

# **The Ghost**

## **A Christmas Story**

**by William Douglas O'Connor, 1832-1889**

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Illustration:
The Ghost

At the West End of Boston is a quarter of some fifty streets, more or less, commonly known as Beacon Hill.

It is a rich and respectable quarter, sacred to the abodes of Our First Citizens. The very houses have become sentient of its prevailing character of riches and respectability; and, when the twilight deepens on the place, or at high noon, if your vision is gifted, you may see them as long rows of Our First Giants, with very corpulent or very broad fronts, with solid-set feet of sidewalk ending in square-toed curbstone, with an air about them as if they had thrust their hard hands into their wealthy pockets forever, with a character of arctic reserve, and portly dignity, and a well-dressed, full-fed, self-satisfied, opulent, stony, repellant aspect to each, which says plainly: „I belong to a rich family, of the very highest respectability.“

History, having much to say of Beacon Hill generally, has, on the present occasion, something to say particularly of a certain street which bends over the eminence, sloping steeply down to its base. It is an old street—quaint, quiet, and somewhat picturesque. It was young once, though—having been born before the Revolution, and was then given to the city by its father, Mr. Middlecott, who died without heirs, and did this much for posterity. Posterity has not been grateful to Mr. Middlecott. The street bore his name till he was dust, and then got the more aristocratic epithet of Bowdoin. Posterity has paid him by effacing what would have been his noblest epitaph. We may expect, after this, to see Faneuil Hall robbed of its name, and called Smith Hall! Republics are proverbially ungrateful. What safer claim to public remembrance has the old Huguenot, Peter Faneuil, than the old Englishman, Mr. Middlecott? Ghosts, it is said, have risen from the grave to reveal wrongs done them by the living; but it needs no ghost from the grave to prove the proverb about republics.

Bowdoin street only differs from its kindred, in a certain shady, grave, old-fogy, fossil aspect, just touched with a pensive solemnity, as if it thought to itself, "I'm getting old but I'm highly respectable; that's a comfort." It has, moreover, a dejected, injured air, as if it brooded solemnly on the wrong done to it by taking away its original name, and calling it Bowdoin; but as if, being a very conservative street, it was resolved to keep a cautious silence on the subject, lest the Union should go to pieces. Sometimes it wears a profound and mysterious look, as if it could tell something if it had a mind to, but thought it best not. Something of the ghost of its father—it was the only child he ever had!—walking there all the night, pausing at the corners to look up at the signs, which bear a strange name, and wringing his ghostly hands in lamentation at the wrong done his memory! Rumor told it in a whisper, many years ago. Perhaps it was believed by a few of the oldest inhabitants of the city; but the highly respectable quarter never heard of it; and, if it had, would not have been bribed to believe it, by any sum. Some one had said that some very old person had seen a phantom there. Nobody knew who some one was. Nobody knew who the very old person was. Nobody knew who had seen it; nor when; nor how. The very rumor was spectral.

All this was many years ago. Since then it has been reported that a ghost was seen there one bitter Christmas eve, two or three years back. The twilight was already in the street; but the evening lamps were not yet lighted in the windows, and the roofs and chimney-tops were still distinct in the last clear light of the dropping day. It was light enough, however, for one to read, easily, from the

opposite sidewalk, „Dr. C. Renton“, in black letters, on the silver plate of a door, not far from the gothic portal of the Swedenborgian church. Near this door stood a misty figure, whose sad, spectral eyes floated on vacancy, and whose long, shadowy white hair, lifted like an airy weft in the streaming wind. That was the ghost! It stood near the door a long time, without any other than a shuddering motion, as though it felt the searching blast, which swept furiously from the north up the declivity of the street, rattling the shutters in its headlong passage. Once or twice, when a passer-by, muffled warmly from the bitter air, hurried past, the phantom shrank closer to the wall, till he was gone. Its vague, mournful face seemed to watch for some one. The twilight darkened, gradually; but it did not flit away. Patiently it kept its piteous look fixed in one direction—watching—watching; and, while the howling wind swept frantically through the chill air, it still seemed to shudder in the piercing cold.

A light suddenly kindled in an opposite window. As if touched by a gleam from the lamp, or as if by some subtle interior illumination, the spectre became faintly luminous, and a thin smile seemed to quiver over its features. At the same moment, a strong, energetic figure—Dr. Renton, himself—came in sight, striding down the slope of the pavement to his own door, his over-coat thrown back, as if the icy air were a tropical warmth to him, his hat set on the back of his head, and the loose ends of a kerchief about his throat, streaming in the nor'wester. The wind set up a howl the moment he came in sight, and swept upon him; and a curious agitation began on the part of the phantom. It glided rapidly to and fro, and moved in circles, and then, with the same swift, silent motion, sailed toward him, as if blown thither by the gale. Its long, thin arms, with something like a pale flame spiring from the tips of the slender fingers, were stretched out, as in greeting, while the wan smile played over its face; and when he rushed by, unheedingly, it made a futile effort to grasp the swinging arms with which he appeared to buffet back the buffeting gale. Then it glided on by his side, looking earnestly into his countenance, and moving its pallid lips with agonized rapidity, as if it said: „Look at me—speak to me—speak to me—see me!“ But he kept his course with unconscious eyes, and a vexed frown on his bold, white forehead, betokening an irritated mind. The light that had shone in the figure of the phantom, darkened slowly, till the form was only a pale shadow. The wind had suddenly lulled, and no longer lifted its white hair. It still glided on with him, its head drooping on its breast, and its long arms hanging by its side; but when he reached the door, it suddenly sprang before him, gazing fixedly into his eyes, while a convulsive motion flashed over its grief-worn features, as if it had shrieked out a word. He had his foot on the step at the moment. With a start, he put his gloved hand to his forehead, while the vexed look went out quickly on his face. The ghost watched him breathlessly. But the irritated expression came back to his countenance more resolutely than before, and he began to fumble in his pocket for a latch-key, muttering petulantly, „What the devil is the matter with me now!“ It seemed to him that a voice had cried, clearly, yet as from afar, „Charles Renton!“—his own name. He had heard it in his startled mind; but, then, he knew he was in a highly wrought state of nervous excitement, and his medical science, with that knowledge for a basis, could have reared a formidable fortress of explanation against any phenomenon, were it even more wonderful than this.

He entered the house; kicked the door to; pulled off his over-coat; wrenched off his outer kerchief; slammed them on a branch of the clothes-tree; banged his hat on top of them; wheeled about; pushed in the door of his library; strode in, and, leaving the door ajar, threw himself into an easy chair, and sat there in the fire-reddened dusk, with his white brows knit, and his arms tightly locked on his breast. The ghost had followed him, sadly, and now stood motionless in a corner of the room, its spectral hands crossed on its bosom, and its white locks drooping down.

It was evident Dr. Renton was in a bad humor. The very library caught contagion from him, and became grouty and sombre. The furniture was grim, and sullen, and sulky; it made ugly shadows on the carpet and on the wall, in allopathic quantity; it took the red gleams from the fire on its polished surfaces, in homœopathic globules, and got no good from them. The fire itself peered out sulkily from the black bars of the grate, and seemed resolved not to burn the fresh deposit of black coals at the top, but to take this as a good time to remember that those coals had been bought in the summer at five dollars a ton—under price, mind you—when poor people, who cannot buy at advantage, but must get their firing in the winter, would then have given nine or ten dollars for them. And so (glowered the fire), I am determined to think of that outrage, and not to light them, but to go out myself, directly! And the fire got into such a spasm of glowing indignation over the injury, that it lit a whole tier of black coals with a series of little explosions, before it could cool down, and sent a crimson gleam over the moody figure of its owner in the easy chair, and over the solemn furniture, and into the shadowy corner filled by the ghost.

The spectre did not move when Dr. Renton arose and lit the chandelier. It stood there, still and gray, in the flood of mellow light. The curtains were drawn, and the twilight without had deepened into darkness. The fire was now burning in despite of itself, fanned by the wintry gusts, which found their way down the chimney. Dr. Renton stood with his back to it, his hands behind him, his bold white forehead shaded by a careless lock of black hair, and knit sternly; and the same frown in his handsome, open, searching dark eyes. Tall and strong, with an erect port, and broad, firm shoulders, high, resolute features, a commanding figure garbed in aristocratic black, and not yet verging into the proportions of obesity—take him for all in all, a very fine and favorable specimen of the solid men of Boston. And seen in contrast (oh! could he but have known it!) with the attenuated figure of the poor, dim ghost!

Hark! a very light foot on the stairs—a rich rustle of silks. Everything still again—Dr. Renton looking fixedly, with great sternness, at the half-open door, from whence a faint, delicious perfume floats into the library. Somebody there, for certain. Somebody peeping in with very bright, arch eyes. Dr. Renton knew it, and prepared to maintain his ill-humor against the invader. His face became triply armed with severity for the encounter. That's Netty, I know, he thought. His daughter. So it was. In she bounded. Bright little Netty! Gay little Netty! A dear and sweet little creature, to be sure, with a delicate and pleasant beauty of face and figure, it needed no costly silks to grace or heighten. There she stood. Not a word from her merry lips, but a smile which stole over all the solitary grimness of the library, and made everything better, and brighter, and fairer, in a minute. It

floated down into the cavernous humor of Dr. Renton, and the gloom began to lighten directly—though he would not own it, nor relax a single feature. But the wan ghost in the corner lifted its head to look at her, and slowly brightened as to something worthy a spirit's love, and a dim phantom's smiles. Now then, Dr. Renton! the lines are drawn, and the foe is coming. Be martial, sir, as when you stand in the ranks of the cadets on training-days! Steady, and stand the charge! So he did. He kept an inflexible front as she glided toward him, softly, slowly, with her bright eyes smiling into his, and doing dreadful execution. Then she put her white arms around his neck, laid her dear, fair head on his breast, and peered up archly into his stern visage. Spite of himself, he could not keep the fixed lines on his face from breaking confusedly into a faint smile. Somehow or other, his hands came from behind him, and rested on her head. There! That's all. Dr. Renton surrendered at discretion! One of the solid men of Boston was taken after a desperate struggle—internal, of course—for he kissed her, and said, „Dear little Netty!“ And so she was.

The phantom watched her with a smile, and wavered and brightened as if about to glide to her; but it grew still, and remained.

„Pa in the sulks to-night?“ she asked, in the most winning, playful, silvery voice.

