THE CHOLERA-FIEND;

-OR-

THE PLAGUE SPREADERS OF NEW YORK.

A MYSTERIOUS TALE OF THE PESTILENCE

IN 1849.

BY CHARLES E. AVERILL

AUTHOR OF

KIT CARSON, The Prince of the Gold Hunters

"Such wert thou, proud city, when o'er thee had swept,
Resistless and mighty, the pestilence dread!—
When came the plague-scourge, which for ages had slept,
And thy title was written, —The Place of the Dead!"

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BOOK FIRST. HOW THE CHOLERA CAME TO THE CITY

CHAPTER I. THE QUACK DOCTOR'S SHOP.

Elihu Quackenboss, Apothecary and Surgeon, No. —, Murray-street, was the stereotype sign of a certain New York dealer in drugs and medicines, who flourished in the renowned metropolis of Manhattan, so very late as the year of our Lord, Eighteen Hundred and Forty-nine; and who rejoiced in the possession of a by no means unprofitable 'run of custom,' probably so styled, because it is the custom to run up the profits at a tolerably liberal average of from fifty to a thousand per cent., all in the course of trade, which improved trade, of course.

At any rate, such, in fact, was Mr. Elihu Quackenboss's calling and profession, tho' there were certainly some malevolent individuals, who presumed to insinuate that it was more *profession* than anything else; that the *calling* mostly consisted in the daily rounds of his drug-carrying office-boy; and to venture, also, more than one quiet hint that a part, at least, of this worthy man's name, was no misnomer!

But, as the good Dr. Quackenboss, himself, happened to be one of those sleek, oily, fat, round, sanctimonious-looking little personages of whom the world always has a good opinion, and who almost as invariably turn, out to be some conspicuous ecclesiastic functionary, deacon, warden, elder or vestryman, in the particular sectarian denomination to which they are morally sure to belong,—this must be set down, accordingly, to the long account of sheer 'Envy & Malice;' a well-known firm—dealing in human infirmities—which ought by this time to have a pretty little responsibility resting upon its broad shoulders against the day of judgment.

It was exactly the first of May—which, everybody knows, is 'moving-day' in New York—the first of May, 1849, which, everybody must know, was no longer ago than last year. And, as seven o'clock in the evening, and 'closing-time,' drew near, the little fat apothecary bustled. from the little back-room into the little front-shop, where a small, shrewd-looking urchin was very busy assorting medicines behind the counter. But as his sharp, twinkling eye turned from his diminutive assistant, with a searching look around the shop, the sleek, round face of the good doctor, which, on first encountering the lad, had exhibited a decidedly ruffled aspect, all at once assumed as expression of the most smiling suavity, as he advanced to the office-door and proceeded, with the same scrupulously affable demeanor, to glance about and before the lighted windows, seemingly with the view of satisfying himself, beyond the possibility of mistake, that no customer or other lingerer was in the immediate vicinity. And just as he was finishing this somewhat wary survey of his premises—the ulterior

object of which was not very clearly apparent—there was the smothered sound of a slight chuckle behind him, and then a very small voice saying, —

"There's nu 'un there, sir. Coast's clear, now."

At this intimation, uttered in a rather peculiar tone by his office-boy, the doctor turned short round, with a face which, in the very short time before mentioned, contrived to exhibit a somewhat extraordinary change of expression, and looked full at the juvenile speaker.<

Presently the doctor spoke, or rather, bolted out the words, —

"The coast is clear, hey? *Clear*, is it? —well, jackanapes! and pray what do you mean by *that?*"

A broad grin came upon the shrewd face of the youngster at this abrupt interrogatory, and the boy said, with an abortive effort to keep his countenance, —

"Oh, nothing! nothing at all, sir; only—only that the coast is clear,—customers all gone—nobody about, and so—so, you see, sir, you can blow me up as much as you please, sir!"

And the grin elongated from feature to feature, until it took in the whole physiognomy of the boy, which certainly was a very impudent one.

"You—you little wretch!" ejaculated the apothecary, turning very red and looking very much disconcerted, as well as very angry. "How—how dare you, sir? Speak out, sir! No prevaricating, sir; tell me in plain English what d'ye mean by making such a remark as that? No evasion, sir—I *will* know it.

"Why—why, ye see, sir," began the urchin retiring a step or two, either afraid or pretending to be afraid of the doctor's belligerent aspect.

"Go on, you rascal, go on!" cried the doctor.

"I said so," proceeded the urchin, acause I always notices as how you always reconnoitres that way afore you lets drive at me, and so, you are, sir, I always knows what to expect."

"What to expect! you rascal."

The doctor grew still redder.

"Yes, sir, always sartin sure, then, I'se got to catch it."

Had not the eye of the hopeful lad been as keen as seemed to be his wit, it is extremely probable that he would have 'caught it', and and [*sic*] that, too, after a most vigorous fashion; for the good-tempered little doctor, who had looked so very benevolent and bland when he peeped out of the front door to see if anybody was near by—unable to reach him from the distance—had, in a sudden burst of ire, hurled one of the glass bottles—which were within his reach—full and fair at his assailant's head, which it would undoubtedly have hit, to the great credit of Mr. Elihu Quackenboss as a marksman, if that head had not dodged with an expertness possessing the look of ex- [*sic*] experience. A remarkable instance of successful evasion on the part of its juvenile owner by no means tending to mollify the doctor's wrath; which, furthermore,

was rather aggravated than otherwise, by hearing that young gentleman—as both saw the bottle smashed to atoms on the floor—with great coolness observe,—

"There's two and sixpence gone. A quart bottle o' laud'num, sir."

"Two and sixpence, hey!" roared the doctor, in a rage. "I'll—I'll charge it in your wages!"

Now, the excited druggist no doubt intended this as a most terrific explosion of resentment and vengeance dire; but instead of evincing any very great excess of trepidation at this tremendous threat, the offending boy, on the contrary, began immediately to exhibit every sign of the most lively satisfaction—this extravagant delight testifying itself in the most exuberant terms, such as,—

"Will you? Oh, will you, now? Don't I wish you would, sir! Glad to hear on't—indeed I is. Didn't know as I had any wages afore."

From red, the doctor now became decidedly purple

"No wages! you little wretch, you! Don't you have your clothes, and your washing, and good, wholesome victuals, as often as—as you——"

"As often as you gives 'em to me—yes, sir. *Oh*, yes," chuckled the grinning boy. —About semi-occasionally, sir—that is, I have that daily, twice a week!"

"I'll flog you within an inch of your life, you young scoundrel—as I'm a Christian I will!" roared the doctor, making at him with a very unchristian-like aspect. "Within an inch of your life, do you hear!"

"That's not so near, sir, as last time, by half an inch."

It was an unlucky circumstance for the hoy that this time his master, no longer trusting to missiles, look the administering of vengeance literally into his own hands. The incensed doctor, in fact, made so sudden a rush at him, that he caught him by the collar, and gave him sundry vigorous cuffs, which had the effect to extort a sharp cry from the unfortunate youngster, whereupon the worthy M.D. gave him another admonitory box on the ear, and then let him go, puffing himself like a high-pressure steamboat, from the exertion, as he demanded,—

"There, sir! —there, sir. Did that hurt, sir?"

"No, sir!" said the lad, quite as coolly as before.

"*No!* The d—l it didn't—hem! Why not, sir?"

"Acause I is used to it."

Enraged afresh at having exhausted himself to such small purpose, the fat doctor vociferated, —

"Used to it! —damna——ahem! What did you *cry* for, then, if I didn't hurt you. Tell me that."

"Why, if you must know, sir, —I cried acause you *swore*—not acause you *hurt*."

"Damn me!" spluttered the doctor—who, from having been, at first, a bright scarlet, and then a deep purple, had now turned a pale pea green——under the eyes—"I'll give you something to get used to, damnital—(*Slap—slap!*) "How do you like that, you wretch."

"Which, sir—the cuffing or the swearing?"

This last retort, as might have been expected, had the effect to put the little man almost beside himself with passion. But it was quite evident that there was something more than mere passion concerned. Something very like apprehension appeared to take possession of his plethoric countenance, as he stood stock still, incapable of motion in his apoplectic excitement, glowering at the boy.

Presently he doubled his first [*sic*] and shook it at the offender, and, in a voice over which he had lost all command, hissed, menacingly, —

"Boy! if you ever breathe to a living being that I—I——"

"Swear——" suggested the boy, with perfect gravity.

"Shut your head, sir! don't let me hear you open your mouth again. I say, if ever you so much as hint to a live soul that—that your master occasionally so far forgets himself, owing to an uncommonly ardent temperament and an excitable imagination, as to—to——I'll—I'll skim you—skin you alive, and——

The apothecary's boy skilfully performed a piece of pantomime, which did not lack significance.

"There's plenty skin to work on, sir, and precious little flesh."

"Break every bone in your body," thundered the little man, who was not to be stopped in his withering course.

"Thank'ee—I'm all skin and bone, that's a fact; and it's all owing to good eating, p'rhaps."

We think it more than likely that this ingenious sarcasm might have led to still more lamentable consequences, with peculiar reference to the personal comfort of the luckless Master Mark, the apothecary' boy, had not that remarkably quick-witted young gentleman, just in time to avert the thunderbolt which he saw coming, suddenly whispered, with a cautionary sort of contortion of all the muscles of his face,—

"Hush! hush, doctor. A customer coming, air."

There was something actually marvellous in the rapidity with which our worthy apothecary's sleek visage underwent still another transformation, from fierce to smiling, from savage to amiable; until it settled down into an expression of the utmost benignity and benevolence.

His voice became all at once modulated to the softest tones of urbanity, while the hand which had been raised, rather threateningly, was suffered to rest gently on the head of the grinning urchin, with a most paternal gesture, as Doctor Quackenboss said, in the same fatherly way,—

"Yes, my boy! let this be your guiding rule through life, this precious precept of pure Christian meekness and charity; this beautiful moral, which is so—so morally beautiful, I may say; and O, remember, dear youth, on no account to lose your hold on the blessed truths——"

“Hold on, yourself, doctor,” was the ‘dear youth’s’ rather irreverent interruption— “There’s no need of wasting any more beautiful morals just now, sir, seeing that it is only Parson Mathew’s darkie that’s coming this way.”

“Parson Mathew’s darkie!” with a trifling abatement of his zeal, repeated the moral apothecary, and looking a little sheepish at the announcement.

“Yes, sir— the parson’s darkie.”

“Ahem! I—I thought, boy, you said it was a customer.”

“Why, so I did, so I did, sir,” energetically vociferated the vigilant young gentleman who had so skillfully telegraphed the approaching party. “Why, sir, he’s one o’ our very best patronizers, he is! —ho, ho!”

And indulging in this cachinnatory accompaniment, the precocious lad leaned back against the counter, apparently overcome by some unknown association, which amused him hugely.

The irascible apothecary was getting very angry again, when, for both parties, a burly, tall individual of the pure Ethiopian species, presented his huge figure in the doorway and clumsily advanced to the counter, rolling his great goggle eyes around the shop, as he asked for some medicine which the boy appeared remarkably assiduous in providing him with.

“Sarsaparilla? Sarsaparilla? Oh, yes— here it is, Gumbo.”

And the drug was speedily bottled up by the lad, after a moment’s fumbling at a side-drawer, and handed to the negro, with the inquiry, —

“Well, Gumbo, what’s the sarsaparilla for now, old fellow?”

“For de ole complaint, de ole complaint, Massa Mark,” replied the African, with a sigh of alarming profundity, while he cast a most deprecatory downward glance at his own athletic person. “Dar am no longer any doubt on de subject—it am ’sumption dat am killin’ me.”

“Consumption!” echoed Quackenboss, in no small astonishment, as he measured from head to foot the gigantic negro, who looked as if he could have choked a polar bear with the most perfect ease. “Well! by the leper that bathed in Bethesda! — consumption, did you say?”

The colored gentleman rolled up the white of his eyes with a lachrymose air of desperate resignation.

“Yes, Massa Doctor, dat’s um. Dis nigger hain’t long to lib in dis world. It am de ’sumption, and nuttin else; dis nigger am saxified ob dat.”

And the afflicted African departed, giving vent to a deep groan from the lowest recesses of a pair of lungs probably made of cast iron.

The doctor looked after him with a shrug of the shoulders, then turned toward his assistant, on the corners of whose mouth he no sooner detected a slight smirk than he demanded, angrily, to know what he was laughing at.

This query proved to be a very injudicious one, for the moment it was propounded the young disciple of Esculapius forthwith went off into an explosion of the most

extravagant merriment, of which he finally got so far the better as to be able, with some difficulty, to make answer,—

"Why, at that 'ere darkie, to be sure.—He'll be the death of me yet, he will. I never saw such a cave as he is, in all my life, afore. There's always something the matter with that nigger. There ain't a bull-dog in York that's stouter or ruggeder nor he is, and yet there's everlastingly some one complaint atroublin' of him."

"Is there?' queried the doctor, interrupting, with a sigh of considerable resignation.

"Just so, doctor; just so, to a T!" still more briskly responded the lad, with this I beautifully metaphoric illustration of his meaning. "He's never well, that nigger ain't—He's had the dropsy, the dyspepsy, the liver complaint, the consumption, the—the hyderphoby——"

"Eh! the Hydrophobia!" exclaimed the little apothecary, with an unfeigned start of alarm.

"Yes, the hyderphoby; he always has that reg'lar, in the dog-days; and now he's got the gallopin' comsumpshun, and is going to take the first train of cars for the big railroad depot in the valley of the shadder of death. Oh, he's an awful victim of disease, that darkie is—but I prescribes, I physicks him, I does."

"*You* physic him! indeed," said Doctor Quackenboss, taken a little aback; "and pray, sir, when did *you* set up for a practitioner? —tell me that sir."

"Only since old Gumbo required my medical 'tendance," said the youngster, with his saucy mouth stretched from ear to ear. "Perhaps, too, I fixes him, whenever I get hold of him, and p'r'haps I don't. I *never* makes him sick on purpose, oh no. I had *always* made a practice of giving him the very medercine he axes for——"

"And don't you, sir!" inquired the astonished apothecary.

"In course I does—oh yes! May be as Sars'periller he got, and may be it wasn't and if it was, may be I didn't put nothing into the bottle, out of that 'ere drawer, just the color of the sars'periller."

But, while this ingenious experimenter in the probable virtues of powdered tobacco when taken into the human stomach, went off into a fresh convulsion as he pointed to the drawer labelled 'Scotch Snuff,' his worthy master, meanwhile, was, in all likelihood, suffering his anger against the amateur practitioner to be considerably cooled by the consoling reflection that the unfortunate Gumbo would only come back again the sooner, and, for once, in unquestionable need of medicine.

Comforted by this humane consideration, the corpulent vender of drugs contented himself, therefore, with a slight shake of the head by way of fatherly reproval of such juvenile pleasantries, and suddenly appeared to recollect something previously forgotten.

"Here, Mark, run after that black fellow and bid him tell his master, the Rev. Mr. Mathews, that Dr. Quackenboss wishes to see him at his office this evening, on important business—he will understand me! Or stop! —on second thoughts, you may

go yourself; that black rascal might make some mistake. You know where Mr. Mathews lives, don't you, Mark?"

"Know where old Gumbo's, master lives? I should hope I did, sir. Don't I carry medicines there, and isn't it in the Parson's own church that you're head-vestryman?"

"Chief elder and head-vestryman," repeated the doctor, complaisantly, and Mark glibly ran on, —

"Exactly, sir; don't I sit in the gallery on Sundays, and see you pass round the plate? I knows the parson like a book."

"Do you?"" ejaculated rather suddenly the chief elder and vestryman, with a half-apprehensive cast of the eye, and what appeared a very unnecessary emphasis. "Ahem I well, be off with yourself to Brother Mathews, and be sure that you deliver my message correctly."

"All right, sir; I'll be back again in two o shakes of a donkey's ears."

And with this elegant comparison the apothecary's lad was springing briskly over the marble-top counter, when his master hastily interposed,—

"Stop! stop, boy! you needn't come back again, afterwards. Take your basket of medicines along with you, to deliver on your way."

"All delivered, sir; two good hours ago," said the boy.

"Well, well," rejoined the apothecary, with some vexation in his manner. "Then you may have the rest of the evening to yourself."

"'Nuff said, sir! I'm off!" replied the lad quickly and willingly enough; though he looked at his employer evidently in some little surprise at the permission granted, "*Hallo! what's that?*"

This abrupt exclamation and interrogation were caused by a sound in the little drugstore, closely approaching that sonorous noise usually emitted by the human lungs in giving utterance to a cough.

It startled the bony—for it was too remote to proceed from the doctor, who was close at hand; and he was perfectly certain that the cough had never originated in his own throat.

The lad threw his quick, shrewd eye round the shop; there was no one else there. — Then, naturally enough, he looked at the doctor again.

The latter seemed to be considerably startled, likewise.

Immediately he fell to coughing, himself. (This time here could be no doubt about its origin) And nervously drawing forth his hankerchief, complained that he had quite a bad cold.

The shop boy stared at his employer for a moment, and then said, with a meaning laugh, —

"Oh! it was you, then, was it! I thought there was some one else in the shop. You scared me."

“Did I? —he! he! —very good,” said the little druggist, with a rather faint laugh. “Oh yes! I am troubled with a—a decidedly bad catarrh. There, there; it’s getting dark, and you may go.”

“Shan’t I light up first,” asked the lad, lingering.

“No, no; I shall shut up early to-night,” hurriedly answered Dr. Quackenboss, who, for some reason, appeared to be particularly desirous to accelerate his assistant’s departure. “Here’s a penny for spending money; you may have the night to yourself.”

The apothecary’s boy looked hard at his master, but too shrewd not to take the piece of money, and with it the hint, the next moment Master Mark was half-way round the street corner, whistling forth at the top of a most rigorous pair of lungs, as he went, the mellifluous burden of that classic melody of modern time, with a popular variation,—

Oh, Susannah!
“Don’t you cry for me;
I’m going to Californy,
For to dig gold for thee!”

The druggist waited till his musical young gentleman was out of hearing; then, first looking cautiously all around, and closing and locking the shop door upon himself, on the inside, he hastened to the back of the store, at the same time muttering between his fat, oily lips,—

“There! I have got rid of that infernal boy, at last.”

Passing as quickly into the little back room we first mentioned, he approached a closet-door in the wall, unlocked and flung it open.

All was darkness beyond. But, peering eagerly into this darkness, in a low, wary pitch of voice the little apothecary called, quickly, —

“Come out! come out! There’s no danger now.”

He had not well spoken these words, when, from the interior of this dark closet, issued forth an object which, though bearing some approach to the human likeness, certainly, was yet so peculiar and remarkable in appearance, that we must defer our description of it to the commencement of our second chapter.

CHAPTER II. THE THREE PRECIOUS WORTHIES OF THIS GREAT CITY.

Coming from his concealment, the personage who now emerged so secretly from his hiding-place was a man whose age it was next to impossible to calculate with any certainty, by reason of the singular deformity which so strikingly characterized his bodily exterior.

We should not like to aver that this exterior was at all in a fair lady' taste. He was hump-backed—even hideously so—for his whole spine was contracted and gathered into a heap in the very centre, producing one of those terrible distortions which, at first sight, seem impossible for Nature, even in her most cruel mood, to inflict.

This looked the more unnatural, and the more extraordinary from the fact that all the other limbs,the muscles and sinews of this man, as well as the Goliath-like mould of his large-boned, strongly-marked face, appeared to denote a man of colossal height and athletic build; whereas, like all other hunchbacks, he was low in stature. and warped out of all proportion.

However, his appearance, little prepossessing as as [*sic*] it was, was evidently not at all unfamiliar to the fat little apothecary, to judge from the by no means placable look with which that worthy man greeted the egress of his symmetrical friend, begging to be informed why the latter individual had thought proper to sneeze.

The gentleman with the spinal curvature measured the corpulent druggist from the roots of his hair to the toes of his boots, with the cool, deliberate glance of a hard, gray eye, and replied, very quietly and sententiously, —

"I did *not* sneeze, Dr. Quackenboss."

"Well, if you didn't," retorted the apothecary a trifle disconcerted by this blank denial, "you coughed. You coughed, sir! and that was a great deal worse, sir!" said the little doctor, in an awful tone. "What did you cough for?"

The hunchback threw his heavy head backward, looked the doctor full in the face, and, with a sneer and a gruff voice, answered, very rationally, —

"There was nothing very startling, it is quite true, in this announcement, but there was in the expression of countenance with which it was delivered, a malignant coolness, heightened by the grotesqueness of deformity, that made the plethoric dealer in drugs and medicines quail before its cold, freezing look, and change his tone, as, after a half-hesitating pause, he said,—

"Well, well; you know it was for your own good I spoke. That unlucky cough came very near betraying you to the boy, and I am not at all sure the little knave did not go away suspecting something, as it was."

"Then what did you let him go away, at all, for?" demanded the man sharply. "Better let me have broken his back—and make him like me."

The hunchback scowled darkly as he looked down upon his own uncouth form.

The druggist seemed to shrink before his savage companion, replying, —

"Well, well; there is no use working yourself into a fury about it. I am pretty certain I kept him in the dark, notwithstanding; and, at any rate, he's off for the rest of the evening," added Mark's master, "with a penny for pocket-money,——"

"Which he don't get very often, I suppose," sarcastically suggested the hunchback, with a grim smile which did not appear to please Dr. Quackenboss.

"Well, and what of that? what if he don't, I should like to know. Didn't I take the brat out of the street, and feed, and lodge, and save him from starving, when—when—when the——"

And for some reason or other, the doctor chose to stop short, and, with a little more stammering, added, —

"But that's neither here nor there. I've been too kind to him—a great deal, 1 have. That boy don't earn his salt—he don't; and, what's worse, he's the aggravatingest creature I ever set eyes on. Why, would you believe——"

"The horned Satan take the hoy, Quackenboss!" impatiently interrupted the deformed. "We have something else to do, besides talking about this young jackanapes. If not, why the d—l was I boxed up here, like a chicken stealing fox in spring-trap, to prevent my being seen on your premises? Where is this precious parson that was to meet both of us here to-night?"

"I have sent for him," said the doctor; "the boy, Mark——"

"D—n that boy," angrily cried the hunchback. "You are eternally dragging him in. I'll break his back, if I catch him."

"No you won't," said the doctor, with a prophetic shake of the head.

"Won't I, though?" was the fierce retort.—"Who's to prevent me!"

"You couldn't catch him," replied the druggist, with considerable asperity. "Tried that thing too often myself, drat him! But, as I was going to say, the lad has gone to remind the—the Reverend Brother of his appointment here."

"Why," demanded the Deformed, "did you think there was any probability of his forgetting it?"

"No," answered the druggist, readily. "I did not send the lad as a reminder, but only as an excuse to get rid of him."

"And the priest?" asked the hunchback.

Just as the doctor was proceeding to reply, the shop-bell was rung, in a peculiar manner. Making an expressive sign to the hunchback, the apothecary hastened to unlock the closed door of the drug-store, and then the Deformed, from within, heard the whispered sound of voices.

Presently Quackenboss rejoined him, in company with a third person.

The latter, who entered with a somewhat hesitating step, was a tall, spare man dressed in black broadcloth, with the white cravat which denoted his clerical profession.

His head was quite bald, above the brows, which were high, but narrow; and perhaps the most peculiar characteristic of his countenance, was its extreme and ghastly paleness.

He started back as his eye rested, for the first time, upon the repulsive person of the Deformed.

This movement was instantly noted by the hunchback.

"Ho, sir, you shrink from me, do you? —You shrink from the misshapen monster as you would from some unsightly toad that might happen to cross your path. I like that! I like to have met quake and tremble before the wretch they make a scoff and a by-word of; the very dog they spit upon and mock and laugh at, as if he were a dog, and not a human being like themselves. Her! look at me well, and tell me if I am not the devil's own instrument in the work of death that we three are to plan out and execute? Look, I say."

The clergyman, at this strange address, uneasily moved on his feet and looked from the speaker to the apothecary, with an expression of countenance that evinced small relish for the plain, blunt words with which he found himself thus accosted.

"You use scant ceremony, sir," he said, with a trembling lip.

"Ceremony!" harshly repeated the ill-favored stranger, with a laugh of fierce irony. "Precious little need of ceremony, of all other things, between three honest gentlemen, met, as we are, to work out three such ends by one and the same common means. Humph! talk of ceremony, will you, between a money-griping, avaricious doctor, who would bury the whole city, if each man's death would bring him in a dollar—a licentious priest, who would ride over the ruin of the daughters, wives and mothers of his congregation, to the gratification of his saintly passions and most holy desires; and, lastly, a distorted monster, who——"

A sudden and more than half-threatening motion upon the minister's part, caused him to leave the harangue half finished, and confront the former with a steady look from his cold, gray eye.

The clergyman had twice raised his hand as if to strike the speaker where he stood, but the other's iron front seemed to daunt him—or, possibly, the influence of some other motive beside fear alone.

In truth there were reasons—as we shall soon see—why he did not wish to quarrel with his strange acquaintance—reasons which had brought him here, and which he would not willingly lose sight of, even in resentment.

Inwardly those reasons acted with him now to check the angry impulse, and his uplifted hand fell listlessly beside him, without the meditated blow; while, with a quiet sneer, the hunchback said, —

"Aha, you have thought better of it! I like your prudence. Quite right—quite right—merely for the sake of a hard knock or two, it would never do to lose all that you have set your heart upon, by making an enemy of me."

He spoke with a peculiar intonation that made the minister stir nervously, and his pale cheek grow paler yet.

"Pish! man," he impatiently continued, "what earthly use is there in trying to dissemble, this way? Come, the sooner you throw aside the parson's smooth face and sanctimonious look, the better it will prove for you—It's time we understood each other—and to convince you that I, for one, do understand you fully, all that I have now to do is to pronounce two words—two words will do—*The Cholera!*"

"*The Cholera!*" repeated both the preacher and and [*sic*] the druggist, with a strange energy, and a glance full of fearful but hidden meaning passed between the three.

"The cholera. You have heard that name before. It is even now advancing toward this city, with slow but certain strides. Already it is raging in St. Louis—in a month, in a week—nay, even in one short day—it may be here."

The preacher shuddered slightly.

"At any hour," went on the hunchback, and with the same strong but secret significance, "the scourge may be among us, with its work of death and dread. Newton Mathews, *we are preparing for it!*"

There was a terrible excitement in the speaker's manner, as well as a mysterious purport.

The clergyman, who at first had started at the mention of his name, made another movement, but, this time, it was a motion of absorbing interest.

"We are preparing for it; yes, getting ready for the cholera! But not in fear, in terror, or dismay——"

Then, with an accent of ferocious joy he added, — "We hail its coming and drink to its health!"

Involuntarily did the minister shrink back.

The Deformed laughed aloud.

"Ay, ay! and why should we not! What to all others is a curse, to us must prove a blessing! Each one of us three, here, has his own end to gain. You, to make money."

He glanced with ill concealed contempt at the oily apothecary.

"You," (and his look of bitter irony returned again to the minister,) "you, Newton Mathews, to find, in the pestilence, the means of ministering to the reverend purposes of a libertine priest, who would fain be rid of one wife that he may take another——

"Lying hunchback!" cried the minister, springing hack, as if seared by a red-hot coal. "Who told you that?—who told you that?"

The hunchback, with his cool smile, gazed at him.

"Why, man, that is as good as confessing it. It is quite enough that I know you for what you are!"

"Ah! what mean you? —what am I?" was the hasty retort.

"A minister of the gospel, with a loving congregation, a living worth just three thousand dollars a year; and, last, but not least, an amiable wife, whose greatest misfortune seems to be, that she has a sister much handsomer and younger than herself,

whom you would very much like to call Mrs. Newton Mathews; also, since the young lady is not to be won in any way short of the rite of marriage."

This time there was no response to the sneering speech—no interruption—no fierce retort, as previously. The clergyman stood trembling like a leaf.

Satisfied, seemingly, with the impression he was producing, the hunchback mercilessly persisted, —

"Well, is it a thing to be wondered at, then, that you, though a meek and pious teacher of the church, should have become a little impatient of the bar between you and your wife's pretty sister?"

Again he paused to mark the strong effect of all he was saying, then in a short, stern tone, abruptly demanded, —

"Now, sir! in one word, is it not *by the help of the cholera that you hope to make this handsome sister-in-law your wife?*"

Whether it was that he had had time enough given him for reflection; whether it was the repetition of the ominous sounding pestilence, or that the cord had been already stretched to its greatest tension, and the revulsion was now come; certain it is, that the minister's whole air and manner underwent an almost immediate change, and his voice, for the first time, became quite collected and composed, as he laid his hand on the hunchback's arm, saying firmly,—

"That is sufficient. I see we understand each other. With our common friend, the doctor, here, I am better acquainted; yourself I only know as what he has described you to me,—as one of the most desperate characters in the city, whom, on that very account, he has selectd as the most fitting agent in the dangerous undertaking we have on foot, and in which you must be the leader. Am I right?"

The Deformed smiled grimly.

"Plain words, Newton Mathews! plain words, but to the point; I like you all the better for it, I will show you that you have not mistaken your man in making common cause with one who has such good reason as I, the hunchback, have, to bear a grudge to all mankind.

"Woman! —money!" he ejaculated, with a wild laugh and a sneer; "what are they to revenge—to a good round hatred of everything human? Give me that! give me that, and you may have the rest. Good! I shall make you a first rate tool in helping you to satisfy both avarice and lust, most pious priest and worthy doctor, by means of——"

He lingered designedly upon the utterance, the better to enunciate, with slow and fiendish emphasis, —

"Yea! by means of *the cholera!*"

And again the breathless lips of his auditors repeated, fearfully, that dread name, — "The cholera!"

But the next moment the preacher, by a hurried gesture, gave token of his wish to claim his companions' attention.

Seeing that he had arrested it, after a moment's hesitation, in which he seemed to be struggling with some repugnant impulse, he proceeded, with the same appearance of eager haste, to say, —

"I have one word to say to you both, which should have been said before. Since we last communicated together, I have learned one fact which, I am sorry to say, will interfere with, our plans."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Deformed, quickly; while the apothecary looked doubtfully at both the speakers.

"Perhaps ruin them altogether," added the minister.

The hunchback started and muttered an oath.

The preacher hurriedly continued, addressing him directly, —

"It is perfectly true, as you have said, that this pestilence was marching toward New York, eastward coming from St. Louis, with its dead and dying in its wake. But you did not mention, what is equally true, and equally important, that its influence, in this city will be comparatively light."

The growl of a wounded bear issued from the hunchback.

"The devil——ahem!" stuttered the little apothecary.

The preacher anxiously marked the effect on both.

"Comparatively light, I said. By which I mean that it will not be felt here with the severity that has characterised it throughout the West."

The snarl-like sound was still more fiercely repeated.

"This will prove, undoubtedly, the fact," the minister proceeded, uneasily looking toward its utterer. "Men of science tell us that local causes will greatly moderate its virulence; that the farther East it journeys, the milder is the form it takes—that this mighty city, which suffered so terribly in 1832, will, in the present instance, escape with little injury from the ominous visitor. What do you say to this?"

"Say to it?" said the hunchback, gruffly, with a gloomy brow. "All I have got to say is, that it's curs'd unlucky. Our cake is dough already, I'm very much afraid."

And he ground his teeth tightly together as he spoke.

"This is bad news—bad news!" added the doctor, in a whining tone, and with a very grave shake of the head.

CHAPTER III. THE STARTLING PROPOSAL.

A dead silence fell upon the three men. The city outcast remained with his huge head sunk upon his protuberant breast; his stern eye bent on the floor, and his shaggy eyebrows knitted into one another, in the intensity of steadfast thought.

More than once his savage visage was contorted by the angry expression of disappointment, each time succeeded by that iron look of deliberate, determined, inexorable reflection.

Suddenly the hunchback's head was raised with a violent jerk. A gleam of joy darted from the cavern-like hollows of those deep-set eye-balls, and there struggled through his clenched lips a suppressed sound, like the smothered hiss of a snake.

Before his perplexed associates could comprehend the cause of his passive excitement, that excitement was gone, and he had resumed his usual icy demeanor. But their wonder was changed to startled surprise, when they heard the apothecary's shop echo no less abruptly to the sound of the deformed man's discordant laughter.

"What!" sardonically cried the hunchback, "this information does not please you? You are in no humane mood now—the milk of human kindness has turned a little sour, just now, and—and—it does not suit you to learn that the dreaded scourge may visit us so lightly."

For a moment the deformed paused, as if to note the effect his sarcasm was taking, then proceeded, —

"Not that I mean to insinuate anything against your philanthropy—oh, no! You are a pious priest, one of the Lord's anointed, who only looks upon the grim old cholera as a right proper judgment upon the ungodly and the sinner, and who would think it flying in the face of Providence to murmur at the blazing of Sodom and Gomorrah."

And again the outcast laughed aloud, in the withering sarcasm which had caused the minister so oft to quail.

Then his sneering look fell on the druggist, who with open mouth stood watching him.

"You, too—you are an honest trader; yes, a humane and tender-hearted doctor, so brimful of brotherly love and benevolence, considerate creature! that it really distresses you to think how many hundred of your brother-quacks must starve, if the cholera—or just some other such blessing should not luckily, turn up."

The number of deprecatory 'ahems!' that were sticking in the throat of Dr. Quackenboss, during the delivery and at the conclusion of these injurious inuendos, might possibly have choked him outright, had not the author of them, with his characteristic abruptness, turned sneeringly from him to the clergyman, again demanding of the latter, who stood silent and haggard, yet full of wonder.

"Well, I have astonished you, I suppose—have I?"

"I see no reason for such untimely merriment, I confess," was the hesitating answer; "nor how you can possibly take amusement in that which, unfortunately enough, baffles our chance of profiting by the expected event which——"

"Was to rid you of a useless wife," interposed the inflexible hunchback, coolly, "and make room for her sister, eh? You think, do you, that Fate is against us, after all, and that we are doomed to lose the means we thought the devil himself has sent us, to work out our private purposes! What a pity we don't look at the same thing with the same eyes."

Seeing that the others did not attempt to conceal the fresh surprise his words created, he kept on, —

"Because you have all at once discovered that our good friend cholera—for whose company you are so anxious, is likely to give New-York the go-by, you must needs take it granted that there's no means of bringing the bull to market when he won't come willingly?

"Good heavens! you do not—cannot mean to say——"

"What I mean to say, is——

The deformed crossed his long lean arms before him, curving still more his distorted spine, and glowered forth upon them both with his keen hard eye gleaming with a devilish meaning, —

"Is this. That, as the cholera promises to run so mild a race, we must take the necessary measures to give it the poison, the severity, the danger that it lacks. That if the cholera will not come to town of its own accord, then we must find a way to force it here!"

With an ejaculation of horror and of terror, stronger, even than his utter astonishment, Mathews, the minister, recoiled; as did the confounded apothecary.

