep; I could not get the man's face out of my mind.

"And then there came a worse complication. Pratt, the farmer to whom Faulkner had spoken in the street, had an accident and was thrown out of his dog-cart; and Hale had a sort of stroke and was ill for a long time. And this I think made matters hopeless. You

know what sort of things people say, and underneath all our civilisation there's a great deal of the ugliest old superstition left.

"After that Faulkner shut himself up altogether, except that he would ride or walk in the early summer mornings before people were about. In winter he hardly ever left the house; and what went on here I don't know—I don't like to think. He read a great deal, he did some gardening. I went to see him from time to time, but he would never talk freely again. He used to ask a few questions, and sometimes told me stories about his boyhood, things his mother had said to him—he had a curious kind of affection for her—the tricks he had played on his father; he seemed to me like a man in a dream. He also took to speculating on the Stock Exchange, and lost a lot of money. The only person who stuck to him was the old soldier-servant. They lived in three or four rooms, did their own cooking, smoked and drank to-

gether, and the house got into a filthy state. But nothing happened: he didn't die, he was never ill, he simply lived on. Once or twice old friends came to see him; and I remember one man—a retired Colonel, I believe—whom I met, leaving the house in haste, looking very much perturbed. He came up and spoke to me, said he had been to see his old friend Faulkner—they had been subalterns together—and he had been very much shocked, 'though I'm not very particular,' he added. Then he suddenly said, 'Tell me, is he mad?' 'Not in the least,' I said. 'Then, good God,' said the Colonel, 'why doesn't the man shoot himself?'—and he went off straight to the station.

"Now, for more than ten years things went on—think what that means—the garden was all overgrown with bushes and brambles, with a path through to a plot where they grew vegetables; and in front the shrubs grew over the lower windows, and most of the upper windows were broken. But it shows what

a strange thing human nature is, Mr. Hartley, for I believe the people here were rather proud of it than otherwise, though there was once an ugly demonstration. The old soldier-servant used to be seen about—he did the shopping, and he was rather a feature of the place. And strange to say, I got rather to like the man. He had been a real ruffian, I expect, but the way that man stuck to poor Hugh—it was heroic. There was nothing he wouldn't have done for him, and he simply worshipped him. I used to wonder what would happen to Hugh if he died.

"I still went in at times to see Hugh, and I believe he was glad to see me, though when he was in a bad mood he used to ask me all kinds of ingenious and bewildering questions about religious matters which I could not answer; but as a rule I don't think he was even very consciously unhappy. They lived by a routine, and Hugh used to talk mysteriously of his experiments—I never quite knew what he meant, but nothing very good, I fear.

And then there were stories—at one time the garden was thought to be full of great black birds; and at another there were supposed to be creatures which grunted and snorted about among the bushes, and screamed out sharply at night. There were said to be curious mounds in the garden, like earth thrown out from burrows. Sometimes the windows were lighted up, and music was heard; and a man was said to have been seen going up the wall at the back like a fly. But I never saw anything myself, except for the fact that the house seemed to me sometimes to be full of smells—bitter, suffocating smells, like nothing on earth; and at times appeared full of shadows, gliding blacknesses, like mist or smoke. But I daresay all these things had some explanation.

"But I must bring my story to an end—and I must add that though I never quite gave up trying to get hold of something in Hugh's mind and heart that I could pull on, and though I said many prayers for him, it all

was a total failure; but I somehow became aware of a change of atmosphere about the house, about Hugh himself. I had generally had the feeling as if some struggle was going on somewhere out of sight, or even as though one were watched by something that would like to make a spring if it dared. Hugh himself was less violent and quieter; it seemed like exhaustion.

"One night, about the end of April (I was alone then, for my dear wife had died the year before; and I must tell you that in one of the last talks we had, she said to me, 'Don't give Hugh up—I think there is something coming to him,' but she could not explain), I was working late when I heard someone tapping at the door, quietly and insistently; and I found it was Hugh's servant. He wanted me to come and see Hugh at once. 'Did he send for me?' I said. 'No, sir—but I'm frightened about him. He doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep—he sits watching something.' The man kept moistening his lips as

he spoke and then broke out, 'Come and see if you can help him.'

"I went off at once; and when we got into the house I knew that there was something very wrong indeed. There was a silence that appalled me—I have never experienced such a silence; and though it was a warm night, the house was deadly cold. But worse still, there seemed something holding us back which required pushing into. I fought my way upstairs; but the old servant gave up, sate down on the bottom step and watched me. There was one solitary candle in the hall, which flickered and cast hideous shadows.

"I went straight into Hugh's room—the room at the top of the stairs. I found him stretched fully dressed upon his bed, his eyes closed, and making motions with his hands as if he were trying to thrust something away. His brow was horribly puckered and his face seemed swollen and congested. I went up and took his hand, and he gave a kind of moan

or wail—the sort of cry a hare gives when a keeper takes hold of it. 'Don't be afraid,' I said; 'it's only me. John, you know!' At this he sate up and opened his eyes. 'The dream,' he said, 'the dream—it's closing in on me!' Then he said to me in a faint voice, 'Surely it's enough?—it's all empty and dark —it's draining my life away!' Then he turned to me and said, 'Where have I been?' I knew well enough. It isn't only a name, Mr. Hartley, it's a very real thing—the most real thing but one in the world. Then he said to me, 'Fifteen years of hell, John—does anything deserve that?' I hardly knew what I was saying then, for the cold that I had felt on the stairs was gathering in, thicker than ever. But I said—the words were given me somehow, 'Perhaps you have done your punishment, Hugh; it's over and done.' He shook his head and lay down again; and I just knelt down and said the last prayers, and in the middle he gave one shudder, which went through

him from head to foot, and I knew he was gone.

"Yes, I know what you would like to ask me, Mr. Hartley, and my answer is that I don't know. He was gone, but something else was gone too. The servant came running up the stairs, and looked in. I beckoned to him. He came and knelt down by me, and I finished the prayers; and when I had finished, he took my hand and pressed it; and then he took Hugh in his arms and stroked his face. I left them there, and went away a wiser man, I hope.

"The family lawyer came down, and he and I made a search for documents to no purpose. He had kept some papers in a despatch-box that was always near him; but this was missing, and could not be found. There was nothing to throw light on the matter, except that the servant said that he had lately been strange in manner and apathetic, and that he had lost his appetite; and I will only add that there was an inquest. I told my tale

with reservations, and they called it natural death. I didn't hesitate to bury him in the churchyard, and there he lies; but no one came to the funeral. And the Bishop sent for me to enquire into the circumstances; but when I had finished the story, as much as it was fit for a Bishop to hear, he told me frankly that he had meant to suggest to me to resign my living, but that now he had altered his mind, and that I must on no account leave the place. I never saw a man in such a state of what we will call godly embarrassment. And the next Sunday I made my flock a little sermon on 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' and gave them a bit of my mind. And, strange to say, I have never had any trouble to speak of since."

The Vicar made a long pause, and shook his head. I could see that there was something further in his mind which he had decided not to mention. I confess that this strange and tragic story produced an extraordinary effect upon me. For one thing, it

was all so darkly mysterious, so full of unexplained hints and suggestions of evil, that it aroused in me a vague terror which made me wish that I had never listened to it. Not so Bendyshe; he was sitting back in his chair, his hands clasped together, looking at the Vicar with gleaming eyes, like a man on the brink of a great discovery.

Then the Vicar turned to me, and said, "There, Mr. Hartley, I have told you the story at Mr. Bendyshe's request. You may be thinking that it is the sort of tale that had better not be told, and that such a collection of shocking incidents is better forgotten and buried in oblivion. But I have two reasons for telling you. In the first place, the outline of the story, only greatly exaggerated, is known to and repeated by a good many people in this place, and I should wish you to have a more accurate version of what happened—anything is better than secrecy about such things; and Mr. Bendyshe tells me he has a special reason for asking me to

relate it to you, which you no doubt know, and of which I approve. I think it ought to be seriously investigated.

"And then, too, I have a further reason. There are very dark corners in this world of ours, and facts of our existence, which seem inconsistent with any faith in a beneficent and Almighty Creator; and I don't think it right to ignore them. My own belief—I will speak frankly—is that God is slowly and patiently making a conquest of a world in which there exists—how originated I cannot even guess—a strong element of something atrocious and horrible, which defies Him, and seizes every opportunity of undoing His work. And to my mind, the horror of this story is that it seems like a deliberate attempt to focus this evil power, an attempt which failed, because this malignant influence, as I interpret it, is essentially what is called stupid. It has no principle; it works at details with a laborious persistency—that is where its essential weakness lies; but it ought not to

be ignored; it must be met by anyone who comes across it with courage and intelligence. I don't think that Hugh Faulkner did any very serious or deep-seated harm here, and he certainly did not succeed in making evil attractive. He may have struck a blow at individuals, and I believe that he certainly did—but that is all.