„Pa's a fool,“ he answered in his deep chest-tones, with a vexed good humor; „and you know it.“

„What's the matter with pa? What makes him be a great bear? Papa-sy, dear,“ she continued, stroking his face with her little hands, and patting him, very much as Beauty might have patted the Beast after she fell in love with him—or, as if he were a great baby. In fact, he began to look then as if he were.

„Matter? Oh! everything's the matter, little Netty. The world goes round too fast. My boots pinch. Somebody stole my umbrella last year. And I've got a headache.“ He concluded this fanciful abstract of his grievances by putting his arms around her, and kissing her again. Then he sat down in the easy-chair, and took her fondly on his knee.

„Pa's got a headache! It is t-o-o bad, so it is,“ she continued in the same soothing, winning way, caressing his bold, white brow with her tiny hands. „It's a horrid shame, so it is! P-o-o-r pa. Where does it ache, papa-sy, dear? In the forehead? Cerebrum or cerebellum, papa-sy? Occiput or sinciput, deary?“

„Bah! you little quiz,“ he replied, laughing and pinching her cheek, „none of your nonsense! And what are you dressed up in this way for, to-night? Silks, and laces, and essences, and what not! Where are you going, fairy?“

„Going out with mother for the evening, Dr. Renton,“ she replied briskly; „Mrs. Larrabee's party, papa-sy. Christmas eve, you know. And what are you going to give me for a present, to-morrow, pa-sy?“

„To-morrow will tell, little Netty.“

„Good! And what are you going to give me, so that I can make *my* presents, Beary?“

„Ugh!“ but he growled it in fun, and had a pocket-book out from his breast-pocket directly after. Fives—tens—twenties—fifties—all crisp, and nice, and new bank-notes.

„Will that be enough, Netty?“ He held up a twenty. The smiling face nodded assent, and the bright eyes twinkled.

„No, it won't. But *that* will," he continued, giving her a fifty.

„Fifty dollars, Globe Bank, Boston!" exclaimed Netty, making great eyes at him. „But we must take all we can get, pa-sy; mustn't we? It's too much, though. Thank you all the same, pa-sy, nevertheless." And she kissed him, and put the bill in a little bit of a portemonnaie with a gay laugh.

„Well done, I declare!" he said, smilingly. „But you're going to the party?"

„Pretty soon, pa."

He made no answer; but sat smiling at her. The phantom watched them, silently.

„What made pa so cross and grim, to-night? Tell Netty—do," she pleaded.

„Oh! because—everything went wrong with me, to-day. There." And he looked as sulky, at that moment, as he ever did in his life.

„No, no, pa-sy; that won't do. I want the particulars," continued Netty, shaking her head, smilingly.

„Particulars! Well, then, Miss Nathalie Renton," he began, with mock gravity, „your professional father is losing some of his oldest patients. Everybody is in ruinous good health; and the grass is growing in the graveyards."

„In the winter-time, papa?—smart grass!"

„Not that I want practice," he went on, getting into soliloquy; „or patients, either. A rich man who took to the profession simply for the love of it, can't complain on that score. But to have an interloping she-doctor take a family I've attended ten years, out of my hands, and to hear the hodge-podge gabble about physiological laws, and woman's rights, and no taxation without representation, they learn from her—well, it's too bad!"

„Is that all, pa-sy? Seems to me, *I'd* like to vote, too," was Netty's piquant rejoinder.

„Hoh! I'll warrant," growled her father. „Hope you'll vote the Whig ticket, Netty, when you get your rights."

„Will the Union be dissolved, then, pa-sy—when the Whigs are beaten?"

„Bah! you little plague," he growled, with a laugh. „But, then, you women don't know anything about politics. So, there. As I was saying, everything went wrong with me to-day. I've been speculating in railroad stock, and singed my fingers. Then, old Tom Hollis outbid me, to-day, at Leonard's on a rare medical work I had set my eyes upon having. Confound him! Then, again, two of my houses are tenantless, and there are folks in two others that won't pay their rent, and I can't get them out. Out they'll go, though, or I'll know why. And, to crown all—um-m. And I wish the devil had him! as he will."

„Had who, Beary-papa?"

„Him. I'll tell you. The street floor of one of my houses in Hanover street lets for an oyster-room. They keep a bar there, and sell liquor. Last night they had a grand row—a drunken fight, and one man was stabbed, it's thought fatally."

„O, father!" Netty's bright eyes dilated with horror.

„Yes. I hope he won't die. At any rate, there's likely to be a stir about the matter, and my name will be called into question, then, as I'm the landlord. And folks will make a handle of it, and there'll be the deuce to pay, generally."

He got back the stern, vexed frown, to his face, with the anticipation, and beat the carpet with his foot. The ghost still watched from the angle of the room, and seemed to darken, while its features looked troubled.

„But, father,“ said Netty, a little tremulously, „I wouldn't let my houses to such people. It's not right; is it? Why, it's horrid to think of men getting drunk, and killing each other!“

Dr. Renton rubbed his hair into disorder, with vexation, and then subsided into solemnity.

„I know it's not exactly right, Netty; but I can't help it. As I said before, I wish the devil had that bar-keeper. I ought to have ordered him out long ago, and then this wouldn't have happened. I've increased his rent twice, hoping to get rid of him so; but he pays without a murmur; and what am I to do? You see, he was an occupant when the building came into my hands, and I let him stay. He pays me a good, round rent; and, apart from his cursed traffic, he's a good tenant. What can I do? It's a good thing for him, and it's a good thing for me, pecuniarily. Confound him. Here's a nice rumpus brewing!“

„Dear pa, I'm afraid it's not a good thing for you,“ said Netty, caressing him, and smoothing his tumbled hair. „Nor for him either. I wouldn't mind the rent he pays you. I'd order him out. It's bad money. There's blood on it.“

She had grown pale, and her voice quivered. The phantom glided over to them, and laid its spectral hand upon her forehead. The shadowy eyes looked from under the misty hair into the doctor's face, and the pale lips moved as if speaking the words heard only in the silence of his heart—*„hear her, hear her!“*

„I must think of it,“ resumed Dr. Renton, coldly. „I'm resolved, at all events, to warn him that if anything of this kind occurs again, he must quit at once. I dislike to lose a profitable tenant; for no other business would bring me the sum his does. Hang it, everybody does the best he can with his property—why shouldn't I?“

The ghost, standing near them, drooped its head again on its breast, and crossed its arms. Netty was silent. Dr. Renton continued, petulantly:

„A precious set of people I manage to get into my premises. There's a woman hires a couple of rooms for a dwelling, overhead, in that same building, and for three months I haven't got a cent from her. I know these people's tricks. Her month's notice expires to-morrow, and out she goes.“

„Poor creature!“ sighed Netty.

He knit his brow, and beat the carpet with his foot, in vexation.

„Perhaps she can't pay you, pa,“ trembled the sweet, silvery voice. „You wouldn't turn her out in this cold winter, when she can't pay you—would you, pa?“

„Why don't she get another house, and swindle some one else?“ he replied, testily; „there's plenty of rooms to let.“

„Perhaps she can't find one, pa,“ answered Netty.

„Humbug!“ retorted her father; „I know better.“

„Pa, dear, if I were you, I'd turn out that rumseller, and let the poor woman stay a little longer; just a little, pa.“

„Shan't do it. Hah! that would be scattering money out of both pockets. Shan't do it. Out she shall go; and as for him—well, he'd better turn over a new leaf. There, let us leave the subject, darling. It vexes me. How did we contrive to get into this train. Bah!“

He drew her closer to him, and kissed her forehead. She sat quietly, with her head on his shoulder, thinking very gravely.

„I feel queerly to-day, little Netty,“ he began, after a short pause. „My nerves are all high-strung with the turn matters have taken.“

„How is it, papa? The headache?“ she answered.

„Y-e-s—n-o—not exactly; I don’t know,“ he said dubiously; then, in an absent way, „it was that letter set me to think of him all day, I suppose.“

„Why, pa, I declare,“ cried Netty, starting up, „if I didn’t forget all about it, and I came down expressly to give it to you! Where is it? Oh! here it is.“

She drew from her pocket an old letter, faded to a pale yellow, and gave it to him. The ghost started suddenly.

„Why, bless my soul! it’s the very letter! Where did you get that, Nathalie?“ asked Dr. Renton.

„I found it on the stairs after dinner, pa.“

„Yes, I do remember taking it up with me; I must have dropped it,“ he answered, musingly, gazing at the superscription. The ghost was gazing at it, too, with startled interest.

„What beautiful writing it is, pa,“ murmured the young girl. „Who wrote it to you? It looks yellow enough to have been written a long time since.“

„Fifteen years ago, Netty. When you were a baby. And the hand that wrote it has been cold for all that time.“

He spoke with a solemn sadness, as if memory lingered with the heart of fifteen years ago, on an old grave. The dim figure by his side had bowed its head, and all was still.

„It is strange,“ he resumed, speaking vacantly and slowly, „I have not thought of him for so long a time, and to-day—especially this evening—I have felt as if he were constantly near me. It is a singular feeling.“

He put his left hand to his forehead, and mused—his right clasped his daughter’s shoulder. The phantom slowly raised its head, and gazed at him with a look of unutterable tenderness.

„Who was he, father?“ she asked with a hushed voice.

„A young man—an author—a poet. He had been my dearest friend, when we were boys; and, though I lost sight of him for years—he led an erratic life—we were friends when he died. Poor, poor fellow! Well, he is at peace.“

The stern voice had saddened, and was almost tremulous. The spectral form was still.

„How did he die, father?“

„A long story, darling,“ he replied gravely, „and a sad one. He was very poor and proud. He was a genius—that is, a person without an atom of practical talent. His parents died, the last, his mother, when he was near manhood. I was in college then. Thrown upon the world, he picked up a scanty subsistence with his pen, for a time. I could have got him a place in the counting-house, but he would not take it; in fact, he wasn’t fit for it. You can’t harness Pegasus to the cart, you know. Besides, he despised mercantile life—without reason, of course; but he was always notional. His love of literature was one of the rocks he foundered on. He wasn’t successful; his best compositions were too delicate—fanciful—to please the popular taste; and then he was full of the radical and fanatical notions which



infected so many people at that time in New England, and infect them now, for that matter; and his sublimated, impracticable ideas and principles, which he kept till his dying day, and which, I confess, alienated me from him, always staved off his chances of success. Consequently, he never rose above the drudgery of some employment on newspapers. Then he was terribly passionate, not without cause, I allow; but it wasn't wise. What I mean is this: if he saw, or if he fancied he saw, any wrong or injury done to any one, it was enough to throw him into a frenzy; he would get black in the face and absolutely shriek out his denunciations of the wrongdoer. I do believe he would have visited his own brother with the most unsparing invective, if that brother had laid a harming finger on a street-beggar, or a colored man, or a poor person of any kind. I don't blame the feeling; though with a man like him, it was very apt to be a false or mistaken one; but, at any rate, its exhibition wasn't sensible. Well, as I was saying, he buffeted about in this world a long time, poorly paid, fed, and clad; taking more care of other people than he did of himself. Then mental suffering, physical exposure, and want killed him."