It was full a moment before the former of the two could recover the speech of which amazement had deprived him.

"Impossible!" he cried, as if in a dream. "The idea is as impossible as it is terrible! —*Means*—what means, in God's name, could man take to *spread the cholera?* Impossible!"

"There is a way, I tell you," almost screamed the ruffian, "and I have thought of it. *A way to spread the cholera*—yes, you have named it well. Quackenboss! —a light!"

Trembling from head to foot, the stupefied apothecary obeyed. A moment, and it was in the hands of the hunchback.

"A map of the city! —this is what I wanted. Leave me alone by myself, and I'll lay a plan before you, by means of which the pestilence of 1819 may, in its mildest form, be stamped, by human agency, with all the horrors of the cholera in 1832!"

With the words on his lip and the map in his hand, the outcast darted into the same the dark closet from which we have seen him originally emerge; the fiend-like triumph and malignity of his last look, sending a shudder through the frames of the two men left behind.

The renewed silence that followed was broken first by the druggist, who, prompted by some motive best known to himself, abruptly turned toward the preacher, repeating quickly, the word last uttered by the hunch- back.

The cholera in 1832! That makes me think of a wild legend of that fearful year of pestilence and death. Come! to make the time pass quicker, while that born devil is working at his chart, shall I tell you this strange tale of the cholera times?"

Engrossed in his own reflections, the parson did not answer.

"I will tell it to you. Perhaps it may give you an inkling of some of the secrets of the terrible agent we are about to press into our service—I, to coin gold from it; you, to make yourself the lawful husband of your loving wife's sister."

The preacher started.

"Ha! I thought that allusion would arouse you. Hark, you shall hear my legend—it is a terrible one."

The preacher Mathews waived his hand— Speak he could not—his excitement was loo great.

Unperceived by him, Quackenboss cast a peculiar look upon the clergyman, and with a suppressed but singular smile, prepared to commence the narration he seemed so desirous his companion should hear.

CHAPTER IV. A LEGEND OF THE CHOLERA IN 1832.

Before, however, we allow Dr. Quackenboss to proceed with his story, it is proper that we should make the reader somewhat better acquainted the history of his clerical companion, who was to be his listener in the strange and exciting relation he had promised.

The Rev. Newton Mathews was the wealthy pastor of one of the largest and most flourishing congregations in the city; but to what particular denomination be belonged, we are not at liberty to say, and for the reason that this same Rev. Mr. Mathews is both a living and a well-known character, whose reputation and whose deeds have filled the largest place in the public ear and eye.

The minister had been several times married.

The last time save one, he had united him self to a wealthy widow lady, with the incumbrance of only a son by her former husband, a third of whose large property became her own at his decease.

She had been the third wife of the clergyman, but had died suddenly within a few year after her re- marriage, leaving Mathews the entire estate she had brought him, and the guardianship of her young son, whose fortune was wholly independent of his mother's. And then the thrice-widowed minister led to the altar his present wife—the fourth and last—a lady of his congregation, of considerable personal attractions, and the elder of two sisters. The younger had resided with them, since the marriage; and it is with this fair relative and inmate of the pastor's family that our story will have much in common.

As for Mr. Mathew's step-son, by his previous wife, this young man was a midshipman in the Navy, at the present time; but though he kept up an occasional intercourse with the clergyman's new family, it was rumored that the young reefer and his reverend father-in-law, Mr. Newton Mathews, were not on the best of terms.

With respect to the minister himself, his third marriage, as wo have seen, had placed at his disposal the widow's large properly; while each of his two former wives had also brought him a considerable portion; so that the preacher Mathews was now, at the time of his fourth union, in very affluent circumstances.

The present Mrs. Mathews, it is true, had brought him little beside her youth and her good looks: but there were those among the number of his acquaintances, who smiled and winked, when alluding to the subject, and whispered their belief that the clergyman of ——— Church knew how to prize beauty as well as the best of them: that no one had a quicker eye for a handsome woman than the Rev. Mr. M.

No such scandal, however, found currency among his parishioners; it was confined to the ungodly without the pale of his pious charge.

By his devoted congregation, their pastor was honestly regarded as a pattern Christian, and a saint; in fact, his talents as a preacher were of a high order, and the rigid

austerity of his manners was such as to command, to a like extent, their reverence and respect.—Nevertheless, the nodes and the winkers counted over his four wives, and only nodded and winked the more.

But this was not quite all. Mr. Mathews having been four times to the mill, it followed that he was looked upon as decidedly a marrying man; and an immense favorite, as a matter of course, among all the female part of his large congregation. No surer evidence of his popularity is, consequently adducable.

As it was, therefore, Mrs. Newton Mathews the fourth, had been little more than a year the successor of his three former wives, at the time, and on the night, when her reverend husband and his worthy elder, the doctor, stood together in the apothecary's shop, waiting the expected disclosures of their hunchback comrade, and occupying the meantime in the relation of the somewhat peculiar narrative, the startling character of which the sleek little apothecary had spoken of in such strong terms.

Silent and pale, and even without seeming to hear, the city-clergyman listened while the quack began, —

"Just seventeen years ago," commenced the doctor, looking keenly at his only auditor, the cholera was in this country. That you know; and in New York it held its reign of death and desolation, as it had never reigned before or since.

"It was in Montreal, Canada, too, in all its terrors, and at that time I was in practice, in that city, as surgeon and apothecary. I had business enough, I do assure you. I was in clover then.

"I was not employed at the hospitals, yet scarcely a day passed that I had not twenty cases, at least. I made money hand over hand—made hundreds of dollars where I had made a sixpence before.

"But I had *one* case of Cholera, in particular, that filled my pocket better even than this—it is of that very case I am now about to speak.

"One evening, when the plague was raging at its greatest height, I was returning home from my office, chucdling [*sic*] over the profits of the day, when I was stopped on the very steps of the drug-shop, by a Catholic priest of Montreal.

"I knew the monk well. He belonged to one of the three convents in the city; and we had already had dealings together, that paved the way for a tolerably good understanding between us."

Here the minister seemed to half arouse from his lethargy, and became faintly conscious that the other was speaking to him.

"Nor was it at all remarkable that such should be the fact. The friar, life most of his brethren of the cowl, was not a little given to the infirmity from which not even St. David was exempt; and the consequence was, naturally enough, that, when the good father and one of the pious nuns had wandered from the path of duty, my services were rather acceptable in the way of averting the threatened scandal from the church. Eh? do you hear me, brother Mathews?"

In fact, the minister, who had previously shown some signs of attention, now aroused himself with some abruptness, and looked earnestly at the apothecary.

"You are listening, then, now!" said the latter. "If I am not mistaken, I have had some similar little services to render to Protestant priests in this goodly town of Gotham. Eh! brother Mathews; eh?" he slily repeated, punching the preacher familiarly is the ribs.

That personage, however, shrank haughtily from the bantering touch," and replied only by an indignant but somewhat tremulous, though withering look.

The jocose doctor, who seemed to think that he had ventured rather too far, immediately resumed, —

"Well, ahem, that is neither here nor there—I had been useful to the holy monk, as I said, and he knew, well enough, he could trust me, and trust me he did, with a vengeance.

"His errand was a strange one, certainly. He wanted two things of me—two curious things. One of these was a powder that would produce all the symptoms of the prevailing epidemic. The other was a sleeping potion, a narcotic, that might cause a deadly lethargy."

By the time the narrator had got thus far in his story, the minister had now become thoroughly interested. This was plainly to be seen, from an involuntary half-start on his part, and a sudden increase of pallor in his check.

The druggist pursued his story, —

"The priest did not stop to say what he wanted of them. It was not my business to ask that; my business was to mix the drugs and take pay for them—which I did in the shape of the best gold coin Canada. [*sic*]

"It was so much the more money in my pocket for that day's work; but I must say, my thoughts dwelt much less upon the solid cash, that night, than they did upon the probable use to which the holy father intended to put that narcotic and the accompanying drug.

"But what are you talking to yourself about, there, Parson Mathews?" he suddenly added, as he observed the clergyman's lips moving rapidly.

And as those white lips thus moved, they seamed [*sic*] to utter, —

"The drug! —the narcotic—the cholera! Heavens, what a resemblance—what a striking coinci——"

And he appeared to check himself in the middle of a word.

The incoherent murmurer then recovered himself, and said, apologetically, —

"Go on; go; I beg pardon for interrupting you. I was thinking of something else."

"Very well," continued the doctor, "that you must pay more attention,hereafter. The interest of the story is coming now.

"As I told you, the thing kept running in my mind; in fact, I had my suspicions and surmises, but, like a wise man, I kept them to myself. What say you? —do you think I did right?"

“You did—you did; quite right,” stammered the preacher.

“I am glad that’s your opinion. I did not repent my prudence, at all events,” the doctor rejoined, with a half-smile. “Now listen a little better.

“This happened in the good old Canadian town of Montreal, as I have told you, brother—and you must know that, as your pious elder was in a Catholic city, I was a very good Catholic in those times! I tell you this, Brother Mathews, merely to let you know how it was that I came to be attending mass, at the convent, one fine morning—the same convent where this reverend father counted his beads and pattered his *Aves*, and—*kissed the nuns*.

“Well, mass was soon over, and then we should have all gone home again, but for one thing more. We stopped to hear the funeral service read, over a good Catholic who had given up the ghost.

“This was a wealthy citizen of Montreal, a married man, who had been so accommodating as to die, and leave his wife a widow and the mistress of his fortune, he had died of the cholera, and rumor, which is rarely charitable, whispered that the lady would not die or grief at the bereavement, for her late honored lord and master had been somewhat jealous, and the fair dame herself was said to somewhat too kind—where others were concerned.

“In fact, it was thought that the jolly monks themselves were not excluded from the number of her friends. Indeed, her pious father-confessor was supposed to be on highly confidential terms with her, in more senses than one, perhaps. But who this father confessor of hers was——

“By-the-bye, are you listening, Brother Mathews?”

The clergyman moved his hand from his forehead, which he had been tightly pressing, and replied, —

“Yes, yes; go on!”

The doctor recommenced again, —

“It was, if the truth must be told, none other than my friend of the drug and the sleeping-powder; the good monk who was now at the funeral. Perhaps, therefore, being so close in the lady’s confidence, he could pray with peculiar unction, for the repose of the dead man’s soul.

“Poor fellow! the Cholera had made but short work of him; but there was nothing very wonderful in that, when strong men died in an hour, and hundreds dropped dead in the street.

“Those were terrible times in ’32—but glorious days for the doctors!

“He was a rich man—so every body went to his funeral. Perhaps, had it been otherwise, the attendance would have been a good deal more scanty, for his had been one of the most malignant cases, and the cholera, then, thought to be contagious.

“It was this general belief in the infectious properties of the dark disease, that was the cause of what would have been both shocking ing [*sic*] and starting under any other circumstances. The mysterious terror which the pestilence inspired, was universal

throughout the city; and in all Montreal, no one was to be found willing to perform the usual office of stripping those who died of the dreadful scourge.

"This was a fact, —the plague-stricken were buried in their clothes—in the very garments they wore, when living. It had been the same in this instance. The dead man went to the tomb in his every-day suit, and the widow, in her weeds, followed him to his last, long home.

"By the way," said the apothecary, breaking off at this point; "I believe such was the custom, to some extent, even in this city, in 1832>"

"I—I believe it was," stammered the clergyman, as if some unwelcome recollection rose before him.

"Just so, Brother. But it was a deal better than the plague in London; they did'nt [*sic*] even allow them coffins, then —to say nothing of the funeral service over the corpse—both of which, in this case, we had. But I must tell the rest seriously; what followed was solemn enough, God knows."

And with an air much more grave than he had made use of before, the doctor proceeded to the final and most important part of his story in the following terms, —

"The funeral preliminaries over, then, in the convent vaults where he was to be buried the last pious offices were performed. The holy fathers offered up their priestly prayers for the spiritual felicity of the deceased; the departed man's relations had taken their last look at their poor kinsman's face; and the coffin lid, which had beed [*sic*] opened for a single moment, and shut as quickly, to prevent the danger of contagion, was being nailed for the last time, over the motionless corpse—when three distinct, hollow knocks were given against the closed coffin's interior—there was a harsh, heavy, grating-noise from within, like the bursting of iron rivets—and then, with a crash that made the vault rattle, the wooden cover flew suddenly off, and the full-dressed body of the *dead cholera patient* leaped halfway up in his prison, and fell over on his knees!"

In this place pausing, the druggist gazed keenly at the minister, whose eyes were fixed in a wild and stony stare; but whether to watch his listener's countenance, or to take breath, merely, he had thus stopped, it was only to go on again,—

"Lord bless you! it was then that I smelt the rat! I had not been a cholera-doctor for nothing, that's a fact. Aha! I knew now why the good priest came to me. I know what the holy father-confessor wanted with the sickening-powder and the opiate! hey, brother Mathews, hey?" |

The preacher had bounded a pace backward from the spot where he had listened to the startling tale. His face, all the while ghostly and livid, was now strangely altered; the features, before so fixed and stony, were now convulsed and wreathing, with a terrible agitation that possessed the whole man.

While Quackenboss, thus interrupted, once more scrutinized him with apparent astonishment, he heard him ejaculate,—

"This coincidence! this hellish coincidence!"

The quack-doctor took another look—a rapid but furtive one—at thee strongly-moved minister; and his oily lips curved into a faint approach to a quiet smile. Then he said, coolly, —

"I believe you have got St. Vitas' dance in you, too-night, brother. This business, of ours which that hump-back rascal is planning, has got the better of your nerves. But I have not told yon quite all, yet. Shall I finish?"

Mathews, thus interrogated, made a strong effort to control himself, and replied with a quivering voice, —

"Yes, finish your devil's legend. I want to hear it out. Good God!" he murmured, "can such coincidences come by mere chance? Can——"

The excited clergyman abruptly checked himself.

"Nervous still? hey?" said the doctor composingly; well, it is a nervous story, I admit. A few words more will end it; in fact, I must make way with it before our friend in the closet, yonder, gets through with that chart of his."

His eyes wandered to the closet; but the door had been closed by the hunchback behind him, and the gleam of his light through the interstices was all that told of his neighborhood.

The preacher made a movement of apprehension as he followed the druggist's eye, and said, —

"Do you think he could have heard you, Quackenboss?"

"No; or I should not now be telling you this story," was the reply. "What little remains is soon disposed of. —

"Brother Mathews, it was the priest's work and the widow's; they both wanted to be rid of the poor man, you understood? But the sleeping-potion was not strong enough; the momentary opening of the coffin had admitted the fresh air; that fresh air had brought back life, and conscious, and desperation's strength —and the corpse revived and burst the half-nailed coffin."

"Revived and burst its coffin!" gasped the preacher. "There, at least, the accursed coincidence ceases!"

And a strange flush of exultation, as he spoke, brought returning color to his ashy cheek.

"Why, what coincidences are you talking about?" demanded the little apothecary, rather abruptly. "How you keep harping on that word."

"Harping on it! do I?" repeated the preacher, vaguely.

Then with another of his frequent attempts at self command, which was productive of a still more icy and unnatural calmness, he inclined his head earnestly toward the doctor's now silent lips, and asked this question of him, —

"Elihu Quackenboss, tell me, is this story that you have been relating to me, actually true?"

"Did I not assure you so, in the outset? It is a veritable tradition of the jolly cholera, a piece of my own experience."

“True in every detail?” ran the next earnest query.

“Substantially so,” was the druggist’s brief answer.

“*Substantially!* Then you have been *coloring* your story,” exclaimed the minister, half-angrily.

The wily Quackenboss, however, observed that he awaited his answer with the deepest anxiety.

CHAPTER V. THE COINCIDENCES AND THE CONTRADICTIONS.

"'ell? indeed!" said the doctor coolly. "I'm coloring it, hey? I'm afraid there's rather too much of the ghostly about the story to admit of much *color* in the case."

"Still," maintained the preacher, sharply, eyeing him keenly, "you have drawn on fancy for some things?"

"Not for any of my facts. In the names of place and persons," replied the doctor, "I might have made some slight mistake for convenience sake."

"Place and persons! *place!* echoed the preacher; "why, was it not in Montreal—in Canada, then, that all this occurred? You told me so!"

"Why, yes, I believe I did. It's not always best to give places and names, you know— when others will do as well. No," continued the doctor, in a very matter-of-fact sort of tone, "it was not in Montreal. In point of fact, it was in——

"Where? where, then?" interrupted the excited clergyman.

"To speak on the square, then, it was in New York."

"In New York!"

The faint flush of excitement, which, as we have mentioned, had so lately relieved the habitual pallor of his check, died out that instant, and left him more ghastly white than before.

The druggist did not fail—though still furtively—to mark the full effect of his words.

Suddenly reawakened resentment flashed again from the eyes of Mathews.

"Quackenboss!" he exclaimed, "you have deceived me. Why this follery? this absurdity. If it was in New York this thing really took place, and not in Montreal, what is all this nonsense about Canadian convents, and monks, and—"

"Ah!" said the doctor, not at all disconcerted; "a trifling inconsistency, at first blush, I admit."

"A trifling one—it is an irreconcilable one. Your whole tale is a tissue of fabrications, sir!"

"Tolerably sweeping remark, that, brother Mathews. But it must be confessed, the thing don't seem to hang together, exactly. It's pretty certain that there's no convents in New York, if you were to hunt a year of Sundays—and that's 365. And as for the father confessor——"

"Yes! your Catholic priest!" added the minister, who seemed to have some strong reason for whishing [*sic*] to discredit the entire story.

"Another little slip of the tongue, that, too," replied the doctor.

"And your monk of the convent!"

"By the way, it was a Protestant priest, not a Catholic one, that was the hero of my little legend."

"*A Protestant!*" cried the preacher, almost with a shriek. And he bit his lip so sharply, that a cry of pain involuntarily burst from him.

"Exactly. There you have it. A Protestant—a priest—but not a Roman one! And as I said, he lived in New York, where the whole really happened—and not in the Canadas!"

"Why did you tell me, first, that he was a Catholic? —why name Montreal, instead of the true city?"

The minister's voice was strangely hollow as he asked these questions.

With the same ready coolness the doctor replied to them.

"Oh! because I did not want to bring discredit upon our own cloth, Brother Mathews. I thought it best to prepare you for those little peccadillos in the orthodox church, by gentle degrees, at first. So, you perceive I said Montreal, in place of Gotham, and Catholic priests and convents, instead of puritans and meeting houses. Consequently——"

"Consequently," interrupted the Rev. Mr. Mathews, with a wandering air, "the parties were all protestant and all resided in this city?"

"Just so; all of them. You understand that, I see."

"I understand you to tell me so; but it is strangely contrary to your original statements, and, indeed, your whole narrative is full of contradictions."

"Remarkably full of them, hey? Perhaps, now, your penetration may have led you to discover one or two more?"

The perplexed minister said nothing; and as he received no reply, the druggist answered himself, —

"Well, then, as you have failed to discover it, I must set you right on one point more."

"What! have you more corrections yet to make?"

"Only one I believe. Won't you take a pinch of snuff! Yes, now I think of it, one other small discrepancy occurs to me. Instead of it being the husband that died of the cholera, it was the *wife!*"

"*The wife!*" screamed the minister.

"The wife who died—and *not* her lord and master. Consider the case inverted, exactly inverted. It was the husband who wished to be rid of his spouse, by the help of the quack—and, furthermore, that husband was himself no other than that same Protestant clergy man, whom I chose to make, at first, a pious priest of the holy Roman Catholic Church.—Why, man alive! what the deuce ails you, now?"

He might well ask the question. The minister stood before him, speechless, silent, motionless as death; but with the long, thin locks of hair actually bristling upon his forehead.

"The Lord preserve you, Mathews! why you are not going mad, are you?" exclaimed the druggist, turning away one moment to hide the oft-repented smile he could not now suppress.

But the clergyman neither stirred nor answered.

"You look as if you had seen the dead woman's ghost, brother. I had better wind up at once, I see, by setting you finally right on the only remaining mistake into which we have fallen——"

But he was interrupted, and very strangely, too.

"And *that*—and *that*" burst at last from the paralysed clergyman.

As he spoke he dashed right forward to the old druggist's smirking face and fiercely grappled him by either shoulder, in a gripe that rooted him to the spot, and then thundered forth, —

"Speak, sir! In this, the last of your intentional misrepresentations of a too—yes, *too true* tale—say, sir! have you not likewise *lied*—yes, *lied*, in saying that the cheat was discovered—that that the coffin was—was burst open—that the corpse—that the corpse *revived?*"

Rigid as so much marble, and full as stony in his looks, stood the Rev. Newton Mathews, awaiting the final answer which he had so peremptorily demanded.

But how was that answer given?

"Keep coot—keep cool, do, Brother. On my soul I believe you are determined to go a stark mad, unless I answer you quick. Well, I may as well confess that you're right—that the coffin was *not* burst open; that the corpse did not revive; that the sleeping-powder *was* amply strong enough, and that, Newton Mathews, *your* third wife the supposed victim of the Cholera, was buried alive."

Without a word or groan, the guilty minister sank down.

As he fell, he struck sideways against the closed door of the hunchbank's closet, which rattled in its ricketty socket as it felt the weight of the fainting man rebounding on the floor.

The doctor smiled one of his strange, shrewd smiles, and stood silently looking on the swooning preacher. A voice behind him recalled him to himself.

CHAPTER VI. NUMBER III AND NUMBER IV.

"Confound it man! what is the matter?—do you mean to break the door down?" demanded the occupant of the closet, giving the door a strong push outward, when he found that a slight one would not do.

But the body of the Rev. Mr. Mathews had fallen in such a manner against, that the opening of the closed door was by no means an easy task.

Grumbling with surprise and growling at the trouble, the outcast succeeded, by a third and more vigorous effort, in thrusting it open from within.

On seeing the nature of the impediment, the outcast slopped directly in the entrance of the obscure retreat, within which he had been maturing his ominous and mysterious designs.

Quackenboss, whose eye he met, appeared aware that some explanations were necessary on his own part; and something in the character of his grotesque comrade seemed, also, to make him feel very certain that the sooner those explanations were given, and the more consisely, [*sic*] the better it would probably be.—The distorted outcast was not a man to be trifled with.

Quackenboss made the undertaking, therefore, by saying, —

"Pooh! he has fainted—like a sick girl—because I have been raking up an old story about his third wife."

"Ah?" said the hunchback, winking; "did he love her so well? Wonder if he loved her as much as he does the fourth one? —eh?"

"Why, I suppose so," replied the quack, with a laugh, "for he cut her days short, in pretty much the same way as he would like to do, with our help, in the case of his present lady.

"His third wife, you said," observed the outcast, musing; "so that was the way he disposed of her?"

"Yes; to make way for the Mrs. Mathews that is. He married the third wife for money—which was all he wanted of her—and as that was settled on herself, exclusive of all claims from her son, it went to him, as her husband, at her death——"

"Which happened in a hurry?"

"Quite true, everybody thought it was the cholera."

"And so it was—at least a pretty good imitation of it."

The apothecary looked shrewdly at the outcast, who bad said this. The other was looking straight at him.

That double-look conveyed a good deal of meaning.

"You overheard us, then?"

"Couldn't very well help it."

"All right. I meant you should."

"A devil of a hauling over the coals you gave the old gentleman, too! But what was it all for?"

"To make him desperate."

"How so!"

"Desperate enough for our purpose, you understand! I have been half afraid of him backing out."

"Thought he wouldn't come quite up to sticking-point, hey? in this precious cholera-plot of ours."

"I had my fears on that head."

"And yet he showed pluck enough, I should think, when he came to you in '32, for the nauseating drug and the trance-producing powder, to give to his wife No. 3."

"You're right; the fire of the flint shone there," and the doctor, worthy man, chuckled at the terrifying reminiscence, whose previous effect was so fearfully marked upon the motionless body that lay under their very feet.

"So much for number 3! Now for number 4!"

"Yes, now for number 4. We are bound to help him in disposing of her, too, as summarily; and as successfully, also. But what was it that he married her for?" asked the outcast. "For, her money, also?"

"No, she had little enough of that, when he married her. But she had beauty, at that time," rejoined the good doctor, "and beauty is a goodly thing in the eyes of our parson."

"In spite of all that, he is tired of her, now, it seems."

"Pretty much so; Number 4 has had her day. It slips by the sooner, perhaps, in consequence of her unluckily having so pretty a sister in the house?"

"She is very handsome, then, is she?" asked the hunchback, carelessly,

"Who? the sister? That she is! —and shall be Number five," and the doctor smacked his lips,

"Possibly—if she is willing," said the deformed quietly.

"That is his lookout; not ours. The girl has gallants enough?"

"Any of 'em rich?" asked the other, drily.

"Yes, one of them. The son by a former husband, of the third wife, who was a widow when Mathew married her."

"The son of Number Three—and *rich?* —Depend upon it, he'll carry the day."

The doctor laughed, and rejoined, —

"I rather think he will; especially as he happens, luck[i]ly, to be the favored one. What is more, I believe his step-father knows it; and that's the reason they don't like each other any better."

The outcast smiled.

"Lucky dog! but do you think the young man has any suspicions of his reverend father-in-law's secret bearings?"

"So far to the contrary, I don't believe the youngster has the smallest idea of his covettings?"

“He may find it out soon, then; in a hurry. But I guess the parson, here, is getting a little of his spent breath back into his body, again.”

A low rattling in the minister’s throat, and a slight movement of the body at their feet, furnished some faint indication of the fact, expressed with so little feeling.

“Thump him on the back, Quackenboss. That will bring him to, quicker than anything. And in the meantime,” continued the hunchback, retreating into the closet, “I have my chart all ready to show you.”

“Your chart!” repeated the druggist, recollecting.

“Yet, my chart of the city, its streets, its buildings, and—its church-yards. You will then begin to know what I meant, by engaging to *bring* the cholera to New York, whether it would *come* or no! I have the whole planned out, and ready to show you both, when you are both ready to hear.”

While the outcast was groping his way, again, in the dark closet, where the apothecary’s lamp scarce baffled the obscurity; the Doctor busied himself in professional efforts to call back the clergyman’s wandering senses, and suspended animation.

It was the task of several moments; but by and by, the Rev. gentleman was again upon his feet, and by degrees was able to stand, and look around him.

The attentive apothecary gave him sufficient time to recover himself; and then when he saw him in a measure restored, deeming it best to avoid all recurrence to the dreadfully agitating recital through which he had obliged him to pass, he called to the inmate of the closet:—

“We are ready now!”

“And so am I, at last!”

With these words the hunchback reappeared at the door of the closet, with the light; but just before he reached the outlet, his feet stumbled and he tripped headforemost over some object which the gloom had prevented him from discerning, in season to guard against the disagreeable accident.

The light was in one hand; the mysterious chart in the other. His hold of the latter, he let go, instinctively, in trying to save himself with his right arm; but the former fell with him, and under him, the weight of his huge body breaking the ’amp into an hundred atoms, as the hunchback-bearer came thundering down upon it.

CHAPTER VII. THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER.

At no time. probably, blessed with the sweetest temper in the world, the hump=backed man gathered himself up, with several very angry oaths; his natural stock of suavity not much enhanced by the sundry divers sharp cuts he had sustained from the broken glass, which had gashed his face and hands in a dozen different places.

He arose, streaming with blood and oil, and bruized and smarting from the shock of his violent personal contact with the floor of the dark closet.

The druggist, without, was not surprised to hear his hoarse voice, with not a little wrath in its tones, demanding, —

"What the devil have you got here, Quackenboss? on purpose to make me break my neck over, in this cursed closet of yours. I should think a broken back was quite enough for a man, without that. Curse it! I've cut my hands to the bone."

And the doctor heard him groping in the total darkness of the interior, for the unknown object which had occasioned the accident, as if he wanted to wreak his spite on the thing itself.

Having picked himself up, he now was very actively endeavoring to pick up the invisible cause of his displeasure; after which, he presently made his way out into the back room of the drug store, holding in his left hand the fallen chart, which he had recovered, and, in the right, the unlucky stumbling-block which he had seized upon.

It was the wooden frame of an old, time-worn painting; covered with dust and mould, in such thick and heavy layers, that the several rough shakings to which it had been subjected, in its progress from the closet promised to turn out of a good deal of use, in freeing it from the dingy coating of age and dampness.

Had it been anything else but what it proved to be, the ruffled discoverer, would probably have dashed it to pieces, or trodden it into fragments under foot.

As it turned out, therefore, the hunchback did not sacrifice it, directly, to a superfluous vengeance, but contented himself with another compensatory oath or two, and a closer examination of it.

However gloomy the demolition of the lamp might have left the dark closet, there was still light enough streaming in through the windows into the outer shop, from the flickering street door without, to show to him who held the picture, the framed portrait of some person whose dust-dimmed features he proceeded to scrutinise.

While the city-outcast did so, something very peculiar was manifest in the apothecary's actions.

When the outcast first appeared with the worm-eaten wooden frame in his grasp, the druggist had been seen, by the now nearly recovered minister, to start, change color, and then take a quick step forward, with outstretched arm, as if to snatch the portrait from the hand that held it.

The gesture was repeated, less decidedly, as he saw the examiner of the painting brush away the mildew from its face; and his lips opened twice, as though he would have said something to prevent it.

He altered hie mind, however, to all appearance; and Mathew saw him draw back, though his oily face retained its look of uneasiness.

The preacher's observation was, on a sudden, recalled from the disturbed druggist to him in whose possession remained the portrait, and to whom his attention was now drawn, in consequence of a sound from the latter of the two, that struck him as singular in the extreme.

The sound was a choking, strangling sort of noise in the hunchback's throat; a kind of gurgling effort to suppress some strong emotion.

He could not see the outcast's face, for the portrait came between it and his range of vision. But in a moment the other lowered the painting and, coming forward, with the portrait, and a very wry face, said, by way of explanation, —

"On my conscience, I believe I swallowed my cud of tobacco in that infernal fall I had! It came up in my gullet, just now, and half-choked me."

"Did it? Shall I give you something to prevent it making you sick?" asked the doctor, making, at the same time, a motion to take the portrait.

"No, thank'ee. I've chewed the cud a little too often before the mast, aboard ship, to knock under at an ounce, or even more, in the locker."

"So you have been to sea, then, have you? Still," persisted the doctor, "a little Cherokee Cholagogue—to take off the bad effect. Admirable preparation is that Cherokee Cholagogue!"

And the doctor endeavored, by a second effort, to get possession of the painting, which the hunchback did not seem inclined to yield.

"Thank'ee, I want none of your quack nostrums," replied the deformed, coolly, and seeming, for the first time, faintly conscious that the druggist was pulling very eagerly at the painting. "By the bye, whose portrait is this?"

And he turned it so that both the minister and the apothecary could now make out the features of a very young and handsome female.

The doctor turned away with what appeared a muttered imprecation on seeing the portrait exposed.

Not so the clergyman. His languid form received, from within, a sudden impulse that caused him to extend his before impassive arm, and catch at the object with an activity strongly enough in contrast with his previous listlessness.

"Let me see it! let me see the portrait!" he cried, with an energy that occasioned the holder to let go his somewhat too tenacious grasp.

In fact, the hunchback, who had not surrendered it to the apothecary, now relinquished it without objection to the third person of the group.

The Rev. Mr. Mathews, in whose hands it now was, scanned the picture intently; and, as he so scanned it, a slight shiver ran thro' his frame, he turned aside his head and murmured, —

"I thought so."

"What?" inquired the deformed, quickly. 'Quackenboss," he added, "whose portrait is this?"

That personage hesitated before he answered, —

"My daughter's."

"*Your* daughter's!"

With a sullen look Quackenboss answered, —

"Yes; my daughter's—damn her."

"If she was your daughter," said the inquirer, scanning him narrowly, "why do you damn her?"

"Because she disgraced me," said the druggist, sulkily.

"Disgraced you!" repeated the other, with supercilious sneer. "Pray how did she manage to do *that?*"

The apothecary eyed the questioner as if he had a great mind not to answer at all, but finally he replied, —

"As girls usually do, —by the seducer's help."

"Seduced! eh?"

"Yes, and I turned her out of doors, d—n her."

"Turned her out of doors, eh! Humph! that's fatherly," sneered the outcast. "Well, what became of her?"

"Curse her and her brat, too. I don't know and I don't care," was the heartless response.

"Don't *care*, eh! Comfortable feeling, that, when you don't *know?* By the bye, you haven't said yet, who her seducer was. I suppose, now," pursued the deformed, casting a mocking glance at the preacher Mathews, who still retained the picture, though his face was averted from it; "I suppose, now, it might have been some pious friend of her affectionate father; perhaps her pastoral shepherd, himself, whose business it was to see that she did not wander from his spiritual fold! Eh, Brother Mathews, eh?"

And the last words were in exact mimicry of the apothecary's voice and style, when addressing the minister.

The minister looked up quickly, his pale face reddening at the charge; but his friend the doctor, saved him the trouble of defending himself, interposing, —

"You are quite mistaken. The best man living has quite enough sins of his own to answer for, without having those he never committed laid to his charge. It was altogether a different person."

The interogator [*sic*] proceeded to ask carelessly; "Who was it then?"

"It was a young sailor. A young sailor, who is at sea, or dead, now—this was some fifteen years ago."

“Fifteen years ago, hey?” said the outcast, musingly. “That was some two years after the cholera times in ’32. But what sort of a fellow was he, this young sea-dog, who played the girl so false? I hope he was handsome, wasn’t he? As good looking as I am, at all events,” added the hunchback, with a mocking laugh.

“Why, yes—he was a tall, stout, good-looking enough fellow. But devilishly below the girl, curse her. He was nothing but a common sailor, and a regular scape-grace at that. He had a bad name among his shipmates, young as he was.”

The hunchback seemed to ponder a moment, and then he enquired: —

“Ah! what was his name? Perhaps I know the man. I was a sailor once, too.”

“It was Jack Standish.”

The sailor hunchback shook his head.

“Jack Standish! I know no such fellow.”

The minister’s hand still held the faded portrait, but nervelessly; and the outcast, with his long arms folded over his own distorted chest gazed over the hunchback’s shoulder’s [*sic*] at the young girl’s face which looked out from the time-worn canvas on them.

It was a merry and frank a face as a guileless girl ever wore; and even if the features themselves were not full pretty as they might have been, owing to a slight irregularity, yet there was, in the whole expression, a laughing, good-humored, pleasing look, so overflowering with life and spirits, and youthful innocence, and gayety, that made her attractive by its very animation and joyousness.

It represented her, evidently, at the age of artlessness: for, at the time when she first sat for the artist, her years could not well have exceeded fifteen.

The outcast might have observed this for himself, if he had chosen, but he nevertheless asked: —

“When was this painted, Quackenboss?”

“The very year I turned her out of the house,” was the sullen answer. “And that’s fifteen years ago.”

And then it was that the pitiless father, who had been moodily pacing the floor of his shop, while this examination was going on, stopped at last before the others, and said, sulkily: —

“There! if you too have done looking at that cursed picture, I’ll just put it back where you took it from.”