"And now I must ask you to excuse me, if I say good night. May I have the pleasure of seeing you at the Vicarage, Mr. Hartley? You may have some questions to ask about what I have told you. But I have nothing to add, and I may not be in a position to give you an answer."

The Vicar took his leave, and left on my mind the impression of great simplicity and goodness. He and Bendyshe went to the door together, and stood talking for some little time in low tones.

When Bendyshe came back, he said to me with a curious look, "Now what do you think of all that?"

"I don't know what to make of it," I said —"at present I'm simply rather stupefied. One goes along making the best of life and thinking the world on the whole a satisfactory and wholesome place; and then comes a tale like this, and one wonders if one has any real idea of what is going on, or of what may be hidden away in the minds of men and women. I wish I had never heard the story."

"Oh, come," said Bendyshe, "don't say that—it seems to me to have all the elements of a big adventure. I would give anything to get a little more information; but here one only gets the wildest and silliest gossip. I may tell you that I have tried to get on the track of Faulkner's servant, but I can't find a trace of him."

"I expect he is dead by this time," I said.

"No," said Bendyshe; "he is not dead. I can say that quite confidently—I have my reasons."

We sate for some little time together, and I asked Bendyshe one or two disjointed questions. I said, "There was one point in what the Vicar said which I did not quite understand. He spoke of Faulkner doing harm to individuals. What did he mean by that?"

"Well," said Bendyshe, "he meant Hale and Farmer Pratt in the first place; and there are some other cases too, if you care to hear them."

"No, I don't want to hear them," I said; "but tell me this. Do you, and does the Vicar, really believe that Faulkner had the power of inflicting bodily damage upon these unfortunate men, without using some known human agency? Of course it might be that some mental shock and physical deterioration followed from a fright which——"

But Bendyshe interrupted me. "Do I believe it?" he said. "Why, I *know* it. Faulkner was just as much responsible for their illness as if he had fired a gun at them."

"But how is it possible?" I said.

"Ah, I don't know that," said Bendyshe; "but that he had the power of doing that sort of thing—at all events in the case, let us say, of people whose moral force was weakened by some indulgence—is incontestable. He didn't use it often, I admit; he was afraid to do so; but in both of these cases, and in others which I could tell you, he lost all control of himself, and I believe that he let loose against them an undiluted current of evil; and the Vicar believes it too."

"But it isn't rational," I said; "we don't believe in witchcraft in the twentieth century."

"Perhaps it would be better if we did," said Bendyshe grimly. "We can't get rid of facts by calling them irrational."

I saw that he was getting nettled by the discussion, so I said, "Well, I must have time to let all this settle down."

In a moment the other Bendyshe appeared. "Yes," he said; "we mustn't let this visit of

yours degenerate into a series of shocks and explosions. I've no right to do that, and if you give me a hint, I will drop my theory for a bit. But I very much hope you will help me to look into the matter. We'll have an easy day to-morrow."

He accompanied me to my room and said, "I hope the story to-night hasn't made you nervous? Perhaps this will reassure you." He showed me, let in beneath the dado-cornice, in the corner by my bed, a little circle looking like the top of a wooden peg, and painted white like the rest of the room. "That's a fancy of mine. My butler, Bartlett, doesn't sleep in the house—he has a house in the village. And this bell rings in my room —both the other spare bedrooms have it. I put it up when old Ford was staying here, and was taken ill in the night and couldn't make anyone hear. If you press on that, I'll be with you in a minute. I'm a very light sleeper!"

"Oh, I'm not nervous," I said. "I'm a

sound sleeper, and then I'm a rational man."

Bendyshe smiled at this and said, "Yes; that's just why I want your help. Good night, old man."

V

LEFT to myself that night, I went slowly and deliberately to bed. I felt curiously tired and drowsy after the cataract of varied impressions which I had received during the day; and I was conscious, too, of a growing excitement. The Vicar's story had done more to arouse this than any of Bendyshe's semi-scientific theories. The Vicar, I felt, was a man without an axe to grind, and with a certain duty to perform in the world, a desire to illumine the darkness, to extinguish evil. He did not turn his back upon it or ignore it, and his aim was a practical one. Bendyshe, on the other hand, was like a man engaged in research; he simply wanted to arrive at facts. Indeed, there had been moments in the day when I had suspected him of being something very like a monomaniac; but his friendliness was engaging, and the appeal he had

made to me for help had touched me. But help in what? That I could not say.

Just, I imagine, before I slept, I had a curious sensation of something vague and restless in the house, something that faintly jarred my drowsy nerves; it was all a fancy, but I thought dimly that someone, sleeplessly and wearily, was engaged in pacing about, and searching for a thing both secret and momentous, which had been mislaid or hidden. I wondered vaguely if the inquisitive brain of Bendyshe, weighing, considering, discriminating, was having a sort of telepathic effect on my own. The house was absolutely still; the church clock struck two with a murmur sweet as honey; and then, curiously enough, I had a sensation of great mental ease. If anything was going forward, I was at least in no way concerned in it; the searcher did not wish me ill—my presence there was nothing to him. And then, I suppose, I passed into sleep.

While I dressed in the morning, I could

see Bendyshe pacing in the narrow strip of garden that lay beneath my windows, lost in thought. He greeted me when I came downstairs with much effusion. "Slept well?" he said. "That's right. You look very fit and spry. We'll have a good spin to-day—we might go to Canterbury perhaps?" And yet, strange to say, I had an indefinable sense that Bendyshe was in some way disappointed.

Our run was uneventful enough. Bendyshe made no allusion to the narrative of the previous evening. I thought, indeed, that he was a little conscience-stricken for having plunged me, so to speak, up to the neck in these dark matters. In fact I do not think he had intended to do so, but his own overpowering interest, in the company of someone whom he thought sympathetic, had run away with him. I felt in a singularly placid mood, and the summer fields, the woodland corners, the hop-gardens, the hamlets through which we went, worked upon me like some

gentle anodyne. We ate our luncheon on the shoulder of a high, upstanding ridge along which the road passed; and I was amazed at Bendyshe's knowledge of the country. There was hardly a church-tower visible that he could not name, and he was full of local and personal anecdotes which beguiled the time very pleasantly.

We got back for tea, and I then experienced something of a reaction. In spite of the beauty and comfort of the house, there came on me a sense of lurking dreariness which I could not analyse; something was going on there, in the cool rooms, the panelled corridors, which I could not penetrate. I tried to work, I tried to read—Bendyshe had gone off to the village on some friendly errand—and I became aware that I did not wish to be alone. When the dressing-gong sounded, I felt a strong disinclination to leave the room.

Ten minutes later I heard the front-door open. Bendyshe's brisk stride was audible in the hall. This was a relief to me; but

instead of coming, as I had expected, to the library, he went quickly upstairs. I decided that I must go too; but just as I got to the head of the stairs, I became aware that someone was coming down the corridor as if from Bendyshe's room. It was beginning to be dusk, and I could not see the figure very plainly. It was a man, carelessly dressed in an old grey suit of clothes, shuffling along very noiselessly, his head hanging down, with a markedly sullen and dejected air. The face looked healthy but careworn, and it came into my mind that it was some petitioner who had come to make a request of Bendyshe, but who had been decisively and perhaps unceremoniously refused. I said " Good evening " to the man as he passed me, and then I had a real surprise of rather an unpleasant kind, for he took not the slightest notice of me or my salutation, as if he neither heard nor saw me; he shuffled on down the corridor and was swallowed up in the shadow at the head of the stairs. Yet it did not seem to me an in-

tentional rudeness, but rather as if the stranger's preoccupation was so intense that there was no room in his mind for any other impression.

I went and dressed and was downstairs in the smoking-room when Bendyshe appeared. "You've had a busy evening," I said. "And I saw you got caught by a caller on coming in."

Bendyshe looked at me quickly and interrogatively. "Oh, yes," he said, "I have endless visitors—there's nothing I'm not asked to do."

"But I expect you can't always do it," I said. "I passed your friend in the corridor, and I never saw disappointment so legibly written on anyone's face as on his—he hadn't even time to exchange civilities!"

"You spoke to him?" said Bendyshe, adding, "Poor chap, yes, he has no end of troubles. But what the real trouble is I don't quite know. So he struck you as disappointed, did he?"

"Yes, indeed," I said. "I almost wonder that you had the heart to refuse him. He looked quite worn out, and took no notice whatever of me. I should like to know his history."