The stern voice had grown softer than a child's. The same look of unutterable tenderness brooded on the mournful face of the phantom by his side; but its thin, shining hand was laid upon his head, and its countenance had undergone a change. The form was still undefined; but the features had become distinct. They were those of a young man, beautiful and wan, and marked with great suffering.

A pause had fallen on the conversation, in which the father and daughter heard the solemn sighing of the wintry wind around the dwelling. The silence seemed scarcely broken by the voice of the young girl.

"Dear father, this was very sad. Did you say he died of want?"

"Of want, my child, of hunger and cold. I don't doubt it. He had wandered about, as I gather, houseless for a couple of days and nights. It was in December, too. Some one found him, on a rainy night, lying in the street, drenched and burning with fever, and had him taken to the hospital. It appears that he had always cherished a strange affection for me, though I had grown away from him; and in his wild ravings he constantly mentioned my name, and they sent for me. That was our first meeting after two years. I found him in the hospital—dying. Heaven can witness that I felt all my old love for him return then, but he was delirious, and never recognized me. And, Nathalie, his hair—it had been coal-black, and he wore it very long, he wouldn't let them cut it either; and as they knew no skill could save him, they let him have his way—his hair was then as white as snow! God alone knows what that brain must have suffered to blanch hair which had been as black as the wing of a raven!"

He covered his eyes with his hand, and sat silently. The fingers of the phantom still shone dimly on his head, and its white locks drooped above him, like a weft of light.

"What was his name, father?" asked the pitying girl.

"George Feval. The very name sounds like fever. He died on Christmas eve, fifteen years ago this night. It was on his death-bed, while his mind was tossing on a sea of delirious fancies, that he wrote me this long letter—for to the last, I was uppermost in his thoughts. It is a wild, incoherent thing, of course—a strange mixture of sense and madness. But I have kept it as a memorial of him. I have not

looked at it for years; but this morning I found it among my papers, and somehow it has been in my mind all day.“

He slowly unfolded the faded sheets, and sadly gazed at the writing. His daughter had risen from her half-recumbent posture, and now bent her graceful head over the leaves. The phantom covered its face with its hands.

„What a beautiful manuscript it is, father!“ she exclaimed. „The writing is faultless.“

„It is, indeed,“ he replied. „Would he had written his life as fairly!“

„Read it, father,“ said Nathalie.

„No—but I'll read you a detached passage here and there,“ he answered, after a pause. „The rest you may read yourself some time, if you wish. It is painful to me. Here's the beginning:

*„My Dear Charles Renton:—Adieu, and adieu. It is Christmas eve, and I am going home. I am soon to exhale from my flesh, like the spirit of a broken flower. Exultemus forever!*

„It is very wild. His mind was in a fever-craze. Here is a passage that seems to refer to his own experience of life:

*„Your friendship was dear to me. I give you true love. Stocks and returns. You are rich, but I did not wish to be your bounty's pauper. Could I beg? I had my work to do for the world, but oh! the world has no place for souls that can only love and suffer. How many miles to Babylon? Threescore and ten. Not so far—not near so far! Ask starvelings—they know. I wanted to do the world good and the world has killed me, Charles.“*

„It frightens me,“ said Nathalie, as he paused.

„We will read no more,“ he replied sombrely. „It belongs to the psychology of madness. To me, who knew him, there are gleams of sense in it, and passages where the delirium of the language is only a transparent veil on the meaning. All the remainder is devoted to what he thought important advice to me. But it's all wild and vague. Poor—poor George!“

The phantom still hid its face in its hands, as the doctor slowly turned over the pages of the letter. Nathalie, bending over the leaves, laid her finger on the last, and asked—„What are those closing sentences, father? Read them.“

„Oh! that is what he called his *last counsel* to me. It's as wild as the rest—tinged with the prevailing ideas of his career. First he says, *Farewell—farewell*; then he bids me take his *counsel into memory on Christmas day*; then, after enumerating all the wretched classes he can think of in the country, he says, *These are your sisters and your brothers—love them all*. Here he says, *O friend, strong in wealth for so much good, take my last counsel. In the name of the Saviour, I charge you be true and tender to mankind*. He goes on to bid me *live and labor for the fallen, the neglected, the suffering, and the poor*; and finally ends by advising me to help upset any, or all, institutions, laws, and so forth, that bear hardly on the fag-ends of society; and tells me that what he calls *a service to humanity* is

worth more to the doer than a service to anything else, or than anything we can gain from the world. Ah, well! poor George."

"But isn't all that true, father?" said Netty; "it seems so."

"H'm," he murmured through his closed lips. Then, with a vague smile, folding up the letter, meanwhile, he said, "Wild words, Netty, wild words. I've no objection to charity, judiciously given; but poor George's notions are not mine. Every man for himself, is a good general rule. Every man for humanity, as George has it, and in his acceptance of the principle, would send us all to the alms-house pretty soon. The greatest good of the greatest number—that's my rule of action. There are plenty of good institutions for the distressed, and I'm willing to help support 'em, and do. But as for making a martyr of one's self, or tilting against the necessary evils of society, or turning philanthropist at large, or any quixotism of that sort, I don't believe in it. We didn't make the world, and we can't mend it. Poor George. Well—he's at rest. The world wasn't the place for him."

They grew silent. The spectre glided slowly to the wall, and stood as if it were thinking what, with Dr. Renton's rule of action, was to become of the greatest good of the smallest number. Nathalie sat on her father's knee, thinking only of George Feval, and of his having been starved and grieved to death.

"Father," said Nathalie, softly, "I felt, while you were reading the letter, as if he were near us. Didn't you? The room was so light and still, and the wind sighed so."

"Netty, dear, I've felt that all day, I believe," he replied. "Hark! there is the door-bell. Off goes the spirit-world, and here comes the actual. Confound it! Some one to see me, I'll warrant, and I'm not in the mood."

He got into a fret at once. Netty was not the Netty of an hour ago, or she would have coaxed him out of it. But she did not notice it now in her abstraction. She had risen at the tinkle of the bell, and seated herself in a chair. Presently a nose, with a great pimple on the end of it, appeared at the edge of the door, and a weak, piping voice said, reckless of the proper tense, "there was a woman wanted to see you, sir."

"Who is it, James?—no matter, show her in."

He got up with the vexed scowl on his face, and walked the room. In a minute the library door opened again, and a pale, thin, rigid, frozen-looking little woman, scantily clad, the weather being considered, entered, and dropped a curt, awkward bow to Dr. Renton.

"Oh! Mrs. Miller. Good evening, ma'am. Sit down," he said, with a cold, constrained civility.

The little woman faintly said, "Good evening, Dr. Renton," and sat down stiffly, with her hands crossed before her, in the chair nearest the wall. This was the obdurate tenant, who had paid no rent for three months, and had a notice to quit, expiring to-morrow.

"Cold evening, ma'am," remarked Dr. Renton, in his hard way.

"Yes, sir, it is," was the cowed, awkward answer.

"Won't you sit near the fire, ma'am," said Netty, gently; "you look cold."

"No, miss, thank you. I'm not cold," was the faint reply. She was cold, though, as well she might be with her poor, thin shawl, and open bonnet, in such a bitter night as it was outside. And there was a rigid, sharp, suffering look in her pinched features that betokened she might have been hungry, too.

„Poor people don't mind the cold weather, miss," she said, with a weak smile, her voice getting a little stronger. „They have to bear it, and they get used to it."

She had not evidently borne it long enough to effect the point of indifference. Netty looked at her with a tender pity. Dr. Renton thought to himself—Hoh!—blazoning her poverty—manufacturing sympathy already—the old trick—and steeled himself against any attacks of that kind, looking jealously, meanwhile, at Netty.

„Well, Mrs. Miller," he said, „what is it this evening? I suppose you've brought me my rent."

The little woman grew paler, and her voice seemed to fail on her quivering lips. Netty cast a quick, beseeching look at her father.

„Nathalie, please to leave the room." We'll have no nonsense carried on here, he thought, triumphantly, as Netty rose, and obeyed the stern, decisive order, leaving the door ajar behind her.

He seated himself in his chair, and resolutely put his right leg up to rest on his left knee. He did not look at his tenant's face, determined that her piteous expressions (got up for the occasion, of course) should be wasted on him.

„Well, Mrs. Miller," he said again.

„Dr. Renton," she began, faintly gathering her voice as she proceeded, „I have come to see you about the rent. I am very sorry, sir, to have made you wait, but we have been unfortunate."

„Sorry, ma'am," he replied, knowing what was coming; „but your misfortunes are not my affair. We all have misfortunes, ma'am. But we must pay our debts, you know."

„I expected to have got money from my husband before this, sir," she resumed, „and I wrote to him. I got a letter from him to-day, sir, and it said that he sent me fifty dollars a month ago, in a letter; and it appears that the post-office is to blame, or somebody, for I never got it. It was nearly three months' wages, sir, and it is very hard to lose it. If it hadn't been for that, your rent would have been paid long ago, sir."

„Don't believe a word of *that* story," thought Dr. Renton, sententiously.

„I thought, sir," she continued, emboldened by his silence, „that if you would be willing to wait a little longer, we would manage to pay you soon, and not let it occur again. It has been a hard winter with us, sir; firing is high, and provisions, and everything; and we're only poor people, you know, and it's difficult to get along."

The doctor made no reply.

„My husband was unfortunate, sir, in not being able to get employment here," she resumed; „his being out of work, in the autumn, threw us all back, and we've got nothing to depend on but his earnings. The family that he's in now, sir, don't give him very good pay—only twenty dollars a month, and his board—but it was the best chance he could get, and it was either go to Baltimore with them, or stay at home and starve, and so he went, sir. It's been a hard time with us, and one of the children is sick, now, with a fever, and we don't hardly know how to make out a living. And so, sir, I have come here this evening, leaving the children alone, to ask you if you wouldn't be kind enough to wait a little longer, and we'll hope to make it right with you in the end."