As he made a motion indicative of his intention to return to to [*sic*] the dark-closet, after unceremoniously withdrawing it from the slackened, nerveless grasp of Mathews,—the hunchbacked-sailor, who had chosen to be so particular in his enquiries relative to the doctor’s daughter, now thought proper, furthermore, to demand of the sullen apothecary:—

“Quackenboss, what makes you keep your daughter’s portrait thrust away in that dark hole there, as if it were nothing but so much rubbish?”

To this interrogatory the druggist replied, with an oath, that he hated the sight of it.

“Why, it will mould and rot there man!”

“The sooner the better, then!”

“What! you’re not going to fling it back there again!”

The doctor’s only answer was to toss the time-worn frame, with a jerk, that might have demolished it, into the closet; and then slam to the door upon the dark, confined place whence, by a mere accident, it had that night, for the first time in fifteen years, found the light!

Yes! there, for fifteen long years, had the heartless parent kept the likeness which any other father would have treasured up; the likeness which had looked down upon him, in speechless, silent, voiceless accusation, from the white-washed walls, until he dared no longer brook the withering reproach of those laughing, sparkling eyes, and sought, the conscious coward! to hide himself from them, by darkening them forever, in the refuse rubbish where he had vilely flung all that now remained to him, of the poor forsaken daughter! the lost and ruined child, whom he had driven forth from her girlhood’s home, into the wide and wicked city,—into want, and woe, and shame, and death!

CHAPTER VIII. THE CHART OF THE CITY CHURCHYARDS.

Breaking loud and long on the air, the deep, measured, booming stroke of two of the city clocks, striking, simultaneously, suddenly warned the conspirators of the lapse of time.

Although, in truth, not two hours had passed since the Rev. Mr. Mathews first joined his two boon companions in the apothecary's shop, and scarcely three since the druggist's boy had left it; yet much of that time had been consumed, as we have seen, in a manner foreign to the object which had brought the three men together, there; and these incidental interruptions had more than once stepped between the plotters and the important but unknown plan of procedure, which its hunchback originator had already announced himself prepared to disclose to his expectant comrades.

Looking eagerly into each other's faces, they read, there, mutual impatience of the long delay, and their common resolve at once to end it.

Quackenboss lighted another lamp in place of the broken one.

The outcast was the person to whom the rest of the trio were to look, for the clue that was now to be furnished to the future movements of the cholera conspirators, in view of their strange, their frightful purpose! Silently the hunchback took from beneath his arm the map, or chart, over which he had pored so steadfastly, so mysteriously, in secret and alone.

With careful hand he unrolled it, smoothed out the wrinkles, and pressed down the folds; and spread it before himself, the doctor and the preacher.

The two latter bent over it eagerly. But Mathews drew back with an expression of disappointed curiosity upon his pallid features.

It was, as the outcast himself had once informed them, nothing but a map of the city, its streets, its squares, its public edifices, its churches and its churchyards.

The minister's disappointment, as we have said, was plain enough; for his expectations had gradually been wrought up, by the ruffian's impressive manner, to the highest pitch. The druggist, on the other hand, who had been previously aware of the original character of the roll of parchment, only glanced inquiringly back at the ex-sailor, simply saying, —

"I see nothing."

Without one word of reply the deformed man pointed the doctor's eye to several small, distinctly marked circles, drawn with a lead pencil, around particular portions of the map before him.

The apothecary, and also the minister, closely scrutinized the several spots thus specially indicated; and then they looked once more at their still silent companion, but with an air that plainly intimated, —Well, what of this?

Preserving the same taciturnity, the guide, by whose help they were following their uncertain clue, directed their attention to the printed labels stamped upon the spaces which he had encircled with his pencil.

Then the two men read these inscriptions, originally made by the printer on the spots in question.

The first of the series on which their eyes rested was, — "B street Churchyard."

Following the guiding finger of the hunchback, they read the second label on which it was laid.

That label was, — "Eighteenth Ward Burying Ground."

The third to which the finger passed, —

"Episcopal Cemetery, corner of Hudson street."

And the next, —

"Roman Catholic Cemetery, —First Avenue and Twelfth street."

At the fifth and last of the marked spots in the map, which bore the still more ominous inscription of "*The Potters' Field,*" there the pointed finger stopped.

Dumb with doubt and amazement, the preacher and the druggist knew not what to think.

The slow, deliberate portentous manner of their singular companion sufficiently informed them that he attached the utmost importance to those little square and circular spots he had marked with so much care.

The subtle schemer saw that he must be more explicit if he would suit himself to the slower comprehension of minds not so crafty as his own.

"You have looked these little black spots over and over again, I see," said he, putting an end to his long silence; "and do not perceive their meaning."

Both shook their heads.

"I suppose I must come down from my stilts a little and explain them, especially as it is by the agency of these same little black spots I intend to keep my promise and bring the cholera to New York!"

A feather could not hare fluttered unheard during the thrilling moment of suspense and expectation in which the two plotters awaited the explanations of their fellow-conspirator.

Those explanations, so long looked for, were now given. They consumed but a short time in their communication; yet the during the whole of that short time there was scarcely a moment when some ejaculation of surprise astonishment, dismay, or consternation, did not break from one or soother of the two listeners to tho secret unfolded then and there.

The pale checks blanched paler, the starting eyes protruded yet more from their sockets—the trembling hand grow doubly tremulous; and when, at last, the whole depths of the hunchback's Satanic cunning became fully revealed to them, one low, simultaneous cry of horror might have been heard echoing through the interior of the apothecary's shop.

It was the first involuntary, instinctive impulse of shocked humanity; but the soil was stony, and the seed perished instantly. That first natural recoiling over, and they saw no longer anything but the dreadful means of compassing the one fiendish end in view.

What that hidden means was—in all its mystery and all its terrors—the reader who would learn, will learn it soon enough.

But when, in each detail, it was finally laid bare and understood, between the guilty trio there; then did its dark originator, as hideous and repulsive as his own subtle creation, exultingly demand of his scared listeners, —

"Well, well. *Have* I kept my promise, *now?* You see that it is possible to do *all* that I have guaranteed [*sic* to do. The cholera shall sweep New York in 1849, as New York was never swept by any plague before! The pestilence of '32! pshaw! it shall prove a child to it!"

And the hideous hunchback laughed as an archfiend would laugh when triumphing in human misery.

Such seemed to be, indeed, his strongest attribute; this hatred of humanity, which spurred him on to all. He stood like a mocking spirit among the three, and asked—

"Well, what do you both say now? You agree to the measure; shall we examine the ground to-night?"

It was with increased respect that the druggist replied, —

"Yes; yes, sir! if you think it best."

But the guilty preacher's while lips refused to utter the trembling assent he fain would have given, yet had not the courage.

But the deformed had turned short upon the previous speaker, as if he had taken offence at something in the very words whereby the giving of it had been so carefully avoided.

"Sir! *sir!*" he repeated, mockingly, and in his most jarring tones, "sir, to me! Ho, ho! that is too good, now—too good, by ——I— Why, Elihu Quackenboss, you are the very first man who has said 'sir' to me, in a dog's age. The very first man who has called me anything but *Hunchback*, day in and day out. *Sir*, indeed! ho! ho!"

His grey eye glared with wolfish fury.

"No, no!" he cried. "Don't call me sir, or I shall faint! Call me Broken Back—Broken Back! That's the name I always go by, and that's the name I choose to take." S

"But," said the little apothecary, hesitatingly, "you don't mean to have *us* call you that!';

"Yes, I do! yes by——!" screamed the hunchback. "I like to hear it—it keeps me, in mind of my wrongs—my wrongs, do you hear? and makes me hate all mankind the more. I use to hate the cursed nickname, once; hate and loathe it, when they jeered and spit at me, and flung it in my teeth, every hour in the day. But *now!* I like it—I love it and I want you to call me by that name—and no other!"

"I daren't" protested the doctor, "I daren't —hardly."

The deformed smiled contemptuously.

"Hark ye!" he rejoined, "I have said it, and I will have it so. Call me always Broken Back, mind that; or, hang me if I don't break your back."

The doctor started, in no little alarm, at the threat.

The outcast curled his lip again, sneeringly, at the fright he had produced, and turned to the preacher.

"Come! let us be off to the city churchyards. We must visit them to-night."

"The churchyards!" echoed the clergyman, looking fearfully around him.

"Yes, it is getting late. Our ground must be surveyed before to morrow morning," was the outcast's answer.

He motioned his companions to follow him as, with a quick, strong step, he passed from the little back-parlor of the drug-store into shop beyond, and sternly bade the apothecary unfasten the street door, in order to let them out.

The doctor hurried to comply with the ruffian's bidding, and while he was busy at the fastenings, the outcast suddenly left them in the outer shop and returned silently in the little back room.

The doctor, after unfastening the shop-door, glanced behind him, and was surprised at not seeing the hunchback.

"Where are you, Broken Back?" called out the doctor.

"Coming! I had forgotten the chart," was the reply from within of the person addressed —who was groping in the dark closet, not for the chart, which was safe in his hand, but for the portrait of the druggist's daughter, which the unnatur[a]l father had tossed among the rubbish, with his brutal arm.

It was now so dark that the deformed could discern nothing of the features as he possessed himself of the sought-for object; but as he hurried back to rejoin his comrades, a very keen ear might have heard him mutter, exultingly,—

"Humph! *Jack Standish* has got the likeness, at any rate. The two fools! they little guess who *Broken Back* is!"

"He found the preacher and the doctor both in readiness, at the door, for their immediate departure.

The hunchback-sailor was not disposed to delay.

As with his own hand he flung open the shop door, he turned for the last time to the the [*sic*]others, quietly whispering in the ear of each, —

[a]In three days' time you will read in the city newspapers, *that the cholera has broken out in the city—that hundreds are dying of it every night—that the wife of the Rev. Newton Mathews has fallen among the rest.*"

Thou, silently and together, out into the sleeping city which they had doomed to desolation, passed the *cholera propagators!*

BOOK SECOND. A NIGHT'S ADVENTURES

CHAPTER I. THE CITY BOY AND THE LADY OF THE TOWN.

Circumstances have compelled us, we are sensible, good reader, thus far to keep company not altogether the most creditable that might have been selected; but we trust you will cheerfully do us the justice to suppose that this has been more through necessity then choice, and that we shall be as well pleased in leaving it, presently, for a higher and better sphere.

But, in the meanwhile, we must not allow ourselves altogether to lose sight of our old, or rather, young acquaintance and friend, Mark, the apothecary's boy, whom we hope the reader has not quite forgotten; and to whom we must now return, for reasons which will soon appear, to follow and watch awhile his movements, immediately subsequent to his departure from the shop of the quack doctor, as narrated at the end of the first chapter of the first book of this history.

When, therefore, that interesting young gentleman reached the first comer, he left off whistling, and stopping short looked back with rather a thoughtful face, and an appearance of puzzled speculation, that might have been highly amusing to an observant passerby.

First, he balanced himself on one foot, then upon-the other, and then stood on the toes of both together, flattenning its nose and rubbing his chin, most industriously, for full five minutes.

At the expiration of that period, down went both hands into the profoundest depths of his trowser's pockets, jingling and rattling away at the piece of spending-money his master had given him, the better to get rid of him for the residue of that eventful evening. All of which appeared indicative of a highly perplexing process of cogitation in the shrewd lad's mind.

"Something's a brewin'!" muttered he presently. " Something's in the wind, I knows!" repeated the boy, very confidently. "Master never would ha' g'in me a night to myself, of his own accord, and a penny's worth of pocket money, if there warn't something or other to pay. Han't known of such an instance as this since—since I was Pres'dent of these 'Nited States," said Master Mark, quite positively, and he ruminated again.

"Carn't understand it!" and he shook his head still more dubiously. "Carn't see thro' it, no how. Now, supposin' I go back, and try to find out what in thunder master's up to. Why not?"

At this felicitous suggestion he was starting off at a run, when some 'sober second thought' appeared to strike him, bringing the lad to a dead halt.

“No I won’t either! Darned clear of it! Like as not he’d take that ’ere penny away, again—shouldn’t wonder if he’d repented the giving on it, by this time. No! hope to be shot if I’ll go back again—till the money’s gone.”

This prudent reflection naturally enough led the cautious lad to an immediate personal inspection of his prize, in the possession of which he had been made so unexpectedly to rejoice.

In the dim, wavering glare of the street-lamp, everything was undefined and uncertain to the eye; and as the boy stood twirling the coin between his fingers, and talking to himself, he looked repeatedly at the little circular piece of metal, and then wistfully up and down the street.

“What a bright copper it is,” said he, surveying it more closely; “it’s as bright as gold. Why it’s a bran new cent, I swow! just fresh from old Uncle Sam’s mint, and as yellow as a guinea. By hokey! how it shines, though. Just coined, that’s certing——

“Hallo! —thunder and lightning!”

Whatever might, really, have caused this last rather vehement ejaculation, the lad, at all events, was now keenly and eagerly scrutinizing the paltry piece of money so munificently bestowed upon him.

“Thunder and lightning! may I catch the consumption as bad as parson Mathew’s nigger, if this ain’t a go! a reg’lar, right up-and-down go as I ever yet seed. Hooray I ain’t I in luck?

“Whew! git eout!” fairly yelled the youth in his delight, throwing up his cap with every gesticulation of the most extravagant and exquisite joy.

“Hooray! hooray!” he shouted; “only jest think of old Quackenboss giving me a real gold eagle in mistake for a bright cent!—a genewine shiner of a ten dollar yaller boy, I sure as ’Lihu Quackenboss never sets his two blessed eyes on it again. Whooh! guess I will have the night to myself, and this little feller, too,”

And executing a series of the most beautiful antics, he tossed up the glittering piece of money in the air, and watched it with infinite enjoyment as it came dropping back into his practised palm.

“Heads up! —heads it is. That settles the thing to a T. *Won’t* I have a lark with this ere bright gold X? Oh, no, in course I won’t.”

Hereupon ensued a most profound discussion in the shrewd lad’s mind. Like the discoverer of many a more valuable treasure, the happy possessor of the apothecary’s stray gold piece, found his chief perplexity in deciding what he should do with it.

No doubt he might have laid it out mentally in fifty different ways, in as many seconds, if the savory steam of sundry divers juicy edibles, from it neighboring restaurant had not chanced to reach his youthful olfactories, giving his vascillating predilections a sudden tendency.

“Oysters!” chuckled the ingenious Mark.

"I'll have some oysters—them's um! Some real Jersey Bays, and nothing else. I'll have 'em stewed—no, roasted; stews is wulgar.— Two dozen roasted, in the shell: that's the kind!

"But I won't get 'em here," he said, looking with great contempt at the aforesaid restorator; "it's too vulgar, that place is! to darned vulgar. Oysters is'nt fit to eat unless you gets 'em in Broad'ay!"

Accordingly, at a very smart pace, the fastidious young gentleman whose notions of gentility carried him so far, trotted away, without further ado, to the first 'respectable' establishment he could find in 'Broad'ay,' which proved to be a small oyster saloon kept by a little old woman, who was so fat that she could scarcely waddle; a fact in natural history that, as the apothecary's boy failed not shrewdly to conjecture, furnished pretty good evidence that there was 'a plenty of good eating, there, at all events."

In marched the lad, as bold as a lion, and swaggering up to the counter, delivered his order, —

"Bring on your 'ysters. old lady! Two dozen in the shell, roasted—devil a less—Have 'em done in five minutes, Ma'am: time is valerable."

"The Lord ha' mercy!" cried the old woman, stick in her arms akimbo as she saw the urchin plump himself down into a sidebox, with considerable more independence than an alderman. "Are you sure you've got the money to pay for 'em, boy?"

"Am I quite sure!" indignantly vociferated the city-boy; and pulling out his gold piece he brought it with a thundering sound down upon the table before him. "Am I quite sure that I've got money to pay for them 'ysters? Is this the way you treats gentleman customers as come with spread heagles in their pockets? Look here, ma'am! catch me a rec'mending any of my friends here, will you?"

"Lord bless you, young gentleman!" said the good dame, waxing cordial, all of a sudden, at the sight of the talismanic piece of gold; "you shall have it, dear—anything you want."

"That's the talk, old lady; now fire up! I is hungry enough to eat them 'ysters, shells and all."

"I'll have them cooked right off, young gentleman," said the mistress of the eating-couse. [*sic*]

"Oh? I is a young gen'leman, now, is I?" said the lad. "I was a *boy* afore you got a squint at that yaller thing!"

And then, for want of something better to occupy his active mind, after relentlessly beheading all the unfortunate flies he could lay his hands on, he looked all around the oyster-celler, [*sic*] and then out at the door and windows.

It was one of the ten thousand and one oyster-cellars of the city into which he had descended; and before and above him Broadway lay outspread.

It was long past nightfall, as we have said; the streets were lighted, for it was a moonless night, and the hour was just that time at which the fallen fair ones of this city

come forth on their unhallowed rounds with their rustling silks and their painted cheeks, their echoing laughter and breaking hearts.

Dozens and scores swept by, before the door of the oyster saloon, successless in their quest.

The city-boy counted thee fluttering satins, in each color and shade, until by the different tints he could recognise did identify each successive wearer, as they came and went, passed and repassed again.

One dress, in particular, he noticed; a superb blue watered satin, that had flitted by, and back again, full twenty times while he was watching.

He noticed, however, that the step was lagging; the round, full ankle, so voluptuously displayed, moved less lightly, and there was a langor and listlessness about the gliding feet that indicated weariness and want of animation.

But those gliding feet, that tempting ancle, and that flaunting skirt, were all that he could see of their fair, frail owner, the rest or whose person was hidden from him by the elevation of the sidewalk above his place of observation.

Growing a little curious to catch a glimpse of the face of the flitting damsel, Mark called out in a very important tone to the busy dame,—

"Is them 'ysters ready yet?"

And then, getting up, lounged lazily to the door.

From this post he had a full view of the pavement, but the wandering nymph had vanished, and several of her sisterhood, only, met his disappointed gaze.

"Never mind! she'll be back again," murmured the boy.

By the time he had delivered another admonitory recommendation to— "hurry up the 'ysters, or he should be starved,"—the rustling robe was heard again.

"Hero she comes!" chuckled the lad as a tall girl, rouged up to the eyes, came flaunting along.

But this time her weary pace was exchanged for a somewhat hurried step, as he saw her hasten to and accost two young gentlemen, who were promenading up Broadway, arm in arm.

One of these, he noticed, was a youth of about nineteen in the undress uniform of an American naval officer, who was sauntering leisurely along in company with a young friend.

It was him that she addressed, with a courtezan's wanton invitation; but the young man only favored her with a cold stare, and with a look of contempt, passed on with his companion.

The repulsed girl drew back, with a disappointed air.

For a moment the courtezan paused, and then darted after the two young men, laying to her hand upon the same youth's arm, and murmuring,—

"Well, if you will not go home with me, at least *treat* me—take me down into this oyster cellar and treat me. Young man, I am starving!"

The young midshipman turned in surprise, colored—hesitated, and quickly thrusting a bank note into her hand, hastened on with his friend.

Mark saw the girl examine it eagerly, and heard her falter,—

"Thank God! now I can get something to eat. It is a five dollar bill."

While he was still looking, the wearer of the blue watered silk descended the steps of the oyster cellar.

The lad quietly retreated into his box. As he did so, the girl, who, with a feverish eye, had been advancing, with her money to the counter, saw the old woman place the dish of oysters before him.

No sooner did she observe the boy and the oysters, than she seemed to change her mind, and concealing the bank note, made up to the lad.

The mistress of the saloon, who had just sat down her burden upon the table, immediately bent over and said to the urchin, in a whisper.

"Look out for that girl, young master! I know her, and she don't bear a very good character. If you don't take care, she will douse you out of your oysters—and money, too."

"What's that she's been saying to you, duckey?' said the girl, sidling up to him.

"She says I'd better look out sharp for you," replied the bov, grinning, and preparing to open an oyster.

"Does she? the old termagant," said the girl, looking after the shop woman, rather angrily. "She's always talking bad about her neighbors."

"She says as how you likes oysters," retorted the lad, significantly, grinning still more broadly as he flung away the divided shell.

"Why, so I do," returned the young woman, setting down opposite to him, with the table between them; and so do you, too, ducky."

"Why, I 'spect there ain't much doubt of that," answered the shrewd lad, as he bolted his first oyster whole.

"No, no," said the girl, smiling, and perceiving that he had not quite understood her. "I didn't mean that, exactly. I meant that I liked oysters, and liked you, too."

"Oh, ho! you *do*, hey?" laughed the keen-witted boy. "My eye! you don't, though? Now, see here, young 'oman, how many 'ysters do you expect for that 'ere complement?"

The girl burst into a laugh, and looking at him keenly, replied, —

"I see you have cut your eye,teeth [*sic*], my lad—I'll just try one of them, to see how good your oysters are. I won't ask anything for my compliment, but perhaps you will give me an oyster or two for this?"

And leaning smilingly over the table, she pressed her pouting lips upon the impudent ones of the boy, who received the salute with so much resignation and fortitude, that she was encouraged to repeat it; and passing over to the same aide of the table, sat down beside him.

But when she attempted to wind her full, white arms around his neck, and draw his head coaxingly towards her, making a pillow for it upon the heaving bosom which swelled but too plainly into view beneath her own uncovered neck, chucking him under the chin, and kissing him; he withdrew himself from her close embrace, and pushing her back, looked the girl directly in the eyes, with a wink and a grin desiring to be informed,—

"Did she see anything green in his eye?"

The young woman sank back, evidently in some disappointment.

"So you won't treat me to any of your nice 'ysters?" she asked.

Mark, who had been quietly salting and peppering his second oyster, swallowed it and said, —

"Why I thought it was the midshipmite was to treat?"

"The midshipman?" repeated the girl, in some little confusion.

"Yes; the little reefer wot give you the five-dollar bill. That 'ere V. would pay up for a smashing lot of 'ysters.

The young lady looked at him closely, and demanded how he come to know it was a five dollar bill.

"Hearing you say so—that's how," replied Mark with his third mouthful in his jaws. —Wonder what young midshipmite's father, the parson, would say, if he knew who his son had given money to."

"Was he a minister's son?" demanded the girl of the town.

"Yes, and no—pretty near, and not exactly, either," was the not very intelligible reply. "The fact is, he's step son to a preacher; that's how it is."

"Step-son, hey? what's his name?" she next inquired, —

"Don't remember. It ain't the same as his step-father's, acause his mother's wasn't when she married him."

"No matter what his name is, he's a clever liberal fellow," said the girl, "that's very certain."

The apothecary's boy put another oyster in pickle, and replied,—

"Don't be too sure of that! P'raps you'd better make certain it ain't a counterfeit V. Half the gen'lman about town pays in that 'ere coin, and them young reefers is just devils enough to serve a poor gal the same trick!"

"A counterfeit!" echoed the young woman, in alarm, and with an accent of such keen apprehension and grief, that the boy stopped with his sixth oyster half-way to his mouth, "Oh God! I hope not!"

And snatching the bank-note hastily from her pocket, she looked at it eagerly, dropped it on the table before her, and burst into tears.

The boy started up in consternation; and, overturning the pepper-box, in his dismay, exclaimed, —

"What—what's the matter? You liked to make that 'ere last mouthful choke me, you did!"

The unfortunate girl raised her streaming, eyes to the boy's face, with such an expression of heart-piercing and bitter sorrow, that it was impossible for him not to perceive that it was unfeigned and sincere.

"Poor boy!" she murmured, in a sobbing voice, "you do not know what will become of me, if that bill should turn out to be counterfeit. I have eaten nothing in forty-eight hours, and was starving when that good young man gave it me."

"Han't eat nothing in forty-eight hours!—Thunder and lightning!" ejaculated the startled Mark; "why that's worse, a darned sight, than old 'Elihu keeps me. And here I've been gulpin' down 'ysters all the while, right afore your face, like a young sucking pig, have I?

"Hallo, there! old 'oman! Old 'oman!" he shouted.

"Old woman yourself; don't call me old woman," retorted the dame, sharply; appearing, nevertheless, at the loud summons.

"Bring on some more 'ysters! set a couple a dozen more roastin' this minute, d'ye hear? Don't stand staring! I I've got the pewter—I'll pay the damage. Be alive, now—this gal's a starving!"

And pushing over the uneaten dozen and a half of the delicious shell-fish, which remained on the table, the kind hearted lad loudly bade her, —

"Set to work—put at 'em! don't be bashful. There's more where' they come from, and I stand the treat. Never mind me; I can wait for the others. Dig in!—dig into 'em like fun!"

The half-famished girl hesitated—looked at the generous boy, gratefully—then wistfully at the dainty mess, and with the tears still wet on her cheeks, eagerly and thankfully complied, cheered and encouraged by such comforting suggestions as,—

"Eat away! —go it! I'll open 'em for you—don't be afraid, more's a-comin, presently. Hero, old wo——old lady! bring us a glass of n'e—a couple on 'em; and some gin-and-sugar—strong!"

Mark would not touch another oyster; and by the time the starving girl had eaten all he had left, the second batch made their appearance on the table.

"Now I'll put in and help," said Mark, animatedly, handing her the strengthening glass of spirits, while he swallowed the ale, at a gulp.

"Ain't these little chaps prime?" he added, as he dissected a fresh bivalve.

"What is your name, my little fellow? inquired the young woman, gently, leaning back with a sigh of relief and gratitude there was no mistaking."

"Mark."

"Mark what?"

"That's more than I knows," answered the boy; "old 'Lihu never called me anything else, except lazy rascal."

"Have you got a good master? and is he kind to you?" she asked, with grateful interest.

"No, that I hain't. No, that he ain't. He is a reg'lar old skin-flint; and I wish he had half a dozen of the 'yster-shells down his throat, I does."

"Are you apprenticed—are you bound to him?"

"Bound to him?—why, I suppose I is.—I'm bound to give him thunder some time or other."

"I mean—does he keep you?"

"He keeps me half-naked—if that's what you mean! But I s'pose what you're driving at is to know whether he took me from the poor'ouse, or not! He says he did, no thanks to him."

"Does he treat you well?"

"He don't *treat* me, at all—'specially to 'ysters! He had to furnish the dust, though, this time—darn his hide. But, say, what'a yourn!"

"My name!"

"Yes, if you've got any."

The girl sighed.

"I have more than one, poor boy."

"Well, then, give us the right one—bother the others."

She shook her head, sadly.

"I cannot do that, my boy. Miserable women, like me never speak the names they must ever blush to own. Call me Lizzie."

She spoke so sorrowfully, so mournfully, indeed, that the young lad left his pickled oyster untasted, and took a long, wistful look at the girl.

She was a woman of tall and full figure, inclined to the buxome and plump; but suffering, and her course of life, had somewhat thinned the rounded outlines, and left a feverish fire in her eye; while dissipation and the paint-brush, had impaired what might have been a very attractive face, and was still handsome by help of the wanton's art.

He perceived now, that she could not be so young as he had supposed her, by several years.

Indeed it was a fully matured woman who sat beside him, and not a young girl, fresh in the ways of sin.

"How old are you?" he asked, bluntly, in the midst of his steadfast survey.

The woman of the city smiled faintly, as she answered,—

"It would not do for me to answer that question to every one, but to you, my boy, who have done me kindness, and are but a child—though a shrewd and a sharp one—I need not deny that I shall never see my thirtieth year again."

"Thirty! —you ain't thirty," said the boy, staring with astonishment.

"Yes, I am."

"Why, then, I'm; sure you don't look more than twenty."

"Poor, dear boy, you little know," murmured the fallen female, "how cunningly we hide our wretchedness, and the wreck of life and beauty which it makes."

And burying her pointed face between her trembling hands, she seemed to abandon herself, silently, to the most painful and bitter reflections.

"Take another 'yster," said Mark, sympathisingly; "nothing like eating for conserlation. Well, how old do you think I may be?"

"Twelve, perhaps—or eleven, judging from your size."

"Judging by my size! that's just the thing that you hadn't orter judge by."

"Why so?" inquired the girl, smiling —"That is the usual way of telling the age of a boy."

"I knows it; but if that infernal old skinflint, old 'Lihu, didn't keep me so outragers short, I should have growed more, and not looked only ten year old, when I'm fourteen, every day of it."

"Fourteen!—you do not look so old," said the frail creature, looking tenderly on the boy.

"But I must go now," added the frail one, rising.

"Going!—why, you haven't finished your oysters yet."

"I have eaten all I dare, I thank you. It is not safe to eat too much in the state in which you found me. Let me settle with you, now, for the price of those oysters, if this bill is good."

"Settle for them 'ysters, eh?" exclaimed Mark.

"Yes, if—if the note proves good, It is every cent I have."

"Settle! —indeed you shall do no such a thing," said the boy, resolutely. "I pays, myself."

"You have been too kind to me, for me to let you do that," said the woman, with emotion. "With any one else I shouldn't mind it—but I won't take your money."

"You can't help yourself. I shall pay," exclaimed the boy, with still more determination; "so that's settled.

"However," he added, I'll take that bank-bill and see whether it is a counterfeit one, or not."

She handed it to him and he took it to the counter.

In a moment or two he returned.

"The old woman says that the V.'s as good as wheat. The parson's son wasn't a flunk, after all."

"Thank Heaven! it will save me from one night's wandering," murmured the unhappy creature. "Blessings on that young gentleman—and bless you, too, my poor, dear child. May God guard you, and make your life happier than mine. Good night!—remember poor Lizzie."

She bent down and hurriedly kissed the boy; then, before he well knew it, she had glided from the cellar.

A tear was trickling down the boy's check, but he brushed it away, quite sure that he had not shed it himself.

It had fallen from the frail one's eye.

“I told you that girl would wheedle you out of them oysters,” grumbled the old woman, on Mark calling out, in a swaggering tone, for ‘his bill.”

“What if she has? —I don’t grumble, do I? Just tip us the change, will you? I want to be off.”

The old dame looked at him sharply, as she said: —

“You ain’t a going; after that girl, I hope, are you?”

“Ahem; that’s telling. But what put it into your head to hope so, old lady?”

“Acause,” returned the beldame, shrugging her shoulders, “You is most too young a chick to keep company with the likes of her.”

“Better clear up your ’ystershells, old ’oman!” retorted the boy, bounding up the steps of the cellar.

There he stopped; and thought a moment—looked carefully up and down the street—caught one distant glimpse of a gliding skirt—dropped his change into his capacious pockets—and a shrewd smile on his shrewd face, set off at a run in the direction in which he had taken his last view of the blue watered satin!

CHAPTER II. A NIGHT IN THE STREETS OF GOTHAM.

A moonless night, we have said it was. The street lamps but partially supplied its place.

The boy hastened on. Just as he was passing one of the handsome private resiliences fronting Broadway, his mime was pronounced, and he stopped short on hearing a guttural voice accost him in the following words,—

"Bress my soul, Massa Mark! be that you? Who dat you runnin arter so fast? What de debbil de matter? Anybody got de 'sumption, or de hyderfoby? Eh! tell dis nigger, quick!"

Mark paused on recognizing the negro, on whom he had played so many tricks. Looking up at the lighted house, he saw that, it was the minister's mansion he was passing,—the residence of the negro's master.

Recollecting the dose of snuff and tobacco which he had mixed with the unfortunate African's sarsaparilla he tarried a moment, in order wickedly to inquire,—

"Ah, dat you, Gumbo? How did the sars'prilla set?"

The colored gentleman afflicted with so many physical infirmities, showed the whites of his eyes expressively, and replied in his guttural tones: —

"Set bad; ver' bad, Massa Mark. It kicked up de bery debble inside of me. Thought I was g'wine to die for sure, for two or free hours."

"Well, but did it do that consumption o' yours any good?"

"Dat'sumpshion? Oh, Massa Mark," said the negro, wagging his woolly head vehemently, "it am not 'sumpshion dat am de matter wid me, any more. It am somefin' woss dan dat."

"Somthin' worse! hello, have you been catchin' some new disease so quick? How in thunder," demanded the grinning youngster, "did you find that out?"

"All 'long ob de sars'p'rillum, massa," responded the negro, striking his enormous chest, mysteriously. "It raise such a debble ob a rumpus in here, I no longer hab any doubt is stir him up at last."

"Stir *him* up? what in darnation do you mean by *him?*" inquired the boy, a little puzzled by the pronoun.

"Oh! de tape-worm, massa."

"The tape-worm," echoed Mark, astonished.

"Yes, Massa Mark; sorry to hate to say it," said Gumbo, dolefully. "Ye see, massa, white dis nigger was sick as deal, in de kitch'n, Old Dinah de cook wus readin' de paper, and she come to a 'count ob a live tape worm, wid forty feet, or forty feet long, I do' know which,—as was cut out of a man's body, in Bos'on, all alive an' squirming, and den I know'd in a minnit what was the matter wid me, and what 'twas dat dam sars'p'rillus had set gallopin' up and down my 'tomach, like de horned Satan hisself!"

And the poor darkie brought up his direful story with a terrible groan.

As for ‘Massa Mark,’ that young rascal had both fists stuffed down his throat to keep himself from roaring out, on the spot.

The gurgling sound in the boys throat, (which threatened to split it,) the not very clear-sighted Gumbo mistook for a sympathetic groan, and dolefully proceeded with the explanation of his bodily grievances.

“Dat’a it! dat’s de t’ing. I made de discovery at last, de kitchen folks am always sayin’ dis chil’ isn’t sic’, ’cos I eats so much; and when I tell ’em dat I hab de konsumpshion, Old Dinah makes up her mouf and says she ’spects it am konsumpshion of buckwheat pan, cake’s and clam-soup! But I knows ’dactyl what it be. It am dat dam tape-worn dat swallows up ebberyt’ing I eat, and gibs dis nigger sich a debble an app’tite. Ki, yuh! me t’ink me feel ’im now!”

In the midst of the poor prosecuted African’s grimaces and contortions, Mark half-dying with laughter, made his escape; leaving the unlucky sufferer under such a complication of infirmities, groaning and grunting away, still lamenting his miserable fate, quite unconscious that he had no longer a listener.

Sensible that he had lost lime, by this curious detention, the apothecary’s apprentice darted on, winding and twisting through the thronged street with the practised expertness of a city youngster.

That street, however, was becoming each moment less and less crowded; the farther up Broadway he hurried, the smaller grew the continually diminishing stream.

For qua[r]ter of an hour he thus ran on encountering occasionally another and still another of the erring sisterhood, but none of the number wearing the identical blue dress which was his guide and clue.

A few moments more, of such accelerated progress, proved to him that he was less than half-mistaken. Not two hundred yards ahead, the same azure-tinted, watered satin was rustling along over the smooth flagging of the street.

But that step was no longer fl[a]uting; there was no longer the studied wantonness of carriage; the woman was hurrying on with an eager and earnest fool, looking neither to the right or left, in search of the syren’s prey.