Bendyshe stared at me in silence, and it struck me that I had been impertinent. "I'm sorry," I said, "if I have been too inquisitive."

"Good Lord, it isn't that," said Bendyshe; "but the man doesn't know what he wants, or at least I don't know what he wants—I can't make out, and that's just the difficulty. And when I find out, then—well, then I shall know what to do."

Bendyshe was in a very strange mood that evening—so strange that I more than once thought that my half-formed conjecture of the previous night was true. He seemed to be wrestling against the approach of a secret and triumphant mirth. Our talk turned on the ailments of middle-age, and I confessed to being conscious of the necessity of a

régime. "I don't believe in taking care of oneself," he said—"plenty of air, enough exercise, variety, work, plenty of other people's business, not too much eating and drinking and smoking; and most of all, if you think you can't do a particular thing or don't want to, go and do it!"

"That's rather Spartan," I said.

"No," said Bendyshe; "it's simply this—we have all of us got three at least, or even more, people inside us. There's the one that admires and enjoys—he's all right. Then there's the one that criticises and reflects. Then there's the animal, which needs to be sensibly and good-humouredly drilled, like a dog or horse, and he's a patient and serviceable fellow enough. But behind them all, in the little innermost room, there's the one that fears, and he mustn't be listened to for a single instant, or he will run the whole show."

"I never thought of it like that," said I; "yet I'm sure you are right. But which is the one that *wills*?"

"Oh, they all do that," said Bendyshe, laughing; "it's a kind of board. The point is that the right man should have the casting vote." And then he was again overtaken by his tendency to laughter, and laughed unreservedly. I suppose that he detected some annoyance in my face, for he suddenly stopped. "Forgive me," he said; "I have a fit of the giggles sometimes, and it is bad manners. But I have been lucky to-day. I have made some progress—more than I expected."

After dinner we had a game of piquet, and went up to bed about midnight. As we came out at the head of the stairs, Bendyshe said, "Was it here you met my poor friend? Which way did he go?"

"Down the stairs," said I; "but I lost sight of him."

"Ah, he ought to have gone down the backstairs," said Bendyshe, "but I suppose he forgot. Hullo, what's this?" He turned sharply round. The door leading into the

unfurnished bedroom was open, and the moon shone in, showing the boarded floor and the clean-cut panelling. "Who the devil did that?" said Bendyshe very irritably. "Here, come in—let's have a look. Has there been someone prowling about, I wonder?" He led the way into the room, but I felt an insupportable reluctance to enter it. "I must have this place locked up," said Bendyshe, half to himself. "Hullo, this is all quite new."

I followed him into the room, suddenly feeling the need of company. He was bending down, looking at something on the floor. "The wet must have got through," said Bendyshe to himself. I drew nearer, and saw that a quantity of plaster had fallen from the ceiling; up above an irregular square opening appeared; but what, I confess, gave me a shudder of dismay was that the plaster on the floor had a strange resemblance to the shape of a prostrate figure. I saw at once that it was a merely accidental likeness, and

even as I looked Bendyshe with his foot swept the débris together.

He took me to my room and said a few friendly words. I saw that he wished to obliterate the impression caused by his merriment. I went to bed, and, contrary to all my expectations, for the evening had been an agitating one, I slept profoundly. But before I slept, I half determined that I would not prolong my stay. Bendyshe was behaving very oddly; but then I thought of the Vicar, and I decided that as he had asked me to his house, I would go and consult him; and this brought me a sense of relief.

VI

THE morning turned out insufferably hot. Bendyshe was very cheerful and pleasant at breakfast. He said he had directed that some chairs should be taken out into the shade of the sycamores. "The verandah is a bit stuffy," he said, "when the wind is in the north." He had got down a parcel of books from town, new books which he thought might interest me. And when we went out there was a table, and two chairs, and an irresistible heap of neat volumes of all shapes and sizes. We sate mostly in silence; occasionally Bendyshe went off to the house, and twice at least he was summoned by the butler to see a caller. "I lead a dog's life," he said, laughing—"plenty of fleas!"

I had again become immersed in my book, when a sudden exclamation from Bendyshe,

betraying a poignant and acute emotion, made me look up. He was leaning forwards, his gaze bent on the front of the house. At the closed window of the unfurnished bedroom, plainly visible, and indeed made curiously luminous by the sunlight, a man was standing looking out into the garden. He was, so far as I could judge, an elderly man, with a shock of grey hair, and a curiously blurred and puffy face, red and bloated. He was dressed in a sort of apron, dirty white, showing arms bare to the elbow. "Who's that? What's that?" said Bendyshe in indescribable agitation. It seemed to me so unnecessary and unaccountable an excitement, that I said, "Well, if you ask me, I should say it was the plasterer come to repair the ceiling."

"You're right—you're right," said Bendyshe, with a gesture of intense relief. "Of course, I forgot—I mentioned it to Bartlett —but I didn't expect him to-day. I imagined —well, I don't know what I did imagine."

He got up from his chair and went hurriedly to the house.

I was by this time very seriously perturbed indeed about Bendyshe, and began to believe that he was on the brink of insanity. It rushed into my mind that I would go to the Vicarage at once. I went back to the house, where all was silent. Old Bartlett was laying the table in the dining-room. I said to him, "If Mr. Bendyshe asks for me, will you tell him I have just gone into the village, but shall be back in a few minutes?"

He was a comfortable and amiable old fellow. "Certainly, sir," he said; "but it's a terrible hot day for the street—you'll wear your straw, no doubt, sir," and he bustled out to open the door for me.

I arrived at the Vicarage—an old substantial house, behind the church—and was shown straight into the study. The Vicar greeted me very warmly. "Yes, I had hoped I might see you, Mr. Hartley," he said. "I'm afraid you think you have got into a very

strange place here, and I'm not surprised at your coming."

I sate down and told him the incidents of the morning and the previous day. He listened to me very gravely. Then he said: "I can't cast any light, I fear, on what has been happening—indeed, I am under a promise to Mr. Bendyshe not to do so. But the important point is this. You may be absolutely and entirely reassured about his sanity. He is as sane as you are, and a great deal more sane than I am. He is the hardest-headed man I know. Mr. Hartley, I can tell you that that man has gone through experiences which would have sent nine out of ten men crazy. And he is a man of great emotional sensibility too, but he has got infinite courage and inflexible purpose. I cannot tell you how I admire and reverence him. But I must add this: Bendyshe wants your help very much. It is worth your while to give it him, and I think that, so far as I can judge from our short acquaintance, he has made a remarkably

shrewd choice. But if, on the other hand, you feel in any way alarmed or repelled by the claim, I will go over to the Manor-house with you, and insist on your being released from any obligation—and he will take my advice."

"No," I said; "once really assured of Bendyshe's sanity, I have no wish to be released. He shall have whatever help I can give him, for as long as I can give it—but I confess I do not quite trust myself."

"Mr. Hartley," said the Vicar, "you have chosen the right course, and I am infinitely relieved; and I may add this, that the results may turn out to be of the utmost importance. Please consult me at any time."

Just as I was going, the Vicar said, "Would it be troublesome if I asked you to take a note for me to Bendyshe? I will come round at 2.30 to speak to him about it; but I think he ought to have this news at once."

The Vicar scribbled a few words on a sheet of writing-paper, enclosed in it an open tele-

gram which was lying on the table, sealed and addressed an envelope, and handed it to me.

I returned to find luncheon ready and Bendyshe pacing in the hall, evidently in a state of great suppressed excitement. I handed him the note and gave him the Vicar's message. He tore the envelope open, read the enclosure, and a cry of surprise not unmixed with a deep satisfaction escaped from his lips. I thought for a moment that he was going to hand it to me; but he did not, and presently replaced it carefully in the envelope. Then he looked at me, rather a grim and searching look. "So you went round to see the Vicar?" he said. "May I ask what you went to talk about?"

"Yes, certainly," I replied. "I was beginning to feel this morning that I was getting too deep into a rather mysterious business; and I don't feel very sure of myself. You must remember how new and unfamiliar this all is to me—how little, in fact, I know of you beyond a mere acquaintanceship, to

speak plainly; and I felt the other night that the Vicar was a man I could trust, so I went round to ask him a few questions."

Bendyshe put down his knife and fork and drummed with his fingers on the table. "Well," he said in rather a grim tone, "what's the result?"

"He seemed to think," I said, "that you needed my assistance, and he was very insistent that I should give it, if I felt able to do so. And the long and short of it is that I decided to do so."