„Mrs. Miller,“ said Dr. Renton, with stern composure, „I have no wish to question the truth of any statement you may make; but I must tell you plainly, that I can't afford to let my houses for nothing. I told you a month ago, that if you couldn't pay me my rent, you must vacate the premises. You know very well that there are plenty of tenants who are able and willing to pay when the money comes due. You *know* that.“

He paused as he said this, and, glancing at her, saw her pale lips falter. It shook the cruelty of his purpose a little, and he had a vague feeling that he was doing wrong. Not without a proud struggle, during which no word was spoken, could he beat it down. Meanwhile, the phantom had advanced a pace toward the centre of the room.

„That is the state of the matter, ma'am,“ he resumed, coldly. „People who will not pay me my rent must not live in my tenements. You must move out. I have no more to say.“

„Dr. Renton,“ she said faintly, „I have a sick child—how can I move now? Oh! sir, it's Christmas eve—don't be hard with us!“

Instead of touching him, this speech irritated him beyond measure. Passing all considerations of her difficult position involved in her piteous statement, his anger flashed at once on her implication that he was unjust and unkind. So violent was his excitement that it whirled away the words that rushed to his lips, and only fanned the fury that sparkled from the whiteness of his face in his eyes.

„Be patient with us, sir,“ she continued; „we are poor, but we mean to pay you; and we can't move now in this cold weather; please, don't be hard with us, sir.“

The fury now burst out on his face in a red and angry glow, and the words came.

„Now, attend to me!“ He rose to his feet. „I will not hear any more from you. I know nothing of your poverty, nor of the condition of your family. All I know is that you owe me three months' rent, and that you can't or won't pay me. I say, therefore, leave the premises to people who can and will. You have had your legal notice; quit my house to-morrow; if you don't, your furniture shall be put in the street. Mark me—to-morrow!“

The phantom had rushed into the centre of the room. Standing, face to face with him—dilating—blackening—its whole form shuddering with a fury to which his own was tame—the semblance of a shriek upon its flashing lips, and on its writhing features, and an unearthly anger streaming from its bright and terrible eyes—it seemed to throw down, with its tossing arms, mountains of hate and malediction on the head of him whose words had smitten poverty and suffering, and whose heavy hand was breaking up the barriers of a home.

Dr. Renton sank again into his chair. His tenant—not a woman!—not a sister in humanity!—but only his tenant; she sat crushed and frightened by the wall. He knew it vaguely. Conscience was battling in his heart with the stubborn devils that had entered there. The phantom stood before him, like a dark cloud in the image of a man. But its darkness was lightening slowly, and its ghostly anger had passed away.

The poor woman, paler than before, had sat mute and trembling, with all her hopes ruined. Yet her desperation forbade her to abandon the chances of his mercy, and she now said:

„Dr. Renton, you surely don't mean what you have told me. Won't you bear with me a little longer, and we will yet make it all right with you?“

„I have given you my answer,“ he returned, coldly; „I have no more to add. I never take back anything I say—never!“

It was true. He never did—never! She half rose from her seat as if to go; but weak and sickened with the bitter result of her visit, she sunk down again with her head bowed. There was a pause. Then, solemnly gliding across the lighted room, the phantom stole to her side with a glory of compassion on its wasted features. Tenderly, as a son to a mother, it bent over her; its spectral hands of light rested upon her in caressing and benediction; its shadowy fall of hair, once blanched by the anguish of living and loving, floated on her throbbing brow; and resignation and comfort not of this world, sank upon her spirit, and consciousness grew dim within her, and care and sorrow seemed to die.

He who had been so cruel and so hard, sat silent in black gloom. The stern and sullen mood from which had dropped but one fierce flash of anger, still hung above the heat of his mind, like a dark rack of thunder-cloud. It would have burst anew into a fury of rebuke, had he but known his daughter was listening at the door, while the colloquy went on. It might have flamed violently, had his tenant made any further attempt to change his purpose. She had not. She had left the room meekly, with the same curt, awkward bow that marked her entrance. He recalled her manner very indistinctly; for a feeling, like a mist, began to gather in his mind, and make the occurrences of moments before uncertain.

Alone, now, he was yet oppressed with a sensation that something was near him. Was it a spiritual instinct? for the phantom stood by his side. It stood silently, with one hand raised above his head, from which a pale flame seemed to flow downward to his brain; its other hand pointed movelessly to the open letter on the table beside him.

He took the sheets from the table, thinking, at the moment, only of George Feval; but the first line on which his eye rested was, „In the name of the Saviour, I charge you, be true and tender to mankind!“ and the words touched him like a low voice from the grave. Their penetrant reproach pierced the hardness of his heart. He tossed the letter back on the table. The very manner of the act accused him of an insult to the dead. In a moment he took up the faded sheets more reverently, but only to lay them down again.

He had not been well that day, and he now felt worse than before. The pain in his head had given place to a strange sense of dilation, and there was a silent, confused riot in his fevered brain, which seemed to him like the incipience of insanity. Striving to divert his mind from what had passed, by reflection on other themes, he could not hold his thoughts; they came teeming but dim, and slipped and fell away; and only the one circumstance of his recent cruelty, mixed with remembrance of George Feval, recurred and clung with vivid persistence. This tortured him. Sitting there, with arms tightly interlocked, he resolved to wrench his mind down by sheer will upon other things; and a savage pleasure at what at once seemed success, took possession of him. In this mood, he heard soft footsteps and the rustle of festal garments on the stairs, and had a fierce complacency in being able to clearly apprehend that it was his wife and daughter going out to the party. In a moment, he heard the controlled and even voice of

Mrs. Renton—a serene and polished lady with whom he had lived for years in cold and civil alienation, both seeing as little of each other as possible. With a scowl of will upon his brow, he received her image distinctly into his mind, even to the minutia of the dress and ornaments he knew she wore, and felt an absolutely savage exultation in his ability to retain it. Then came the sound of the closing of the hall door and the rattle of receding wheels, and somehow it was Nathalie and not his wife that he was holding so grimly in his thought, and with her, salient and vivid as before, the tormenting remembrance of his tenant, connected with the memory of George Feval. Springing to his feet, he walked the room.

He had thrown himself on a sofa, still striving to be rid of his remorseful visitations, when the library door opened, and the inside man appeared, with his hand held bashfully over his nose. It flashed on him at once, that his tenant's husband was the servant of a family like this fellow; and, irritated that the whole matter should be thus broadly forced upon him in another way, he harshly asked him what he wanted. The man only came in to say that Mrs. Renton and the young lady had gone out for the evening, but that tea was laid for him in the dining-room. He did not want any tea, and if anybody called, he was not at home. With this charge, the man left the room, closing the door behind him.

If he could but sleep a little! Rising from the sofa, he turned the lights of the chandelier low, and screened the fire. The room was still. The ghost stood, faintly radiant, in a remote corner. Dr. Renton lay down again, but not to repose. Things he had forgotten of his dead friend, now started up again in remembrance, fresh from the grave of many years; and not one of them but linked itself by some mysterious bond to something connected with his tenant, and became an accusation.

He had lain thus for more than an hour, feeling more and more unmanned by illness, and his mental excitement fast becoming intolerable, when he heard a low strain of music, from the Swedenborgian chapel, hard by. Its first impression was one of solemnity and rest, and its first sense, in his mind, was of relief. Perhaps it was the music of an evening meeting; or it might be that the organist and choir had met for practice. Whatever its purpose, it breathed through his heated fancy like a cool and fragrant wind. It was vague and sweet and wandering at first, straying on into a strain more mysterious and melancholy, but very shadowy and subdued, and evoking the innocent and tender moods of early youth before worldliness had hardened around his heart. Gradually, as he listened to it, the fires in his brain were allayed, and all yielded to a sense of coolness and repose. He seemed to sink from trance to trance of utter rest, and yet was dimly aware that either something in his own condition, or some supernatural accession of tone, was changing the music from its proper quality to a harmony more infinite and awful. It was still low and indeterminate and sweet, but had unaccountably and strangely swelled into a gentle and sombre dirge, incommunicably mournful, and filled with a dark significance that touched him in his depth of rest with a secret tremor and awe. As he listened, rapt and vaguely wondering, the sense of his tranced sinking seemed to come to an end, and with the feeling of one who had been descending for many hours, and at length lay motionless at the bottom of a deep, dark chasm, he heard the music fail and cease.

A pause, and then it rose again, blended with the solemn voices of the choir, sublimed and dilated now, reaching him as though from weird night gulfs of the upper air, and charged with an overmastering pathos as of the lamentations of angels. In the dimness and silence, in the aroused and exalted condition of his being, the strains seemed unearthly in their immense and desolate grandeur of sorrow, and their mournful and dark significance was now for him. Working within him the impression of vast, innumerable, fleeing shadows, thick-crowding memories of all the ways and deeds of an existence fallen from its early dreams and aims, poured across the midnight of his soul, and under the streaming melancholy of the dirge, his life showed like some monstrous treason. It did not terrify or madden him; he listened to it rapt utterly as in some deadening ether of dream; yet feeling to his inmost core all its powerful grief and accusation, and quietly aghast at the sinister consciousness it gave him. Still it swelled, gathering and sounding on into yet mightier pathos, till all at once it darkened and spread wide in wild despair, and aspiring again into a pealing agony of supplication, quivered and died away in a low and funereal sigh.

The tears streamed suddenly upon his face; his soul lightened and turned dark within him; and as one faints away, so consciousness swooned, and he fell suddenly down a precipice of sleep. The music rose again, a pensive and holy chant, and sounded on to its close, unaffected by the action of his brain, for he slept and heard it no more. He lay tranquilly, hardly seeming to breathe, in motionless repose. The room was dim and silent, and the furniture took uncouth shapes around him. The red glow upon the ceiling, from the screened fire, showed the misty figure of the phantom kneeling by his side. All light had gone from the spectral form. It knelt beside him, mutely, as in prayer. Once it gazed at his quiet face with a mournful tenderness, and its shadowy hands caressed his forehead. Then it resumed its former attitude, and the slow hours crept by.

At last it rose and glided to the table, on which lay the open letter. It seemed to try to lift the sheets with its misty hands—but vainly. Next it essayed the lifting of a pen which lay there—but failed. It was a piteous sight, to see its idle efforts on these shapes of grosser matter, which appeared now to have to it but the existence of illusions. Wandering about the shadowy room, it wrung its phantom hands as in despair.