But hers was not the only figure in sight. The sound of voices, on the opposite side of the way, caused Mark to throw his eye across the street—coming down which, at a slow a and sauntering pace, he observed two young men, arm in arm, each with a cigar in his mouth, and moving towards him with their careless steps and conversation,

One was a mere youth, in undress uniform, and a second glance quite satisfied the keen-eyed Mark that it was none other than the young midshipman of nineteen, who had ‘been so flush with his V. spots,’ as Mark expressed it, and who was just returning, with his friend from what seemed a long promenade, or what might possibly have been a fashionably late party.

The shrewd Mark, however, as he recognised them, appeared to be of a different opinion; for he instantly gave vent to a quiet whistle, and muttered to himself with a slight grin, —

“Guess them ’ere nice young gentleman is out for a lark!”

But as they were on the opposite side of the street, neither Mark, nor the female he was dogging, encountered them in their way; and Mark trudged on, coolly wondering, “how many cigars them youngsters ’ad smoked since the fust one? How many they ’ad flung away, slily, when one of ’em warn’t lookin, purtending to have smoked ’em up?’ and whether they wouldn’t be as sick as an ottar, presently.”

The young men sauntered on; came opposite the boy; passed him, and continued to lounge leisurely down the street, evidently not in the smallest possible hurry.

“Taking it easy, arn’t you?” apostrophized the observant urchin, over the way, turning round to look after them, when the two had got by, enveloped in an atmosphere of smoke.

And thereupon, wheeling twice round on his right heel, the practised city-boy applied both hands to his mouth, making a trumpet for the louder passage of his voice, and vociferously shouted out, —

“Hallo, you young gen’leman! does your mothers know you’re out?”

At this strikingly original, peculiarly felicitous, and altogether most unexpected formula of address—from the opposite sidewalk— the two promenades came to a dead halt; removed their cigars from their mouths, with considerable celerity, and cast their surprised and indignant glances across the street, where stood Mark, the hailing party, perfectly unconcerned as to the probable consequences of his temerity, and chuckling, meanwhile, to himself,—

“Polite attention, that! ’Affectionate inquiries, gentlemen. Forgot to recollect, tho’, that that ’ere midshipmite’s mother died ef the chol’rer in ’32, as I’ve heard say. At all events, I wonders if the old lady knowed he smoked?”

The cloudy atmosphere in which the two smokers had encircled themselves, added to the natural obscurity of the moonless night, prevented them, for the first minute or two, from seeing anything at all. This was the best reason why they did not immediately discover the tantalizing Mark, who, with the whole of his ten digits applied to a very prominent feature in the human face divine, at this juncture sung out, —

“I say, over there! guess you’d better blow away the smoke, first, if you wants to see much.”

A puff of fresh wind, from up street, saved them the necessity, even, of complying with this very friendly advice. But, like a good deal of other gratuitous advice, in this curious world, it did not seem to be received in quite as friendly a spirit by those for whose especial benefit it was designed.

“What impertinent young rascal was that, Clinton?” hastily demanded the midshipman’s companion, a spruce young dandy, as the tobacco-mist rolled away and discovered the apothecary’s boy in the midst of the very respectful pantomime aforesaid.

“Some young dog or other, Allen. Never mind him,” replied the reefer, coolly, resuming his cigar.

“No, no!” cried Allen. “I consider myself insulted! Let’s give chase.”

“Oh, very well,” answered Clinton, “anything for a lark!”

“A lark it is, then! so here goes,” was the prompt reply; “and you’ll pity his ears if I catch him?”

Mark, who now thought it high time to be moving, only stopped long enough to saucily, inquire, —

“Don’t you wish you could?”

Saying this, he at once made the best use of his heels.

It was lucky enough that he did no, for the insulted Mr. Allen had dashed across the street, flinging away his cigar as he went; while the midshipman, quite as ready, but considerably more cool, had tossed *his* at the head of the retreating urchin, whom it struck just on the extreme tip of the threatened ears, at the lighted end, causing master Mark to jump about a half a yard into the air, and give audible vent to more than one involuntary, “Thunder!”

>The lad grinned, first with pain, and secondly with admiration of the midshipman’s dexterity; and then started on, rubbing his fire-touched ear very briskly as he ran onward,

“By the Lord, he’s off” shouted Allen, in full pursuit.

“I see it, Allen.”

“Hurrah! give chase.”

“It’s my opinion I’ve done my share already,” replied Clinton, coolly.

“Come along and see me do mine, then! By Jupiter! I won’t leave him the remnant of an ear.”

Here the incorrigible Mark whirled round to bawl back, —

“Why, they ain’t near so long as yours, by a darned sight.”

“What does the young scoundrel say?” cried Allen, pretending not to hear.

“He thinks,” rejoined Clinton, laughingly, “that your ears need shortening more than his, Allen.”

The affronted exquisite muttered several high-sounding threats and darted on after the fugitive.

Laughing at his friend’s discom5ture, [*sic*] Clinton followed, leisurely, probably wishing to ‘see the fun.”

Mark threatened to distance his pursuer.—He had lost some little time in stopping to play off his audacity upon the two young men, during which delay the female he had been following, continued on, until she was now lost sight of.

The boy, who had not quite forgotten his main object, in this little mischievous by-play, could thus couple both that and his present purpose of retreat from the summary vengeance of the indignant Mr. Allen, in the precipitate escape he was now forced to make, by the help of a good pair of heels and a tolerable start. |

Both of these latter important essentials served him to such excellent effect, that he was rapidly leaving farther and further in the rear his panting pursuer, the city exquisite,

who followed at the top of his speed, anathematising the urchin at every step; while his laughing friend, Clinton, who followed, also, was obliged to quicken his pace, to keep the pair in view.

This, it will readily be believed was no easy matter.

Ten minutes' run had already brought Mark in full sight of the distant female, once more, and he was contemplating a strategetical dive down a side-street, and then a serpentine turning and twisting back again, two or three squares ahead, when an unlooked-for incident interposed to drive the idea altogether out of his head.

This was neither less nor more than the sudden appearance of a new party in the scene.

Up the broad avenue, a short distance in advance of the female figure which he had so nearly overtaken, —turning into the spacious thoroughfare, at the corner, from a small, narrow side street, three men crossed into Broadway.

One of these three men was tall and thin, with a long black cloak wrapped closely about him.

The second was short and corpulent, and had on a grayish box-coat, which, at all events, had the merit of being well-filled—so far as flesh was concerned.

On the other hand, though both fat and short, as compared to his tall companion in the cloak; yet short he did not seem, in comparison with the third person of this new group.

The last, in fact, was so greatly beneath the common stature, that his height, from head to heel, must have fallen considerably short of four feet; and there was a grotesqueness about the whole disproportioned figure—if so it could be called—which made it conspicuous at first sight.

This odd shape, forming the third and last of the party, moved with a rolling, unsteady gait, that betrayed the influence of intoxication.

As the three men issued from the side street, they stopped, as if by common consent, to take a survey of the broad open avenue before them.

It presented, at that particular moment, a rather a curious prospect, —the grinning urchin was coming up at full speed—the angry exquisite in hot pursuit.

Clinton, the young midshipman, was following as fast as his uncontrollable laughter would let him.

Startled by the noise of running footsteps, and the reefer's ringing merriment, behind her; the lost woman of the city had turned round, to learn the occasion of the disturbance.

Woe to the wretched daughters of shame, who chance to meet, in the silent and slumbering metropolis, a troop of midnight rowdies! The taunt, the jeer, the cutting jibe; such, such the cruel gauntlet that they must run!

And now, as she backward threw that apprehensive glance, the woman's ready fears deceived her with the belief that the merry laughter and the running feet, behind, were those of the mocking city rowdy and the bullying b'hoy.

She quickened her steps; and, when she reached the next corner, for the first time perceived the three men who had turned out of the side street.

The blood died away from her painted cheeks as she fancied she had an enemy of the same character to encounter, in front; and she would instantly have turned down a side street, but it was too late; she was already at the corner, and not daring to turn back, she drew her bonnet closer around her face and with a faltering but hurried step, pressed onward.

But she was not allowed to pass, as she had hoped.

When directly opposite the three men, the dwarf sprang suddenly forward and caught hold of her arm, with a drunken oath.

The very next instant the street rang to the sound of a shrill shriek, that reached the ears of many a distant watchman.

It was that abrupt cry which had attracted the notice of the fugitive lad—but not his attention, alone.

CHAPTER III. THE MIDNIGHT RENCONTRE IN THE CITY.

Equivocal enough, considering time and circumstance, was this alarm in the streets. As for the two young men, who were within a short distance of the spot they ceased to think of anything else the moment that outcry reached them from the corner next above.

Clinton left off laughing, instantaneously; Allen forgot his affronted dignity and grinning fugitive; and Mark, himself, with all his ears and eyes wide open, breathlessly gained the spot.

"Allen! where the deuce did that scream come from?" hurriedly demanded the midshipman, as he overtook his friend.

"Hang me if I know!" rejoined the latter, drawing a long breath, "unless from that girl ahead."

"Quick, then!" cried the young officer, hurrying on; "don't let a girl scream in vain!"

"Why—why—deuce take it," said the exquisite hesitatingly, "that's a lady of the town, Clinton."

"And what if she is, Allen?" was the quick inquiry and rejoinder. She is a *woman* and a fellow-creature, and has a right to protection—and shall have it."

"Well, well—but," demurred the fastidious Mr. Allen, more slowly following, "how do you know it was not a watchman? Ten to one, 'is a Charley."

"It is no such thing—it is no watchman," returned young Clinton, with spirit; "but a drunken bully who has struck the unfortunate wretch a brutal blow! Come on, if you are coming."

It was as Clinton had said. The reeling dwarf in his intoxication, had staggered up to the poor creature, throwing his bloated arms around her, and when she shrank back, with the aroused instinct of fear or loathing, from his repulsive embrace, he had dealt her, in the wantonness of maudlin fury, a violent stroke with his open palm, that sent her half way across the side-walk.

Only a single moment had elapsed since that blow had been given; yet before Mark, who was first to arrive on the spot, could interpose, had he wished; before the two friends—Clinton the foremost—had time to reach the scene, they were, in part, anticipated by the interference of the party who accompanied the hunchback.

Scarcely had the shriek of the stricken female followed the blow, when the tall man in the black cloak stepped precipitately forward, exclaiming, —

"My God! what have you done?"

While the short, fat personage, making a spring of considerable agility, for a corpulent figure, pulled the drunken man sharply by the sleeve, saying, —

"Broken Back! man, are you mad? Do you want to bring half the watchmen in the ward down upon us, by a drunken brawl with a girl of the town? Ten thousand curses

light on you! could nothing content you but to drink yourself into a perfect spot, to-night, too, of all others."

"He would do it,' exclaimed the tall man in an agitated tone, "nothing could prevent him from drinking, till—till—you see the consequences. My God, he will ruin everything!"

But, heedless of their remonstrances, the bully shook them off and struck the trembling woman a second and yet more brutal buffet in the bosom.

The deep agonized groan which she this time gave utterance too, was more fearful to hear than even the wildest shriek would have been.

It did not plead for pity unanswered, for the generous Clinton had that moment gained the spot.

With one sadden, unexpected, indignant blow from his strong young arm, delivered directly under the left ear, and planted with the practised expertness of a midshipman's berth boxer, he knocked the brutal dwarf headlong to the pavement.

The two companions of the prostrate bully stopped short in the very act of throwing themselves once more upon their intoxicated associate, on purpose to tear him forcibly from his prey; but finding themselves thus anticipated they drew back to examine the new party, whose summary interference had taken one and all by surprise.

Then it was that a very singular thing occurred, —

No sooner did the eye of the tall man in the black cloak fasten itself upon the slight, graceful person and handsome uniform of the young midshipman before him, than he gave a violent start.

No sooner had he taken his second look at the frank, open, handsome, but indignation-suffused face of the stripling-officer, than recoiling with a suppressed cry, he turned with the greatest rapidity upon his heel, darted away, and fled round the corner of the first street.

The young man, startled by this abrupt flight, gazed after him; an expression of surprise in his fine dark eyes, which this strange retreat might well cause, or to which some other mingled feeling might possibly have given rise.

His attention scarcely had time to be called off in this quarter, however, before another and not very dissimilar circumstance occasioned it to revert back again, as suddenly as it had been summoned away.

This was nothing less than the unequally unceremonious disappearance of the fat man in the box-coat.

That corpulent personage had no sooner caught sight of no less an individual than the redoubtable Mark—who had stood for the last two minutes staring him point-blank in the face—than the aforesaid proprietor of the gray coat precipitately took to his heels and vanished down the street from which his party had originally emerged.

Now, unluckily for that gentleman, Mr. Allen, breathless from his run, and the last to arrive, had just come up with his more active friend, the moment before the little fat man had taken it into his head to decamp so unaccountably.

The natural and inevitable consequence was, that as the late pursuer of Mark stood immediately in the little fat men's way, —the little fat man, accordingly, brushed directly against him, in passing, overturning him in an instant.

The Falslaff-like figure did not think it at all necessary to stop for the purpose of ascertaining the damage done; and the ill-starred Broadway exquisite all at once found himself—without so much as one consoling apology—landed directly in the gutter, not three feet from the drunken bully.

"A suit of the very finest and most unexceptionable French broadcloth, ruined to all eternity!" growled the elegant Mr., Allen, surveying the defaced condition of his no longer immaculate sables, with infinite chagrin; "by all the gods and goddesses!"

And then, immediately, at a rather suspicious sound from behind, he wheeled round and caught the grinning Mark by the ear, fiercely demanding, —

"You precious young varlet! what are you chuckling at, sir? Oh! I've got you now, have I? I'll touch you to insult a gentleman of my cloth!"

"Your cloth's rather damaged at present, sir, ain't it?"

This saucy query from the incorrigible Mark caused him to get two cuffs and an additional shaking, where he would probably have received only one of each kind, had he possessed the prudence to refrain from this last little pleasantry.

But Mark was not thus prudent, and the involuntarily smiling Clinton was obliged to interfere in his favor.

"Let the lad go, Allen; and let us look to this poor girl."

The humane young man was advancing toward the sobbing and trembling creature, who was leaning for support against one of the dark and silent buildings which fronted the street, when the boyish voice of Mark, in its shrillest and most cautioning key, arrested his movements.

"Better look to the chap you just knocked on the head."

And then he heard the same voice warningly add, —

"Take care! take care!"

The caution was no superfluous one. Latterly unnoticed in the amazement caused by the unaccountable flight of his two more sober associates, and the concurrent consequences, the prostrated dwarf had risen quietly, well-nigh sobered by his fall, and selecting his opportunity, rushed forward, with fury in his eyes, upon the unguarded young man who had given him such forcible proofs of his interference between the bully and the original object of his rage.

The boy's warning, however, came too late—for all that Clinton had time to do in self-defence.

The friendly lad who had given it, nevertheless, had his wits as well as his eyes about him; and at the critical moment when the drunken man flung himself, with the ferocious violence of a wild beast, right forward upon the unprepared young midshipman, Mark quietly stretched out one foot and tripped the ruffian up.

Down he went, upon the solid flag-stones, and there he lay quite senseless from the shock.

"Go it, hump-back!" shouted Mark, springing to his side.

Clinton now drew a step nearer to scrutinize more narrowly the misshapen lump of humanity, which all now perceived to be that of a hunchback, as well as dwarf, and in which the reader has before this recognised the malignant *Broken Back!*

But what had become of his two comrades, who had deserted him in this emergency? and who and what were they?

CHAPTER IV. JACK STANDISH, THE SAILOR.

Broken Back uttered no groans, but remained without any signs of life, quite insensible to the close scrutiny he was undergoing.

It did not last long, however; for the young man, Clinton, presently drew back, suppressing a slight movement of surprise, and called to his friend.

"Just look here a moment, Allen. I know this fellow."

"Do you, though? Then that's more than I wish to," rejoined the discontented exquisite, drawing nearer. "He came near breaking your neck, Clinton."

The midshipman smiled slightly, as he replied, —

"I am afraid he would infinitely have preferred breaking my back. It is the threat he always uses, when his fury is excited since his own was broken."

"Broken! —wasn't he always deformed!", said Allen.

"No. His deformity was the result of an accident at sea," replied Clinton; "he was a sailor, at that time."

"A sailor, hey? pity he had not been lost at sea. But eow [*sic*] came you to know him, Clinton?"

"By sailing in the same ship with him. I was in the midshipman's berth, and he in the forecastle."

"Why, how long ago was it?" asked Allen, surprisedly.

"A couple of years, or thereabouts. I had just got my reefer's warrant, and shipped for my first cruize."

"But how happened the accident?"

"Through his own fault," rejoined Clinton, looking down at the shapeless deformity, — "He was always a desperate character in the ship, and at last he mutinied. Our captain threatened to put him in irons, first flogging him; but the man ran up the rigging, swearing he would not come down till they promised to let him off—so the skipper had to send two or three stout fellows aloft to seize him, and, in trying to escape from them, the mutineer lost his footing and fell to the deck, saving his neck by breaking his back."

"The deuce he did!" said the exquisite, a little nervously.

"Yes, he was bad enough before, but after that he was a very devil incarnate. He seemed full of hatred and malice toward all men. He twice attempted to set the ship on fire—sick and disabled as he was. When the vessel returned to port we sent him ashore to the hospital—and that was the last I ever saw of him, until we encountered him here tonight."

"Then you must know his name!" inquired Allen.

"Certainly. He seduced the daughter of one of my step-father's parishioners, I have heard it said—though that was many years ago—when I was a mere babe. That, and his broken back, make me remember him the easier."

“But his name?”

“His name! his name was—was Jack Standish.”

“Jack Standish?” repeated his listening friend, coolly; “deuced common name, that—but—but what the deuce are you looking at, Clinton?”

Clinton, in fact, had turned round abruptly at the sound of a slight movement proceeding from the hitherto forgotten female, whom they had left leaning against the building to which she had tottered for support.

At the sudden noise made by her, the midshipman, as he turned, perceived that she had advanced a step or two toward him, and stopping there, stood quite still, gazing fixedly on him, with an eye strangely haggard and a face deadly pale, wherever the deceptive rouge did not hide its ashy pallor.

There was a wild, singular expression in her eyes that he could not define, and now, recalled to the recollection of her condition, and fearing for the consequences of the hunch-back’s violence, he approached her, and in a kind tone inquired,—

“You are faint—you are ill, are you not? from the effects of those heartless blows.—You have nothing more to fear, however, from that——”

He stopped here, voluntarily; for he discovered, for the first lime, that the female to whom he was speaking was no other than the painted wanton, the famishing unfortunate, who had once already been the object of his careless bounty.

The female knew him, also, in her turn, it seemed; for after returning his gaze with the same indefinable, earnest expression, which we have before mentioned, she said, —

“You are very kind to me, young sir. You have already been very kind to me, to-night. An unhappy wretch such as I am, can never repay such generous goodness as you have shown me.”

“You do not seem wholly lost to feeling, girl,” said the young man, seriously. “Why, do you not leave this miserable life you now lead?”

“God know—God knows, how willingly I would!” was the faltering and sobbing reply, for the young woman had burst into tears.

The young man watched her suspiciously and searchingly, for he was no novice in the arts and deceptions of a city life, youthful as he was.

His practised eye failed, however, to discover hypocrisy or deceit, for hypocrisy or deceit there was none; and as he became more and more satisfied of it, his frank countenance regained all its openness.

“If that be the case, what prevents you, then?”

With a voice whose plaintive, heart-rendering accents touched him to the soul, was he answered, —

“Poverty! Necessity, young man. I should die of want and starvation—die in the streets at night.”

Clinton shuddered.

“Tell me your name, young woman!” he said.

The lost creature started, and shuddered, also; but with a far different feeling.

“It is—it is——I had a better one once, and must not tell you the true one now. They call me Lizzie.”

“Well, tell me, Lizzie, what sum would enable you to forsake this hateful life for ever, and turn to a better one.

“Speak; do not stare so! I am rich—and mean what I say!”

The woman was indeed glaring on him, with clasped hands and eager though doubling looks.

“Oh, no, no—it cannet [*sic*] be—you do not mean it. It would be too generous, even for you, young man,” she cried.

Clinton replied by placing in her trembling hands, a silken purse—heavy with gold and and [*sic*] notes.

The scorned and despised creature of the town gazed wildly, incredulously and wonderingly upon him.

Mad with joy, one hand mechanically clutched the precious prize; the other was pressed convulsively against her bosom, as if the heart within threatened to burst with happiness and gratitude.

“Go, and let it save you!” was all the generous giver said.

“It shall! O God, it shall!” she murmured, amid her fervent blessings. “I swear—I swear it shall! Never, never can it restore to me the purity and virtue that once were mine, but it will snatch me from a life of shame and a shameful death. God rain his blessings on your head.”

The women, Lizzie, sent one long, earnest gaze around the group; full of warm, breathing gratitude as it lingered on her noble benefactor; full of surprise as it dwelt for the first time upon the lad, Mark; full of shuddering aversion as it passed to the senseless lump of deformity, which lay at the feet of Allen and his friend.

With a full heart she had already begun to turn away, when, at the sight of the apothecary’s boy, whom she had not expected thus to meet again, she lingered and beckoned the boy to her side.

As Mark readily advanced to her, not knowing what to anticipate, she bent down and whispered in his ear, —

“Boy, I know not why you have followed me, but be certain I will not forget you.—Meet me on this very spot to-morrow night, and you shall find then, poor boy, that Lizzie remembers those who have been kind to her. Do you understand me?”

Mark looked up in astonishment, but she motioned him to keep silence.

“Hush! not a word. But answer me one question,” said Lizzie, with a strange, eager look, —

“What was it that noble young man there called the name of that deformed brute?”

Mark scratched his head, deliberatingly, before he replied,—

“Jack Standish, I believe.”

“Jack Standish!” echoed the woman, in a tone as strange and wild as her look. “Standish, you say?”

Before Mark could nod in the affirmative, Lizzie had glided away.

It is more than probable that Mark, as well as his remaining companions in the broken group, might have fell some little wonder at the abruptness of her departure; had it not been that, from the neighboring streets, came at this moment the distant sound of springing rattles, clattering sharply on the air, and furnishing sound reasons for the immediate dispersing of the whole party.

"The Charlies are coming," ejaculated Allen, hastily.

"Ah, yes—the watch!" said Clinton, absently.

"Why, you are asleep, man! Hark! I hear their confounded rattles. We shall have to cut and run, my boy."

At this moment the abstracted Clinton felt his coat-sleeve pulled suddenly. Supposing it to be his impatient friend, Allen, who was manifesting unmistakable signs of a desire to be off, Clinton looked round.

It was not the exquisite—it was the apothecary's boy.

Struck by the lad's meaning face, he met his shrewd eye awaiting his own.

"I want to speak to you, sir," said the boy, with a manner perfectly respectful. "I want to ask you a question," he said, sinking his voice at the last word, which the mercurial Mr. Allen caught.

"Confound your questions!" interrupted that gentleman, with some little trepidation.—"Those internal Charlies will be asking rather unpleasant ones, if we don't make pretty good work of it."

"What is it, my lad? be quick," replied Clinton to the boy.

Mark whispered, —

"You did me a good turn, sir, and now I'll do you one. You saved my ears from being jerked off by that 'ere gen'leman, and I'll tell you a secret or two to pay for it."

"A secret—what do you mean?"

"Why, sir! just this. You recollect that funny-looking, little fat fellow that tumbled over your friend, the other gen'leman, and spoiled his clothes for him?"

"The short, fat man, you mean?" said the midshipman.

"The short 'un, sir. Well, I knows him, and his gray coat, too."

"Ah!" said Clinton.

"Yes sir. He's my master—he's Doctor 'Lihu Quackenboss," continued Mark, as fast as possible, and that's why he run when he saw me."

"I thought as much," muttered the young man.

Mark's eyes brightened instantly.

"Did you, sir! Perhaps you recognised the tall thin man in the black cloak, too? —Coz if you didn't I did." | t

"*You* recognised him!" exclaimed Clinton, with a start, and a frowning brow.

"

"Certainly, sir. He was——" stammered Mark, "he was——"

"Who?" demanded the young man, fixing his eye sternly on the boy.

"Why—why—*your stepfather, sir—the minister.*"

For a moment the young midshipman said nothing, but remained with his brows knit. —Then he said, in a clear, distinct, but somewhat agitated tone, —

"You have sharp eyes, boy! I had been hoping my own might have deceived me. —Look you, my lad! —you seem to have wit enough to keep a secret—think you can you do so?"

"I can and will, for *you* Mr. Clinton," replied the lad, firmly, meeting his eye, with a world of shrewd intelligence in his own.

"Do so, my good boy! and I will see that you do not lose by it. Heaven only knows," pursued the young man, his agitation increasing, "what my stepfather could be doing, at the dead of midnight, in the streets of New York, in the company of one of the greatest desperadoes in the city. My God, what will his wife think of this? —his wife and Alice!" he murmured, abstractedly.

But, at this juncture, the patience, or, perhaps, the courage, of the watchman-dreading Mr. Allen, having become quite evaporated, after the number of urgent but unsuccessful appeals which he had been making, in the meanwhile, he seized his indifferent friend by the arm, calling out,—

"Clinton! Clinton, I say! Deuce take me if I am going to pass the rest of the night in the station-house, to suit you or any one else. I'm off."

And having a gentleman's regard for his word, the Broadway exquisite suited the action to it, and made good his own escape round one corner, as some watchmen made their appearance at another.

Smiling slightly as he saw his faithful comrade's solitary-retreat, the young midshipman carelessly gathered his naval cloak around his elegant figure, and bidding the sharp witted Mark look to his own safely, Clinton darted across Broadway, evading the watchmen, and rapidly disappearing in the obscurity.

But that his thoughts went occupied with other than the mere considerations of escape, was more than once evident from his abstracted manner, and his frequently muttered repetition of the words,—

"His wife—his poor wife, and Alice! what *would* they, what *could* they think of this?—Jack Standish!—what could *he* and my stepfather have in common?"

But, as he for the third or fourth time reiterated these thoughts, while passing another corner, a watchman sudden suddenly [*sic*] dashed across his path and planted himself in his way.

Young Clinton drew back—aimed one rapid blow at the head of the man and sent him a headlong to the pavement, without speaking a single word.

Then cooly pursuing his onward course, the young man continued to matter—as if no such occurence had happened—

"It is strange. It is very strange!"

BOOK THIRD. THE DREADED VISITANT

CHAPTER I. THE FIRST CASE OF CHOLERA.

Frank Clinton, the young midshipman of nineteen—our hero, as we now acknowledge him to be, was seated at breakfast in his private room, on the morning of the third day following that highly eventful night which has occupied so extended a space in the story, thus far.

The quarters of young Clinton, when off duty, ashore, were at the house of his stepfather, the Rev. Mr. Mathews.

He was breakfasting alone, as was, indeed, his frequent habit; and was taking his coffee, eggs and toast by himself, when a woolly head was thrust suddenly into the door, and the guttural tones of his black waiter delivered a not altogether unexpected announcement.

"Here I is, wid de mornin papers, Massa Clinton. Dey hab jist come, bof ob dem."

And the African laid down the two freshly opened dailies on the breakfast-table, without, however, offering to leave the room.

His young master who, in truth had been more occupied in meditation than in carving the broiled chicken before him, mechanically took up one of the papers and began glancing over it.

At he turned the sheet, his somewhat abstracted eye happened to fall upon his sable attendant, who was standing bolt upright besides his master's chair, in an attitude expressive of great patience.

"What are you waiting for, Gumbo?" inquired the young gentleman, as he observed him.

Gumbo twisted one leg uneasily over the other, rolled up his eyes after his own peculiar fashion, and with a good deal of alacrity made answer, —

"I'se a waitin to see ef dere am any furder 'counts ob dat debblish tape-worm, dat ebery body is 'peaking ob. Hab got de same myseff; only dat dis one ob mine muss be tree hunders and sixty-five foot long, at de berry leas'—he grow zackly twelve inch ebbery night ob his life, and commence wid nuffin in de fuss place. Me swallcr him in de shape ob a angle-worm, jist one year 'go, at dat pump in de kitchen, when ole Dinah in de sulks and 'fuse to let dis nigger hab a cup for de purpuss, and he hab te run in a debble ob a hurry to the spout, and drink out ob de same. Dat Dinah, and dat dam theef ob a snake, will be de deff ob die chile yet, dey will."

The negro stopped, for he thought—contrary to the usual fatality attending the recital of his distempers—that he detected symptoms of the moat lively sympathy in his master's face.

Appearances were certainly altogether in favor of this supposition: The young gentleman had leaned back in his chair, an expression of the most genuine horror in his countenance, and consternation and apprehension in every feature.

Preserving the same horrified look did Clinton ejaculate, in tones of the most dismayed commisseration, —

"Good Heavens! Gumbo, your troubles have taken a new and most alarming form, certainly. A serpent—a voracious reptile, digging away for dear life at your vitals! A dreadful monster in your body, as many feet long as there are days in the year. Why, Gumbo, man, this is horrible—horrible to think of!"

Gumbo groaned like an anaconda.

"It is maddening!" exclaimed the compassionate master, starting up in the utmost excitement and terror; "maddening—astounding—absolutely demoniac! You must have it extracted immediately! *Immediately*, do you hear?"

Gumbo stared.

"Immediately—*this instant!* A single second's delay might be fatal—fatal to your life!"

"Oh tor!—oh Gor a'mity!" moaned the affrighted African.

"We must have it out," pursued Clinton; "this very instant! It must be ripped from your body—*ripped alive* from its place! —Merciful heavens! —I will do it myself!"

And snatching up the carving-knife—the most desperate determination in all his looks—Clinton bounded toward his suffering servant, the dissecting-blade energetically upraised.

The affrighted Gumbo gave one look at the carving-knife, and making one jump to the door, bolted like a rocket from the room, gained the stairs, leaping down the steps, ten at a time, and when within six of the bottom, stumbled, lost his balance, and tumbled head first, down the residue!

Faint with laughing at the complete success of his artifice, his master, dropping the carving-knife, stood looking after the terrified negro, who slowly picked himself up, rubbing his woolly pate—which he had reason to bless for its thickness—and carefully feeling of his shins, which had probably suffered most of the two.

"Come back, you scoundrel; I want you," ordered Clinton, after indulging for some time in his merriment.

Reluctantly and cautiously the African crept up stairs and reentered the chamber sidelong, stopping right by the door, in order to secure his sudden retreat, in case of necessity.

"What did you run away for?" demanded his master.

"I—I—I—thought I'd better," stammered the negro, with his hand grasping the doorhandle.

"You'll never be better, till you have that operation performed."

"I'll wait and see, Massa Clinton; I'll wait and see."

“Delays are dangerous, Gumbo; you had better let me go through with the operation,” said Clinton, very gravely.

“Lor’ bress dis nigger, no!” spluttered Gumbo, hastily; “me feel better now—de snake am quiet, now.”

“Well, I hope I’ve scared him out of you, altogether. Now go down stairs and present my compliments to Miss Hascal, and ask her if I can speak with her for a short time, this morning. You may go, now.”

“Please God I will, sar!” eagerly replied the negro; only too willing to avail himself of the permission to get out of the way of the dreaded carving knife.

Resuming the perusal of his papers, something of more than ordinary interest appeared immediately to strike the eye of Clinton—that eye was instantly rivetted in its attention. A violent start was visible in the young man’s manner, a sudden paleness overspread his cheek, and then he reapplied himself to the reading with an intensity of interest that he betrayed itself in every feature, and in the nervous lingers with which he held the paper.

The color had not yet fully returned to his countenance when he laid the paper down, and raised his head thoughtfully.

“The cholera! the cholera!” he repeated, earnestly, to himself. “And is it possible that the cholera is in New York—the scourge in our midst, at last. Good Heavens! the first case occurred yesterday, and there were thirteen others before the night set in. This is news, indeed!”

He remained sitting in deep and anxious thought for several moments—the shuffling footsteps of the negro, reascending the stairs, aroused him.

Gumbo had returned from his errand.

Clinton had almost forgotten the commission, so completely had the astounding intelligence taken possession of his mind.

“Well; what said Miss Hascal?”

“Why, if you please, Massa Clinton,” said the African, hesitatingly, casting a wary glance at the carving-knife, “dis nigger did not ’liber de message.”

“Did not deliver my message! you sooty rascal!” exclaimed his master. “Well! upon my word!”

“Hear I speak!” stammered the unfortunate Gumbo, apparently a little apprehensive of his master’s warmth, the possible consequences of which, his fears instantly connected with the threatened dissection. “Hear I speak, Massa Clinton. I didn’t ’libber dat eerrand, ’coz dar was a young gemman in de parlor.”

“A visitor! who was it?”

“Massa Allen, sar. He come for morning call on Miss Alice, and dis darkie know better dan to ’libber any sich message to de same—was’nt dat right, massa?”

“Ned Allen, hey? Very well,” replied Clinton, smiling at the mention of his friend’s name, “I am glad you did not disturb them, then. You may go. Stay! is Mrs. Mathews up, yet?” he inquired, recalling him.

"No, sar. I heard her te'1 de maide she should'nt get up, dis morning."

"Should'nt! Why not?" inquired Clinton, quickly.

"She say she no feel well," replied the servant.

"Not well, eh!"

"Not well nuff to dress herseff and leab her room, de gal say. I no ax de same what de matter, but I s'pect she hab a tape-worm, too."

"Mrs. Mathews have a tape-worm, you scoundrel! I thought I had cured you of that notion."

And Clinton made a sudden movement to take up the carving knife from the table on which he had laid it.

At the bare sight of this formidable eyesore in the hands of his master, the negro made a desperate rush through the door, and was down stairs again, with marvellous celerity.

Satisfied with the discomfiture of poor Gumbo, Clinton folded up the paper which contained the weighty announcement that had so startled and interested him; and carefully depositing it in his pocket, left the chamber, crossed the spacious hall and knocked at the door of an opposite apartment.

A servant girl answered his knock.

Clinton instantly inquired, —

"How if your mistress, Jeannette? I understand she is indisposed, this morning?"

"She if not well, sir. She intends keeping her bed to-day." f

"Indeed! so unwell as that? ask her if she will see me for a few moments?"

The young man waited with a somewhat anxious air, while the girl retired to obtain the desired permission.

"Mrs. Mathews says you may come in, sir," was the answer presently returned.

The lady's maid opened the door for him to enter; he passed through an intermediate room into a chamber beyond, and the next instant the preacher's step-son found himself in the presence of Mrs. Newton Mathews, the minister's fourth wife.

CHAPTER II. MRS. NEWTON MATHEWS.

Clinton advanced to the bedside of his step-father's wife.

Mrs. Mathews was an eminently handsome woman. The marked personal attractions which had won her her reverend husband, she still possessed, though a good deal faded by a few years of married life.

In comparison with the minister, she was young. Her own age could not much have exceeded twenty-eight; and yet there was a look of care upon her face that seemed to have become habitual, and an expression of anxious and painful thoughtfulness that corresponded with its pervading melancholy.