Bendyshe's face lit up with a smile; he held out his hand to me, and I grasped it, feeling that some compact of a momentous kind was being made. "Well, old man," he added in a tone which showed that he was deeply moved, "I can only say that I am truly grateful and thankful. It's a big business, and I want someone at hand whom I can trust, very badly indeed. Mind," he added, "I'm not afraid of anything that may happen—but I want a perfectly fair-minded man, who isn't

afraid either, and that's what I feel you are. Now," he went on, "I'll have no secrets from you. Ask me any questions, and I'll answer them."

"No," I said, "I won't ask for that. I know that you want an impartial observer. I can see that something very queer is going on in this house, but I won't ask questions; I'll draw my own conclusions, and then when you think it best you shall tell me."

"That's right," said Bendyshe, "just what I want, and that's a bargain. If you will keep your ears and eyes open, it's all I ask. You may be surprised—you may even be shocked; but I can assure you that there is nothing to be afraid of—nothing whatever. We will just go our own way for a bit, and see how things turn out. Now, this letter," he went on, slapping his pocket, "is the most important thing that has happened yet. Perhaps you will see the Vicar when he comes up, and tell him anything you have noticed, anything in the smallest degree un-

usual; and then leave us to discuss it—and thank you once again."

While we were smoking, the Vicar arrived, and I saw that he looked perturbed. I left the two alone together, and half an hour later Bendyshe came to the library, and said that the Vicar and himself were obliged, owing to the news received, to go away on the following day.

"We shall leave immediately after breakfast in my car," he said, "and we shall be back for dinner, unless anything unforeseen occurs. It's very inhospitable, I know," he added, "and I don't feel sure if you will care to be so long alone. Have you anything in town that you want to do? Or you could easily spend the day at the Vicarage—that could be arranged. I'm afraid it is absolutely imperative for us to go."

"Oh, don't bother about me," I said. "I will do what I am very fond of doing—go out for a long vague walk, get some food at a village inn, and be back in good time in the

evening. It will do me good; and I can think over things a bit."

"It's very good of you," said Bendyshe, looking decidedly relieved.

The rest of the day passed quietly enough. We sat in the garden, and the only event that struck me was that one of the gardeners and the chauffeur, in the course of the afternoon, brought a ladder across the lawn and got it into the house with some difficulty.

Bendyshe was thoughtful and cheerful. We played a game after dinner, and he proposed an early adjournment.

I was glad to go to bed—the day had been one of some agitation. But when I had got to bed I could not sleep. I was seized with a kind of detective fever, and found myself speculating as to what the whole mystery could be. I did not believe very firmly in its supernatural character, and as for the occult side of it all, I may say I was frankly sceptical. It seemed to me that the Vicar and Bendyshe were probably affected by the

tragic fate of Faulkner, and were perhaps inclined to attribute significance to circumstances of no great importance, but there were evidently things which had yet to be told me. While I was pursuing this train of thought —it was now nearly one—I distinctly heard soft footsteps in the corridor. I went to the door, opened it very quietly, and looked out. I saw Bendyshe, in his shirt and trousers, carrying in his hand a lantern, walking very gently, his back to me, towards the staircase. He came to the door of the unfurnished room, drew a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and went in, closing it with great precaution. I had a strong impulse to follow him, but thought that he might be annoyed at my intrusion; so I left my door half-open, and feeling restless and anxious, I put on some clothes, sat down in an arm-chair near the door, prepared to rise and close it the moment I heard the door of the unfurnished room open. I will admit that I was far from easy in my mind about this solitary explora-

tion, but I had by this time a robust confidence in Bendyshe's strength of will. For a time I heard nothing; but then I began to perceive very faint muffled sounds overhead, as though Bendyshe (I supposed) was moving about slowly and cautiously, and perhaps searching for something that was not easily to be discovered—for there were long pauses between the sounds, as if the searcher were standing still.

I suddenly perceived what was happening. The ladder had no doubt been brought upstairs and put in the unfurnished room. Bendyshe was certainly using it to obtain access through the hole in the ceiling to some room or loft overhead, and was quietly investigating it at night, so as to be secure against interruption. I confess that the nerve which would be required for such a proceeding fairly amazed me, particularly when I thought of the supernatural influences which Bendyshe clearly believed to be at work in the house.

I suppose that half an hour had passed thus, when suddenly I became aware that a very alarming interruption had happened overhead. Heavy footsteps stamped and rushed in the loft above me, then grew fainter, and then I heard the sound of a fall and a half-stifled cry from the direction of the unfurnished room. I rose and hurried down the corridor, flung open the door of the room and saw a sight which horrified me. The moonlight streamed in at the open window. Bendyshe was sitting on the ground with his hands clasped on his forehead; beside him lay the extinguished lantern.

"What has happened, Bendyshe?" I said, hastening to his side. He unclasped his hands and looked at me, and I could see that blood was flowing on to his shirt.

"I have had an accident, old man," said Bendyshe in rather a husky tone, "but I'm not much the worse, I think. No, don't ask questions—just help me up." I held out a hand and lifted him to his feet. He looked dizzily

round. "Good God, what a fool I was!" he said. "I might have known it wouldn't do —here, Hartley, pick up that lantern, there's a good fellow, and come to my room with me. I don't think I'm much amiss, after all. I only hope to God that no one else heard. How did you know I was here? You came like lightning."

"I saw you go in here," I said, "and I heard you overhead—and I had a feeling that I might be wanted."

We went into the passage; I passed my arm through his, and he seemed glad of the support. He turned on the electric light in his room and I followed him into the bathroom. He was very pale, his hair disordered; the wound turned out to be at the base of his throat, a scratch or cut, torn and lacerated. He bathed it, and it proved not to be very deep. "I must have caught my neck on the broken edges of some of the laths," he said. "Well, I'm thankful it's no worse." He came back into his bedroom, and opened

a small case which I saw contained some surgical appliances. He soaked a bit of cotton-wool in some disinfectant; and very deftly wrapped a bandage round his neck and under his arms, only asking me to fasten it for him. Then he dropped some liquid into a glass and swallowed it. "Now, old man," he said, "you get to bed and let me have a sleep. I have got a long day to-morrow."

"But you won't go in this condition?" I said.

"Yes, I must go," he said, "but Elton will drive. I shall be all right. I have just had a bit of a shock—I slipped on the ladder, you see, and I'm only thankful I didn't break a limb. Now go and get some sleep yourself," he added—"you look as if you wanted it; and mind, don't be *excited*! Nothing more will happen to-night, you may be sure of that —I've had a lesson, anyhow!"

And so I left him, but lay long awake, pondering and speculating what had Bendyshe expected to find in the loft; and what

had he found or seen that caused him to beat so hasty a retreat. For I knew enough of Bendyshe by this time to know that it must have been something of a very alarming or startling kind to upset him so.

VII

I WAS relieved to find in the morning that Bendyshe showed few signs of the adventure of the previous day. The man was as tough as steel! He limped a little, and the wound in his neck was stiff and uncomfortable; but he was cheerful, not with any assumed cheerfulness, but with the tranquil assurance of the soldier who has come out unexpectedly well from a dangerous affray. I saw that the element of danger, whatever it was, about the whole investigation was a stimulus to him rather than the reverse.

It was a fine cool day, and the Vicar and he started about ten o'clock. It was a four-hour drive, Bendyshe told me, and they hoped to be back at seven. "If we are delayed," he said, "we will wire at once; and if you then don't care about staying here alone, the Vicar has arranged for his housekeeper to give you a cold supper at the Vicarage." I wrote a

letter or two, and telling Bartlett that I should be out for luncheon and probably for tea as well, I went off soon after eleven.

It was astonishing to find how much more cheerful and light-hearted I became on getting clear of the house. I had hardly realised how much the atmosphere of the place was weighing on my spirits. It was not what had actually occurred, for that was trivial enough. It was a feeling of suspense, of hardly knowing from hour to hour what might not happen.

I walked off into the country, delighting in the freshness of the green lanes, the views from higher ground, the pleasant villages and farms I passed through. I got some bread and cheese at an inn. The landlord was a chatty old man, amiably inquisitive. He asked where I had come from, and when I said from Hebden Hill, he brightened up. He knew Hebden well, it seemed, and had some relations living there. Then he asked me if I knew the Manor-house. "You mean

the big house opposite the west end of the church?" I said.

"That's it, sir," he said. "Did you ever hear tell of Squire Faulkner?" he went on.

"Yes," I said, "I have heard the name—I think the Vicar mentioned it."