Presently it grew still. Then it passed quickly to his side, and stood before him. He slept calmly. It placed one ghostly hand above his forehead, and, with the other pointed to the open letter. In this attitude its shape grew momentarily more distinct. It began to kindle into brightness. The pale flame again flowed from its hand, streaming downward to his brain. A look of trouble darkened the sleeping face. Stronger—stronger; brighter—brighter; until, at last, it stood before him, a glorious shape of light, with an awful look of commanding love in its shining features—and the sleeper sprang to his feet with a cry!

The phantom had vanished. He saw nothing. His first impression was, not that he had dreamed, but that, awaking in the familiar room, he had seen the spirit of his dead friend, bright and awful by his side, and that it had gone! In the flash of that quick change, from sleeping to waking, he had detected, he thought, the unearthly being that, he now felt, watched him from behind the air, and it had vanished! The library was the same as in the moment of that supernatural



revealing; the open letter lay upon the table still; only that was gone which had made these common aspects terrible. Then, all the hard, strong skepticism of his nature, which had been driven backward by the shock of his first conviction, recoiled, and rushed within him, violently struggling for its former vantage ground; till, at length, it achieved the foothold for a doubt. Could he have dreamed? The ghost, invisible, still watched him. Yes—a dream—only a dream; but, how vivid—how strange! With a slow thrill creeping through his veins—the blood curdling at his heart—a cold sweat starting on his forehead, he stared through the dimness of the room. All was vacancy.

With a strong shudder, he strode forward, and turned up the flames of the chandelier. A flood of garish light filled the apartment. In a moment, remembering the letter to which the phantom of his dream had pointed, he turned and took it from the table. The last page lay upward, and every word of the solemn counsel at the end seemed to dilate on the paper, and all its mighty meaning rushed upon his soul. Trembling in his own despite, he laid it down and moved away. A physician, he remembered that he was in a state of violent nervous excitement, and thought that when he grew calmer its effects would pass from him. But the hand that had touched him had gone down deeper than the physician, and reached what God had made.

He strove in vain. The very room, in its light and silence, and the lurking sentiment of something watching him, became terrible. He could not endure it. The devils in his heart, grown pusillanimous, cowered beneath the flashing strokes of his aroused and terrible conscience. He could not endure it. He must go out. He will walk the streets. It is not late—it is but ten o'clock. He will go.

The air of his dream still hung heavily about him. He was in the street—he hardly remembered how he had got there, or when; but there he was, wrapped up from the searching cold, thinking, with a quiet horror in his mind, of the darkened room he had left behind, and haunted by the sense that something was groping about there in the darkness, searching for him. The night was still and cold. The full moon was in the zenith. Its icy splendor lay on the bare streets, and on the walls of the dwellings. The lighted oblong squares of curtained windows, here and there, seemed dim and waxen in the frigid glory. The familiar aspect of the quarter had passed away, leaving behind only a corpse-like neighborhood, whose huge, dead features, staring rigidly through the thin, white shroud of moonlight that covered all, left no breath upon the stainless skies. Through the vast silence of the night he passed along; the very sound of his footfalls was remote to his muffled sense.

Gradually, as he reached the first corner, he had an uneasy feeling that a thing—a formless, unimaginable thing—was dogging him. He had thought of going down to his club-room; but he now shrank from entering, with this thing near him, the lighted rooms where his set were busy with cards and billiards, over their liquors and cigars, and where the heated air was full of their idle faces and careless chatter, lest some one should bawl out that he was pale, and ask him what was the matter, and he should answer, tremblingly, that something was following him, and was near him then! He must get rid of it first; he must walk quickly, and baffle its pursuit by turning sharp corners, and plunging into devious streets and crooked lanes, and so lose it!

It was difficult to reach through memory to the crazy chaos of his mind on that night, and recall the route he took while haunted by this feeling; but he afterward remembered that, without any other purpose than to baffle his imaginary pursuer, he traversed at a rapid pace a large portion of the moonlit city; always (he knew not why) avoiding the more populous thoroughfares, and choosing unfrequented and tortuous byways, but never ridding himself of that horrible confusion of mind in which the faces of his dead friend and the pale woman were strangely blended, nor of the fancy that he was followed. Once, as he passed the hospital where Feval died, a faint hint seemed to flash and vanish from the clouds of his lunacy, and almost identify the dogging goblin with the figure of his dream; but the conception instantly mixed with a disconnected remembrance that this was Christmas eve, and then slipped from him, and was lost. He did not pause there, but strode on. But just there, what had been frightful became hideous. For at once he was possessed with the conviction that the thing that lurked at a distance behind him, was quickening its movement, and coming up to seize him. The dreadful fancy stung him like a goad, and, with a start, he accelerated his flight, horribly conscious that what he feared was slinking along in the shadow, close to the dark bulks of the houses, resolutely pursuing, and bent on overtaking him. Faster! His footfalls rang hollowly and loud on the moonlit pavement, and in contrast with their rapid thuds he felt it as something peculiarly terrible that the furtive thing behind, slunk after him with soundless feet. Faster, faster! Traversing only the most unfrequented streets, and at that late hour of a cold winter night, he met no one, and with a terrifying consciousness that his pursuer was gaining on him, he desperately strode on. He did not dare to look behind, dreading less what he might see, than the momentary loss of speed the action might occasion. Faster, faster, faster! And all at once he knew that the dogging thing had dropped its stealthy pace and was racing up to him. With a bound he broke into a run, seeing, hearing, heeding nothing, aware only that the other was silently louping on his track two steps to his one; and with that frantic apprehension upon him, he gained the next street, flung himself around the corner with his back to the wall, and his arms convulsively drawn up for a grapple; and felt something rush whirring past his flank, striking him on the shoulder as it went by, with a buffet that made a shock break through his frame. That shock restored him to his senses. His delusion was suddenly shattered. The goblin was gone. He was free.

He stood panting, like one just roused from some terrible dream, wiping the reeking perspiration from his forehead and thinking confusedly and wearily what a fool he had been. He felt he had wandered a long distance from his house, but had no distinct perception of his whereabouts. He only knew he was in some thinly-peopled street, whose familiar aspect seemed lost to him in the magical disguise the superb moonlight had thrown over all. Suddenly a film seemed to drop from his eyes, as they became riveted on a lighted window, on the opposite side of the way. He started, and a secret terror crept over him, vaguely mixed with the memory of the shock he had felt as he turned the last corner, and his distinct, awful feeling that something invisible had passed him. At the same instant he felt, and thrilled to feel, a touch, as of a light finger, on his cheek. He was in Hanover street. Before him was the house—the oyster-room staring at him through the lighted transparencies of its two windows, like two square eyes, below; and his

tenant's light in a chamber above! The added shock which this discovery gave to the heaving of his heart, made him gasp for breath. Could it be? Did he still dream? While he stood panting and staring at the building, the city clocks began to strike. Eleven o'clock; it was ten when he came away; how he must have driven! His thoughts caught up the word. Driven—by what? Driven from his house in horror, through street and lane, over half the city—driven—hunted in terror, and smitten by a shock here! Driven—driven! He could not rid his mind of the word, nor of the meaning it suggested. The pavements about him began to ring and echo with the tramp of many feet, and the cold, brittle air was shivered with the noisy voices that had roared and bawled applause and laughter at the National Theatre all the evening, and were now singing and howling homeward. Groups of rude men, and ruder boys, their breaths steaming in the icy air, began to tramp by, jostling him as they passed, till he was forced to draw back to the wall, and give them the sidewalk. Dazed and giddy, in cold fear, and with the returning sense of something near him, he stood and watched the groups that pushed and tumbled in through the entrance of the oyster-room, whistling and chattering as they went, and banging the door behind them. He noticed that some came out presently, banging the door harder, and went, smoking and shouting, down the street. Still they poured in and out, while the street was startled with their stimulated riot, and the bar-room within echoed their trampling feet and hoarse voices. Then, as his glance wandered upward to his tenant's window, he thought of the sick child, mixing this hideous discord in the dreams of fever. The word brought up the name and the thought of his dead friend. „In the name of the Saviour, I charge you be true and tender to mankind!“ The memory of these words seemed to ring clearly, as if a voice had spoken them, above the roar that suddenly rose in his mind. In that moment he felt himself a wretched and most guilty man. He felt that his cruel words had entered that humble home, to make desperate poverty more desperate, to sicken sickness, and to sadden sorrow. Before him was the dram-shop, let and licensed to nourish the worst and most brutal appetites and instincts of human natures, at the sacrifice of all their highest and holiest tendencies. The throng of tipplers and drunkards was swarming through its hopeless door, to gulp the fiery liquor whose fumes give all shames, vices, miseries, and crimes, a lawless strength and life, and change the man into the pig or tiger. Murder was done, or nearly done, within those walls last night. Within those walls no good was ever done; but, daily, unmitigated evil, whose results were reaching on to torture unborn generations. He had consented to it all! He could not falter, or equivocate, or evade, or excuse. His dead friend's words rang in his conscience like the trump of the judgment angel. He was conquered.

Slowly, the resolve to instantly go in up-rose within him, and with it a change came upon his spirit, and the natural world, sadder than before, but sweeter, seemed to come back to him. A great feeling of relief flowed upon his mind. Pale and trembling still, he crossed the street with a quick, unsteady step, entered a yard at the side of the house, and, brushing by a host of white, rattling spectres of frozen clothes, which dangled from lines in the inclosure, mounted some wooden steps, and rang the bell. In a minute he heard footsteps within, and saw the gleam of a lamp. His heart palpitated violently as he heard the lock turning, lest the answerer of his summons might be his tenant. The door opened, and, to his relief,

he stood before a rather decent-looking Irishman, bending forward in his stocking feet, with one boot and a lamp in his hand. The man stared at him from a wild head of tumbled red hair, with a half smile round his loose open mouth, and said, „Begorra!“ This was a second floor tenant.

Dr. Renton was relieved at the sight of him; but he rather failed in an attempt at his rent-day suavity of manner, when he said:

„Good evening, Mr. Flanagan. Do you think I can see Mrs. Miller to-night?“

„She’s up *there*, docther, anyway.“ Mr. Flanagan made a sudden start for the stairs, with the boot and lamp at arm’s length before him, and stopped as suddenly. „Yull go up?—or wud she come down to ye?“ There was as much anxious indecision in Mr. Flanagan’s general aspect, pending the reply, as if he had to answer the question himself.