Clinton was pained to perceive that her usually pale cheek was greatly flushed, and that there was a leaden dulness beneath the eyes, which confirmed her alleged indisposition.

As with his kindly inquiries he approached her pillow, the lady laid her hand upon his own and looked up affectionately, and even gratefully in his face.

"You are always thus, Francis," after a moment's silence she said; "your generous solicitude and goodness are uniformly the same. I am only your step-father's wife—the last of his four wives—and yet you have ever given me the respect and the attention due to a dear mother."

The young man regarded her with visible emotion, as he replied, —

"It is because I have always looked upon you as a mother, dearest madam."

"I know you have, Francis. At least, you have always treated me as such, before the world and in private. Believe me, I have ever been grateful to you for it. And all the more so, because I had no right to expect it, no right to look for it. I had not even a stepmother's slender claim upon you—I was simply and solely the wife of your dead mother's husband!"

"My dead mother's husband!" repented the young man, half-bitterly. "You have well named him so. He has been little else to me before or since her death."

"Gently Mrs. Mathews sought to check him, —

"Do not speak slightingly of him, Francis—for my sake, do not."

"It is for *your* sake, dear madam," replied Clinton, earnestly, "that I do speak, rather than for my own."

Though he stopped here, his lips moved as if he would have added more.

"How can you say so, Francis?" said the lady, with a glance half of reproach—but there was a singular mingling of just perceptible apprehension in her tone.

The young man noticed it—scarce distinguishable as it was.

Fixing his fine, dark eyes full upon her, Clinton answered, —

"I say so, my dear madam, because—because—I have my doubts that you are happy with him."

“Francis!” And the sick lady’s flushed check grew pale, while she rose in her bed with a sudden start.

“I repeat it, madam; you are not happy with your husband!”

“I never said so.”

“I know you never did. You are too mild, too patient, too forbearing, to breathe a murmur against him.”

“If that be so, Francis,” replied the young wife, faintly and tremulously—but with a glance that sought to read him to the soul— “how, then, could you divine what you assert so positively?”

The singular young man folded his arms across his breast, and, drawing a step nearer, regarded her with a look full as keen and searching as her own.

“Yes, I will tell you, madam, how I divined the truth you were so careful to conceal,—by your faded bloom—by your wilting youth—by your cheek growing daily more thin and wan—by the sorrowing look of your pleading eye. Far plainer than words speak they!”

A low deep sigh reached the speaker’s ear, and the form which had half raised itself on its couch, sank faintly back.

“Your lips refuse, then, a denial. You dare not say that it is not so. Ah, madam! I have long feared it—but not myself, alone.”

“How!” exclaimed the minister’s wife, agitatedly, “you speak of another! who—who that?”

“Your sister.”

“My sister!”

“Your sister Alice.”

The lady turned away her face, sighing deeply.

“Poor Alice!” he heard her murmur; “and has the dear girl, too, distressed herself with this belief, and her fears for me?”

“Yes, believe me, dear madam. Miss Hascal has more than once sighed in secret over your hidden griefs—for such she feels her sister has.”

The sorrowing wife only faltered the word, “Alice!”

Clinton perceived how much she was affected, and forbore to agitate her until she should have become more composed again; but he did not seem willing to waive all further reference to the subject, exciting as he saw it was, to her.

After a moment or two of silence, therefore, he returned to it.

But when he did speak, it was moodily, and with a frowning brow, and a lip that was tremulous, —

“Perhaps I have had sharper eyes for your sorrows, madam, from knowing those of my own mother.”

Mrs. Mathews raised her face from the pillow in which she had buried it, and with an earnest, startled air turned once again toward the young man. There was eager inquiry in her whole manner.

Her husband's step-son proceeded, —

"I was but two years old when she died—it was full seventeen years ago; but the private papers and letters she left me, have left me little room to doubt her unhappiness with your husband and hers."

As he spoke these latter words, the invalid suddenly stretched out her hand and grasped that of the young man. He almost turned pale at the wild expression he could trace in her eyes, as in a hollow voice she demanded, rather than asked, —

"What, Francis! —you do not mean to have me understand that—that she died of a broken heart?"

By a violent effort Francis Clinton restrained the powerful emotion that manifested itself in every feature, and with a tone of forced calmness answered, —

"No; Newton Mathews' third wife died by a swifter and surer stroke—my mother died of the cholera."

"Of the cholera!"

Mrs Mathews shuddered—as thousands had shuddered before her—at the sound of that terrible name!

"Oh, that was very terrible! And she died of the cholera?"

Husky was the son's answering voice, —

In a single day! She was sick twelve hours—that was all. And my poor mother went to the tomb."

"It was swift—fearfully swift!" murmured the lady.

Clinton was silent. He was debating within himself whether it was best to communicate to her the startling intelligence he had that very morning learned.

He bethought himself of the sudden reappearance of the dread visitor of seventeen years before—the scourge which had swept away his only parent; and recollected that he had not, as yet, broken the momentous information to her.

He hesitated now to do so, as he beheld her flushed check and leaden eve, and saw that she had already passed through as much excitement as it was prudent for her to bear, in her present indisposed state.

This decided him to say nothing about it, though he tried in vain to drive the subject from his thoughts.

He perseveringly repeated the effort, however, and asked, —

"But you have not yet told me how far unwell you are. Is this sickness anything serious?"

She answered him languidly, pressing her hand to her forehead, —

"I feel a slight headache. That is all—unless it be a little fever here." And she pointed to her temples.

The young man laid his hand gently on her smooth, white brow.

"Here is fever, indeed. Your forehead is absolutely hot," he said, "and your cheek is unusually flushed. When did you first feel unwell?"

“Last night, only,” was the reply; “I did not rest well, I believe. But this little illness is nothing new to me—I am indisposed very often.”.

“Still, you need care,” said the young man, gently; “there are strong signs of fever, and you must not neglect yourself. I’ll send your sister to you?”

“Oh, no; there is no need of disturbing Alice for such a trifle. She is engaged down stairs.”

“Ah, yes; with my good friend Allen. It had quite slipped my mind.”

“By-the- bye,” added the young man, abruptly it seems to me that Allen comes here very often, lately.”

“So Alice tells me, Francis. In fact, I believe he has some serious intentions with regard to her,” said Mrs. Mathews, forcing a smile.

“Indeed!” said Clinton, compressing his lips a little.

“Yes, but you need not look jealous,” returned the clergyman’s wife, with the same difficult effort at gaiety; and added, more gravely, — “You need have no fears of Alice. Her affections are too firmly fixed on you for that.”

The young man smiled likewise; and then, as if a sudden thought occurred to him, demanded, —

“But where is your husband?”

The wife looked quickly up, as she rejoined, —

“Mr. Mathews? I do not know. He must have passed the night in his private study—as he sometimes does. He was absent from the house as late as three o’clock, the night before last; and the night before last, he did not return till near morning.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the minister’s step-son, with an energy and emphasis that caused her eyes to linger upon his face, inquiringly.

“Indeed!” he reiterated, with the same vehemence. “These are strange hours for a minister to keep. And it is but three nights ago, that——

He checked himself abruptly, and continued hastily, —

“But I must agitate you no more. I have already done so sufficiently—perhaps too much. As for——”

“Stay!” interrupted the lady, earnestly, “tell me what was it that you were going on to say? Why did you check yourself, Francis?”

“But Clinton now seemed eager to hasten away without explanation.

“It was nothing—nothing of consequence. I was merely wondering what business could detain him out so late. And now, as you are resolved not to let me do anything for you, I must go and send Alice to you as soon as Mr. Ned Allen thinks fit to decamp. I must not go before, or possibly Ned might consider my coming a decided intrusion.”

With the gay, parting sally on his smiling lips, he left the chamber, before she could interpose another question.

But, once out of the chamber of his stepfather’s wife, he paused of his own accord, and remained for a moment in an attitude of deep thought.

Appearing to have formed a resolution in his own mind, he descended the stairs, passed the drawing-room doors, and kept on to an apartment situated at the extreme end of the large hall of the mansion, directly adjoining the parlors.

This was the minister's study.

He knocked at the door twice——thrice. ——There was no answer.

He knocked a fourth time.

Receiving, still, no response to his last and loudest application for admission, he tried the door—expecting, however, to find it locked from within.

On the contrary, the glass handle of the lock turned in his hand, and he quietly entered, presuming that his father had not yet arisen, and slept soundly, or that he was already up, and had left the library.

Quietly advancing, he approached the couch where he knew it was Mr. Mathew's custom to pass those nights which he did not spend in his wife's chamber.

The bed had not been slept in the previous night!

Where, then, was the minister?

CHAPTER III. THE MINISTER'S WIFE'S SISTER.

Alice Hascal, the younger sister of Mrs. Mathews, came from the drawing room, just as Frank Clinton, issued from the minister's library.

Her visitor, it appeared, had gone.

The cloud disappeared instantly from the young man's brow, and he advanced affectionately toward the young lady, with his most cheerful morning salutation.

Their frank, warm erecting sufficiently told the story of the mutual relation in which they regarded one another.

Alice was eighteen, her sister twenty eight; consequently there were ten years' difference in their ages. Alice was also much the handsomer of the two; for all the freshness of youth and beauty was hers; but the family resemblance of the married and unmarried sisters, was sufficiently striking to prove the relationship. About Alice herself, there was a gentleness that made her equally winning and fascinating.

Clinton met her with a gay smile and a mischievous inquiry concerning his friend, Ned Allen.

The somewhat pointed allusion heightened the color in Alice's cheek, and Clinton had no difficulty in gathering, from her confused appearance and confessions, the trifling information that the early morning call of the Broadway exquisite had a peculiar and important object.

In fact, Mrs. Mathews had not been very far out of the way in her observations to Mr. Clinton, in reference to that gentleman—as was proved by our hero's question to the blushing Alice.

"And so master Ned proposed in due form, and was rejected?"

"He—he did not seem to consider so," was the stammering reply.

"What? would he not take 'no' for an answer?" inquired the young man, laughing.

"With a good deal of natural embarrassment Alice replied, —

"He—he did not appear to regard my answer as conclusive, and——"

"And, in fact," interposed Clinton, coolly; "Ned Allen was quite self-conceited enough to deem it quite impossible for any lady to refuse him."

"I believe you are half right, Frank; and I was obliged to refer him to—to my sister's husband."

"To Mr. Mathews, hey? Why didn't you refer him to me?"

An arch, expressive glance passed between the betrothed lovers, and Alice replied demurely, —

"I am afraid you would have been rather a dangerous person for him to apply to on such a matter!"

But the next moment the smiling look faded from her lip, as she asked, with a cheek much paler, —

“Oh, Francis! have you heard this dreadful intelligence which Mr. Allen just brought me?”

“Which Ned just brought you? —no,” he replied, “I cannot say that I have, unless it be that——”

“The cholera is in New York—the cholera, Francis! only think of it. It first appeared in the city yesterday, he told me the papers were full of it.”

Clinton recollected the journal he had put in his pocket, produced it and handed it to her, gravely saying, —

“It is true, dear Alice; too true, I fear. —There were thirteen cases before nightfall, and God only knows how many more there may be to-day.”

She took the paper, but had barely cast her eye over its columns before she uttered suppressed ejaculations of mingled awe and wonder, and said, —

“Hear this! hear this, Francis! I would scarce have believed it. Listen to what this paper says.”

“The Asiatic cholera—seventeen years a stranger to this country—has made its appearance once more in our midst. Yesterday, the third of May, 1849, will long be remembered as the fatal era on which this long absent scourge of mankind paid its second visit to New York.

“Our hopes, our expectations, our very calculations, are all disappointed!

“We all knew of the previous advent of the cholera in the cities of the West; we all knew that Cincinnati, St. Louis, and New Orleans were being ravaged by this fearful visitor to our shores. But scientific men—keen observers of the philosophy of the pestilence—had repeatedly expressed, and united in the confident opinion, that a happy combination of geological and local causes would absolutely arrest the progress, eastward, of the ominous traveller, and that New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, were almost secure from the dread contagion of its devouring wrath!

“Alas, for human calculations! alas, for the fallacy of all human science! —*the cholera is here!*

“In a single day—without a warning—silent and stealthy as the arrowy snake—leaping mountains, and rivers, and lakes—*the cholera is here!*

“A bound of a thousand miles—and it is here!”

“Yesterday morning’s sun rose over a healthy city—a happy and prosperous people—yesterday evening’s sun set on a gloom-shrouded metropolis; set upon half a million of human beings, filled with fearful forebodings and dark dismay.

“They knew that the cholera had been there—it had taken thirteen of their number away.

“Only thirteen—thirteen, alone, out of half a million.

“But they shuddered at the terrible consciousness, that this was but the first breath of the scorching sirocco—the first knell of the funeral bell!”

“The cholera was there—the cholera had come!

“Reader, we expect, before another day’s race is run, to chronicle the fearful progress of the pestilence. In the course of the next twenty-four hours, hundred will probably have followed those original thirteen.

“Reader, —you or we, may be among them.

“One word of advice to you, then. Remember our warning is of the cholera. Exercise caution—the greatest care and caution, in your daily diet. Let fruit of every kind be banished from your dessert-table—there is infection in it. Avoid excitement of any description. Let your minds be kept composed; and, above all, do not give way to fear. Agitation and apprehension are known provocatives of the pestilence. Beware of these secret stimulants to infection! In one word, beware of the cholera!”

“Beware of the cholera—oh, Francis!” reiterated the pale and trembling girl. “O, this is very, very terrible.”

“It is, it is, indeed, dear Alice. May kind Heaven, in its mercy,” replied Clinton, “shield us from it. My poor, dear mother died of the cholera.”

The young girl gazed with tender sympathy into her lover’s face, but did not trust herself to speak.

The emotion which the mournful association had called up, the young man hastened to conquer.

“I came to tell you, Alice, dearest,” he then said, “that your sister is not so well as usual, this morning, and that, perhaps, it would be as well for you to go to her.”

“Not well! Francis?” repeated the sweet girl, apprehensively. “I did not know it. —Unwell, is she?”

“I left her with a slight headache, and a face unusually flushed, a few moments since,” he replied. “She complains of having rested ill last night.”

“Indeed! I will go to her immediately.”

And Alice was turning toward the staircase, when a word from her lover arrested her purpose

“Stay a moment, Alice. Her maid is with her, and I am anxious to have a single minute in private conversation with you, and I am afraid I must say it will be on a painful subject.”

Alice wonderingly paused, and Clinton continued, —

“I sent my man, Gumbo, a half-hour ago, in search of you, to request this favor, but he brought me word that you were engaged with Mr. Allen. I could not, therefore, think of disturbing you.”

He had taken her by the hand as he thus spoke, and led the wondering girl back into drawing room.

Carefully closing the door through which they had passed, he looked into the back parlor to satisfy himself that there was no possibility of his being overheard by any person in the adjoining apartment, which was separated only by folding doors from the other; and then drawing a chair close to that of the greatly surprised Alice, he encountered her inquiring, half startled glance, and addressed her.

His first and abrupt words were, — “Tell me, Alice, have you the smallest idea where your brother-in-law, and my step-father, passed the night?”

“Passed the night. Francis? What a strange question! Why, at home, Francis, of course?”

“No. Alice he did not. His pillow has not been pressed last night,” replied the young man, in the same firm, deliberate tones in which he had commenced; “at least, not in this house.”

“You do not mean me to understand that he did not sleep at home?” said the young girl, in surprise. “I noticed he was not at the breakfast table this morning, but presumed he had preferred breakfasting in his own room, as he often does.”

“Depend upon it, he was not here Alice.”

“Mr. Mathews absent all night!” cried the astonished girl.

“Yes; Mr. Mathews was absent—where I know not, during the whole of last night. I should not, perhaps, think so strange of the circumstance, were it not that for the last two or three nights, he has been absent until uncommonly late hours; and what is more extraordinary still, Alice, but three days have passed since I encountered my step-father, at midnight, in the streets of New York, in company with one of the most notorious ruffians in the whole city.”

A cry of astonishment from the young girl evinced the sensations of dismay and consternation with which she received this deliberate declaration.

Some seconds elapsed before she could find breath sufficient to stammer,—

“Impossible! Francis; you cannot be serious in what you assert. My brother-in law—a minister—a minister of the gospel, in company with such a character—at dead of night—impossible!”

With a calm, derisive tone, the young man assured her that it was truth he spoke—truth and no more.

In as few words as possible, he explained, so far as he could with delicacy relate the particulars, the singular details of his nocturnal rencontre with the clergyman and his two companions.

Alice listened in silence and thoughtfulness—but when he had finished, she raised her eyes to her lover’s face, with a strange expression in her countenance.

“Francis,” she said, with energy, “I am glad that you told me this, and now I must ask you to listen to me, in turn; for I, too, have a secret to confide to you.”

There was a depth of earnestness and meaning in the young girl’s rapid utterance, independent of the words themselves, that gave to what she said the strongest emphasis; and it was now the young man’s turn to be surprised.

“Francis, you know that to no living person have I ever breathed the strange doubts and vague suspicions you have at times expressed of your stepfather’s character—of his piety.”

“Alice, those doubts, those suspicions, I have had.”

“And I,” continued Alice, “have never whispered them—not even to my sister, tho’ I have sometimes feared, as you do, that some secret unkindness of her husband may have caused her failing spirits and her fading bloom.”

“I, alice, [*sic*] am convinced of it.”

“Convinced?”

“Even more—I have gained the tacit admission from her.”

“Then, Francis, I must no longer keep silence toward you, in a matter which so nearly concerns us both.”

“What is this matter, Alice?”

He waited for her answer, anxiously. It was not given as readily as her previous words might lead him to expect.

Alice’s eyes were bent upon the ground, but her lips moved not, she appeared communing with herself.

“I have been thinking, Francis, how best to break to you, that which it is my duty to reveal. I choose the frankest way, Francis,”— she spoke in a low, agitated tore— “Francis, were it not for my sister’s sake—were it not that I tremble at the thought of distressing her—I should no longer have any wish to remain an inmate of this house.”

Clinton started and regarded her with an expression of astonishment, clearly mixed with other feelings.

“Alice!” he exclaimed.

“You are surprised, Francis; but your surprise will be still greater when 1 speak more plainly—when reluctantly, but candidly I tell you, that there has been that in the conduct of Mr. Mathews, which should make me most anxious to leave, at once and for ever, the shelter of his roof!”

With the strongest and most forcible emphasis, did the staggered lover rearticulate, —

“Alice! Alice!”

That name was Mill the only sound he uttered, but he saw that the young girl’s sweet face was suffused with the deepest blushes; though her lovely lips were resolved and calm, as if they were determined to finish their task.

To a whisper sank, again, her voice, —

“Francis, not for worlds would I hint such a thing to his suffering and sorrowing wife; yet, toward me, his deportment has never been of that character which a sister would expect from a brother—a sister-in-law from a brother-in-law.”

“Alice! Alice! Alice!”

“He is a minister—a clergyman—a man of God—the husband of my sister, or I should, long and long ago, have shrunk, in fear and trembling, from the more than fatherly warmth of manner which he has shown to me, almost from the very day when I first came beneath his roof. More explicit, you will not ask me to be.”

“Oh, Alice, is this so?”

“It is, by my hopes of Heaven, Francis. Prudence, delicacy loudly warn me to fly from his protection. My poor sister alone keeps me here.”

“*She*, alone, Alice?” said the young man, sadly.

The young girl returned a look of calm and true affection, and responded—

“Herself and you, Francis.”

Clinton started forward; and with looks full of meaning, of love and deep earnestness, he said, —

“What you have this hour revealed, my Alice, astounds—bewilders—takes me by surprise. It came upon me like a thunder-bolt. But it only convinces me, dear Alice, that there is now the greater reason that an event I have long looked forward to, should now take place.”

Alice, though she colored slightly, continued to gaze with perfect frankness in his fine face, while he went on to add, —

“Since, dearest Alice, you can no longer remain, with safety, beneath the protection of your sister’s husband, the same spirit of propriety as clearly dictates that you should place yourself under the protection of a husband of your own——”

Before any answer could she made, there was a knock at the door of the drawingroom.

Clinton, considerably displeased, hurried to the door, to see who might prove the malapropos intruder.

It was only Mrs. Mathews’ lady’s maid, who had come to tell the young lady that her mistress suddenly felt herself much worse, and desired that Miss Hascal might be immediately sent for.

Alice, in alarm, hastened up stairs to her sister’s room, leaving Clinton alone in the drawing-room.

He had to content himself, therefore, with returning to his own room, from whence he could hear the noise made by the bustling attendants in the chamber opposite, and see the servants coming and going.

CHAPTER IV. MARK AND HIS ADVENTURES.

Before half the morning was gone, the Rev. Mr. Mathews returned to the home from which he had been absent all of the preceding night. He went directly to his library, where he flung himself wearily, and without undressing, upon the bed.

He had been detained, he stated, during the whole night, by the bedside of a parishioner, who was sick with the cholera; and, worn out and exhausted by his long, death-bed watching, the clergyman left directions with his servants not to awaken him should he fall asleep.

His step-son, Clinton, learned this from his lackey, Gumbo, who, at twelve o'clock, came to his room, to inform him that a boy, in waiting in the hall below, wished to see him and would take no denial.

Francis, without stopping to consider who it could be, ordered the applicant to be shown up immediately.

The minute the impudent but shrewd face of Mark, the apothecary's boy, presented itself.

Clinton, who, on recognising him did not seem in the least surprised by his visit, called him close to his chair and proceeded to question him, —

"So, my boy, you have found me out, it seems. But what news do you bring, and why did you not come sooner?"

Mark's peculiar physiognomy lost all of its impudence, but none of its shrewdness, in replying to the young gentleman. |

"Couldn't do it. sir—the fates was against me. But I have brought you plenty of news: and have got all the more on it in consequence of the time I'se taken."

"Ah, my boy! and what does this news of yours relate to?"

"The girl," said Mark, briefly.

"The girl? —what girl?"

"Lizzie."

"Lizzie!"

Clinton recalled to mind his nocturnal adventure, three nights before, and all its singular associations.

"Lizzie, sir—the girl you gave the money to. I follered her home, and found out where she lives," was the lad's reply. "But that is not all I found out."

"Indeed! what more did you discover?" was the immediate inquiry from Clinton, who had his own reasons for desiring this very information.

The only response the boy made was to take a heavily-laden purse from his pocket, and fling it upon the table before the young officer.

Clinton took up the purse, and let it drop again in astonishment.

It was the same he had given to the fallen but repentant Lizzie, three nights before.

He knew it again, instantly.

With an intelligent smile the shrewd Mark watched him, while he examined it in his surprise.

Clinton, laying it down and turning to the person who had so unexpectedly reproduced his former property, directly demanded of the boy. —

"How came you by that purse?"

The lad, with his ready tongue, and in his own curious style, then proceeded to solve the young gentleman's doubts and perplexity by explaining what had happened immediately subsequent to the forced flight from the police, on the memorable night of the rencontre; communicating, as he did, an occurrence which was as little known to our hero as it is to our readers.

But though our good friend, Mark, told his story in his usual concise and pointed way, we, on the other hand, must give it in a plainer and much more connected shape than the one in which Clinton received it.

It appeared, from the boy's own story, that he had had a 'sharp run for it,' in eluding the watchmen, whom the street brawl brought to the spot.

One of those worthies, in fact, had actually overtaken him, and was in the act of collaring the retreating boy, when Mark, just as he stretched out his brawny arm for the purpose, suddenly and adroitly slipped down on his knees, right in front of the man, who, missing the object, and unable to stop himself, pitched directly over the lad's head, and measured his whole length on the pavement, from which he was in no condition to rise in a hurry.

Then Mark, grinning at the ease with which he had outwitted the crest-fallen watchman, made haste to get out of the vicinity of the whole tribe of 'Charlies' who were springing their rattles around.

He did not avail himself indiscriminately, however, of the first avenues of escape that offered themselves; but from the motives best understood by himself, he selected the street by which Lizzie had effected her previous retreat, and rapidly pursued the same course which the girl had taken before him.

He had not pursued it long, nevertheless, although he had left his own pursuers behind, before he became very well convinced that a policeman was in advance of him—not with the view of heading-off himself, but evidently in hot chase of some other fugitive, who had got the start of them both.

This the quick-witted urchin instantly conjectured to be the girl Lizzie, who had been the first to take the alarm and the first to fly from the gathering guardians of the night. —Notwithstanding, the nocturnal police were on her track.

This discovery had, by no means the effect to arrest the lad's further progress, as, indeed, it might very well have done. Mark kept on in the wake of the watchman ahead, who was altogether too intent on his fugitive to allow of his perceiving that his own steps were dogged.

In a few moments more, a glimpse of the girl herself convinced Mark that he had not been mistaken.

She was flying along the street, far in advance, but the lad's practised eye told him that the policeman was gaining upon her at every stride he took.

As he was hurrying on at the same swift gait, his foot suddenly slipped upon some dark object on the sidewalk lying directly in his path. With some little trouble he managed to preserve his equilibrium, picking up the object which had glided away from his tread. It was the purse.

The fugitive girl, in her alarm and terror, had evidently dropped it, and continued, her flight without perceiving her loss.

Mark was a little staggered on finding such a treasure in his possession, but after a moment's close cogitation, he dropped the purse into his pocket, buttoned up his jacket over it, and abated not one atom of his former speed.

By this time he had become quite satisfied that he was a much faster runner than the policemen ahead, and Mark, for reasons of his own, determined to get in advance of the 'Charlie."

There was but one safe way to do this, which was by cutting round the first corner, and coming out again into the same street, several squares further on—a manœuvre which, he calculated, would bring him out very nearly on a line with the fugitive, at some distance ahead of the watchman.

A town-reared boy, he knew every turn and winding of the streets, and there proved to be no error in his reckoning.

When he had performed his short circuit, therefore, and emerged into the street once more, Mark found himself not more than twenty paces in front of the female.

Apprehension and terror were in her every feature, half palsying her lips and impeding the activity of her movements. Not two hundred yards behind was the pursuing policeman—now sure of his prey.

But the female fugitive had a secret friend in readiness to afford her unlooked-for assistance.

Just as she was passing a building which formed an angle in the street, close to the corner at which the boy's swift circuit had ended, an unseen arm suddenly grasped her by the shoulder and drew her, quickly into the shadow of the lofty granite steps of a proud city mansion.

"Hush! —keep silence, and you are safe!" was the whispered warning, as she found herself drawn under the arched opening beneath the stately stone-work.

Before she could recover from her astonishment, her unknown friend had darted out at the other side of the arch, to the open street, at the corner, a few yards farther on.

The policeman came up—looked around for his prey—saw only the boy, and accosted him with a hurried inquiry whether he had not seen a woman pass that way.

Mark, with the most innocent countenance, replied, —

"Cert'nly! cert'nly, sir. She tore by me, just now, like mad!"

"Did she? Which way?" eagerly cried the watchman.

“Down that corner, sir! down the corner. I say, old boss, what’ll you give me to help to catch her??”

But the cheated policeman was out of hearing and half way out of sight by this time, as he dashed away in the supposed direction of the fugitive.

Mark coolly watched him till he was quite out of view, and then plunged a second time beneath the arch-way.

The surprise of poor Lizzie, on recognizing, in her protector, the boy Mark, may be easily conceived.

But he put a stop to all her acknowledgements, by warning her, in his own most impressive style, that “the rascally Charlie may find out he is fooled and be back again in double quick time.”

This, certainly, was one powerful inducement to ensure their final escape with as little delay as possible.

Mark, who had given such good proofs how much his boyish sympathies were enlisted in her favor, assured her he would see her safely housed, before he budged a rod from her side; but even he, as he heard the distant sound of the echoing rattles, was not sorry to learn from her that her home was now quite near, and that five minutes’ walk would bring them thither.

In even less than the time mentioned they reached it; but when they gained the very door and stopped, the woman Lizzie, with a low, sad tone, and a sadder smile, turned to the boy and said, —

“I will not—must not ask you to go in with me. This house is no place for one like you. Thank God, poor boy I you are yet too young to know of such evil as those brick walls hide—here we must part, but not till you have learned that the lost and wretched Lizzie lacks not gratitude.”

She was in the act of raising her hand to her bosom, to feel for the purse which she had placed there, and Mark was quietly waiting to see the effect which the sudden discovery of her unsuspected loss would have upon her—when, just at this juncture, the door of the house abruptly opened, and in the doorway appeared a fat, middle aged woman, bearing a light, who instantly called out to Lizzie,—

“Oh ho! so you’ve come back again, have you. Miss? Well, and who have you brought with you? What! only that young jackanapes. Is *that* all you could pick up in half a night’s tramp? —a beardless yang sculpin like that, eh?”

“I’d just thank you to be a little more respectful in your remarks, ma’am,” returned Mark, saucily.

“Oh! you would, would you? who asked you to speak?” cried the old woman, in a termagant voice.

“And you, you hussy,” cried the beldame, addressing Lizzie, “it’s you I’ve got to talk to, Miss! Fine goings on, this is, I should think! How dare you show your face till you had caught up somebody as could have paid one day’s board for you, at least. Fine goings on, I say, and you owing me for two weeks’ board.”

In return for this tirade, Lizzie, who had at first shrank back, with a shudder, at the appearance of this old woman, now boldly marched up the steps of the house, and confronting the virago, addressed her in firm and decided tones,—

"I have come for my trunk and my clothes, Mrs. Martin. I am going to pay you and quit your house."

"Pay me, and leave me! —come for your trunk and your clothes!" screamed the shrew, putting her fat arms akimbo. "Well, did you ever! And where, pray, will you get money to do all this?"

"Where I got my money, Mrs. Martin, it matters not. It is quite enough that I am prepared to settle with you, and leave these accursed walls of yours for ever, and, with them, the thrice-accursed life that I have led here!"

"Aha! you cusses 'em!" screamed the ogress, "you cusses 'em, does you? when [t]hey've given you shelter and food, and kept you from starving, long ago, Money to pay me, hey? It's a lie, a lie, I say! You've been drinking, Miss, and now you're trying to gammon me.

"But it won't do—it won't work! you owe me twenty-eight dollars for two weeks' arrears—twenty eight dollars!—and I ain't a-going to be cheated out of it; that's what I ain't!"

She shook her fist in the face of Lizzie, as she spoke.

"No, no! your trunk or your clothes you don't have, Miss, while you owes me a single cent."

"I shall not owe you long, then, Mrs. Martin," was the calm reply. Would to Heaven I could square my long account with my God, as easily as I can with you."

Her hand, for the second time, sought for the purse.

As Mark and the reader knows, —it was not there!

With a faint cry, and trembling like a stricken deer, she staggered back, the picture of despair.

"Good God! I have lost it! God help me, now!"

Mark's hand went to the bottom of his pocket but before he could draw forth what it hastily fumbled for, he heard the shrill laugh of the ogress and her mocking voice, exclaiming, —

"Oh! you've lost it. Miss, have you? I thought something of that kind would happen, I did. So that pocketfull of rocks ain't forthcoming, oho! oho!"

Saying this, the Xanthippe stretched out her fleshy arm, and catching hold of the poor girl, dragged the half-fainting Lizzie over the threshold, by main force, into the house, exclaiming, —

"There! there, Miss! I've got you safe, now; and out of this house you don't stir till you've paid me my twenty-eight dollars!"

"None o' that! none o' that, you old she-bear!" cried Mark, indignantly, springing up the steps and through the door-way, as, not content with malignant taunts, the vindictive woman commenced shaking her victim violently.

What reception the boy met with must be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V. THE OGRESS.

And Mark continued his story to the young officer—which, however, we prefer to relate in our own manner, rather than in his quaint style.

The spiteful beldame released her hold of her trembling prey, and made an effort to close the door forcibly upon him; but not succeeding in this—for Mark was too quick for her—she dealt the boy such a tremendous cuff on the side of his head, as he entered, that she sent the astonished lad half way across the open hall.

Thanks to his rather extensive experience in that line, under Doctor Quackenboss, Mark was a perfect philosopher with regard to cuffs and blows of every description; but even he was a little amazed at the exceeding emphasis with which a box on the ear, from an angry woman is certain to come.

His flesh tingling not a little, he gathered himself up from the floor and cautiously approached the two females, from one of whom he received such a doubtful welcome.

"Well, brat!" cried the old woman, fiercely, you'll say none of that to me again, I reckon—what business had you to put in your jaw, and what business have you here, anyway? Yes, and what business had *you* to bring him here?"

And she turned again, sharply, upon the shrinking Lizzie.

"As for you, minx! I'll keep you snugly enough housed, I warrant you, till I'm sure of my honest dues, Here you and your traps are—and here they'll stay! Oh, you needn't think I'm going to let you out, Miss, to give you a chance to run away,"

And the ogress gazed at her with a malicious leer.

"Not I, Miss! not I. I'll keep you locked up in your room—locked up, do you hear? But you need not think to be lazy, and earn nothing; I'll find business for you, you hussey —though you can't find it yourself. I'll send customers to you, when the other girls is out, or engaged."

The wretched Lizzie uttered a moan. —

The blow which she had sustained in the discovery of her irreparable loss had utterly prostrated her.

Broken-spirited—broken-hearted, almost—she sank on her knees at the feet of the old beldame, and in frantic entreaty clasped her hands, —

"Oh, pity me, pity me!" she gasped, in accents scarcely articulate. "Have some mercy upon me, woman, if there's one spark of it in your breast."

The hag shook her head.

"Let me go—let me go! I cannot pay you. —I have lost the money, every cent of it; but oh! let me go! I have sworn to forsake this evil life—I have sworn, before God, to be a better woman. Oh! do not hold me! Let me go! let me go!"

The tigress uttered a hellish laugh.

"Do you think I'd let you go, girl, without paying me? That's a good 'un, it is. You cusses this house, aed [*sic*] the life you've led in it: and perhaps you cusses me; who

knows? But you've got to stay here till you've paid up—that's the fact. I'm glad on it—glad you can't pay me!"

And the malignant hag again chuckled hideously.

As for Mark,—the generous-hearted boy had already heard (to use his own expression to Clinton) 'much more than he could stand,' and not being able to hold in any longer, he deliberately took the lost purse out of his pocket, and drawing one step nearer to the kneeling and sobbing Lizzie, was in the very act of placing it quietly, and without a word, in her hand, when certain words pronounced by the vindictive mistress of the house, caused him to change his determination. The words were, —

"Cry away! away! and much good may it do you. It's lucky you lost that money, for I'd take every cent of it away from you, and then charge it as board paid in advance, I would."

Mark drew back his outstretched hand, instantly, and the purse was quickly returned to his pocket. It was no time, then, to restore it, he saw.

Hardly had he concealed the purse so wisely retained, when the old woman gave utterance to a most masculine whistle, and the sound of men's footsteps were heard coming down from the chambers above.

The shrewd and experienced boy needed not to be told that these footsteps were those of the ruffians usually kept in reserve by the keepers of dens like the one into which he had penetrated.