"Ah! that would be Mr. Fortescue," he said. "I knew him when I was a young man." Then he went on in a rambling way, telling me about the Squire. "They did say he done a murder, or next door to it, and he come out of the army, and he lived all alone at the Manor with an old soldier as had been in his regiment for his servant, and they carried on dreadful. People used to say that they cooked the mice and rats and ate them, and the drink going from morning to night. But there were worse stories than that, sir," the old man went on, dropping his voice. "Folk said the Squire had sold himself to you know who, sir, that ain't the one above—and that don't seem hardly worth while, do it? And if the Squire had an ill-will to anyone, he could

bring all sorts of mischief to pass. I don't know rightly about it, sir, but it wasn't thought hardly safe to cross the Squire, and they used to say that the two would catch a cat, as it might be, and burn it alive, and then it would be like poison to the man the Squire had an ill-will to.

" And there was one bad story about a poor girl—a pretty girl she was, Annie Rogers by name, who lived with her mother that was a widow, and had a little money of her own. The old sergeant, it seems, took a fancy to her, and wanted her to marry him, but she couldn't abide the sight of him. That was hard enough, but then the Squire got wind of it, and thought that if the sergeant married her, he would lose his servant. And they had very high words about it, it was said. But the Squire went secret to work, and first old Mrs. Rogers lost her bit of money and had to go out for jobs; and then she died; and Mr. Fortescue was very good to Annie, and took her as a servant—but she was afraid of

meeting the sergeant about the place; and one day the Vicar found him at the back door, speaking to Annie and frightening the girl with some nonsense; and the Vicar ordered him off, and the sergeant swore and that, and the Vicar went after him to the gate. There were some people passing by who stopped to look on; and the Vicar kept quite cool, and said to the sergeant in a loud voice that he was going to say before them all what he thought of him; and he said he was a dangerous and drunken ruffian—those were his words—and that if he ever annoyed the girl again, he would have him up before the magistrates and they would put him where he would have to hold his tongue.

"The sergeant kept quiet after that for a long time; some of the Hebden men liked him well enough, for he could be very friendly when he chose, and could tell a good story. But poor Annie fell ill after that, and the Vicar sent her to the seaside, but she died for all that—they said it was a decline."

The old man stopped for breath. "But if the Squire was like that," I said, "and if the people believed all this about him, did they never show him what they thought of him?"

"Well, not for a long time, sir," said the old man. "You see, he was a cousin of the Vicar's, and the Vicar used to stand up for him. Some of the men in the place went one day to the Vicar and complained about the Squire; and the Vicar said to them, 'It isn't the Squire,' he said, 'as does the harm—it's your fear of him. The worst harm he can do is to make you afraid of him—it's the fear does the rest.' That was a true word, sir. But a little while after that, some of the same men, who had been having a bit of a drink, went up to the Manor, and began shouting under the windows, and beating on cans, and carrying on. And some of them threw stones and broke some of the windows—the Squire would never have them mended afterwards, but boarded them up. Someone saw and told

the Vicar, and he ran down, but before he got there, the big door flung open, and the Squire, he marched out, and stood on the steps between the gateposts. 'Here I am,' he says, without turning a hair, and they say his face was dreadful to look upon, all white, with his eyes flaming; and then he called them cowards, brute beasts, and a lot of things that it wouldn't be hardly proper for me to repeat nor for you to hear. And he invited them to do what they liked to him. But no one dare lift a finger. 'There,' said he, 'you daren't so much as speak.' And someone in the crowd piped up at that and called him a hard name. 'Oh, so that's what you think,' said the Squire; 'and if you weren't such a little cur, I'd ask you to step out here, and do you the honour of knocking you down.' And then he stopped short, and said, 'But there's a better way than that!' and he looked about him, they say, like a devil, and then they began to slink away, one by one; and some of them began to run. And that was the end of that

evening's work. But would you believe it, sir, Billy Dale—that's the one that spoke—within a week went clean crazy, and was took away; and after that they left the Squire alone."

I felt that I had perhaps better not listen to more of these tales. I did not know how much was fact and how much fiction. But it was clear that the Squire was a man suspected of unspeakable things, and not without some reason. I began to feel that the best course would be to forget all about them. But then, why was Bendyshe so hot on the scent; and suddenly, like a flash of lightning, the truth, or what seemed the truth, dawned upon me. The evil was not dead; it was alive and active; and Bendyshe was trying to drag it to the light. Evil, of course, was anywhere and everywhere. But had something been done, did something remain in the house, that formed as it were a guarded stronghold of evil? Was there a core of malignant influence which needed to be extirpated? And

if so, by what hideous personal agency, what bodiless ministers of fear was it perpetuated?

And then it dawned upon me that if there was any truth in my thoughts, Bendyshe must be exposed to dangers of a kind that defied precaution, and the more courageous he was, the nearer he got to the goal, the more appalling was the danger. I could not quite understand what part the Vicar was playing in all this. He was standing by Bendyshe —that was clear; but I thought that his kindly and generous nature might perhaps blind him to the danger, by leading him to believe that things had never been so bad as were supposed. In any case my duty was clear: I must stand by Bendyshe at any risk, and share the danger with him. It was a contest of wills, perhaps; and I could possibly, by throwing my own will into the scale, turn the current against our adversaries. And in any case I felt that I must not be left any longer in the dark, but must know exactly what had

happened, and what had induced Bendyshe to embark on the quest.

I wandered on in the grip of these thoughts, hardly knowing where I went; I felt for a moment that I ought to return at once to the house—that I was like a sentinel deserting his post; but, on the other hand, I felt that it might be simply foolhardy and reckless to go back and wait in solitude until Bendyshe and the Vicar returned, and that some experience might befall me which would mar or damage such effectiveness as I might possess.

I got a cup of tea at an inn which proved to be about five miles from Hebden; and then I strolled quietly back, arriving about seven. To my relief the car caught me up about half a mile out of the village. Both Bendyshe and the Vicar looked tired, and were very grave. I talked vaguely about my wanderings, and they gave me but scanty attention.

When we got to the house, I said to Bendyshe, "If the Vicar is not too tired, would he come back to dinner?—I have a special

reason for asking this. I have something to tell you and some further questions to ask." The Vicar assented, and Bendyshe and I entered the house together, while the Vicar pledged himself to return at eight.

Bendyshe went to the smoking-room, and flung himself down in a deep chair. "Any the worse for yesterday?" I said.

"Oh, I'm stiff as a board, and dog-tired," he said rather impatiently, "and just when I had need of all my strength; but we have found what we wanted to know, and it is all as I expected, only worse; and now the whole business is in such a tangle that I hardly know what to do!" Then he added, "Why were you so keen that the Vicar should come back? He has had a shock, and seems to me done up."

"I couldn't help it," I said; "to-day I have thought it all out, and I'll stick to you through thick and thin; but I feel that I must know all, and know at once. If I am to share a danger, I must know what the danger is; I

can't be of any use if I am still groping in the dark."

"Yes, you're right," said Bendyshe wearily. "I have been feeling that too—but I wanted you to form your own opinion."

When we went up to dress, Bendyshe said, looking round, "I don't like the feel of the house to-night, old man. There's mischief brewing of a bad kind—but we'll weather it out!" I was conscious too myself of a sort of heavy and brooding stillness everywhere; but I saw and heard nothing.

VIII

At dinner, while the servants were in the room, we did our best to talk of indifferent matters. It was like a bad play, I thought. When we adjourned to the smoking-room, Bendyshe said to the Vicar, "Here, Vicar, Hartley says that he thinks he had better have the whole story, and I agree with him. He won't be taken by surprise; and it's no use pretending now that it is a mild sort of investigation; it's a battle of a bad kind, and we must be forearmed, if we can. I made a mistake last night by taking the offensive—and now hell's loose—— But I'll go ahead.

"It was about three years ago that the thing began," said Bendyshe. "I don't know why it didn't begin before—perhaps it *had* begun; but I had been getting more and more interested in my problem, and I had been, I suppose, training my perceptions without knowing it; and the curtain went up with a

run. I ought to say that when I first settled in here, I had taken the unfurnished room for my study. But I could never work there in any peace. There seemed to be something on the move there, and if I sate at the table, I used to feel there was someone behind me; and there were odd noises overhead too. I had the roof examined—the only way in was through a little trapdoor in the ceiling, in the corner where the plaster came down—but above, there was only a long, low loft, lit by a window looking out on the tiles and gutters, with a cistern in it and waterpipes, and the builder said that the noises came from the pipes.