„I’ll go up, Mr. Flanagan,“ returned Dr. Renton, stepping in, after a pause, and shutting the door. „But I’m afraid she’s in bed.“

„Naw—she’s not, sur.“ Mr. Flanagan made another feint with the boot and lamp at the stairs, but stopped again in curious bewilderment, and rubbed his head. Then, with another inspiration, and speaking with such velocity that his words ran into each other, pell-mell, he continued: „Th’ small girl’s sick, sur. Begorra, I wor just pullin’ on th’ boots tuh gaw for the docther, in th’ nixt streth, an’ summons him to her relehf, for it’s bad she is. A’id bettther be goan.“ Another start, and a movement to put on the boot instantly, baffled by his getting the lamp into the leg of it, and involving himself in difficulties in trying to get it out again without dropping either, and stopped finally by Dr. Renton.

„You needn’t go, Mr. Flanagan. I’ll see to the child. Don’t go.“

He stepped slowly up the stairs, followed by the bewildered Flanagan. All this time Dr. Renton was listening to the racket from the bar-room. Clinking of glasses, rattling of dishes, trampling of feet, oaths and laughter, and a confused din of coarse voices, mingling with boisterous calls for oysters and drink, came, hardly deadened by the partition walls, from the haunt below, and echoed through the corridors. Loud enough within—louder in the street without, where the oysters and drink were reeling and roaring off to brutal dreams. People trying to sleep here; a sick child up stairs. Listen! „*Two stew! One roast! Four ale! Hurry ‘em up! Three stew! In number six! One fancy—two roast! One sling! Three brandy—hot! Two stew! One whisk’ skin! Hurry ‘em up! What yeh ‘bout! Three brand’ punch—hot! Four stew! What-ye-e-h ‘BOUT! Two gin-cock-t’il! One stew! Hu-r-r-y ‘em up!*“ Clashing, rattling, cursing, swearing, laughing, shouting, trampling, stumbling, driving, slamming, of doors. „Hu-r-ry ‘em UP.“

„Flanagan,“ said Dr. Renton, stopping at the first landing, „do you have this noise every night?“

„Naise? Hoo! Divil a night, docther, but I’m wehked out ov me bed wid ‘em, Sundays an’ all. Sure didn’t they murdher wan of ‘em, out an’ out, last night!“

„Is the man dead?“

„Dead? Troth he is. An’ cowld.“

„H’m“—through his compressed lips. „Flanagan, you needn’t come up. I know the door. Just hold the light for me here. There, that’ll do. Thank you.“ He whispered the last words from the top of the second flight.

„Are ye there, docther?“ Flanagan anxious to the last, and trying to peer up at him with the lamp-light in his eyes.

„Yes. That'll do. Thank you!“ in the same whisper. Before he could tap at the door, then darkening in the receding light, it opened suddenly, and a big Irish woman bounced out, and then whisked in again, calling to some one in an inner room: „Here he is, Mrs. Mill'r,“ and then bounced out again, with a „Walk royt in, if you plaze; here's the choild“—and whisked in again, with a „Sure an' Jehms was quick“; never once looking at him, and utterly unconscious of the presence of her landlord. He had hardly stepped into the room and taken off his hat, when Mrs. Miller came from the inner chamber with a lamp in her hand. How she started! With her pale face grown suddenly paler, and her hand on her bosom, she could only exclaim: „Why, it's Dr. Renton!“ and stand, still and dumb, gazing with a frightened look at his face, whiter than her own. Whereupon Mrs. Flanagan came bolting out again, with wild eyes and a sort of stupefied horror in her good, coarse, Irish features; and then, with some uncouth ejaculation, ran back, and was heard to tumble over something within, and tumble something else over in her fall, and gather herself up with a subdued howl, and subside.

„Mrs. Miller,“ began Dr. Renton, in a low, husky voice, glancing at her frightened face, „I hope you'll be composed. I spoke to you very harshly and rudely to-night; but I really was not myself—I was in anger—and I ask your pardon. Please to overlook it all, and—but I will speak of this presently; now—I am a physician; will you let me look now at your sick child?“

He spoke hurriedly, but with evident sincerity. For a moment her lips faltered; then a slow flush came up, with a quick change of expression on her thin, worn face, and, reddening to painful scarlet, died away in a deeper pallor.

„Dr. Renton,“ she said, hastily, „I have no ill-feeling for you, sir, and I know you were hurt and vexed—and I know you have tried to make it up to me again, sir—secretly. I know who it was, now; but I can't take it, sir. You must take it back. You know it was you sent it, sir?“

„Mrs. Miller,“ he replied, puzzled beyond measure, „I don't understand you. What do you mean?“

„Don't deny it, sir. Please not to,“ she said imploringly, the tears starting to her eyes. „I am very grateful—indeed I am. But I can't accept it. Do take it again.“

„Mrs. Miller,“ he replied, in a hasty voice, „what do you mean? I have sent you nothing—nothing at all. I have, therefore, nothing to receive again.“

She looked at him fixedly, evidently impressed by the fervor of his denial.

„You sent me nothing to-night, sir?“ she asked, doubtfully.

„Nothing at any time—nothing,“ he answered, firmly.

It would have been folly to have disbelieved the truthful look of his wondering face, and she turned away in amazement and confusion. There was a long pause.

„I hope, Mrs. Miller, you will not refuse any assistance I can render to your child,“ he said, at length.

She started, and replied, tremblingly and confusedly, „No, sir; we shall be grateful to you, if you can save her“—and went quickly, with a strange abstraction on her white face, into the inner room. He followed her at once, and, hardly glancing at Mrs. Flanagan, who sat there in stupefaction, with her apron over her head and face, he laid his hat on a table, went to the bedside of the little girl, and

felt her head and pulse. He soon satisfied himself that the little sufferer was in no danger, under proper remedies, and now dashed down a prescription on a leaf from his pocket-book. Mrs. Flanagan, who had come out from the retirement of her apron, to stare stupidly at him during the examination, suddenly bobbed up on her legs, with enlightened alacrity, when he asked if there was any one that could go out to the apothecary's, and said, „sure I wull!“ He had a little trouble to make her understand that the prescription, which she took by the corner, holding it away from her, as if it were going to explode presently, and staring at it upside down—was to be left—„left, mind you, Mrs. Flanagan—with the apothecary—Mr. Flint—at the nearest corner—and he will give you some things, which you are to bring here.“ But she had shuffled off at last with a confident, „yis, sur—aw, I knoo,“ her head nodding satisfied assent, and her big thumb covering the note on the margin, „charge to Dr. C. Renton, Bowdoin street,“ (which *I* know, could not keep it from the eyes of the angels!) and he sat down to await her return.

„Mrs. Miller,“ he said, kindly, „don't be alarmed about your child. She is doing well; and, after you have given her the medicine Mrs. Flanagan will bring, you'll find her much better, to-morrow. She must be kept cool and quiet, you know, and she'll be all right soon.“

„Oh! Dr. Renton, I am very grateful,“ was the tremulous reply; „and we will follow all directions, sir. It is hard to keep her quiet, sir; we keep as still as we can, and the other children are very still; but the street is very noisy all the daytime and evening, sir, and—“

„I know it, Mrs. Miller. And I'm afraid those people down-stairs disturb you somewhat.“

„They make some stir in the evening, sir; and it's rather loud in the street sometimes, at night. The folks on the lower floors are troubled a good deal, they say.“

Well they may be. Listen to the bawling outside, now, cold as it is. Hark! A hoarse group on the opposite sidewalk beginning a song. *Ro-o-l on, sil-ver mo-o-n—*. The silver moon ceases to roll in a sudden explosion of yells and laughter, sending up broken fragments of curses, ribald jeers, whoopings, and cat-calls, high into the night air. „Ga-l-a-ng! Hi-hi! What ye-e-h 'bout!“

„This is outrageous, Mrs. Miller. Where's the watchman?“

She smiled faintly. „He takes one of them off occasionally, sir; but he's afraid; they beat him sometimes.“ A long pause.

„Isn't your room rather cold, Mrs. Miller?“ He glanced at the black stove, dimly seen in the outer room. „It is necessary to keep the rooms cool just now, but this air seems to me cold.“

Receiving no answer, he looked at her, and saw the sad truth in her averted face.

„I beg your pardon,“ he said quickly, flushing to the roots of his hair. „I might have known, after what you said to me this evening.“

„We had a little fire here to-day, sir,“ she said, struggling with the pride and shame of poverty; „but we have been out of firing for two or three days, and we owe the wharfman something now. The two boys picked up a few chips; but the poor children find it hard to get them, sir. Times are very hard with us, sir; indeed

they are. We'd have got along better, if my husband's money had come, and your rent would have been paid—"

"Never mind the rent!—don't speak of that!" he broke in, with his face all aglow. "Mrs. Miller, I haven't done right by you—I know it. Be frank with me. Are you in want of—have you—need of—food?"

No need of answer to that faintly stammered question. The thin, rigid face was covered from his sight by the worn, wan hands, and all the pride and shame of poverty, and all the frigid truth of cold, hunger, anxiety, and sickened sorrow they had concealed, had given way at last in a rush of tears. He could not speak. With a smitten heart, he knew it all now. Ah! Dr. Renton, you know these people's tricks? you know their lying blazon of poverty, to gather sympathy?

"Mrs. Miller"—she had ceased weeping, and as he spoke, she looked at him, with the tear-stains still on her agitated face, half ashamed that he had seen her—"Mrs. Miller, I am sorry. This shall be remedied. Don't tell me it shan't! Don't! I say it shall! Mrs. Miller, I'm—I'm ashamed of myself. I am, indeed."

"I am very grateful, sir, I'm sure," said she; "but we don't like to take charity though we need help; but we can get along now, sir—for, I suppose I must keep it, as you say you didn't send it, and use it for the children's sake, and thank God for his good mercy—since I don't know, and never shall, where it came from, now."

"Mrs. Miller," he said quickly, "you spoke in this way before; and I don't know what you refer to. What do you mean by—*it*?"

"Oh! I forgot sir: it puzzles me so. You see, sir, I was sitting here after I got home from your house, thinking what I should do, when Mrs. Flanagan came up-stairs with a letter for me, that she said a strange man left at the door for Mrs. Miller; and Mrs. Flanagan couldn't describe him well, or understandingly; and it had no direction at all, only the man inquired who was the landlord, and if Mrs. Miller had a sick child, and then said the letter was for me; and there was no writing inside the letter, but there was fifty dollars. That's all, sir. It gave me a great shock, sir; and I couldn't think who sent it, only when you came to-night, I thought it was you; but you said it wasn't, and I never shall know who it was, now. It seems as if the hand of God was in it, sir, for it came when everything was darkest, and I was in despair."