Instantly springing to the drooping Lizzie's, side, he energetically called on her to seize the opportunity and escape with him from the house.

"The street-door is open," he cried. "Come on!"

But the hag's eye was as quick as her termagant tongue, and slamming back the open door, before he could prevent her, she threw her whole weight against, and cried to the villains above to hasten to her help.

Mark was strong, for a boy of his years, but he was not strong enough to move a woman of her large size from the door; for, in comparison with his own puny frame, she was a mountain of flesh; and one or two well-delivered blows from her fat, stout fists, proved that the virago was possessed of the manly art of pugilism, as well as the accomplishment of whistling.

Nevertheless, Mark obstinately continued his futile efforts to wrench the ogress forcibly from her position against the barricaded door, unappalled by a torrent of abuse from the enraged old beldame, who did not desist from her repeated loud calls to the villains who were hurrying to her aid.

In another moment the men were upon him, and now the boy had quite a different enemy to deal with.

Before he was well aware of their coming, the lad was set upon front behind and thrown down.

Scarcely a dozen words passed between the ogress and her tools; she flung open the door which she had so obstinately endeavered [*sic*] to keep closed, and making one

bound to the side of the young woman Lizzie, who was faint with terror, grief and despair, she held her by the shoulder with the grasp of a tigress, to prevent the escape of the wretched girl; while the men, seizing upon the boy, tossed him forcibly out into the open street.

Mark rose, severely bruized, in time to hear the street-door bolted upon him; and having first made sure that none of his bones were broken, he next satisfied himself that the purse, with its contents, was equally safe.

* * * * *

"And with it,' said Clinton, as the boy closed his tale, "you came to me? Was it not so?"

"Exactly,' said the boy, "I believed she had one friend left, beside myself, and so I came here. But why I did not come sooner, was be——"

Before he could finish, the door of Clinton's chamber opened suddenly, and Gumbo, exhibiting signs of great pertubation, burst into the room.

Francis Clinton started up abruptly, demanding the cause of the intrusion. But it was at least full three minutes before the stuttering and breathless African could give an intelligible explanation.

The slight illness of Mrs. Mathews had taken an unfavorable turn, and was increasing to an alarming extent; and the minister's wife had requested that the family physician might be instantly summoned.

"Worse! still worse! is it possible?" ejaculated Clinton, and seizing his hat he rushed from the room, exclaiming, —

"A physician! I will go for him, myself, immediately!"

The next moment Mark was alone in the chamber.

CHAPTER VI. AN ALARMING DISCOVERY.

Comprehending very little of Clinton's reasons for his precipitation, Mark, notwithstanding, felt tolerably satisfied that the young gentleman, in all probability, would wish him to await his return, though he had not stopped to stay so.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes elapsed, without his coming back; and Mark, who was naturally of a most active turn of mind, looked around for something to employ his own attention, in the meanwhile.

There was the confusion and noise of a considerable bustle about the house, and Mark, who delighted in bustle of any kind, went to the door of the chamber and peeped out into the entry.

Servants were coming and going, in a hurried manner, from the room opposite; but almost the first person whom his searching glances rested on, was the burly figure of the stalwart Gumbo, whose intelligence had caused his master's hasty departure, and who was standing at stiff as a post before the chamber of his invalid mistress—stretching out his long neck to get a stolen glimpse in at the door, through which the maids were constantly passing to and from the bedside of Mrs. Mathews.

The mischievous boy's shrewd eyes twinkled with pleasure, as he thus caught sight of a living subject for his roguish propensities, and quite sure of having found a prolific source of amusement, he went softly up to the huge negro and, reaching up, clipped him on the shoulder.

Gumbo whe[e]led round, in something of a hurry, but recovered his composure on perceiving that it was Mark who beckoned him into the chamber.

"De Lord lub you, Massa Mark, I thought it was the doctor."

"Old Quackenboss?"

"Lord, no. It am de family physician dat Massa Clinton am gone arter—our family physishun," replied Gumbo, with considerable importance.

"Want to know, Gumbo!" returned Mark, ironically. "I suppose, now, he has gone in search of him to see if something carn't be done for that tarnation tape worm of yours, you know."

But, contrary to Gumbo's customary mode of receiving condolences. he hastened to make a sudden gesture of awkward warning to the boy, and gutturally ejaculated, with a frightened look, —

"Hush! de Lord forgib you, hush! Keep dark; for Heaben's sakes do! If my young massa was to heah you, dis nigger nebber surbibe it! Nebber! nebber, as long as you lib, 'peak one word to Massa Frank 'bout dat debbilish tape-worm!"

And Gumbo wriggled about and grinned with such unmistakable symptoms of fright, that the apothecary's boy could only refrain from laughing long enough to ask, with a chuckle, —

"Why so Gumbo?"

“Cost de berry debble heseff be to pay, if you ebber does! He got a carvin’-knife, Massa Clinton hab, and he offer to ’plit dis nigger’s ’tomach open, and rip de dam t’ing out all alibe and kicking! Gor-a-mighty—what you laffin at?”

Mark, in fact, was so tickled by the idea, that he had gone off into strong convulsions on the floor, immensely amused at the intelligent Gumbo’s total unsuspiciousness of the good-humored trick his young master had played him.

The trick itself—through which Mark at once saw—instantly suggested another ingenious idea of his own to the boy’s fertile mind.

To conceive mischief was to put it in execution; and the knavish Mark, putting on a solemn countenance, in sorrowful tones began his attack.

“Gumbo, is it possible you have not heard the news? It’s all over town—everbody is talking of it.”

“De new? —what news? Ebberybody am a talkin ob it, is dey? No, dey isn’t—old Dinah isn’t!”

The negro stopped, a little scared at the increasing solemnity of Mark’s lugubrious countenance.

“De good Lord delibbher us, how solemn-cholly you looks, Massa Mark! For de holy possle’s sake, vital ’tupenderous c’lamity hab happened?”

With the longest possible face, he could put on, Mark heaved a huge sigh and replied, —

“Gumbo! Gumbo! The cholerer is in New York.”

Gumbo’s long shanks executed an incontinent jump of two yards from the spot.

“De cholerum! De chol—er—um! What *dat?* What de debbil dat long word mean? He an’t a new kind ob tape-worm, am he?—Oh, de Lord! oh, de Lord!”

Mark groaned, sighed, and then groaned again.

“De Cholerum in New York! de debble it be! What will become ob me now? Hebben hab mercy upon me. What an unfortoonate nigger I is!”

“Very,” groaned Mark.

And Gumbo, with his goggle eyes half-way out of his head, glared away in stupid terror at the grievously-elongated visage of the melancholy Mark.

Gumbo quaked in his shoes.

“Massa Mark! in de name ob de fourteen Evangelists! what am de natur ob dis ’bominable disease?”

Mark’s groans were, this time, more sepulchral and grievous than before—every fresh one causing Gumbo to dance, like a bear on hot plates, till his heels were sore with the exercise.

This, however, was just the intelligence Mark most desired to impart, and the mischievous lad did not suffer the opportunity to slip by unimproved.

“The nature of it, Gumbo? Ah!” and he shook his head, sorrowfully, “ah, I daren’t tell you that.”

"But you must! Massa Mark," bellowed the unfortunate individual, in an agony. "Do 'splain dat—'splain it to dis nigger, quick! —If you don't 'splain de cholerum, p'raps me hab it, widout knowin it."

"Rather guess you'll find out you *have* got it, soon enough!" chuckled the incorrigible, *sotto voce*.

Then the lad responded, in most lachrymose tones,—

"Oh, Gumbo, Gumbo! It's a—n horrible' fact, but truth must be told; and—and it's an invol'ntary bonfire, inside of a man—a spontaneous combustification of the whole human frame, kindled by eating too much dam soup and pepper-sass and of which the unfortunate victim is sartin sure to die in something less than three hours and a half—if he don't survive any longer."

A tremendous howl of horror went up from Gumbo.

"Hebbens and earth! 'Pontaneous combustifercation!—clam-soup and pepper-sass," yelled the affrighted blackee.

"Yes, poor Gumbo!" responded Mark, dolefully.

"Die and gib up de ghost in tree hours an' a half, eh?"

"Yes, the victims seldom survive the first appearance of the disease so long," replied Mark.

"And dis nigger swallered a whole brimming bowl ob it for his breakfuss, dis mornin'—sure as I is a dead nigger dis night! Git out ob de way—git out ob de way! *I hab got de cholerum!*"

And actually knocking down Mark, who stood in his way, the half-witted African rushed out of the room, across the entry, and down the stairs—never once stopping until he found himself in the presence of old Dinah herself.

Roaring with laughter, Mark rolled on the floor, coming more than a dozen of times within an inch of self-strangulation.

The whimsical incident had not yet fully lost its remaining powers of amusement, when, some ten minutes after, his quick ear caught the noise of the opening street door, and he presently saw the handsome figure of young Clinton ascending the stairs, in company with a certain crave and sober elderly personage, whom Mark set down as the family physician.

The young officer left the medical attendant at the door of the sick room, saying a few parting words to the doctor, and then crossed to his own chamber, with a slow and thoughtful step.

He started slightly on perceiving it already tenanted by no less an important individual than Mark—the boy. and his business with him, having probably passed altogether from his mind.

The young midshipman slowly seated himself and said, —

"Now, my good boy, I will hear you out, if yon have any more to add to what you have already told me."

Mark needed no second invitation, and replied, —

“I was on the point of telling you, sir, how it was that I happened to wait so long before I came to you with the purse I found, and the story.”

“Well, I will listen to your explanation, now. What was the cause of the delay?” inquired Clinton.

“It was all owing to old ’Lihu Quackenboss, the bloody old sinner! he had me shut up for two days and a night in an infernal dark hole of a closet, with a couple of good wallopings into the bargain, by way of something tasty.”

“But what did you do to deserve such punishment?” asked Clinton.

“Being out so late, without being able to give a satisfactory ’count of myself—though, shoot me! if I could help thinking there was I quite as much need of his giving an account of himself, too, arter what I once seed of him.”

Clinton, with some quickness, then demanded if the boy had suffered his master, the druggist, to suspect that he had been recognised, at the time and in the occurrence alluded to.

The lad instantly replied in the negative, adding, —

“I hope you didn’t think, sir, I was green enough to do that. I had to wait till I could get out of that darnation closet, and then I came straight here, hoping——”

And hesitating, the boy paused, without saying what.

“Hoping what, my good lad! Speak up—do not be afraid,” was Clinton’s encouraging bidding.

This time Mark answered boldly, —

“Hoping and b’lieving, sir, that you would do something for that poor Lizzie, and not let those precious covies coop her up there till they’ve half killed the girl, sir.”

The boy spoke with feeling, and Francis Clinton gazed at him with an approving smile, answering, —

“You have not much mistaken me, then, my lad. I will have her out of the clutches of those harpies before to morrow night.”

“But you will have to get help to do it, sir,” said Mark, earnestly.

“Help we will have, then! I will take a policeman with us. But are you sure you can guide us to the house? —for that I shall want you to do.”

“Sure as a brick, sir. I knows the place like a book!”

“So much the belter; you will be useful, then. I will set out with you this very night, if nothing should prevent. That poor girl has shown a disposition to repent and reform, and God forbid that I should neglect the opportunity of plucking a brand from the burning!”

He arose and paced the chamber, and then added, earnestly, —

“I know not who she is, boy, any more than yourself; but whoever she is, and whatever she might once have been, I think it my duty to take this course, and this course, therefore, I shall take. Come here to me, my lad a moment.”

Mark sprang to his side at the call, and Clinton, taking out his note book, wrote & few words upon one of the blank pages, which he tore out and handed to Mark, after folding the same in the form of a billet and directing it on the outside.

"Can you read?" inquired Clinton, of the boy.

"Yes, sir."

"Then take this note to the address of the chief of Police, and bring me back his reply, he will appoint an officer to accompany us, and do you be in readiness by ten o'clock this evening—we shall go then, or to-morrow night at the very farthest."

"I won't fail, sir—not I," cried Mark, full of delight.

"Do not, on any account. And now hurry away with your note. That fallen but unhappy creature must and shall be rescued from the clutches of the ogress and her foul minions."

Francis Clinton continued to pace his lonely chamber, long after Mark was gone; but gradually his thoughtful tread slackened, and ceased at length altogether, before the gilded portrait of a middle-aged lady, which adorned the walls of his luxurious apartment.

It was the portrait of his ill-fated mother, — the minister's third wife, who had died of the Cholera seventeen years before!

He was still dwelling lingeringly and sorrowfully upon it, when a light finger was upon his shoulder, and turning round, he beheld the familiar face of the family-physician, who had entered his chamber so quietly as not to disturb him in his abstracted gazing upon the dead lady's picture.

But there was something in the expression of that countenance, which sent a chill to the young man's heart—and before he could falter forth the trembling inquiry which died on his lips, the pale and agitated physician had whispered, with deep emotion, these few but expressive words,—

"As sure as we stand here, Francis Clinton, poor Mrs. Mathews is *stricken with the cholera!*"

BOOK FOURTH. THE MYSTERY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

CHAPTER I. THE VAMPIRES.

For ourselves, the time has now come when we must lift the veil from the mystery and unfold, in all their terrors, the secret deeds of dread and darkness by which the mightiest metropolis of the Continent had been, for four days, plunged into the clutches of the pitiless pestilence.

It was the night following the day on which the Rev. Newton Mathew's fourth wife had been attacked by the cholera—stricken down by the same mysterious scourge which had swept away one of her predecessors, seventeen years before.

Around one of the score of city churchyards, one hour after midnight, three men were hovering.

Carefully examining the surrounding space, apparently with the view of satisfying themselves that no watchful eye was on them, two of these three men began silently to climb over the tall iron paling, which encircled the grave-yard within its wide-reaching arms, and then as quietly struck out into the enclosed area, leaving their single companion remaining on the other side, possibly for the purpose of communicating a ready alarm, in case of necessity.

Keeping close under the shadows of the drooping willows which formed the melancholly ornaments of the burial-place, the twain who had thus penetrated into its solemn solitude continued to steal along, until they had gained its heart.

Not a word, not a syllable had been as yet spoken, when the two men halted, by common consent, and each fixed his glance upon the other.

The night was as dark a night as ever shrouded a slumbering city in gloom and obscurity.

Far off twinkled the waning street-lights, two thirds of their number quenched hours before; but no feeble glare of flickering gas found its way to that secluded solitude, which the clouded skies had no starry eyes to look coldly down upon.

All was darkness and desolation around, as the two men paused in the burial-ground.—The first to halt was a man of dwarfed stature and deformed proportions; who, flinging from him a heavy cloak that had partially covered his distortion, without being able to conceal his diminutive height, threw down upon the grassy soil several implements of labor, which though fashioned of weighty metal, returned only a dull sound as they struck the yielding ground.

The other of the twain, who was tall and gaunt of frame, affording a singular contrast to the dwarf, also laid aside his cloak, which was finer in texture and richer than its fellow; and as his left hand, somewhat hesitatingly, freed itself from its folds, an iron wrench and a chisel were disclosed in the grasp of the right, which appeared to be slightly trembling.

But the reader has already recognised these two men, without the help of this explanation, as Broken-Back, the Outcast, and his reverend comrade.

Broken-Back, as the iron tools struck the earth, uttered a low, exulting laugh and glanced on every side around him.

The precise spot which had proved their halting place, was the centre of a crowd of clustering tombs, which covered the extensive area of that solemn and gloomy field.

They rose on every side, those clustering tombs, with their stormy walls, and their solid roofs, and their iron doors,—the granite houses of the dead, the marble mansions of mouldering mortality.

Lowly and peaceful, scattered here and there, were the humble and the grass-grown graves, which nestled at the feel of those haughtier monumental piles, in their close but unpretending neighborhood.—Yet few, very few were they; for the massy vault, and the stately sepulchre, that so proudly towered above their simple mounds, bore testimony that there was one of the final resting-places of departed opulence and luxury.

The dull clang of the falling metal was not all that followed Broken-back's exulting laugh, for the same instant he turned and accosted his companion, —

"This makes the fourth burial ground we have visited, I believe."

The remark was more assertion than inquiry.

"The fourth!" uttered the other, with a deep, strange emphasis.

"The fourth, I am sure," pursued the original speaker; "for last night our visit was to the Potters' Field—and that was the third!"

"The Potters' Field!" again echoed the tall, gaunt man, with a shivering sort of voice. "Yes; the third was the Potters' Field."

"And now we are in B—— Place Cemetry," with a low laugh said the hunchback.—"Ho! ho! they talk of death levelling all distinctions; but here we are among sculptured tombs and marble monuments, and last night, at this self-same hour, we were prowling about the noisome swamp, where the penniless wretch and the homeless poor are cast to rot; the shallow pits and the gaping hollows, where the city buries its pauper dead, in graves one above another, as dogs are thrown when they die! Oho! this is humanity!"

The voice of the hunchback was the voice of a mocking-fiend!

The minister answered not a word. But Broken-back stooped and gathered up one of the iron implements which he had thrown to the ground. As he took it into his hand, again, he gazed upon it with a grim and savage smile.

It was a chisel, a long, sharp chisel, with a hammer attached at the other end. On the ground, at his feet, lay a screw-driver, a crowbar, and a bunch of keys.

These keys, after examining closely the keenness of the tool in his hand, he also picked up and inspected them in the same manner and with the same sarcastic and ominous expression upon his repulsive visage,

These keys were large, heavy and numerous, and each, apparently, varying in size and shape from the others. Selecting a particular one from the ponderous bunch, he

approached him, and inserted the key in the strong, firm lock that guarded the huge iron door.

It entered the wards, but did not turn the bolt, and Brokenback, drawing out the key, supplied its place with another. The second, however, was not more successful than the first; and when, one after the other, he had tried the entire bunch, none of them were found to answer the desired end.

Then, with an impatient ejaculation, the hunchback threw away the keys, saying to the minister.

"Curse the things! not one of them will fit, though they answered well enough in the burying-grounds where we have been before. I suppose your rich folks' tombs are furnished with some patent locks or other, to keep out the body-snatchers. But they can't keep out what is a hundred times worse than body-snatchers—they can't keep out *the vampires* and the ghouls!"

A shudder might have been seen to pass through the gaunt frame of the clergyman, had not his companion, the hunchback, prevented himself from observing him, by bending down to repossess himself of the chisel which he twice had dropped.

"We must have recourse to this," he muttered, feeling its sharp edge.

A moment after, the powerful tool was inserted in the iron hinge, which three blows from a hammer separated.

As the door hung by a single remaining hinge, Broken-back, while he again raised the hammer to attack it, said to the minister, without turning his face toward him or ceasing from his work, —

"All seems quiet, now; suppose we call Quackenboss?"

In a suppressed voice the preacher replied that he had no objection, if the other thought it quite safe.

The hunchback desisted from his work only long enough to cast upon the speaker a sarcastic and scornful glance, and his shrill whistle echoed through the spacious cemetry as he struck the last blow which divided the second hinge.

The door still remained in its place, only held by the adhesion of the lock in its socket, but the preacher's attention was drawn away from the tomb to the fat figure of the little doctor, whose dim outlines were just visible in the distance, as the corpulent sentinel was seen performing the rather difficult feat of climbing the iron pailing which the others had previously surmounted.

The doctor came up at a run, and in a profuse perspiration, looking, moreover, very red in the face; all of which were tolerably satisfactory proofs that he regarded his recent display of agility as a highly brilliant piece of gymnastics, if not, indeed, a decided exploit.

The first simultaneous inquiry of the hunchback and the minister, as to whether he had discovered any person hovering about in the neighborhood, produced a very gratifying negative.

"To your work, then, Vampires!"

The hunchback, giving voice to this ominous command, withdrew his chisel from the last of the severed hinges, though with such evident care as not to cause the loosened door to fall from the slight support of the bolt which still sustained it, and passed on to the next tomb.

"To your work, vampires," again he repeated.

The doctor, who had come provided with similar implements of a mysterious labor, his movements probably quickened by the stern tone of the other, hastened to select a crowbar from the variety before him, and by help of the strong lever began the task of pushing from its socket the slenderly-hanging door which the hunchback had previously deprived of its hinges.

Broken-back—himself in the act of repeating this operation upon the second tomb, furiously turned upon the doctor, as soon as he heard the lever of the latter grating against the door.

"Idiot! what are you about?" he thundered, "Take down that door, if you dare!"

The frightened apothecary dropped his lever, as if the crowbar had suddenly become red-hot, and demanded, in a by no means assured tone, —

"Not take it down? —why not? —what else did you take off the hinges for, if you didn't want it taken down?"

"What! brainless fool! would you throw open that door before the time has come? —that tomb once laid open to the air, do you think a single man here could finish his task?"

The doctor drew back, abashed, muttering, apologetically, —

"I did not think of that!"

"You did not, indeed! It was time that you did, I should think. That door once down, and we should find it impossible to remain ten minutes longer in the cemetery. —Fool! and you did not think of that? Every tomb-door in the burying-ground must be unhinged, before the first one is taken down!"

Now, at least, Quackenboss seemed fully, to comprehend the hunchback's reasons for the prohibition he had imposed; and this time, at all events, he took the best method of averting the possibility of again falling under his displeasure, by closely imitating both his selection of implements and his course of operation.

Broken-Back had substituted the screwdriver for the chisel, and was rapidly unscrewing the hinges or door after door of the surrounding tombs—still exercising, in each case, the same deliberate care in guarding against their fall, *before the desired time*—a precaution to which he seemed to attach so much importance.

As for the clergyman, he had taken a second bunch of keys from his breast, and, inserting them in the locks of some twenty successive tombs, with more success than those of the hunchback, the heavy wards had in each instance yielded to the pressure, and the bolts rolled back; though the preacher was equally guarded in providing against the immediate opening of the iron doors.

Silently the three men worked on together. Occasionally, one would pause to wipe the perspiration from his dripping brow, and to watch the relative progress of the remainder of the trio.

Sometimes, all three would desist from their work, as by one general impulse, and gaze fixedly into each other's faces, seeking to read the expression which pervaded them all, alike.

That expression, seen on every man's countenance, was one of mingled determination, malignity and triumph. In the visages of the apothecary and the preacher there was, however, a lurking apprehensiveness, a kind of secret fear, of which there was not a single sign in the repulsive visage of Broken-Back, whose distorted features exhibited nothing save desperation and malice, and a fiendish exultation which every moment increased and became more fearfully plain.

At the termination of two hours from the time as which these three singular coadjutors commenced their mysterious task, the fastenings of an hundred tombs had been loosened; and there remained, in the burial-ground, not more than a dozen tombs which had been untouched, as yet.

In another quarter of an hour, the whistle of the hunchback resounded shrilly through the cemetery; and, at the concerted signal, his two co-operators, abandoning their several situations, rejoined their ally and leader.

Then the ensuing brief but singular interchange of words took place between the three—the principal spokesman and questioner being the savage Broken-Back, —

"Is it done?"

"It is!"

"How many locks have your keys fitted, Mathews?"

"Thirty-five."

"And all in readiness to be thrown open?"

"Every door!"

"How many tomb-gates have you unhinged with your screw-driver, Quackenboss?"

"Twenty-one."

"And my own work counts fifty. That makes one hundred and six. There cannot be many more vaults in the cemetery. Good!" said Broken-Back, exultingly. "Everything is now in train. Let us proceed to the finishing step! What! do you falter! Cowards! you forget you have had three nights' schooling in this. You are no novices, fools. How! do you still hesitate?"

"We are ready," was the slow and half-tremulous response. The apothecary and the preacher were shaking in every limb!

"Disperse, then, to your several stations—and await the watchword. We must be quick—quick as serpents when they sting. Remember—there are more than a hundred tombs!"

The three men separated—taking different directions each.

The harsh voice of Broken-Back once more made itself heard, —

"Now! are you at your posts, all?"

Two low whistles were the reply.

Then instantly a hoarse-toned, exultant voice rang fiendishly among the tombs, —

"*Let fall! let fall!*"-

A terrific crash, from three different quarters of the cemetery, followed the order thus given. It was as if some ponderous bodies had been hurled from an elevation, and fallen by their own heavy weight to the ground, which gave back the dull, prolonged, hollow sound of a subterranean concussion.

But the startling noise did not cease here. The same clanging roar, the same stunning clatter, continued without the least intermission to resound through the darkness-wrapped burial-ground—while the solid earth seemed to shake beneath the incessant and tremendous blows it received, from the falling objects which inflicted these powerful shocks.

And while unceasingly the clashing reports continued, at fast as shock succeeded to shock, did three gliding phantoms pass swiftly from one tomb to another—to the next, and on to the next again!

The iron doors of thirty-five vaults stood open wide! —the massive tomb-gates of twice that number had rolled from their hinges to the ground.

An hundred sepulchres were yawning, open-mouthed!

What was the secret, the terrible secret of these gaping vaults?

Alas! from these hundred yawning and open-jawed sepulchres, the *deadly breath of the Charnel House* was bursting its imprisoned bounds, and mixing with the pure night-breeze that cooled the sleeping city, far and near! Yes—the DEADLY BREATH OF THE CHARNEL HOUSE!

Forth—forth into the mighty town, the silent and slumbering town, poisoning the fresh sweet air, swept the revolting exhalations of the sepulchres.

Forth from the rumbling coffins, —forth from the hollow skulls, were stealing the noisome vapors, born of the mouldering bones, begotten of the rotten flesh!

The *pestilential effluvia* had begun its appointed task; was doing its awful work!

Half a million of human beings, five hundred thousand sleepers, were respiring the venemous atmosphere which enwraps the putrid corpse and corrupts the crumbling dead!

Had they visions of Plague and Pestilence! Were their dreams of—THE CHOLERA?

Death was in that pestiferous air; Death, Disease, and the Dread Destroyer-of far-off Asia's shores. No human being could breathe in safety and health that air; no, not even the fearful friends who had loosed the vials of wrath. Flying, flying like men who knew that delay was death, the three flitting shadows of the gaping tombs met at the gate of the cemetery.

"Away! away, for your lives! Hurrah for the cholera! But remember, remember! one hour before daylight, *we return to close the oven doors!* Hurrah—HURRAH FOR THE CHOLERA!"

That livelong night, the pestilence-breeding air of the yawning vaults blew over the slumbering city—blew over the doomed and devoted town!

CHAPTER II. THE POISONER.

East and West, upon the North and from the South, the dark, thick, heavy clouds of a gathering thunderstorm overhung the city. At an hour even later than on the former occasions, the preacher, Mathews, had returned home from his nocturnal absences—devoted, as he had said, to midnight vigils by a parishioner's sick-bed. He had lain down, as before, to wrest from the day the repose he had lost by night—but not until after visiting the couch of his invalid wife, the announcement of whose sudden attack from the terrible pestilence had produced the wildest demonstration of grief and distress on his part.

So violent had been the exhibition of this sorrow, that the family physician had earnestly recommended his retirement to the quietude and calmness of his own chamber, until the mind of the affectionate husband should have recovered from the stunning shock.

The minister, however, left instructions with the good physician that he should be instantly awakened, if dangerous results should be seriously anticipated; directions which he repeated to the servants, who promised compliance.

The slumbers of the Rev. Newton Mathews were uneasy and broken, but of long continuance, for he had returned greatly overcome with the pious watchings of the night before; and he had already slept away the entire morning, and part of the afternoon, when he found himself aroused from his fitful sleep by the loud knock of the servant.

A strange sneering smile darted over the livid face of the minister, as he started up expecting to hear the annoucement [*sic*] of some alarming intelligence of his wife's situation; but the messenger had not come for that.

He had come to announce to the clergyman, that a gentleman had just called, desiring to see the minister himself.

With some precipitation his master demanded, —

"A gentleman? who was it? Did he send up his card?"

"Yes, sir; here it is—wished to see you in private, he said."

"In private!"

And the minister, who had turned slightly pale, glanced hastily at the address; but the instant he had deciphered it, a quick, red flush suffused his countenance. "He wishes a private interview. Ask him to come to me here in five minutes." time,' he said—and the messenger departed.

It was scarcely that brief length of time, when, from the parlor in which he had waited, the clergyman's visitor was ushered into the library.

Our hero, Clinton, in the chamber of the invalid, had heard both the ring at the door, and that knock at his step-father's study; and, on inquiry, had received for answer, that the gentleman was Mr. Edward Allen, who had called upon the minister, upon an errand whose nature he could readily conjecture, after the recent disclosures made by Alice.

He, however, was too far remote from the scene, to hear or witness anything which might confirm the correctness of his surmises. But the domestics, who were continually coming and going through the hall, looked not a little surprised and curious, when from the minister's library they heard the sound of voices in loud and angry dispute.

During many moments those angry voices continued to issue from behind the closed door of the study; but high and distinct above those of the other, the incensed tones of the preacher, though not his words, were audible.

Then, at length, the library-door was heard to re-open, and the elegant exquisite, Mr. Allen, issued forth with a very different air and bearing from his appearance when he entered; his cheek flushed, his look angry, with which some seeming astonishment was mingled.

The preacher himself stood in the door-way, trembling and white with rage; his eye actually glittering with the fiery glow which belongs, and belongs only, to concentrated wrath; while with an utterance almost indistinct from passion, he pointed his servants to the crest-fallen suitor, and hoarsely said,—

"Show this gentleman out!"

"Sir!" said the amazed attendants, unable to believe their ears.

"Show this gentleman out; and never admit him again!"

"They will be spared the trouble, sir!" broke from the indignant Allen, haughtily, as he closed the street-door behind him.

The furious minister re entered his study, and re closed his door, but it was not to return again to his broken rest.

Backward and forward, like an enraged lion, did the old man pace his library-floor. The livid whiteness did not leave his cheek, nor the passionate glare forsake his eye; but both seemed rather to increase and deepen, while he often clenched his attenuated hands and muttered aloud, —

"My consent, by Heaven! my consent he dared to ask! Give him Alice! Alice, my own, as she yet shall be. Ha! —I could have murdered him. No! neither he, nor that boy—that accursed step-son — shall have her. Mine and mine alone I will make her. There is but one stumbling-block, but one, in the way. *She* is already stricken, as was another before her—and now I will complete my work. Let them doctor her, let them physic her! her days in the land of the living are numbered!

The paroxysm was past, the preacher grew calm again. But more ominous was the calm that followed; and from such a mood, far more was to be feared.

Mr. Mathews sat down at his library-table, but it was not to read—it was not to write. From a secret drawer in the private cabinet, he deliberately drew forth, first, a small blue envelope, and secondly from within, two colored papers, the one green, the other red, containing, apparently, some carefully treasured powder.

Unfolding these two papers, one after the other, he muttered, with sardonic meaning, —

"*This time* I will trust to something surer than a narcotic! This time it shall be death, indeed, and not the semblance only."

The green parcel contained a dark-looking substance, reduced to small grains, and emitting a peculiar, though very slight odor.

The red paper, on the contrary, exhibited a powder of snowy whiteness, and perfectly inodorous.

Upon both of these gazed the grey-headed clergyman, with something strange and fearful in the ghastly paleness of that bloodless countenance.

Presently, with a finger that trembled almost imperceptibly, the preacher proceeded to add to the snow-white powder a single grain of the dark-colored substance enclosed in the green paper.

That solitary grain, however, was first broken into innumerable small fragments, not so large as the point of a pin, and distributed carefully over the whole surface of the white preparation, which was then shaken until it had completely absorbed these minute black specks and left not a single atom visible.

Fearful, very fearful to behold, was the sardonic smile with which the hoary-headed clergyman gazed on the mingled contents of the green and red papers, and repeated, with exulting emphasis, again and again to himself,—

"The *effects of arsenic*, and the *symptoms* of the *cholera*, are precisely the same."

The minister remained in deep thought for the space of several moments after his last calm reiteration of these words; then he folded up the powder, replaced it in the secret drawer, which he locked securely and cautiously upon it.

Well might the clergyman be thus wary in guarding the hiding place of the most potent of known poisons—the most insidious and terrible.

A handsome mirror hung above the clergyman's bed., He went to the glass to free his face and person from the traces of recent agitation; but the dreadfully haggard expression of his features well nigh caused him to start back in terror and amazement at his own appearance.

Collecting himself, and banishing these signs of violent emotion, the preacher unlocked the door of the library and quitted it.

With a calm, firm footstep he ascended to the invalid's chamber, where he found the medical attendant, Clinton, and his sister-in-law, Alice; the two latter pale and worn with watching.

"Hush!" whispered the physician. "Not the slightest noise! she is steeping and must not be awakened."

He then took the husband aside, and in the low tones of a sick room briefly explained that the sick woman had sunk into a quiet slumber, at length, after having passed thro' a dangerous crisis; and that unless some unhappy relapse took place, he entertained strong hopes of her eventual convalescence.

Mr. Mathews listened quietly, but the good physician suspected little the arch hypocrisy of the husband's murmured gratitude, as he went on to add, to the minister

that he must now leave the patient for a while, but should ere long return in the confident hope of soon pronouncing her ‘a cured case of cholera.’-

Before he went, however, he advised both Clinton and Alice to retire for the purpose of seeking the rest and repose which they needed scarce less than the slumbering invalid; for the young girl had been with her suffering sister the whole of the previous night, and all that day, which, itself, was nearly spent; and as for Francis, in twenty-four hours he had not closed his weary eyes.

The minister seconded the physician’s urgings, promising to watch by the sick bed himself, while his step-son and sister-in law departed to seek the requisite refreshment; and leaving the sufferer, as she he believed, beyond all danger from the dreaded disease she had passed so critically through, the exhausted Alice consented, and with grateful prayer to Heaven, sought her couch.

The reassured Clinton, likewise, was prevailed upon by their representations, to give up, at length, his long protracted vigil in the chamber of Mrs. Mathews; but though he left the bed side by which he had so faithfully watched, it was not, like Alice, to retire to his couch.

Wearied and drowsy he was, indeed, and gladly would have sought his pillow; but he knew that he was better able to bear fatigue and sleeplessness, than the delicate frame of Alice, and he had not forgotten the promise he had made to Mark, and the resolution he had formed.

The catastrophe of the cholera’s appearance in his step-father’s family—the sudden seizure of the clergyman’s wife, by the terrible destroyer, had interposed to defer the fulfilment of that determination.

But now the poor patient was pronounced well-nigh convalescent, and the night that was now close at hand was, moreover, the very latest which he himself had appointed for the enterprise.

With the evening, he counted upon the appearance of Mark and the policeman, who was summoned to their aid. He, nevertheless, mentioned nothing of this to his step-father or to Alice; but seeing the latter hasten to press the pillow, end leaving the former to his solitary watch by his wife’s bedside, Clinton retired.

* * * * *

Before commencing his lonely vigil, the minister silently stole back to his study below. The private cabinet was again unlocked, the secret drawer for the second time, opened, and the treasured powder removed from its hiding place.

This done, and with his fatal prize in his possession, the clergyman quietly retraced his way back to the chamber of his invalid wife.

She was sleeping peacefully.