"However, one day I was coming down the corridor, I saw a man standing by the door of the room—the same man, Hartley, I will tell you at once, that you saw up there, the same dress, the same sort of expression. I thought it must be a plumber for a moment; when it suddenly came upon me with a rush that the wall, so to speak, was broken down,

and I had seen something that a normal healthy man has no business to see. I said out loud, 'What are you doing there?—who are you?' but he took no notice of me whatever, and continued to stand by the door, like a man who wanted something badly, and had been trying for a long time to get it, but all in vain. I didn't think of it as being in any definite and actual way connected with the place—I thought it was an hallucination produced by overtasking my nerves in one direction. I went along to the door, my eyes fixed on the man, and suddenly he was gone. I wasn't exactly frightened, but I felt uneasy about myself. I went up to town and saw a doctor, a friend of mine. He sounded me and questioned me up and down; then he declared me perfectly well in every way. I told him about my studies, and he asked me if I had ever seen any such figure in real life, in childhood, or had any fright or shock connected with such a figure. But I couldn't think of anything. He told me at last that he was frankly

puzzled, but that he had little doubt that it was an hallucination, and did in some way result from my thinking so much about such phenomena. He gave me the advice to turn to other occupations for a bit, limit my work, have more company in the house—all very sensible.

"I did just what he advised, and had a succession of guests here, who bored me to death; and I took up constitutional history, as the least exciting subject I could find. But a fortnight later I saw the thing again, this time in my study, looking up at the trap-door. I got up, and walked straight up to him—and the same thing happened; he took no notice of me whatever, and when I was within a foot of him, disappeared.

"Then I did what I ought to have done before; I went to the Vicar and told him the whole story—and then it came out. The Vicar told me, with a good deal of hesitation, that the figure I described was beyond all doubt the figure of Hugh Faulkner himself,

just as he looked in his later years. Wasn't that so?"

The Vicar nodded. "It was unmistakable, your description! And it gave me a dreadful shock, though I can't say I was exactly surprised." Then the Vicar turned to me and said, "Of course, Mr. Hartley, I am a firm believer in the immortality of the spirit; and I believe that we preserve identity and intelligence, and are not much affected or altered by death; but the spirit is, of course, a bodiless thing—a conscious and intelligent influence. I want to make this clear. There was nothing *material* there to see; but I realised that Bendyshe had somehow or other got within the range of Faulkner's thought, and that the figure was evolved out of this thought acting on Bendyshe's mind, just as we evolve figures in our dreams."

"Yes," said Bendyshe, "but I was also aware that Faulkner was not consciously influencing me—in fact, I think he was wholly unaware of my existence then; and this was a

great relief to me—I was simply a spectator of what was going on, just as you were when you saw him. In fact, if I may say so, I doubt if it was *his* mind acting on yours which made you see him. I think it was *my* mind. And then," he went on, "I saw the figure pretty often. But never in the presence of anyone else—that seemed an absolute bar, I don't know why. I lost all fear of it, and just accepted it as a fact. Once or twice I saw it in the garden, and once or twice downstairs, but almost always in the corridor upstairs, or in the empty room. But I didn't want to run any risks. So I had the trapdoor plastered up, moved the furniture out, and locked the place up.

"Meanwhile I speculated about it, and discussed it with the Vicar; and we came to the conclusion that there was some particular thing that Faulkner was—I won't say looking for exactly, but trying to trace, some book, perhaps, or manuscript—I couldn't make it out—but we decided at last that it was some-

thing which someone else had hidden; but was it in the house at all? Or if so, why couldn't he see it? Or if he could see it, what could he do with it? I don't believe that these spirits have any material powers at all —they can only act through living brains."

I turned to the Vicar. "Did you ever see the figure?" I said.

"No," he said, "I did not—I don't know why. I was nearer to Faulkner than anyone living, except his servant. But I have thought that perhaps Faulkner wished to conceal the very existence of the thing, whatever it is, from me, and was careful not to bring me in."

"But why then did Bendyshe see him?" I asked.

"Oh," said Bendyshe, "I stumbled into it by accident, I believe—it was just a question of my power of perception being heightened."

"But let me ask one other thing," I said: "How do you account for your seeing it only occasionally? If the thing is always in

Faulkner's mind, you ought to see it constantly."

"Well," said Bendyshe, "we don't know what his mental occupations may be—I daresay he has other things to think of."

"Yes, indeed," said the Vicar, shaking his head; "he was a very self-willed and perverse man—he has much to learn."

Bendyshe gave a grim smile, and went on, "What I believe is this—that at times the spirit of Faulkner remembers this thing, whatever it is, and believes it to be still in this house. The result is that for a time his thought is occupied with the house and the familiar rooms; and being an abstract essence, it ranges about the well-known scene; and if one comes within the reach of it, one sees the figure automatically."

"But why, then, does the figure disappear when you come close to it?"

"Ah, I don't know everything," said Bendyshe; "indeed, there is much that quite baffles me. But I have thought that it may

be in some way obliterated by the proximity of my own consciousness, as the moon obliterates the light of the surrounding stars—but that is only my idea.

"And now," he went on, "we come to the more serious part of the story. Some weeks ago I became suddenly aware that the spirit of Faulkner had become aware of mine. I suppose I had begun to speculate more closely as to where the lost thing was, and what it might be. And then, too, it had occurred to me that the old sergeant might be still alive—the Vicar had told me that he thought he was dead—and I had begun to make some enquiries, and had employed a detective to try to trace the man. We now know that he was alive all the time. Faulkner had given him some money at various times, and after Faulkner's death the sergeant had rented a farm in Hampshire, a little bit of a place; but he had taken to drink, and was in a bad way, nearly at the end of his resources. He became aware that he was being tracked, and

I daresay there were plenty of other things about which he might have got into trouble. Anyhow, he was frightened. He sold his farm, which was mortgaged, so he only got a few pounds out of it; and he went off on the tramp. The money was spent at last, and he took cold by sleeping in the open air; he was taken to the workhouse at Pentlow, near Horsham, and went to the infirmary with rheumatic fever.

"But I must go back for a moment. While all this was going on, I became aware, as I told you, that I had for some reason or other come within Faulkner's consciousness, and that he realised that someone was on the same scent as himself. His expression seemed to me to change when I saw him, he looked angry and defiant, and as though he was guarding the approach to something. But even so he was not apparently at first conscious of my physical presence. Then he assumed a menacing air, and made gestures of anger and rage. It was at this time that

I asked you to join me here, because I began to feel that I *must* have someone with me—that I could not be sure of my nerves not failing me; moreover, his appearances became much more frequent.

"And then you came, but instead of telling you everything at once, which would have been by far the best course, I waited, in order to see whether you had any perception of his presence; and when you began to notice certain phenomena, I made excuses and gave explanations—it was all very stupid—in order that you might have your own experiences and draw your own conclusions.

"And then a quite new development occurred. The old sergeant died in the workhouse, and the first intimation of it that I got was the appearance of a new figure at the window, which you also saw. I did not know what to make of this, though I had a strong suspicion; but it happened that they found on the man a letter from someone in the village—one of his old acquaintances—

which seemed to show that he had lived here; and then they wired to the Vicar to say that an unknown man had died in the workhouse—they gave a brief description of him—who seemed to have once lived at Hebden. The Vicar sent the wire on to me, as you know, and I was sure who it was; we went off together to identify him, and the Vicar recognised him at once. That is the position of affairs."

"But," I said, "in what way is he connected with these papers, or whatever they are?"

"Do you remember," said Bendyshe, "that the Vicar said something about a despatch-box that was missing after Faulkner's death?"

The Vicar turned to me. "I ought to have been more explicit," he said. "For some time before his death, I noticed that Faulkner was always writing when I saw him, and that when I came in, he always slipped the papers into an old despatch-box on the table, and

locked them up. I remember once asking him what he was writing. 'My memoirs,' he said with an ugly kind of smile—'an interesting book, don't you think?' When he died, I am nearly certain that the box was by his bedside, though I could not swear to it; and we thought—the lawyer who came down to see about the property and I—that there might be papers of importance in it; but when we questioned the sergeant, who knew the box perfectly well, he stuck to it that he hadn't seen the box for the day or two preceding Faulkner's death, and that he was quite certain that Faulkner had hidden it somewhere—and I couldn't be sure that he was not right."

"Yes," said Bendyshe, "and what I conjecture happened was that the Sergeant, thinking that the contents of the box might be valuable, or indeed might incriminate himself in some way, had secured it himself, meaning later to remove it. That would explain everything—it would explain why

Faulkner did not seem to know where it was, and further it would explain what happened to me there last night."