"Why, Mrs. Miller," he slowly answered, "this is very mysterious. The man inquired if I was the owner of the house—oh! no—he only inquired who was—but then he knew I was the—oh! bother! I'm getting nowhere. Let's see. Why, it must be some one you know, or that knows your circumstances."

"But there's no one knows them but yourself; and I told you," she replied; "no one else but the people in the house. It must have been some rich person, for the letter was a gilt-edge sheet, and there was perfume in it, sir."

"Strange," he murmured. "Well, I give it up. All is, I advise you to keep it, and I'm very glad some one did his duty by you in your hour of need, though I'm sorry it was not myself. Here's Mrs. Flanagan."

There was a good deal done, and a great burden lifted off an humble heart—nay, two! before Dr. Renton thought of going home. There was a patient gained, likely to do Dr. Renton more good than any patient he had lost. There was a kettle singing on the stove, and blowing off a happier steam than any engine ever blew on that railroad, whose unmarketable stock had singed Dr. Renton's fingers. There was a

yellow gleam flickering from the blazing fire on the sober binding of a good old Book upon a shelf with others, a rarer medical work than ever slipped at auction from Dr. Renton's hands, since it kept the sacred lore of Him who healed the sick, and fed the hungry, and comforted the poor, and who was also the Physician of souls.

And there were other offices performed, of lesser range than these, before he rose to go. There were cooling mixtures blended for the sick child; medicines arranged; directions given; and all the items of her tendance orderly foreseen, and put in pigeon-holes of When and How, for service.

At last he rose to go. „And now, Mrs. Miller,“ he said, „I'll come here at ten in the morning, and see to our patient. She'll be nicely by that time. And—(listen to those brutes in the street!—twelve o'clock, too—ah! there's the bell),—as I was saying, my offence to you being occasioned by your debt to me, I feel my receipt for your debt should commence my reparation to you; and I'll bring it to-morrow. Mrs. Miller you don't quite come at me—what I mean is—you owe me, under a notice to quit, three months' rent. Consider that paid in full. I never will take a cent of it from you—not a copper. And I take back the notice. Stay in my house as long as you like; the longer the better. But, up to this date, your rent's paid. There. I hope you'll have as happy a Christmas as circumstances will allow, and I mean you shall.“

A flush of astonishment—of indefinable emotion, overspread her face.

„Dr. Renton, stop, sir!“ He was moving to the door. „Please, sir, *do* hear me! You are very good—but I can't allow you to—Dr. Renton, we are able to pay you the rent, and we *will*, and we *must*—here—now. Oh! sir, my gratefulness will never fail to you—but here—here—be fair with me, sir, and *do* take it!“

She had hurried to a chest of drawers, and came back with the letter which she had rustled apart with eager, trembling hands, and now, unfolding the single bank-note it had contained, she thrust it into his fingers as they closed.

„Here, Mrs. Miller“—she had drawn back with her arms locked on her bosom, and he stepped forward—„no, no. This shan't be. Come, come, you must take it back. Good heavens!“ he spoke low, but his eyes blazed in the red glow which broke out on his face, and the crisp note in his extended hand shook violently at her—„Sooner than take this money from you, I would perish in the street! What! Do you think I will rob you of the gift sent you by some one who had a human heart for the distresses I was aggravating? Sooner than—here, take it! O my God! what's this?“

The red glow on his face went out, with this exclamation, in a pallor like marble, and he jerked back the note to his starting eyes; Globe Bank—Boston—Fifty Dollars. For a minute he gazed at the motionless bill in his hand. Then, with his hueless lips compressed, he seized the blank letter from his astonished tenant, and looked at it, turning it over and over. Grained letter-paper—gilt-edged—with a favorite perfume in it. Where's Mrs. Flanagan? Outside the door, sitting on the top of the stairs, with her apron over her head, crying. Mrs. Flanagan! Here! In she tumbled, her big feet kicking her skirts before her, and her eyes and face as red as a beet.

„Mrs. Flanagan, what kind of a looking man gave you this letter at the door to-night?“



„A-w, Dochter Rinton, dawn't ax me!—Bother, an' all, an' sure an' I cudn't see him wud his fur-r hat, an' he a-ll boondled oop wud his co-at oop on his e-ars, an' his big han'kershuf smotherin' thuh mouth uv him, an' sorra a bit uv him tuh be looked at, sehvin' thuh poomple on thuh ind uv his naws.“

„The *what* on the end of his nose?“

„Thuh poomple, sur.“

„What does she mean, Mrs. Miller?“ said the puzzled questioner, turning to his tenant.

„I don't know, sir, indeed,“ was the reply; „she said that to me, and I couldn't understand her.“

„It's thuh poomple, dochter. Dawn't ye knoo? Thuh big, flehmin poomple oop there.“ She indicated the locality, by flattening the rude tip of her own nose with her broad forefinger.

„Oh! the pimple! I have it.“ So he had. Netty, Netty!

He said nothing, but sat down in a chair, with his bold, white brow knitted, and the warm tears in his dark eyes.

„You know who sent it, sir, don't you?“ asked his wondering tenant, catching the meaning of all this.

„Mrs. Miller, I do. But I cannot tell you. Take it, now, and use it. It is doubly yours. There. Thank you.“

She had taken it with an emotion in her face that gave a quicker motion to his throbbing heart. He rose to his feet, hat in hand, and turned away. The noise of a passing group of roysterers in the street without, came strangely loud into the silence of that room.

„Good night, Mrs. Miller. I'll be here in the morning. Good night.“

„Good night, sir. God bless you, sir!“

He turned around quickly. The warm tears in his dark eyes had flowed on his face, which was pale; and his firm lip quivered.

„I hope He will, Mrs. Miller—I hope He will. It should have been said oftener.“

He was on the outer threshold. Mrs. Flanagan had, somehow, got there before him, with a lamp, and he followed her down through the dancing shadows, with blurred eyes. On the lower landing he stopped to hear the jar of some noisy wrangle, thick with oaths, from the bar-room. He listened for a moment, and then turned to the staring stupor of Mrs. Flanagan's rugged visage.

„Sure, they're at ut, dochter, wud a wull,“ she said, smiling.

„Yes. Mrs. Flanagan, you'll stay up with Mrs. Miller to-night, won't you?“

„Dade an' I wull, sur.“

„That's right. Do. And make her try and sleep, for she must be tired. Keep up a fire—not too warm, you understand. There'll be wood and coal coming to-morrow, and she'll pay you back.“

„A-w, dochter, dawn't noo!“

„Well, well. And—look here; have you got anything to eat in the house? Yes; well; take it up-stairs. Wake up those two boys, and give them something to eat. Don't let Mrs. Miller stop you. Make her eat something. Tell her I said she must. And, first of all, get your bonnet, and go to that apothecary's—Flint's—for a bottle of port wine, for Mrs. Miller. Hold on. There's the order.“ (He had a leaf out of his pocket-book in a minute, and wrote it down.) „Go with this, the first thing. Ring

Flint's bell, and he'll wake up. And here's something for your own Christmas dinner, to-morrow." Out of the roll of bills, he drew one of the tens—Globe Bank—Boston—and gave it to Mrs. Flanagan.

"A-w, dawn't noo, docther."

"Bother! It's for yourself, mind. Take it. There. And now unlock the door. That's it. Good night, Mrs. Flanagan."

"An' meh thuh Hawly Vurgin hape blessn's on ye, Docther Rinton, wud a-ll thuh compliments uv thuh sehzin, for yur thuh—"

He lost the end of Mrs. Flanagan's parting benedictions in the moonlit street. He did not pause till he was at the door of the oyster-room. He paused then, to make way for a tipsy company of four, who reeled out—the gaslight from the bar-room on the edges of their sodden, distorted faces—giving three shouts and a yell, as they slammed the door behind them.

He pushed after a party that was just entering. They went at once for drink to the upper end of the room, where a rowdy crew, with cigars in their mouths, and liquor in their hands, stood before the bar, in a knotty wrangle concerning some one who was killed. Where is the keeper? Oh! there he is, mixing hot brandy punch for two. Here, you, sir, go up quietly, and tell Mr. Rollins Dr. Renton wants to see him. The waiter came back presently to say Mr. Rollins would be right along. Twenty-five minutes past twelve. Oyster trade nearly over. Gaudy-curtained booths on the left all empty but two. Oyster-openers and waiters—three of them in all—nearly done for the night, and two of them sparring and scuffling behind a pile of oysters on the trough, with the colored print of the great prize fight between Tom Hyer and Yankee Sullivan, in a veneered frame above them on the wall. Blower up from the fire opposite the bar, and stewpans and griddles empty and idle on the bench beside it, among the unwashed bowls and dishes. Oyster trade nearly over. Bar still busy.

Here comes Rollins in his shirt sleeves, with an apron on. Thick-set, muscular man—frizzled head, low forehead, sharp, black eyes, flabby face, with a false, greasy smile on it now, oiling over a curious, stealthy expression of mingled surprise and inquiry, as he sees his landlord here at this unusual hour.

"Come in here, Mr. Rollins; I want to speak to you."

"Yes, sir. Jim" (to the waiter), "go and tend bar." They sat down in one of the booths, and lowered the curtain. Dr. Renton, at one side of the table within, looking at Rollins, sitting leaning on his folded arms, at the other side.

"Mr. Rollins, I am told the man who was stabbed here last night is dead. Is that so?"

"Well, he is, Dr. Renton. Died this afternoon."

"Mr. Rollins, this is a serious matter; what are you going to do about it?"

"Can't help it, sir. Who's a-goin' to touch *me*? Called in a watchman. Whole mess of 'em had cut. Who knows 'em? Nobody knows 'em. Man that was stuck never see the fellers as stuck him in all his life till then. Didn't know which one of 'em did it. Didn't know nothing. Don't now, an' never will, 'nless he meets 'em in hell. That's all. Feller's dead, an' who's a-goin' to touch *me*? Can't do it. Ca-n-'t do it."

"Mr. Rollins," said Dr. Renton, thoroughly disgusted with this man's brutal indifference, "your lease expires in three days."