Upon a small table of the bedside was a silver cup, containing a cooling drink, which the physician had left with directions that it should be administered at stated hours.

The eyes of Newton Mathews glistened as they fell upon this object.

He approached and examined it. The contents was wine from the far off isle of Madeira—he set it down again. A cold perspiration began to ooze out in thick, icy drops from his flesh.

He dropped the powder into the goblet, and with his ivory pen-knife stirred it up. An increasing but slight tremulousness in his hand, caused him to lose his hold of the pen-knife, and falling on the table, slid from thence upon the floor.

The trivial noise seemed louder than a thunder-clap to his guilty ears; he was fearful it might have disturbed the sleeper. The sleeper breathed as calmly, as peacefully, as deeply as before.

Mathews recovered from his terror. For four long hours he sat and waited for the invalid to awake and drink the fatal potion from his hands.

Suddenly a new idea—one of guilt's infernal suggestions, flashed athwart the dark gulf of his soul.

He was looking at the window of the room. But what criminal thought could the window convey?

We said, with the first words of this chapter that the sky was dark and lowering, and that the city without was threatened with a thunderstorm.

The air had been close and sultry all that day, but the murmuring voice of the rising wind was sighing amid far-off hills and away on the ocean's breast.

Four long hours, we said, had passed since the minister's lonely watch commenced. It was already evening when that began, and now it was deep night. And when those four hours had dragged themselves by, the minister stealthily started from his seat and looked out from those self-same windows upon the gathering thunderstorm, which now was sweeping down, under the cover of night and darkness, upon the sleeping city.

The wind came rushing against the rattling glass, and the dust from the now silent streets was whirled, in numberless eddies, into the air.

"That whirling dust the minister's eye with a gleam of joy had marked, and muttered as he marked, —

"Aha! it comes from the same direction—from the yawning tombs!"

The preacher raised the window at which he stood—raised it until not an inch farther could it be lifted, and left it open.

He went to the remaining windows, and one after the other, he threw-up with a quick and determined hand. A powerful current of air rushed in and filled the room.

The sleeper was directly in the draft, and the air that came through those opened windows, was the pestilential atmosphere of the cemetries, driven before the rising hurricane.

The tainted exhalations of the violated sepulchres were sweeping over an unsuspecting city, polluting the pure breath of Heaven, and even now penetrating to the couch of the invalid.

Full access, then, had the noxious vapors, breeding death and the cholera. Infernal ingenuity had suggested, indeed, a hellish expedient.

Whether or not, it was that the poisonous effluvia which freighted the rushing wind disturbed the sleeper's rest, the invalid awoke. The sudden rush of air thro' the opened window had quenched the only light which illumined the sick chamber. With the instinctive love of guilt for its native darkness, the minister had forborne to reignite the extinguished lamp.

The sick-room was left in showy obscurity, in the midst of which the awakened slumberer could distinguish nothing further than the outlines of her husband's figure, without being able to identify it; and turning wearily upon her side, complaining of thirst, she feebly asked for some cooling draught.

Gliding to the head of the bedstead, so that the invalid could not readily have seen the person of the attendant, even had the light still burned in the chamber, Mathews silently handed his wife the silver cup.

She pressed it to her feverish lips—once, twice, thrice, and returned it, drained to the dregs!

With the emptied goblet in his hand, the murderer-husband, like a phantom of darkness, glided from the bed, while, at the same moment, the first hoarse outbreak of the impending thunderstorm reverberated with a stunning crash through the echoing atmosphere!

If the thunderbolt itself had struck him, the shock could scarce have been greater to the guilty clergyman; but the invalid wife sank back with a sigh of relief on her pillow, and the homicide forgot everything else but the emptied goblet and the terrific treachery.

Stealthily as a spectre he stole away, murmuring only the words he had repeated only an hour before, full of frightful significance, —

"*The symptoms of cholera and the effects of arsenic are precisely the same!*"

CHAPTER III. THE GUILTY AND THE INNOCENT.

After Alice Hascal had left the chamber of her sick sister, hope and happiness in her heart, but weariness in her young limbs and exhaustion in her frame, nothing occurred to prevent her from seeking rest and repose in her own room, as she had designed to do.

A deep and profound sleep almost instantly came over her—the slumber of excessive fatigue.

It was not yet evening when she went to rest, nor had the impending storm then commenced; but it was at an advanced hour of the night that she awoke, aroused by the pealing thunders which told that the gale was at its height.

Weariness, however, reasserted its empire over her, and she sunk to sleep again, though repeatedly reawakened by the violence of the storm.

Her eyes were heavily closing for the fifth or sixth time, after a roar more loud and deafening than any that had preceded it, when, in the profound though momentary hush that followed, she fancied she heard the sound of a human foot fall near her.

The reclining girl raised herself on her elbow and hearkened attentively. But no; some atmospheric concussion of the tempest had deceived her mistaken ear; there was not the smallest indication of the neighborhood of any one—oblivion crept once more over her, and she lost all consciousness.

For at least ten minutes, in that lull of the external gale, the only noise within the young girl's chamber was the soft and regular breathing of the fair and youthful occupant of that couch of innocence. At the end of that time there was a slight rustling amid the velvet curtains which formed the rich drapery of the bed.

It ceased almost immediately and perfect stillness succeeded, as if the wind which must have disturbed them had suddenly died away. If this were so, that wind soon came back again!

Presently the bed curtains recommenced their rustling, and soon became so much agitated as to separate entirely at one corner, revealing something very like a human face peering out from behind the fluttering velvet screen.

Motionless remained the gazing countenance—it was that of an old man; an old man with his darkness-piercing eye rivetted upon the sleeping, unconscious girl, with a strange and peculiar look that, once seen, was never to be forgotten, His whole soul seemed to be in this penetrating and sense-wrapped gaze, which was fixed upon the fair slumberer's tranquil and innocence-beaming features—upon her ivory neck and her snowy bosom—gloatingly,—gloatingly!

With a hushed and a noiseless step, a step so stealthy that it emitted no sound in its cautious passage over the carpeted floor; the secret gazer and secret intruder into Beauty's sanctuary, left his post at the foot of that hallowed couch and stole around to the side of the bed.

Was it to gain a better view of the unsuspicious sleeper? was it easier to feast his eyes upon the dazzling charms which Night and Oblivion exposed to his sensual gaze? Was it to revel in unholy contemplation of maidenly Loveliness, in its voluptuousness, as well as its innocence?

And who was this daring invader of spotless Purity's most sacred retreat! Was it some youthful libertine; some gay young profligate; some professed votary of Pleasure; some boasted betrayer of Woman's virtue?

Alas, no! —we have said that it was one whose head was whitened with Age's silvery snows, whose forehead was furrowed with Time's ploughshare. It was more; it was a husband—a father—a *minister*.

It was the gray-haired minister; the reverend clergyman; the admired and popular preacher, whose fervid eloquence made the conscience-stricken to tremble, and terrified guilt to quail. It was the pious pastor who had wedded four happy brides, and murdered two wretched wives."

Even in her wandering dreams, the guileless girl would have blushed, with a Woman's pride and a Woman's shame, had she visioned the unknown truth.

A fearful and unknown truth! for each night by her maiden pillow, each night by her virgin couch,—all unseen, all unthought of, all unsuspected,—for weeks and months had the guilty husband and sensual priest, feasted his gloating eye on that voluptuous loveliness, which only through Death's own ghastly gate he dared ever hope to possess.

Again and again he raised to his heated lips the secret and long-prized key by which he had nightly gained sacrilegious access to the chamber of Innocence. And now, as if drawn by attraction irresistible, the libertine preacher stooped his silvery head, and pressed a kiss full of compassion upon the warm, breathing lips of sleeping Voluptuousness!

Another and another of the rifled sweets he ravished—and the girl, with a cry, awoke!

A cry? it was a scream or horror, as the minister was seen and recognised.

"Brother! Man!" she cried—with the agonised tones of an angel recoiling from fiendish wickedness.

The instant that she sprang half-way up from her pillow, the minister cast his arms over her neck, and drew her head deliriously to his shoulder.

"Monster—fiend—let me go!"

"Hark! hear me, Alice! your sister is dead."

"*Dead!*" shrieked Alice. "*Dead!*"

"Dead, or dying. She cannot live! She is no longer a bar between us—the impediment is removed. Alice—my glorious Alice! you can now—*now* become my own! my wife! —my wife!"

"My God! my God, deliver me from this wretch!" wailed the hapless girl. "O, monster of wickedness! leave me, oh, leave me, ere God Himself strikes you dead!"

With a pitiless grasp he tore away the soft, tender fingers which vainly strove to hide her unvailed loveliness, and madly imprinted his lips on that crimsoning bosom of snowy voluptuousness!

"Leave you! —no, no. Let this be our nuptial chamber! —let this be our bridal bed! —this night seal our happiness!"

A groan of pain followed the words of ungoverned Passion, and the libertine priest, the licentious clergyman tottered back and fell to the floor.

By a superhuman effort of womanly desperation the young girl had flung the guilty man from her, backward to the chamber-floor, which his head encountered with terrible violence.

Before he could gain his feet, past him like the spring of a leopard, almost over his prostrate figure, darted the flying girl.

When he stood erect, the door had closed behind her. He darted to it—pulled strongly at the handle. It did not open—it resisted—the poor girl was holding it—holding it on the outer side.

With all his strength, he strove to force open the door. Once—twice—and thrice, again.

The fourth time he felt it yield. The strength of the girl was giving out.

One more determined effort to effect his purpose! —the libertine clergyman resolved it should be the last.

The last, it was. The feeble barrier gave way; it was all that separated them, but Alice had fled from the door.

She had reached the opposite end of the hall.

Too late the preacher repented his rashness.

Uttering no word—no cry—no shriek, but paler than corpses are, Alice was flying to a chamber whose friendly door stood open.

It was the chamber of the minister's wife—the chamber of Alice's dying or dead sister. As if it had been a haven of safety—a refuge from perdition, did she seek its obscurity.

Alice rushed to her sister's couch That sister moved not, spoke not; she did not even breathe.

One white arm, in a convulsed and constrained posture, lay over the snowy counterpane. With an ice-bolt darting through her frame, Alice caught the extended hand. The touch was an electric shock. With the ice-bolt at her heart, she let the arm drop again—and dropped, like a stone, herself.

The minister's wife was dead!

This time, indeed, there was no mistake—no living death—no terrible delusion. The subtle arsenic—with which the dead woman had been drugged, hour by hour—had accomplished its appointed work, —the counterfeit of the cholera.

But it was only the destroyer that was counterfeited—not the death itself—that was really too frightfully real.

The fourth and last wife of Newton Mathews was no more!

CHAPTER IV. MARK'S STRATAGEM.

Francis, Mark, and a single policeman— in the interim between the departure of the former from his stepfather's house and the closing scenes of the last two chapters— were meanwhile proceeding upon the somewhat singular and hazardous enterprise in which the three were engaged.

The reader will readily recollect that the evening had not yet set in, though fast drawing near, when the young midshipman thus set forth upon his novel errand; but, by the time he had been joined by the police-officer and the boy, it was quite dark in the Streets, and the gathering obscurity of nightfall was made yet deeper by the clouds that overhung the city.

"You feel full convinced you shall be able, readily, to recognize the place again?" was Clinton's first inquiry. Everything depends on that!"

"I could take you there, sir, blindfolded. It is number 8— Duane street," he distinctly replied.

The next to speak was the policeman, —

"I knew that house, Mr. Clinton, and it bears a desperate name."

"A desperate name, and desperate characters," returned the young man, calmly. "They are well matched."

The policeman then remarked, —

"If I am not mistaken—and I think 1 am not—the place is kept by an old hag called Martin.

"The ogress!" said Clinton. "Yes, it is the same. Is it not so, Mark!"

"Yes, sir; the old ogress, as you calls her —the she-bear, as I calls her. She's got paws like a polar bear, any way!" and Mark recalled his very vivid recollections of the old woman's vigorous arms, and the equally vigorous blows which they had dealt in his tussle with the virago.

"The old woman is, indeed, little short of a hell cat, sir," said the policeman to Francis Clinton; "and she has a set of male scoundrels in her pay and employ, who are even more desperate."

"You refer to her hired desperadoes?"

"Yes; they are always lying in wait, in case of necessity."

"We shall have them to encounter, I presume."

"Undoubtedly, if it is your intention or desire to make use of force in effecting your object."

Clinton looked at the policeman who had thus spoken, with the air of one listening to an unexpected remark.

"Force! I had certainly thought of no other means. But in what different way could we proceed?"

"By stratagem, possibly, in place of violence."

“By stratagem!” replied Clinton, as tho’ he had not thought of this before. “By stratagem! But why use strategy in preference to force?”

“Simply, sir, because artifice is always safer, and often more effectual than sheer force.”

“Safer!” exclaimed the young man. “I do not care for its safety. I am not afraid of the danger.”

“Probably not, sir. But there is one thing you may be afraid of, sir,”

“Ah! what is that?”

“Of failure, sir.”

“Of failure? Ah, that quite alters the case; but what makes you think that violence might be attended by that undesirable consequence?”

The experienced and cautious policeman was again at no loss for a reply, —

“Merely because, Mr. Clinton, I am too well acquainted with the habits and mysteries of the people into whose den we are going to penetrate, in quest of this unfortunate girl. These ogresses of the city have always their attendant ogres, who are ever ready with steel and bullet, the bowie-knife and slung-shot.”

“Never mind!” said the hot-headed youth. “We will fight them with weapons equally good.”

“And get killed for our pains, in all probability,” was the significant tho’ respectful reply. “With twenty to one against us, we should stand every chance or being quietly murdered.”

“Very good, Mr. Policeman,” said Clinton, coolly. “I, for one, am willing to run the risk.”

“Then that is more than I am,” was the rejoinder; “at least when it can be better effected in another manner.”

“By cunning contrivance, as you continue to think?”

“Certainly.”

But Clinton still hesitated.

“I prefer force,” he said, “for the reason that it is the most natural mode of proceeding. Against tricks and traps such proverbial sharpers would, most probably, be on their guard.”

“And against open violence they certainly would. But, further,” continued the policeman, persuadingly, “there is one other motive why open violence should not be resorted to. It would be dangerous, not only to ourselves, but to the very person we intend to benefit.”

“How so?”

“Because, at the first hostile attempt, the unhappy girl would probably be spirited away.”

“You think so?”

“Most positively. The resources of these people are infinite. At the earliest alarm, their victims are always hurried away, as if by magic. Once out of that house, all search for her would be vain.”

“You have convinced me, sir. What have you, then, to propose?”

The practised policeman did not hesitate an instant in making his reply, —

“We must make a pretended visit to the house, with the ostensible view with which visitors usually go there.”

The police officer perceived, at once, that the young man did not half-like the idea.

“This, you perceive, will secure our admission,” said he.

“Certainly. But how will it secure the girl’s liberation?”

“That, indeed, remains to be decided.”

And the policeman gave himself up to the mental consideration of the mooted point.

Clinton awaited the conclusion of the man’s deliberations.

But the mental puzzle was cut short by the interposition of no less consequential a person than their companion, the boy, who suddenly spoke up, —

“If you please, sir—I have thought of a plan.”

“*You!*” said the interrupted policeman, with some sharpness, and a good deal of. contempt.

The imperturbable Mark look no notice of the sneer at his presumption, but persisted, with undiminished audacity.

“Egg-zackly! I’ve got a first rate idee [*sic*] by the tail, I knows I has.”

“What is your idea, my boy?” encouragly [*sic*] inquired Clinton, who had been taught to have more confidence in the lad’s cleverness, than the policeman thought proper to entertain.

Mark, thus stimulated, proceeded to explain his plan; but after his own fashion, —

“Fact is, sir, this gem man showed you the way to get admitted to that ’ere house, but he hasn’t told you yet how you’re to get off • again with yourself and the gal. It’s one thing to get into a scrape, and another thing to get out of it. Fact is, it must be done by means of the cholera.”

“The cholera! How so?”

“By counterfeiting it.”

“By counterfeiting it! I don’t understand you.”

“It’s very easy understood, sir.”

And Mark forthwith addressed himself to the task of elucidation, in spite of sundry shrugs of the shoulders from the disparaging policeman.

His scheme—and it must be confessed it was shrewd one—was, in effect, this.—They were to proceed, in the ostensible character proposed by the policeman, to the house in question, in company with some medical attendant; secure access to the presence of the imprisoned woman; secretly apprize her of their intentions and purpose; caution her to follow their directions in everything, and then, when all was arranged,

the girl was suddenly to be taken ill—alarmingly ill, and her abrupt sickness immediately pronounced, by the accompanying physician, a case of un doubted cholera.

This was the stratagem! the consequences of which would be the complete consummation of their object; for the pestilence being supposed by the ignorant to be contagious, the depraved dwellers in the ogress' den would be only too eager to free themselves from the presence of the infected one.

Even the contemptuous policeman was forced to admit, with as good a grace as possible, that the contrivance was not a bad one, and that the urchin had more wit than he thought he had.

The singular subterfuge was immediately decided upon. But in order to put it into practical execution, the co operation of the medical friend in question now became necessary.

Mark was prepared for this, however, and instantly suggested that the assistance of his master, Doctor Elihu Quackenboss should be called in.

Clinton and the police officer unhesitatingly acceeded to this second proposition, the former commissioning the apothecary's apprentice to offer the druggist a handsome reward for his services, leaving it to them to apprise him of the nature of the services required of him.

Mark, nevertheless, stipulated to take this duty, also, upon himself; should he find it necessary.

The first outbreak of the coming storm seemed near at hand, and the party adjourned to a hotel, there to await the return of the hoy, who set off for the apothecary's shop, at his quickest pace, to procure the attendance of his master.

The boy promised to be back in fifteen minutes; but when an hour had passed, he had not yet made his appearance.

The policeman and Clinton were impatiently waiting, at the hotel, for his return.

An hour and a half—two hours—three— and then a fourth crept slowly by, without the anxiously-looked-for reappearance of the messenger,

Clinton, who knew the invariable promptitude of the boy, and his habitual alacrity, was full of surprise and perplexity at the unexpected failure of Mark, and his unaccountable absence.

The policeman did not lose his patience or his coolness. In the uneasiness of his patron he did not take the smallest share; for the longer Mark delayed, the more was he benefitted; his pay was going on, at the rate of a dollar an hour.

But at last the patience of Clinton was completely exhausted. He dismissed the officer, with directions to come at the same hour on the following night, by which time, at least, he hoped to have heard some tidings of Mark.

We, however, must at once account to the reader for the prolonged and singular absence of the boy.

CHAPTER V. WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO MARK.

Barely ten minutes had elapsed in fact, after leaving Clinton and the policeman at the hotel, before Mark stood at the door of the apothecary's shop, in the already lighted windows of which was to be seen a flaming placard, setting forth, in mammoth letters, the incomparable virtues of 'Doctor Quackenboss' Justly Celebrated, Anti-mercurial, Indian-vegetable Cholera Preventative, and Stomach Tincture.

This sublime compound was represented to be the most invaluable preparation under the sun, for the cure of that formidable epidemic, concerning whose nature and philosophy the aforesaid Doctor Quackenboss modestly averred himself to be the best informed and most skillful of the whole human race, living or dead—including that ubiquitous worthy, the Wandering Jew himself.

"I swow to thunder! if the doctor hain't got up some new humbug," muttered Mark, with his broadest grin, as he read at the bottom of the placard a very startling 'Caution' to look out for rascally impositions and worthless imitations, of which it appeared that the market was so remarkably full, that the only remaining wonder was, how on earth there could be any place left for the 'Genuine Original' itself.

Whistling vehemently, the apothecary's boy entered the lighted shop.

Behind the counter was the round figure or his master; but no sooner did the worthy and amiable Doctor Quackenboss fairly get his eyes on the shrewd face of the boy, than he bounced around that counter with an agility that was ever after a standing marvel to Mark—and catching his apprentice by the collar, demanded, in a terrible voice, where he had been all the afternoon, and what he had been about.

"In my boots—and about town," was the epigrammatic response.

"In your boots, and about town! I'll—I'll shake you out of your boots, sir," roared the meek Doctor Quackenboss, flying into a towering passion.

"They're out at the toes, now, sir," with great sang-froid replied Mark, looking downwards.

"I'll—I'll kick you—kick you into the street, sir."

"That would be *toeing the Mark*, with a vengeance, sir."

"Mark me! sir—" roared the apothecary, about to thunder forth a furious announcement.

"Mark *you*, sir? Oh, no; I'm Mark—not you."

"I'd write to your parents, sir—if you had any——"

"Never had any," said Mark.

The enraged doctor snorted.

"Never had none, sir," pursued Mark. — "People what comes from the poor-house, never has."

"You had!" said the druggist, with a sudden scowl.

This little piece of intelligence appeared to excite a good deal of interest in the saucy Mark.

"Had I—want to know! Supposing, old fellow, you just make my respects to 'em, and let 'em know their dutiful son is well, and waiting to hear from 'em. It's a long time since they writ. Only fourteen years, and up'ards! Wonder if they hain't forgot how? Anyway, it seems they knowed how to *make their Mark!*"

To this last cut—which certainly was wanting in filial reverence—the doctor replied, with a good round oath, that, unless the lad's manners were mended, he would make his mark on him, and that very vigorously, too; furthermore illustrating his meaning by a tremendous thwack in the ribs, which warned the lad to the tune of 'nuckle under,' in more senses than one.

Mark, however, did *not* knuckle under—at least, immediately, but managed to save breath to retort, —

"Oh! yes, sir; you're always a-makin unpleasant marks and remarks. I'se a reg'lar market for both on 'em."

"You're a young villain!" thundered the enraged doctor, "if ever there was one."

"Oh, yes, sir! there was one afore me. — How much the oldest be you, sir?"

There was no standing this—even in the case of a man of a good deal more forbearance than Doctor Quackenboss assuredly, possessed.

Taking Mark by both ears, in spite of his struggles and wrigglings, the little man dragged him swiftly over the shop floor, into the little back-room, and pitched him, at the imminent risk of his neck, head-foremost into the little dark closet with which Mark had previously had good reason to be acquainted, as well as the courteous reader.

It was altogether to no purpose that Mark, as soon as he could assure himself of the safety of his ears, endeavored repeatedly to make his exasperated master understand that he had got something of importance to say to him; for the moment that he found himself alone in the closet, which the apothecary so surely bolted upon him, the locked up lad suddenly recollected the errand which had brought him back to the druggist's shop, and was made immediately sensible how greatly his love of mischief had got the better of his prudence.

Certainly, however, he had nobody to thank for this, except himself; and moreover, on cool deliberation, the youngster could not very well help acknowledging, to himself, that Doctor Quackenboss, had decidedly more justice'and reason on his side, in the present instance, then usually attended that amiable gentleman's summary acts.

To the little dark closet itself, Mark was, by no means, a stranger. In fact, as he had not scrupled to inform Clifton, upon a former occasion, he had before enjoyed the supreme felicity of passing a couple of day's delightful retirement in his present enviable, quarters—with which he, was, therefore, tolerably familiar.

Forming his present conclusions from his past experience, Mark, in his own mind, made no doubt that he should have the happiness of spending the whole of that night, at me very smallest calculation, in solitary confinement within this curious sort of lock-

up—which would unquestionably have been a trifle more convenient, if it had been also a trifle larger.

"It'll be a mercy," thought Mark, as he curled up his feet under him, after satisfying himself that it was no sort of use for him to try the stretching-out process,—"it'll be the greatest wonder in the world if I ain't smothered."

But notwithstanding this philosophic way of treating things, Master Mark, the apothecary's boy, was by no means so easy in his mind as this stoical speculation would seem to indicate.

Quite on the contrary, he felt vexed, disappointed, chagrined, at the turn affairs had taken, perfectly conscious that it was his own fault.

But his uneasiness only increased, when, after several reiterated calls to his master, he heard the well-known noise made in closing the shutters for the night.

In the course of the next ten minutes, the gas was stopped off in the shop, and the dark closet was now a dark closet indeed—the druggist had left his apprentice a close prisoner.

Waiting until he was convinced the apothecary was gone, Mark made many ineffectual attempts to burst open the closet door, but the narrow quarters made all his strength of no avail.

"Never mind! Old 'Lihu has lost some money for his pains—that's one consolation," said the boy, as he gave up his useless attempts, with a last angry kick at the unfortunate closet door, crouching discontentedly down.

And thus Mark remained a prisoner. This was what had become of the apothecary's boy, while the intended liberators of Lizzie were anxiously awaiting his reappearance at the hotel.

CHAPTER VI. THE OGRES AND THEIR PREY.

A trying day to Clinton was the one which followed the night on which Mark's mishap had prevented the boy from rejoining him, and baffled the intended expedition to the ogres' den.

During its course, he had been forced to go through the painful ordeal of learning the death of the unfortunate Mrs. Mathews; an event which his own heart made him deplore, no less than his fervent sympathy for the sorrowing sister who was now left bereaved and desolate.

The unexpected relapse—the sudden decease of the dead woman, created surprise, but no suspicions.

The mysterious nature of the pestilence was so little understood; there was something so terrible, so inexplicable in the character and consequences of this dread scourge, that its vagaries laughed at calculation.

That Mrs. Mathews had perished by the omnipotent cholera, no one doubted—no one but the cholera-propagators! The learned physician, the experienced man of science, had recognised all the symptoms of the prevailing pestilence, and what should he suspect of arsenic.

The dread of contagion was coextensive in the public mind, with the dread of cholera. —The deceased was solemnly interred the day alter her solitary midnight passage from the world.

From the grave the surving [*sic*] sister returned —but not to the house of the minister!"

To enter again *his* doors—to place herself once more under his protection, she utterly, positively, peremptorily refused; and sought, beneath the roof of a kind relative, the home she would no longer receive from her brother-in-law.

To Clinton, only, did she breathe a whisper of the fearful reasons which actuated her— and not to him, even, was all the truth confessed, but what the young girl herself concealed, his jealous heart divined.

He heard, he understood, and went from his betrothed bride's side, that evening, with a deliberate oath on his lips and a stern resolution in his soul.

With a heavy heart, at the appointed hour, he was at the rendezvous—with a faint hope that the missing boy would make his reappearance.

He expected to find the policeman there, but did not expect to find, in his company, the absentee.

Nevertheless, both the boy Mark, and the apothecary were upon the spot and in readiness.

Mark, it appeared, after being liberated from his night's confinement, had succeeded in making the lately incensed, but now fully appeased apothecary, sensible of the very eligible opportunity he had missed; and having hunted up the policeman at

the station house—prevented by the funeral from seeing Clinton himself—he had ascertained from the police officer the fresh rendezvous of that evening, and, with his master, accompanied him thither.

A brief, hurried explanation made Quackenboss thoroughly comprehend all that his apprentice had not made clear.

The worthy man, with an alacrity that did great credit to his humanity, readily agreed to perform his share of the deception which was to liberate the unhappy Lizzie from her thraldom.

The policeman's previous familiarity with their questionable place of destination obviated the necessity of Mark acting as guide, but nevertheless the boy went along, to prevent all chance of mistake, and to be the means of identifying the girl.

On the way and when within sight of the place, Clinton took the precaution to ask of the officer, —

"But will they not suspect something if I appear among them in the company of one of the police?"

"By no means; I shall pass you off as a stranger, to whom I am showing the lions of the town."

Five minutes after they reached the ogres' den.

To their admission, thanks to the police-man's precaution, there was no resistance offered. By a species of freemasonry, in connection with a flash dialect, not a word of which Clinton understood, the officer made their pretended errand readily comprehended.

Instead, therefore, of being looked on hostile intruders, they were received as welcome guests.

As for Mark, a suit of new clothes, from head to foot, in which he had been dressed by Clinton's liberality and precaution, so completely altered his shabby appearance, that he did not even know himself when he surveyed his full-length reflections in the splendid mirrors which decked the gay walls of the luxurious house of guilt.

The ogress, herself, could not recognise the ragged urchin whom her minion had flung from her door.

Both Clinton and the policeman, in pursuance of their secret scheme, were careful to address their corpulent companion, the little druggist, loudly and incessantly as 'the Doctor!' in order that the hag and her attendant ogres might be perfectly aware of the professional character of their friend.

The trick look, capitally: for, in a very a few moments, the ogress called him 'Doctor,' too.

So far all had gone well, and now the woman said, —

"Nearly all the girls are engaged, but I think, young gentleman, we can suit you, without much difficulty."

These words were addressed to Clinton, Who, recollecting his part, replied with cavalier coolness, —

“I do not know that my good woman. I am rather a difficult person to please.”

The beldame leered with a cunning look, and the young man, with something of an effort to conceal his disgust, turned to the doctor, saying to him, —

“Well, Doctor, who shall be your chosen fair one?”

“The doctor, who well knew his cue, did not reply directly to the last speaker, but accosted the beldame, —

“Yes, who have you in store for me, old lady?”

The ogress replied that his choice must be necessarily rather limited, as all her young ladies were already engaged, with the exception of three.

“One of whom,” the added, “is in the sulks and might not be civil to company.”

“In the sulks! hey! Why that’s just what you like, Doctor,” interposed Clinton, adroitly—hoping it might prove to be the very object of their search. “Haven’t I heard you say you thought a woman never was so handsome as when she was in a huff?”

“To be sure you have!” chimed in the doctor, taking the hint, “nothing like a good fit of the sulks for me! But then, it depends on how long she has been in the dumps—snappish, is she?”

“Oh, no; it’s only the blues” she’s got.—The girl’s handsome enough, but she’s taken it into her silly head that she’s repented of the evil of her ways, and there don’t seem to be no driving the notion out of her. So I locks her up.”

Quackenboss, the policeman, and Clinton, exchanged glances.

As for Mark, he first winked, then shook his fist behind the Ogress’s back.

Quackenboss kept on the scent, —

“Locked up, hay? Well, give me the key and show me the way.”

“Yes, Doctor!” said Clinton, with a light laugh, “the sulky beauty for you. As for me, I prefer a good tempered woman.”

“So do I, for a wife; but not for a mistress.”

Saying this, the little doctor followed the Ogress up the stairs, while Clinton and the policeman, with rapid looks of intelligence, remained awaiting her return below—as the beldame supposed.

It was not so with Mark.

Making a sign of cautionary significance, the boy crept softly up the steps, behind the hag and the druggist; witnessed the unlocking of a chamber; saw through the opened door the figure of a woman, reclining upon a couch, with her head buried in her hands, but who started up at the noise made by the intruders; and, seeing this much, retreated down the staircase, making a sign to those at the foot, that he had discovered Lizzie!

Scarcely had he commenced his silent descent, however, as he saw his master and the ogress enter the chamber, when two terrible cries,—the one a woman’s wild shriek, the other a man’s hoarse yell, broke appalingly on the ear of every inmate of the ogres’ den, and the very next moment, the figure of the apothecary rushed forth from the same apartment, shaking in every limb, and fled like a madman down the staircase, and past

his recent companions—his face whiter than the bleached grave-cloth—uttering only this harrowing shout,—

"Elizabeth! Elizabeth! —as sure as there is a hell! My daughter Elizabeth!

CHAPTER VII. THE DRUGGIST'S DAUGHTER.

"Elizabeth!" was the wild-toned cry which still continued to ring in the astonished ears of those thro' whose midst he rushed, even after the frantic apothecary had precipitated himself into the open street from the ogres' den.

Clinton and Mark were thunderstruck.—Even the police officer stood confounded—equally at fault. It was evident that one and all were impressed with a belief in the doctor's insanity.

But though the druggist had vanished, and his frenzied shout was no longer heard, the shrieks of the female, with whose voice it had been mingled, ceased not to issue, in rapid and startling succession, from the chamber above.

Presently these screams, likewise, sunk into silence, which was only broken by the sudden reappearance of the ogres, at the head of the staircase—consternation in her every feature.

"Hoity-toity! lack-a-day!" cried the old beldame, but in a suppressed tone. "Here's a pretty to-do in my house. O Lord! —only think of a gal of mine meeting her own father here! Her own father—and he come on such an errand!"

Among the amazed persons at the foot or the staircase, the only expression which passed, was a species of stupefied echo, in these words, —

"Her own father!"

And then looks, as rapid as lightning were exchanged between the policeman and Francis Clinton.

Without waiting to be invited by the ogress, the little party, as if by common accord, hastened to ascend the staircase, headed by the startled Mark, who pointed out the room.

They entered it Lizzie, in a deed swoon, was stretched, motionless upon the couch.

The three-surveyed the unfortunate creature in silence—Clinton with the most painful interest.

Horror seemed to have frozen the blood in her veins—agony to have petrified the senseless flesh—the thunderbolt of misery, astonishment, despair, all condensed in one withering lightning-flash, to have blasted her brain to the core.

It was a terrible picture, but the gazer thanked God that she had swooned; he felt that this swoon must have saved her reason—perhaps her life.

"This young woman's name is, then Elizabeth Quackenboss."

"Elizabeth Quackenboss!" repeated the policeman, echoing Clinton's half-unconscious explanation.

And the apothecary's boy reiterated, with an astonished look, —

"Elizabeth Quackenboss."

"It is the daughter of your master, boy. —The betrayed daughter of your master, who—who——"

The humane Francis hesitated.

“Disappeared?” asked the policeman, suggestively.

“No; worse than that! She was driven from his own doors—driven forth into the street.”

“What! with her child, too?” inquired the officer.

“No; not with her babe,” said Clinton, sorrowfully, shaking his head.

“Ah! I understand, it had not yet seen the light.”

Again Clinton answered, —

“The infant was born—but born dead, I have been informed. The mother never saw the child.”

‘Ah, a still-born child! And this, then, was not long ago.”

“On the contrary, it was fifteen years since, I think. You probably judge from my own age, sir, of the date of that dark transaction. But I heard of it in my boyhood; for the seduced girl’s father was an elder in my step-father’s congregation, in which it created so great a scandal, that there were even some steps taken toward the expulsion of the doctor from the church, for his unnatural severity to his poor daughter, who has never once been heard of, till this night’s discovery brought her to light.”

“A singular disclosure, indeed,” rejoined the policeman. “I do not remember ever to have met with a case in which the bend of an over-ruling Providence seemed so clearly manifest. Her own father! —and such a meeting!”

“But there is one thing we all seem to have forgotten!”

“Which is?” said Clinton.

“This strange discovery, and the doctor’s flight, have completely disarranged our well laid plot.”

“And made our artifice no longer practicable—true!” was the chagrined response of Clinton.

This disagreeable conviction had already been stealing over the young man’s mind. But how was the evil to be repaired, and the threatened failure of their plans averted?

Suddenly Clinton was convinced that a happy expedient had occurred to him; and his only wonder was, that it had not struck him before.

Instantly did he propose this new idea to his ally, the policeman; but, to his surprise and great disappointment, the reply of the latter was, —

“That is even more hazardous.”

Clinton, annoyed, demanded an explanation.

“The reason is clear enough, sir. To offer them money, as you propose—to suffer them not only to suspect, but certainly to know, your purse is so well supplied, would sign your death-warrant.”