"What exactly did happen?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," said Bendyshe, looking up at me, "just how it was. I had had a ladder brought up here. Whether the fall of the plaster was purely accidental, I don't know, but anyhow it gave me the idea that the papers had been hidden up in the loft. I didn't like to ask you to join me, Hartley, but I did a very rash and idiotic thing. In the afternoon, I took the ladder into the room, and when the house was all quiet, I went in with a lantern and up into the loft. At first all was quiet, and I hunted about everywhere, but found nothing. Then suddenly I became aware that I was not alone, and I saw two figures standing together in the far corner of the loft looking down at the boarded floor. And then I felt no doubt at all that I had got near the hiding-place. I had better have gone away at once, and bided my time; but

instead, I was fool enough to go to the place. I don't quite know what happened. They flew at me like two wild beasts. It was not a case of any physical violence—it was just a contest of will and brain; but I had all the terror of being attacked, without the possibility of offering any physical resistance. I simply felt that my mind would give way. I ran down the loft, and tried to get on to the ladder; but I slipped when I was half through the hole, cut my neck, I suppose, on the jagged edges of the broken laths; and you heard my fall!"

"What an appalling business!" I said—and there was a silence for a moment. Then I said, "But why did the sergeant not remove the box after Faulkner's death?"

"Ah! I can explain that," said the Vicar. "He had not the time. We had moved Faulkner's body into another room, and we had some talk with the sergeant, Mr. Hartley, and I suppose he was frightened. He had got hold of a certain amount of money, as

it was; and I imagine he never dared to come back."

"There are just two things more," I said: "what *are* these papers, after all?"

"Ah! that I don't know," said Bendyshe; "but I imagine that they are what Faulkner called his experiments—an account of what he did, or tried to do, and the devices by which he carried them out. The force he used was fear, and the question is, how can you frighten people purely through the agency of the mind? We must remember that Faulkner was a very able man, and that the sergeant was clever enough in his way too—and that they were both men of remarkable courage and force of character."

"And if we grant that," I said, "what do they want to do with the papers?"

"My belief," said Bendyshe, "is that they just want to guard them—to preserve them somehow. I don't think they have a very clear idea about them. They don't want them to be made public, and yet they want to hand

on their secrets to someone who will use them. If any of us three, for instance, were a man inclined to make use of these evil agencies, we should encounter no opposition; but at present they simply know that we are hostile, that we want to find the papers, and perhaps to put an end to them; and this they mean to prevent as well as they can."

"What are we going to do?" I said.

"I am afraid that the question rather is," said Bendyshe, "what are *they* going to do?"

The words were hardly out of his lips when an answer came—a thin high mocking laugh was heard in the air, in the middle of us. I can't say how inexpressibly horrible it was, to feel in the presence of something hostile and derisive, and yet not to know what it could do or might do. The horror was that it was *there*. The silent auditor knew what we had said and what was in our minds; and we could do nothing. It seemed to me for a moment as if I should lose control of myself, and that my brain would give way under the conscious-

ness of this unseen and intangible presence. I looked at Bendyshe, and he was sitting clasping the arms of his chair, looking down and frowning.

The Vicar rose unsteadily to his feet, his face very pale. "Merciful God," he said, "here have I been fighting with evil all my days, and trying to think it was weaker than good—and now that I am confronted with it, I can do nothing—nothing."

"No," said Bendyshe, looking up; "that isn't so, Vicar! You have a far stronger hold of this business than either Hartley or myself. We are just fighting for ourselves and our sanity, but you have got bigger forces with you. I want to ask you one thing: Hartley and I—or I—must go and find this thing, whatever it is—*and there's no time to be lost!* The longer we put it off, the worse it will be. But will you stay with us, and see the end? Whatever happens, you must not lose faith."

When Bendyshe spoke of the necessity of

our going straight to our goal and without delay, I confess that I had an access of fear more terrible than anything I had ever experienced. The blood seemed to stand still in my brain—my strength seemed to ebb from me; but I felt too that the idea of giving up, of turning tail now, would leave even a worse legacy of terror behind. It was not a question of moral courage—there simply was no way out.

The Vicar said nothing in reply, but he put his hand out—clasped first Bendyshe's and then mine. And the next minute we were out in the hall. Then Bendyshe took command.

IX

We had risen, and stood looking at each other in silence.

"Now, don't hurry," Bendyshe said. "Try just to think of what we are going to do. I shall want something to prize up the boards with. I know!" He went back to the smoking-room, and returned in a moment with an old ice-axe. Its blade was protected by a leathern cover, and Bendyshe slipped it off. Then he strode to the foot of the stairs and went deliberately up; I followed him, and the Vicar followed me. In a moment we were on the landing. The house was deathly still, with a brooding stillness, like that of a thunder-cloud. Bendyshe drew out his key, and produced two electric torches from his pocket, and then said, "Now, I go first, because I know where the thing is; and when

I am up the ladder—in the loft, Hartley—you come up; and, Vicar, will you stay in the room, and lend a hand? And mind this—they can do *nothing* so long as we don't fear them; or if we do, we must behave as if we did not."

Then he unlocked the door, and we went into the room. Bendyshe clicked on both the electric torches, and gave one to the Vicar. The moon was shining bright, and the shadow of the casements lay dark on the floor.

Then I suddenly became aware of a strange shadow, of an impenetrable blackness, in the corner of the room under the trap-door. But Bendyshe strode out straight to the foot of the ladder, and seemed to me for a moment engulfed in darkness. I followed close behind; and there was nothing there. "You see," said Bendyshe to me in a low tone—"it will all be like that."

But as we stood together at the foot of the ladder, a stream of ice-cold air came gushing

down from the hole in the ceiling, as if coming out of some frozen cave, so cold that I felt my very bones shivering under their covering of flesh. But Bendyshe slipped his hand through the loop of the axe, and then very slowly and deliberately began to ascend the ladder. "Come when I call," he said, "and not before." I looked round; the Vicar was on his knees in prayer; but neither that nor Bendyshe's courage gave me any relief. I just thought of the next thing I had to do. Bendyshe disappeared through the hole, and I heard him step out on the floor of the loft. Then he said, "Now come!" The Vicar held his torch up to illuminate the steps of the ladder, and step by step I went slowly up in the icy air.

As soon as my head and shoulders were in the loft, I felt Bendyshe grasp my arm. "Steady," he said, "step carefully." Bendyshe raised his torch, which sent a long stream of light down the loft, and then in the silence came a strange tremor and agitation of the

empty air. "Now," said Bendyshe, "it will be all over in a moment! Hold on to the top of the ladder, and keep your eye on me." He walked slowly along the loft, to a place about twenty feet away, looking carefully at the boards and turning the torch down on them. "Now," he said, "come up here slowly and hold the torch for me—this is the place!"

Bendyshe bent his head down, and examined the boards. Then he raised his axe and delivered a tremendous blow at the chink between the boards, and then another. The chips of the broken board flew out on the floor; suddenly from the hole he had made there was protruded a dusky thing. It was the head of a great snake; I could see its dull blinking eyes, the black spots that ran in a chain down its forehead, its flickering tongue, and the greenish pallor of its throat. Bendyshe struck another blow, and the creature came out, reared itself up as though to strike at us, and then as suddenly

darted back into the hole again. Bendyshe again raised the axe, and struck fearlessly again. There was now a considerable hole between the boards, and he reversed the axe, inserted the point under the loose board, and putting his foot on the head of the axe brought it down like a lever; the board cracked and split; Bendyshe dropped the axe, and bending down seized the board and tore it up.

A dreadful sight met my eyes. The whole cavity was filled with snakes, entwining, interlocked, writhing; sometimes a head was put up from the mass, and sometimes half a dozen would detach themselves and wriggle over the floor. I must confess that I was now half frantic with horror. But Bendyshe plunged his hands into the mass of snakes, and drew out an old leather despatch-box covered with dust. "This is it," he said; and I was bending down to look at it, when a thing more dreadful than any of our previous experiences occurred. The icy air beat upon us, and

turning my head, I saw standing beside us, stiff and upright, a corpse, swathed in grave-clothes, with pale leaden-coloured hands hanging down; the face was of the same hue, with a fringe of ragged-looking grey hair straggling over the forehead. It had a faint smile, it seemed, on its lips, and its dull eyes, grey like chalcedony, looked fixedly at the opening in the floor; and then a heavy odour of corruption began to spread around us. And then for a moment I wished that I had died rather than have come into this place of horrors. Bendyshe himself turned, and confronted the gaze of the figure. Then he signed to me to pick up the torch and axe, and walked firmly down the loft to the ladder's head.

"Go down first," he said, "and I will lower the box to you—don't leave go of it, whatever happens." And so I pushed on. It was no time to hesitate. I climbed hastily down the ladder, and on reaching the floor, saw the Vicar standing with his back to me, looking out of the

window. But I had no time to attend to anything else, and cried out in a cautious tone, "Now, the box"—and it appeared from the orifice. I seized hold of it, and a moment later Bendyshe began to descend the ladder. But when he reached me, I saw that his strength was failing. At that moment the Vicar turned round, and came up to me with outstretched hands as if to receive the box. I was about to hand it to him, when Bendyshe cried out in an unsteady voice, "No, no—keep hold of it, I say—don't you see?"