„Well, it does. Hope to make a renewal with you, Dr. Renton. Trade’s good here. Shouldn’t mind more rent on, if you insist—hope you won’t—if it’s anything in reason. Promise sollum, I shan’t have no more fightin’ in here. Couldn’t help this. Accidents *will* happen, yo’ know.“

„Mr. Rollins, the case is this: if you didn’t sell liquor here, you’d have no murder done in your place—murder, sir. That man was murdered. It’s your fault, and it’s mine, too. I ought not to have let you the place for your business. It is a cursed traffic, and you and I ought to have found it out long ago. *I* have. I hope *you* will. Now, I advise you, as a friend, to give up selling rum for the future: you see what it comes to—don’t you? At any rate, I will not be responsible for the outrages that are perpetrated in my building any more—I will not have liquor sold here. I refuse to renew your lease. In three days you must move.“

„Dr Renton, you hurt my feelin’s. Now, how would you—“

„Mr. Rollins, I have spoken to you as a friend, and you have no cause for pain. You must quit these premises when your lease expires. I’m sorry I can’t make you go before that. Make no appeals to me, if you please. I am fixed. Now, sir, good-night.“

The curtain was pulled up, and Rollins rolled over to his beloved bar, soothing his lacerated feelings by swearing like a pirate, while Dr. Renton strode to the door, and went into the street, homeward.

He walked fast through the magical moonlight, with a strange feeling of sternness, and tenderness, and weariness, in his mind. In this mood, the sensation of spiritual and physical fatigue gaming on him, but a quiet moonlight in all his reveries, he reached his house. He was just putting his latch-key in the door, when it was opened by James, who stared at him for a second, and then dropped his eyes, and put his hand before his nose. Dr. Renton compressed his lips on an involuntary smile.

„Ah! James, you’re up late. It’s near one.“

„I sat up for Mrs. Renton and the young lady, sir. They’re just come, and gone up stairs.“

„All right, James. Take your lamp and come in here. I’ve got something to say to you.“ The man followed him into the library at once, with some wonder on his sleepy face.

„First, put some coal on that fire, and light the chandelier. I shall not go up stairs to-night.“ The man obeyed. „Now, James, sit down in that chair.“ He did so, beginning to look frightened at Dr. Renton’s grave manner.

„James“—a long pause—„I want you to tell me the truth. Where did you go to-night? Come, I have found you out. Speak.“

The man turned as white as a sheet, and looked wretched with the whites of his bulging eyes, and the great pimple on his nose awfully distinct in the livid hue of his features. He was a rather slavish fellow, and thought he was going to lose his situation. Please not to blame him, for he, too, was one of the poor.

„Oh! Dr. Renton, excuse me, sir; I didn’t mean doing any harm.“

„James, my daughter gave you an undirected letter this evening; you carried it to one of my houses in Hanover street. Is that true?“

„Ye-yes, sir. I couldn’t help it. I only did what she told me, sir.“

„James, if my daughter told you to set fire to this house, what would you do?“

„I wouldn't do it, sir," he stammered, after some hesitation.

„You wouldn't? James, if my daughter ever tells you to set fire to this house, do it, sir! Do it. At once. Do whatever she tells you. Promptly. And I'll back you."

The man stared wildly at him, as he received this astonishing command. Dr. Renton was perfectly grave, and had spoken slowly and seriously. The man was at his wits' end.

„You'll do it James—will you?"

„Ye-yes, sir, certainly."

„That's right. James, you're a good fellow. James, you've got a family—a wife and children—hav'n't you?"

„Yes, sir, I have; living in the country, sir. In Chelsea, over the ferry. For cheapness, sir."

„For cheapness, eh? Hard times, James? How is it?"

„Pretty hard, sir. Close, but toler'ble comfortable. Rub and go, sir."

„Rub and go. Ve-r-y well. Rub and go. James, I'm going to raise your wages—tomorrow. Generally, because you're a good servant. Principally, because you carried that letter to-night, when my daughter asked you. I shan't forget it. To-morrow, mind. And if I can do anything for you, James, at any time, just tell me. That's all. Now, you'd better go to bed. And a happy Christmas to you!"

„Much obliged to you, sir. Same to you and many of 'em. Good-night, sir." And with Dr. Renton's „good-night" he stole up to bed, thoroughly happy, and determined to obey Miss Renton's future instructions to the letter. The shower of golden light which had been raining for the last two hours, had fallen, even on him. It would fall all day to-morrow in many places, and the day after, and for long years to come. Would that it could broaden and increase to a general deluge, and submerge the world!

Now the whole house was still, and its master was weary. He sat there, quietly musing, feeling the sweet and tranquil presence near him. Now the fire was screened, the lights were out, save one dim glimmer, and he had lain down on the couch with the letter in his hand, and slept the dreamless sleep of a child.

He slept until the gray dawn of Christmas day stole into the room, and showed him the figure of his friend, a shape of glorious light, standing by his side, and gazing at him with large and tender eyes! He had no fear. All was deep, serene, and happy with the happiness of heaven. Looking up into that beautiful, wan face—so tranquil—so radiant; watching, with a child-like awe, the star-fire in those shadowy eyes; smiling faintly, with a great, unutterable love thrilling slowly through his frame, in answer to the smile of light that shone upon the phantom countenance; so he passed a space of time which seemed a calm eternity, till, at last, the communion of spirit with spirit—of mortal love with love immortal—was perfected, and the shining hands were laid on his forehead, as with a touch of air. Then the phantom smiled, and, as its shining hands were withdrawn, the thought of his daughter mingled in the vision. She was bending over him! The dawn—the room, were the same. But the ghost of Feval had gone out from earth, away to its own land!

„Father, dear father! Your eyes were open, and they did not look at me. There is a light on your face, and your features are changed! What is it—what have you seen?"

„Hush, darling: here—kneel by me, for a little while, and be still. I have seen the dead.“

She knelt by him, burying her awe-struck face in his bosom, and clung to him with all the fervor of her soul. He clasped her to his breast, and for minutes all was still.

„Dear child—good and dear child!“

The voice was tremulous and low. She lifted her fair, bright countenance, now convulsed with a secret trouble, and dimmed with streaming tears, to his, and gazed on him. His eyes were shining; but his pallid cheeks, like hers, were wet with tears. How still the room was! How like a thought of solemn tenderness, the pale gray dawn! The world was far away, and his soul still wandered in the peaceful awe of his dream. The world was coming back to him—but oh! how changed!—in the trouble of his daughter’s face.

„Darling, what is it? Why are you here? Why are you weeping? Dear child, the friend of my better days—of the boyhood when I had noble aims, and life was beautiful before me—he has been here! I have seen him. He has been with me—oh! for a good I cannot tell!“

„Father, dear father!“—he had risen, and sat upon the couch, but she still knelt before him, weeping, and clasped his hands in hers—„I thought of you and of this letter, all the time. All last night till I slept, and then I dreamed you were tearing it to pieces, and trampling on it. I awoke, and lay thinking of you, and of—. And I thought I heard you come down-stairs, and I came here to find you. But you were lying here so quietly, with your eyes open, and so strange a light on your face. And I knew—I knew you were dreaming of him, and that you saw him, for the letter lay beside you. O father! forgive me, but do hear me! In the name of this day—it’s Christmas day, father—in the name of the time when we must both die—in the name of that time, father, hear me! That poor woman last night—O father! forgive me, but don’t tear that letter in pieces and trample it under foot! You know what I mean—you know—you know. Don’t tear it, and tread it under foot!“

She clung to him, sobbing violently, her face buried in his hands.

„Hush, hush! It’s all well—it’s all well. Here, sit by me. So. I have“—his voice failed him, and he paused. But sitting by him—clinging to him—her face hidden in his bosom—she heard the strong beating of his disenchanted heart!

„My child, I know your meaning. I will not tear the letter to pieces and trample it under foot. God forgive me my life’s slight to those words. But I learned their value last night, in the house where your blank letter had entered before me.“

She started, and looked into his face steadfastly, while a bright scarlet shot into her own.

„I know all, Netty—all. Your secret was well kept, but it is yours and mine now. It was well done, darling—well done. Oh! I have been through strange mysteries of thought and life since that starving woman sat here! Well—thank God!“

„Father, what have you done?“ The flush had failed, but a glad color still brightened her face, while the tears stood trembling in her eyes.

„All that you wished yesterday,“ he answered. „And all that you ever could have wished, henceforth I will do.“

„O father!“—She stopped. The bright scarlet shot again into her face, but with an April shower of tears, and the rainbow of a smile.

„Listen to me, Netty, and I will tell you, and only you, what I have done.“ Then, while she mutely listened, sitting by his side, and the dawn of Christmas broadened into Christmas-day, he told her all.

And when he had told all, and emotion was stilled, they sat together in silence for a time, she with her innocent head drooped upon his shoulder, and her eyes closed, lost in tender and mystic reveries; and he musing with a contrite heart. Till at last, the stir of daily life began to waken in the quiet dwelling, and without, from steeples in the frosty air, there was a sound of bells.

They rose silently, and stood, clinging to each other, side by side.

„Love, we must part,“ he said, gravely and tenderly. „Read me, before we go, the closing lines of George Feval’s letter. In the spirit of this let me strive to live. Let it be for me the lesson of the day. Let it also be the lesson of my life.“

Her face was pale and lit with exaltation as she took the letter from his hand. There was a pause—and then upon the thrilling and tender silver of her voice, the words arose like solemn music:

*„Farewell—farewell! But, oh! take my counsel into memory on Christmas Day, and forever. Once again, the ancient prophecy of peace and good-will shines on a world of wars and wrongs and woes. Its soft ray shines into the darkness of a land wherein swarm slaves, poor laborers, social pariahs, weeping women, homeless exiles, hunted fugitives, despised aliens, drunkards, convicts, wicked children, and Magdalens unredeemed. These are but the ghastliest figures in that sad army of humanity which advances, by a dreadful road, to the Golden Age of the poets' dream. These are your sisters and your brothers. Love them all. Beware of wronging one of them by word or deed. O friend! strong in wealth for so much good—take my last counsel. In the name of the Saviour, I charge you, be true and tender to mankind! Come out from Babylon into manhood, and live and labor for the fallen, the neglected, the suffering, and the poor. Lover of arts, customs, laws, institutions, and forms of society, love these things only as they help mankind! With stern love, overturn them, or help to overturn them, when they become cruel to a single—the humblest—human being. In the world’s scale, social position, influence, public power, the applause of majorities, heaps of funded gold, services rendered to creeds, codes, sects, parties, or federations—they weigh weight; but in God’s scale—remember!—on the day of hope, remember!—your least service to Humanity, outweighs them all!“*