And then I hardly knew for a moment what happened. Something seemed to rush towards me in a passion half of rage, half of entreaty. I was fighting with shadows. The figure that I had thought to be the Vicar came nearer and looked me in the face—and it was Faulkner himself, in a fury of baffled rage and despair, such as a human mind can hardly conceive; and while I gazed fascinated, I heard Bendyshe come close beside me; and

the Vicar himself came forward out of the dark corner of the room, and after that I knew no more.

I awoke not long after from a kind of stupor. I was conscious of having been led and propelled down the corridor. I was in my bedroom, lying on my bed, and the Vicar was sitting beside me with a very anxious face. "How do you feel?" he said in a gentle voice.

"Oh," I said, "I'm all right—in mind, that is; I feel very tired and battered, but not damaged, at least not irretrievably. What I most want is sleep, I think. I suppose I fainted?"

"Yes," said the Vicar, "and I was afraid it was worse; but don't let us talk about that now."

"Where is Bendyshe?" I said.

"Oh, he is all right," said the Vicar; "he has just gone to get something for you. He will be here in a moment. He is very anxious, and so am I, that we should settle

at once, without any delay, about these papers, whatever they are. But he and I disagree; and if you feel up to it, he would like to have your opinion."

"I don't know that my opinion is worth much just now," I said.

But at that moment Bendyshe entered the room with a little cut-glass flask in his hand. He showed few traces of an ordeal—indeed he looked more self-possessed and determined than ever. He carried the box with him, I noticed. He came to my bedside and took my hand. "Well, old man," he said, "this is a good sight! I was afraid . . . well, I won't say what I feared, but I felt that if things had gone wrong, I should never have forgiven myself for bringing you in. How are you feeling—only a faint, you think? Well, I am sure of it—heart, not brain, gave way." He poured something out of the flask, a clear aromatic liquid, and asked me to drink it off. "It is quite harmless," he said. "It will give you an extreme lucidity of mind for

about half an hour, and then the best sleep you have ever had in your life."

I drank it, and the other two sat in silence. A few minutes later I sat up and said, "It is very strange—I could not have believed I could have felt like this. I can remember and see quite clearly all that happened yesterday—was it yesterday? But there's no horror about it. I feel extraordinarily happy—something poisonous seems to have cleared away, and I don't think it will come back."

"Yes," said Bendyshe, "I think we have cleared the air somewhat—blown up the wasps' nest, perhaps! But now—do you feel fit to hear two sides of a question? These horrible papers—what is to be done with them? My own view is that I should go through them carefully. They may have immense evidential value. Here is the packet." He opened the despatch-box—I noticed that he had forced the lid—and took out a small packet of papers, not more than

a hundred sheets, I guessed, carefully tied up with black ribbon, and sealed with two large seals. He put the packet in my hands. On the first page was written in a bold hand-writing, "*A record of experiments made at Hebden Manor-house between the years* 1890 *and* 1903, *with the results obtained by Hugh Faulkner and Harry M'Gee. It is earnestly desired that anyone into whose hands they may come will have them examined by some-one of scientific eminence, as they deal with the surprising development of a comparatively unknown psychical force, the results of which have been of an extra-ordinary character.*" It was signed "*Hugh Faulkner.*"

"Mind," said Bendyshe, "I will take the entire and sole responsibility for examining the packet; and I will add that if I had been able to find the packet unaided—as I think I should have done—I should have gone through the whole thing with the utmost care."

"Bendyshe," said the Vicar, very gravely —and I saw that he was in a state of great depression and exhaustion—"I implore you not to speak like this! If you had attempted to take possession of the packet single-handed, it would have cost you your reason, and perhaps your life. It may be that you would have lost something even more precious than life. And I must say something more, painful though it may be. You are not as strong as you think! You are in greater danger at the moment than you were in either of your two visits to that unholy place up there. My feeling is that the papers should be instantly destroyed. I regard them as I would regard a case which I knew to contain the living germs of all the deadliest diseases known to humanity. For you to read them would be deliberately to introduce into your own spirit the most satanical of all infections."

Bendyshe listened to the Vicar's words with a look of ill-concealed impatience, and

then turning to me, he said, "Now, Hartley, it is for you to decide. The quest was mine, and it was the Vicar's duty to help me; but you are the volunteer, who might have been a martyr, who made the search successful. I leave it in your hands."

"Bendyshe," I said, "you have given me a dreadful task. I see what you feel about it, but I have no sort of doubt that the Vicar is right. We have torn the evil out by the roots, with terrible risks; and you would propose to plant it again for the sake of scientific curiosity?"

Bendyshe stood holding the packet in his hands.

"You would destroy knowledge which has been paid for by a man's soul," he said.

"Yes," said the Vicar, "because it is the price of blood—and you dare not traffic with that!"

I looked up; and in a flash I saw, a little

way from the group, the figure of Faulkner kneeling, his hands clasped and a look of agonised entreaty on his face. I lost control of myself. "It must be destroyed at once," I said, "now and here!"

"Very well," said Bendyshe, "I yield—but I shall regret it all my life!" He said no more, but drew a knife from his pocket, cut the ribbon, drew out a mass of closely-written sheets, stuffed them loosely into the empty hearth, and set fire to the heap. The little pile flared up, and in five minutes was a glowing lump, the writing standing out in lines of fire; and a moment later it was nothing but ashes. And at that moment Bendyshe and the Vicar, who had been gazing at the fire, looked up; and they too saw the figure of Faulkner. But then a strange thing happened, and so swiftly that I can hardly say what it was—a figure in white, young, radiant, smiling, seemed to step up to Faulkner from behind, like a bringer of good tidings.

Bendyshe put his hand before his eyes. The Vicar clasped his hands together. "The uttermost farthing!" he said in a tone of intense joy, "and he departs thence—that is the mercy of God."

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The heroine is a marvellous musician whose only teacher has been Nature. Her adventures in the highlands of Tasmania and New South Wales are described with sympathetic insight. This is a story of stirring adventures and strong love.

Downey of the Mounted *By JAMES B. HENDRYX*

Author of "Oak and Iron," etc.

Even as a boy, Cameron Downey showed that he was made of stern stuff. This story tells of his early adventurous years and of his remarkable rise in the ranks of the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force. Rattling adventures against big odds, and a delightful romance, make this tale irresistible to all who enjoy a stirring story.

One o' the Herd *By MAY SUTHERLAND*

Author of "The Stony Trail," etc.

The author will be remembered for her remarkable story "The Stony Trail." Her latest story, which is set in Canada and England, is notable for its clever delineation of character and well-conceived plot. Adventure and love go hand in hand in "One o' the Herd."

Hutchinson's New Mystery Novels

The Spider's Den *By HARRINGTON STRONG*

Author of "Who Killed William Drew?" etc.

Through picking up a girl's gold bag which had fallen at his feet John Warwick was led to the home of the girl's uncle, the notorious master-criminal known as "The Spider." Adventure followed so fast that even John—always on the look-out for excitement—was almost satisfied. There is a thrill on every page of this well-conceived detective yarn.

The Romance of a Million Dollars *By ELIZABETH DEJEANS*

Author of "The Double House," etc.

This new mystery story is remarkable for its strong human interest and its clever characterisation. The interest never flags, and those who have read "The Double House" will find in the present novel an even more successful and gripping story.

Strange Heritage *By THOMAS UPHILL*

The search for missing family jewels forms the main plot of this exciting tale. The pace is breathless and the action brisk. There is, too, a charming love story interwoven with the mysterious happenings which form the main plot.

The Haunting Hand *By W. ADOLPHE ROBERTS*

The author is well known to the devotees of mystery tales which are flavoured with alluring romance. In his latest detective story he vividly discloses two strangely contrasting existences. In the midst of gay philandering comes the grisly hand of sinister crime, and mystery mounts to the last page—when love finds a way to the truth as well as to the heart.

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Author of "Sweet Pepper," etc.

"Sweet Pepper," Geoffrey Moss's first novel, created a sensation. His new book, which is a subtle study of feminine psychology, is as strikingly and vividly written.

The Marylebone Miser *By EDEN PHILLPOTTS*

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Another of those baffling mystery stories for which Eden Phillpotts is now famous. "The Marylebone Miser" is packed with thrills and subtle action.

The Land of Mist *By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE*

A story in which we meet once again our old friends Professor Challenger and Malone. The investigations of the Professor into the problems of spiritualism land them in many strange and weird situations.