“Sir, you exaggerate.”

“Far from it. I even doubt if I have painted the risk in colors sufficiently strong. No, no,” continued he, “I have a better plan to propose. We must put off the rescue till tomorrow night, and to-morrow night we will come with a band of the police, sufficiently strong in numbers to overpower all opposition and bear the prisoner off.”

“So be it, then; but I will not again be balked!” was the reluctantly acquiescent, but resolute reply. “Stop! what is that the old ogress says?”

The sound of a brutal laugh, and the beldame’s voice had caused the query so abruptly made.

Mark instantly replied, —

The old woman was saying she guessed the girl would come to herself by breakfast-time, at all events, if she didn’t do to afore; she never knowed a young lady yet that didn’t come out of a fainting fit with a. galloping appetite.”

“Now, then, we will go—to prepare for the final blow,” said Clinton.

He called to the ogress. She answered the summons.

Placing two pieces of gold in her hand, he told her, that owing to what had occurred, he and his party should not remain, as originally proposed, but would come again on the following night.

They were going now, as he laughingly assured her, to look after their runaway friend, the fugitive doctor, and see what had become of him.

The greedy ogress accepted the gold and the excuse, which seemed natural enough to her, after what had occurred; and her gray eyes gleamed with delighted avarice at the twice-repeated assurance that her visitors would call again, without fail, the very next night.

CHAPTER VIII. THE REGULAR VISITOR TO THE OGRES' DEN.

Cease we, for the present, to follow the further movements of our hero; and losing sight of him and his little party, remain we awhile longer at the ogres' den, where the hapless Elizabeth Quackenboss, the betrayed victim of the savage Broken-back, continued still a prisoner.

More dead than alive, not till long after morning dawned, did the ill-fated girl come forth from that terrible swoon. For hours she lay, striving to still the wild beatings of her heart, and half doubting if reason remained to her, after the stunning shock her mind had sustained.

For fifteen long, weary years she had not seen her unnatural parent; and thus to meet again the heartless father who had thrust her forth, like a dog, from his doors—forth from his sheltering roof, to starve, beg, die in the open streets, or to drag out a life of shame—oh! it was too terrible, it was maddening to dwell upon.

Second by second, and instant by instant, dwindled away, the long, long day. How endless is time for the wretched in-soul—how solemnly slow Time's billows roll.

Twice during the day, the ogress brought the captive her meals, —at breakfast and dinner time. But untasted they had remained; and when the supper hour arrived, still she felt no appetite.

The third time, however, the ogress did not retire, immediately and silently, as she had done twice before; but setting it down in the usual place, the old woman, instead of leaving her again to her solitude, crossed her bony arms over her shrunken breast, and fixed a pair of squinting eyes upon her poor prisoner; who, not hearing the expected sound of her retreating footsteps, looked up anxiously.

Instantly upon perceiving that she had thus succeeded in attracting attention, the virago cried out, —

"Oh! you're improving. I see—improving quite fast. Well, it's time, high time you did—for night's almost come again, and you've got to prepare for your visitor, miss, and the sooner you pluck up courage, 'twill be the better for you."

"My visitor!" faintly repeated Elizabeth, slightly shivering.

"To be sure! My reg'lar customer is to be here to-night, to make you a visit for the first time. Didn't I tell you? Yes, I did. —You've got to be cured of them sulks just as quick as possible, miss; and so I'm going to let you have the honor of entertaining him, my dear."

"Mrs. Martin—woman!" gasped Elizabeth, unconsciously interrupting her; "you must—must spare me this! I will not, after the sacred vow that I have made, once more steep my soul in guilt."

"What!" snarled the hag, "I don't understand such high-flown talk. Speak plain English, when you talk to me."

But the wretched Elizabeth was not to be deterred, —

“Hear me! —you *shall* hear me, woman. I have sworn a solemn oath,” she cried, “and I will keep it. I will sooner die than return to the hateful course of life I have led for fifteen years. “Visitors!” she shrieked, “visitors! I will never receive them again—never, so help me God! though you keep me powerless here.”

“Hoity, toity!” broke in the hag.

“You shall not tyrannise over me thus, I say. I will go from this house this instant—and prevent me if you dare!”

“You’ll go when you pay for three weeks’ board, afore you do it, I guess,” chuckled the old woman.

“No, I will not! I have not the means—I have not the money. I had enough to pay you twenty times over, but I have lost it all. Take my trunks—my baggage—my wardrobe—all! but let me go! All I ask is liberty!”

“And liberty’s what you can’t have, till I get what’s coming to me,” was the determined reply.

“You have a right to keep my baggage, heartless woman—but you have no right to hold my body.”

“Might makes right, miss,” chuckled the hag; that’s a lesson we larn, all the world over.”

The next moment the ogress had bustled out of the room.

The sound of several voices were then heard below, one of which Elizabeth thought she knew.

The ogress came back again.

“It’s not him; it’s not the reg’lar visitor.— But he won’t be long. He’ll soon be here—no fear of that.”

Elizabeth silently thanked God for the brief reprieve; then, recollecting the familiar sound of the voices, she hastily asked, —

“Who was it, then, Mrs. Martin?”

“Oh, only the young gentleman as came with your father, last night.”

“Who came with my father! Who was with him this time?” eagerly asked the druggist’s daughter.

“The policeman who is showing him ‘the elephant.’ and the boy who is his servant, I suppose.”

“No one else?”

“Not a soul, my dear.”

Elizabeth sighed. She had a faint hope that her unnatural parent might have taken compassion on her and returned to reclaim his daughter, whom he had so strangely met. Vain hope!

“Remember! be ready for the other gentlemen, miss, when he comes.”

This was said with significance, and the hated ogress retired.

For some moments the druggist’s daughter continued to hear the voices below, two of which now appeared as strangely familiar as one, in the first place, had seemed; and

presently she distinguished footsteps ascending from the lower floor, mingling with the shuffling tread of the ogress, and passing along down the entry, before her own door, in their way.

Aware that the ogress had locked the door, as usual, on retiring, Elizabeth started up, and running to it, placed her eye at the keyhole.

What was her astonishment on perceiving the lips of some person, at the same moment pressed to the orifice—while she distinctly heard her own name pronounced, in a soft whisper, —

"Lizzie! Lizzie!"

In a low whisper, equally as cautious, she replied, —

"What? Who is there!"

"Look down—on the floor!" was the breathless response.

Through the keyhole she now saw the light figure of Mark quickly gliding away.

In utter amazement, and half in incredulity, her eyes turned to the floor, to which her attention had thus been directed. A slip of paper had been pushed stealthily under the door.

With a smothered cry she caught up the note.

Volumes it spoke, though it contained only these few words, —

> "Courage! Caution. You have friends. They are near—they are here, ready to rescue you. Be cautious and patient! act precisely as you would have done, had you not received one encouraging word from us. The ogres must not suspect—but the ogres' den is surrounded by half-a-score of policemen, awaiting the signal of surprise. Caution Elizabeth! —caution!"

The druggist's daughter drew back—sank on her knees—clasped her hands, wild with joy and gratitude She dared to bless Divine Providence, for she believed the blessing of Providence was returning to her again.

Never for an instant, during one whole hour, did she cease to pray.

At the end of that hour, the key was heard in the lock, and the door opened—the ogress had returned.

"The time's come, my lady," was the grinning announcement. "The gentleman is here!"

Elizabeth started up—her resolution instantly formed.

"You are resolved I shall receive him, then, Mrs. Martin! I am ready!":

"That's right, my dear," said the old women, approvingly. "It'll be your own fault if you don't make enough out of him to square all accounts between us."

The old women paused, half a moment at the door, by which she was about to take her departure, for the last time; and with an attempt at a good-humored grin, which only made her ugliness appear the more revolting, she said, just at she went out,—

"I told you this visit was something of a 'onor, and so, to be sure, it is. The gentleman is a Reverend."

"A what?"

"A parson—a minister."

The ogress was gone.

"A minister!"

The accursed door re-opened, and the regular visitor to the ogres' den came alone into the chamber of the druggist's courtezan-child.

The eyes of the man and woman met.

What made the two pause—look—recoil—utter simultaneous cries, and stand, as if nailed to the floor?

"Newton! Newton Mathews!"

"Elizabeth!"

"Good God! my seducer!"

Then silence reigned through the room—silence deeper than death, more solemn than solitude. And then, again, the same low exclamation, redolent of terrible meaning and soul stunning mystery, —

"Elizabeth!"

"Seducer!"

CHAPTER IX. THE APOTHECARY'S GRANDSON.

Arrested, as if by a withering thunderbolt, the old man and the young women, the preacher and the courtezan, continued, like two basilisks, to gaze upon each other, as human beings gaze but once in a lifetime.—They did not move—they did not speak, while full five minutes passed away. It seemed as if words were no adequate vehicle to convey the rush of thought, the wild convulsion of soul which gleamed from their staring eyes.

At length this awful pause was broken by the voice of Elizabeth.

The ruined woman took one slow step forward, and stopped, with folded arms, in front of the minister, whose eyes cowered before her own, and whose cheek was reddened with flushes.

She spoke in a voice perfectly calm, —

"Newton Mathews, yesterday I met my father; to-day I encounter you."

"Elizabeth!"

"You to whom I have been a stranger for almost as long a time. You, to whom I owe it that I was ever driven forth to a life of shame—thrust, for ever, from my father's door."

"Elizabeth!"

"Elizabeth! yes, that is the name I bore; the innocent name which, with virtue and purity, the poor girl once possessed, who now stands here, forever ruined and lost. All your work, sir."

"Elizabeth!"

"You call me Elizabeth— it was, once, 'dear Elizabeth!' But that," said the girl, with a wild, strange laugh, "was before I was betrayed—body and soul betrayed."

And still, all the clergyman could trust himself to repeat was, —

"Elizabeth!"

And now, with a voice of irony, she echoed again the name he had pronounced so often, —

"Ay, sir, *here* you have met that Elizabeth—face to face once more. Well, sir; does not the sight of her wither you? Yes, a strange rencontre, and a stranger scene for it here! The pious pastor! the Rev. Newton Mathews, a frequenter of such a haunt as this—a visitor to a brothel!"

"Elizabeth! Elizabeth!"

Cowed, crushed by her mad sarcasms, the preacher stood, like a convicted culprit, before her, utterly unable to articulate any other words than those.

"Ha, ha! a regular visitor to a brothel! —But why should I be surprised? Why wonder at all at that? Was you not a minister when Elizabeth fell from purity?"

And Mathews shuddered at the wild satire of her mocking laughter—the true mockery of merriment.

"Elizabeth,"—and his voice was broken and husky— "have you long been here? Why have we not met before!"

"No, I have not been here three weeks, or we should have met before, since you are a regular customer."

She paused as she sardonically emphasized the biting words.

"God knows," she continued, "since the dark days when you, Newton Mathews, lost me my home, little rest for the sole of my foot has there been. From house to house, and from place to place—until, at last, I am here."

The coward preacher made a strong effort to command himself, and tremulously replied, —

"You shall stop here no longer, Elizabeth; I will take you away forever; you shall leave this horrid place."

"I will not go with you, sir."

The bold, resolute answer took Mathews completely by surprise.

"Not go with me, when I propose to remove you to a comfortale [*sic*] home—a home you may call all your own? Elizabeth, you are mad!"

"I was mad when I first became your victim—mad, then, and only then! No, sir; I will not go with you. First, because I despise, hate, loathe, detest you."

"Elizabeth!"

"Secondly, because I have found other and better friends; friends who have never deserted me, like the father who drove me from his roof, like the reverend hypocrite who betrayed and ruined me."

"Other and better friends?"

"Yes, tried and proved—small claim as I have on them."

"These new friends—who are they?"

"That matters not,sir. I prefer to trust myself to them, sooner than return again to the protection of the priestly hypocrite to whom I owe all my misery. And do not think, Newton Mathews, that the poor, betrayed Elizabeth, cannot penetrate your motives."

"My motives!"

"Your selfish, base motives, sir. They are plain enough to me. You tremble at the thought of discovery; you fear to be exposed."

The preacher grew pale—the preacher started.

"Exposed!" he cried, haughtily.

The girl turned upon him her former sarcastic smile, doubly withering, and in the same cutting tone replied, —

"Exposure, sir—shame and disgrace; these are what you dread. You know that I have it in my power to blast your fair character, and hurl you headlong from the pulpit which you have dishonored so long——"

"Elizabeth, stop!"

"Not yet; not till I have done. You know that it rests with me to declare one damning truth that, once avowed, would crush you to the earth. You know that with me it lies, to

declare to a startled world that you, you, a minister, a man of God, are the seducer of Elizabeth Quackenboss—not a miserable sea-man, as hundreds have supposed."

"Stop, stop! for God's sake, Elizabeth! you may be heard! Hark! what was that?" he cried.

A sound, like a scuffle, was heard below, as he spoke. The noise continued for a moment; then the seeming fall of several heavy bodies was followed by a silence which was broken only by the echo of men's steps along the passages below.

"What was that, Elizabeth? What was that?" repeated the frightened minister, in his alarm.

"I know not, and care not, Newton Mathews—would that it were some one coming to witness your shame!" was the young woman's bold reply.

"Yes, shrink and quail; well you may! —Coward, who had not manhood enough to bear the dark consequences of your own black guilt. Coward, that fixed on another, the crime you committed yourself! Coward, that saved your own reputation, by proclaiming the low-lived Jack Standish the seducer of your parishioner's daughter, whom you had ruined, yourself! hypocrite!"

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Man—had you any mercy for me? —It is mercy you ask! Well, Sir, I had mercy on you once—but that was when I loved you, traitor, when I loved too well to inflict disgrace; when I willingly, weakly yielded to your entreaties, and consented that the coarse sailor, the rude Jack Standish, should be thought, by all, the seducer of my father's child!"

"Your *father* consented to it. He too, was a party to the—the deception,". stammered the priestly betrayer.

"He, was! HE WAS do you say?" exclaimed the girl—struck by an electric shock. HE a party to the deception I believed confined to ourselves? —and yet drove me forth from his roof! O God!" cried the wretched girl, striking her hands together, "what a father Thou gavest me!"

"Be calm, be composed, Elisabeth," cried the preacher, agitatedly, "I think I hear foot- steps coming.",

"Let them come, Newton Mathews, let them come. Hypocrite! villain, they shall learn your whole infamy."

"For Heaven's sake——"

"Entreat me not, serpent! I will tell all!" cried the frantic woman, so foully and darkly wronged.

In an agony the preacher groaned, —

"If not for my sake—if not for the sake of Heaven, then, at least, let it be for the sake of our child!"

"Our child!"

"Our child, Elisabeth."

"Mad! you are mad! Our child is dead."

"No, it is not dead!"

"Madman! our baby was still-born."

"Elisabeth, it was a living babe."

"*Living!*" screamed the mother. "Living! you tell me so! But no, you are raving; fear has driven you wild."

"Elisabeth, I am sane; it is you that are deceived."

"*Deceived!* who deceived me, Newton? My own father told me the child came dead into this world of woe."

"He lied—he lied! your own father lied! You believed your infant to be still-born, but the boy is this day alive."

"Alive—a boy—deceived!"

The words were repeated slowly, painfully, incoherently, as though to comprehend their full import was next to impossible.

The paramour-priest stood guiltily surveying her, marking the effects of his stunning revelation.

The soul-stunned woman—the wonder-struck mother, returned, vacantly, his coward-gaze. But, at last, the brightest light of intelligence—the red flash of the mind's electric spark darted over her countenance and gleamed from her throbbing eye.

"Newton!"

The preacher started.

"Newton!"

"Elizabeth!"

"Where is the boy?"

"Living, and in the city."

"In the city! Where?"

A sudden hesitation came over the clergyman, a reluctance to answer, which had not been visible in his previous apprehensive haste to propitiate the injured woman whose vengeance he dreaded.

Impatient of his dilatoriness, full of the most thrilling suspense, the trembling mother could wait no longer. Imperiously she demanded his answer.

While, as reluctantly he was giving it—while he was yet speaking the broken, quick words in which it was couched—while he was yet saying,—"In Murray street, in the drug-shop of his own——" the door behind him opened silently, and Francis Clinton stepped noiselessly into the room, followed by Mark, alone!

CHAPTER X. THE FIFTH WIFE.

Behind his step-father, unseen and unnoticed by him, the young men advanced into the room, the lad treading softly in his footsteps; while both overheard the last disclosure of the guilty clergyman, —

"In Murray-street—in the drug store of *his own grandfather*, the boy, Mark, is to be found."

At these words, so unexpectedly affecting himself, the apothecary's apprentice stopped with such an abrupt start as to very nearly call the attention of the two previous occupants of the room, even had he not, in the height of his amazement, given loud utterance to the astonished exclamation,

"'Lihu Quackenboss my grandfather."

The wonder-stricken ejaculation was, however, an unfailing clue to a mother's ear and a mother's heart.

Elizabeth stood one moment in frantic uncertainty, then, with the maternal instinct triumphant over every feeling of doubt and hesitancy she sprang forward, caught the young lad to her heart, and with her arms tightly clasped around his neck, she sobbed aloud—

"My boy! —my child! —my son!"

At the same instant, the already startled clergyman felt a touch laid upon his arm.

What language could describe the confusion, the shame, the misery, the utter humiliation of that man when, turning, he beheld at his side the well known form of his young step-son?

"Mr. Mathews!"

The minister's face flushed painfully. It was the first time his step-son had ever called him by that name.

"Mr. Mathews, I know all—understand all—have heard every word that has passed. I have no reproaches to make; I do not come for the purpose of criminating or recriminating upon you. The discovery of your depravity I have made; the guilt, the remorse, the turpitude, and the atonement—yes, the *atonement*, exclusively your own."

"The *atonement!*" repeated the minister.

"Yes, Mr. Mathews, the atonement which you have now to make—the reparation which it becomes your duty to render, and mine to force you to."

"What reparation? what atonement?" stammered the guilty man.

"Answer me two questions, and then I will tell you. sir! Is *that* the hapless woman, whose seducer you were? Is *this* the poor boy whose natural father you are?"

With a wild eye did the thunderstruck boy, Mark—his intellects ever quick, and now sharpened almost preternaturally—watch the effect of these interrogatories upon the face of the recreant minister—watch the very movement of his coward lips, as they faltered a trembling—"*Yes!*"

"Yes!" repealed the boy, with a stifled shout; "mother! father! —mother!"

It was all he said, but his young arms, too, were convulsively flung round the neck of that mother, who, again and again, had tenderly embraced her bewildered and new found child.

But the guilty man's step-son had not yet done!

"You acknowledge them, then, for your ruined victim and your illegitimate child, Mr. Mathews?"

"I do!"

Prevarication was useless; the convicted hypocrite realized it too well.

"Then," said Francis Clinton, slowly and deliberately, "all that now remains for you to do, as the only means of making peace with a foully-offended God, is to legitimatize that poor child and make that ruined victim your wife!"

"*Marry her!* acknowledge him!"

"You can take your choice, sir, make your own election, sir! *Refuse*—and I expose you—expose you in all your hideous hypocricy, in all your secret depravity; make you the scoff of community, an object of scorn and contempt to all good and honorable men; hurl you headlong from the sacred place you have so long disgraced, and cover your grey hairs with merited infamy. Choose, sir—choose!"

"Let me think of this! let me think of this," groaned thee retribution-overtaken minister.

The speaker turned, quivering aside, and hid his face in his hands, which he pressed against his throbbing temples, as if he felt the brain slowly slitting within.

"Think of it, then! I will give you ten minutes, sir," was the inexorable reply. "In the meanwhile I shall send for a magistrate."

"To arrest me!" shrieked the affrighted minister.

Sarcastically smiled the step-son.

"No; to perform the ceremony."

As he was leaving the room, he turned one quick glance on the minister, saying, in his firm and determined tones, —

"Think of it, sir—and think of the consequences!"

But before his foot had left the threshold, the guilty priest staggered forward, and groaned. —

"*I consent! I consent!*"

"Prepare, then—await me."

He was gone.

To the strange group in the chamber, son, mother, father, what must have been the whirlwind of feeling, the agony of sensations, which crowded on their hearts while awaiting that eventful return.

A silence like that of the sepulchre reigned in the dread room; neither father, son, nor mother, dared trust themselves to speak; the minutes passed tike hours, till the expected comers appeared.

The ceremony was performed!

The four times widowed minister had wedded his fifth wife—the woman he had wronged so deeply, fifteen years before!

The young stepson stood calmly by, and thought, — "Was not this a strange retribution!"

The selfsame thought was in the heart of the minister.

And now the avenging step-son spoke again, —

"Elizabeth! you are the wife of Newton Mathews. Boy, you are his acknowledged son. And now, Newton Mathews, one last word to you, —Resign your ministry—leave New York, forever! and no infamy shall fall upon your name—your guilt shall be buried in oblivion. Go!"

"Francis!"

"Go, sir! go! Beware and quit New York forever."

The crushed and confounded coward slunk silently away.

Elizabeth, with her young boy's hand in hers, approached the extraordinary young man, to whom they both owed so much, and looked up into his noble features, earnestly and inquiringly.

He replied to her silent but speaking interrogatories by laying his hand lightly and kindly on the wondering urchin's head, and calmly adding, —

"I have given this boy a father and you a husband—in name, at least. Let it prove to you that an ever merciful Providence smiles, not frowns, upon the penitent! and that it is never too late to turn back again to God, however you may have wandered from his blessed care."

The mother of Mark bent down to kiss the hand of their generous young benefactor, murmuring, with an overflowing heart. —

"Noble, noble young man, we owe you a debt we can never hope to repay."

"There is one way in which you, too, can confer obligation. All I ask in return, is, that this marriage which has taken place, this marriage between my step-father and yourself, may remain a secret one; your own sense of propriety will inform you why."

"I had already anticipated your desire, sir," replied the grateful woman, earnestly. "I fully comprehend the noble feeling of justice which prompted you to this singular sacrifice—believe me sir, a secret from all the world I will ever hold it; the hidden knowledge that I am a wedded wife will be consolation and happiness enough to me, in the society of my poor dear hoy, who shall bless your name each night in his prayers. God bless you, sir."

The deeply affected Clinton could scarcely conceal his emotion, as he added, —

"As for you or your child, you shall never know want or suffering in future, while Heaven continues the wealth I now possess. I will find a home of your own for you both. I shall not lose sight of you. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime?" repeated Mark's mother, eagerly.

“In the meantime the police have fully disposed of your enemies, and you are now free to depart from the ogres’ den.”

Francis Clinton, Mark, and his mother, together took their way from the room, the theatre of such strange discoveries.

* * * * *

“And now,” said our hero, after he had seen mother and son in a place of safety, now for my own dear Alice!”

CHAPTER XI. BROKEN-BACK.

Fatal, fatal night! how much of mystery and evil dost thou hide beneath the cloak of darkness!

Again the vampires were haunting the solemn scene of their dreadful labors; again the cholera-fiends were at work!

Dark, sombre, gloomy as was the place, full as dark, sombre, gloomy, was the hour. A terrible storm was raging—the lightnings were incessant—the thunder prolonged, deafening and continuous. It was a fitting time for such a scene and such an occupation.

Engaged, as once before we have seen them, were Broken back mid the quack-doctor, at work on the iron doors, with screwdriver, chisel, and keys; but, though their former co-operator, the clergyman, was present in the cemetery, also, yet, on this occasion, his employment was no longer the same.

While his two associates continued to attack the locks and hinges of the massive tombs, observing the same precautions and proceeding in the same manner as on the former occasion; the preacher, on the contrary, was occupied in a task which, though different, was set in perfect keeping with the character of that peculiar employment.

With a long, sharp spade, the minister was busied in what at first sight appeared to be the digging of a grave; but which, on closer inspection, proved to be an operation directly the reverse of this.

In fact, he was actively removing the piled-up earth from the surface of an old grave, and emptying the pit, as if for the purpose of disinterring the buried body which lay beneath the grass-grown sod. This he was doing, with an eagerness and an energy which, while it rapidly forwarded his endeavors, promised to fatigue him greatly, if the task were not soon completed.

So intent was he upon his object, that he took no notice of the hunchback and the apothecary, who occasionally paused a moment from their own labors, to look at their companion, as he perseveringly plied his spade. But by a certain expression upon the faces of the other two, whenever they thus turned to watch his progress, it was plain that his present movements afforded matter of some wonder and curiosity, if not of actual surprise, to those who witnessed them.

Finally, Quackenboss, as he disengaged his crowbar from a refractory hinge which had broken off a fragment of the tool, said in a low voice to Broken-back:

"What is the parson about? I can't understand what he is doing?"

"Unearthing a coffin, I should say," replied the hunchback, drily.

This answer did not exactly suit the enquirer, who rejoined:

"Why, yes. that's evident enough, and no questions asked. But what he's after at the bottom of the grave, is more than I've any idea of. Do you know. Broken back, I fancy something has occurred to-night that has played the devil with the man's wits. He's not like himself, somehow; in fact, I believe the fellow is mad."

Broken-back eyed the speaker sneeringly.

"Mad! I wonder if it ain't sorrow that made him so— sorrow, perhaps, for his four dead wives!" he said, ironically. "You know, of course, this is the burial ground where the four wives of Mathews' are interred."

The druggist gave a start of recollection, and instantly answered,

"True, their family vault is here. I had forgotten it. That is it yonder!" and he pointed, with his crowbar, to one of the most stately of the marble sepulchres.

Broken-back had unlocked the door of the tomb in question, by means of his skeleton keys, not fifteen minutes before. The hunchback marked it narrowly, as if to fix its identity in his mind; and then, his eyes still rivetted upon it, he said, sarcastically, —

"So, there lie Mrs. Mathews, Numbers one, two, three, and four."

"No, not No. three. Not No. three—that is the mother of young Clinton—*she* does not lie there."

"Oh, the one that died or the Cholera in 1832. But why did not they put *her* in the family-vault, along with the others?"

The doctor's reply to this question was lost in a peal of thunder that echoed over their heads; and he was compelled to repeat his answer, —

He reiterated with a low laugh. "Why, because she, you know, was buried alive, and there was more danger of discovery of the cheat, in a tomb, than in a grave. So, to a *grave* her coffin went."

"A grave! hey?" said Broken-back, quickly. "How do you know but that grave was the very one that Mathews is digging at, there? I should think he was trying to get a sight of his wife's coffin!"

A [--ing] rattling clap of thunder drowned any [------] response which the druggist might have made, but by the expression of the two man's eyes, as they were turned toward each other, it was evident that a startling idea had struck them both, at one and the same time.

Was this the grave of the murdered mother of Francis Clinton—the unfortunate lady who had been buried alive? and was the guilty husband now disinterring her coffin from its subterranean receptacle, to assure himself, after the lapse of seventeen years, that the wretched woman's fleshless bones were still the tenants of that narrow pit, to which his inhuman [------- ----] had consigned her, living.

It was a wild, thrilling thought—even to those depraved spirits there, his coadjutors in wickedness; and both exchanging intelligent glances, advanced quickly, but silently and stealthily, behind the wholly pre-occupied preacher; Quackenboss retaining in his grasp the heavy iron crowbar with which he had been employed, but throwing it over his shoulder, like a soldier's musket in rest, so that it should not impede his rapid movements, as they approached the minister.

The head and shoulders of the minister only were visible above the level of the pit, from which the grave-digger was throwing up shovel-full after shovel-full of the loosened soil he was so busily removing.

The excavated earth lay in two huge piles, on each side of the narrow grave, in the bottom of which the toiling preacher stood.

It was evident, from the little that could be seen of his person, that he had dug down the distance of three of four feet; and Broken-back made a sign of caution to the doctor.

"Keep back! Keep back—he must have got at the coffin by this time!"

Quackenboss, with the crowbar over his shoulder, stopped, accordingly; and as if to verify the prediction of the hunchback, the grave-digger ceased to fling up the earth with his spade, and, after pausing to rest a moment, was seen to lift the shovel up endways and dash it down with both hands, toward the bottom of the grave.

The harsh, snapping sound of breaking wood, was distinctly heard.

Broken back hoarsely whispered, —

"Hark! he is breaking open the coffin!"

"Is he?" muttered Quackenboss, still grasping the heavy iron implement which trailed over his shoulder, 'then, it's a great pity be hadn't this crowbar of mine."

"Hist!" muttered Broken-back, fiercely, "hear what he's saying!"

A deep, shaking voice was heard murmuring, from the depths of the grave, in the quivering tones of conscience-stricken guilt:

"It was so—it is so! Turned in her coffin, before she died!"

And clambering slowly out of the grave, the late grave-digger regained the level ground, and stood beside the narrow opening, gazing with looks of guilty horror down into the pit.

Broken-back beckoned expressively to the apothecary, and they both drew several paces nearer; the outcast with his distorted neck thrust forward, to obtain a view of the interior of the grave; and Quackenboss, imitating the movement, with such eager curiosity that he unintentionally suffered the butt end of his crowbar to come in contact with the head of the hunchback, inflicting only a slight blow, which, however, nearly made him stumble against the person of the unconscious grave-digger.

Broken-back started aside from the heavy implement, and turned to vent a curse on the bungling hand which held it. Just as he wheeled round upon Quickenboss, (who in his confusion held the offending crowbar bolt upright above his shoulder,) the most terrific crash of thunder to which the storm had yet given birth, dashed the tempest-clouds asunder, and the whole groaning firmament echoed to its awful reverberating roar.

But a long, lurid, dazzling sheet of electric flame had preceded that thunderburst; a vivid gush of zig-zag fire which shot adown the quivering sky,—hovered an instant over the silent and gloomy cemetery,—then, like a serpent darting on its prey, swiftly settled on the upright point of the poised crowbar!

A single second a ball of whitest, flame gleamed on the iron apex of the heavy implement which the doomed druggist held, —there was a soul-harrowing screech—a dull, falling sound—a blood curdling groan!

The quack-doctor had been struck by lightning—the blasted man lay a horrid, mangled object, shattered to pieces, at the feet of Broken back!

That superhuman yell—that marrow-freezing moan, caused the terrified grave-digger to turn in wild affright.

His eyes encountered the horrible sight!

But another sight no less horrible he did not see.

That other, was the distorted foot of the hunchback-dwarf, which was suddenly interposed before him, and two outstretched arms, which dashed him violently backward—backward over the open pit which yawned behind the minister-grave-digger!

The appalled preacher staggered on the brink of the gaping gulf—clutched at empty air, in the effect to save himself, and fell headlong back into the violated grave of his murdered wife!

CHAPTER XII. THE DOOM OF THE CHOLERA FIEND.

Broken-Back springing astride the grave, seized the fallen spade and deliberately commenced throwing the heaped-up earth into the excavation in which the clergy-man had disappeared!

Already had he pitched three successive shovels-full of the loose, clayey soil into the narrow pit, when the face of the minister was upreared from the bottom of the hollow—his eyes starting from their sockets with amazement and stupefied affright.

It was but a moment that his countenance was thus visible; Broken-back heaped a fourth spade full directly upon the minister's face.

Horror-struck, the miserable man shook the earth from his head, and glared up at the deformed astride of the grave, like a man who believes his senses were taking leave of him; like one who thinks himself the victim of a horrible nightmare.

He strove to articulate some incoherent words, but a shower of earth rained upon his head and down his throat, nearly strangling him!

He made one desperate effort to raise himself up from the depths of the pit, but the hunchback, dropping, spade-in-hand, into the grave, jumped upon his breast!

"Almighty God of Heaven!" he groaned, "Fiend! hellhound! do you mean to bury me alive?"

A burst of infernal laughter replied to the fearful question.

"Yes; *alive*, Newton Mathews! I *do* mean to bury you alive! So perished the third wife of your bosom—so perish you!"

A shriek came up from the depths of the grave.

"Heaven and hell! tiger, fiend, hunchback! what have I done to you? —why do you murder me thus?"

The deformed dwarf stayed, midway in its descent, the heaped shovel-load which he was about to dash into the very eyes of the prostrate wretch, and holding it suspended above the devoted head beneath, the hideous cast of his countenance assumed an expression actually demoniac as he paused to reply, in tones fearfully sinister:

"Newton Mathews, you wish me to tell you why I am going to murder you thus? Newton Mathews, I have two of the beat reasons in the world."

"Oh, God! what are they?"

"Interest and revenge! Interest,—for the lightnings of heaven or the flames of hell have already rid me of one accomplice, who knew my crimes and could prove them against me; and interest demands that I should, by my own act, remove the only other living evidence that yet remains."

"Oh, let me live! let me live! I will never, never turn against you!" groaned the wretched voice.

Still the inexorable tones replied, —

"You might—to save yourself. But infinitely stronger is my other motive; the motive of revenge."

"Revenge! Oh, no; not revenge on me! What has a wretsh [*sic*] like me ever done to provoke vengeance from such as you?"

Hissing and hoarse the voice replied, —

"I will tell you what you have done. You are the bitterest foe I ever had."

"I—! Oh, God!"

"My worst enemy on earth. You crossed me in the only gleam of human feeling I ever possessed. You thwarted me in the only honest hope I ever formed. You came between me and the only human being I ever looked upon with anything else save hate in my heart!" furiously screamed the hunchback.

"You ruined the one I had set my soul on —you seduced the girl I loved—*loved* as only a hunchback *can*."

"I—I seduce the woman you loved!" wildly moaned the minister.

Hellishly gleamed the hunchback's hideous eye, as he said, —

"You! you, Newton Mathews, the clergyman. Body and soul you destroyed the girl, and then laid the foul guilt to my charge!—Pitiful coward, do you wonder now that I hate you with a devil's hate? that I will have a devil's revenge on you?"

Writhing, like a crushed worm, in his agony, the doomed wretch groaned, despairingly. —

"My God! be merciful! Devil, fiend, who, who are you?"

"I am——*Jack Standish, the sailor!*"

The hunchback howled the words.

With a shrill cry the thunderstruck, horror-chilled man dropped his upraised head—but his eyes glared wide open, with fearful, stony stare.

"Jack Standish, the sailor—I am he. And it is he that will murder you—HE that will bury you alive!"

With the strength of a tiger he shook the suspended shovel. Its impending load of earth and gravel descended upon the naked eye-balls of the miserable minister, blinding and agonizing him.

In the ecstacy of desperation, the tortured man caught at the fatal spade and clung to it. One furious wrench freed it from his despairing clutch; the spade was whirled for an instant aloft, and then came crashing down upon the miserable wretch's quivering skull!

Broken-back looked a moment at the blood-stained head and the stiffening limbs; and then, at one leap, bounded from the grave—thus turned into a double one!

The spade he still firmly grasped, and making rapid use of, it, he threw shovelfull after shovelfull of the exavated [*sic*] earth back into the pit, which, in three minutes' time, he had completely filled up with the loose sand and gravel—the minister beneath it all!

CHAPTER XIII. THE AWFUL RETRIBUTION.

Ceasing, then, the hunchback flung down the spade and looked grimly around him—The Shovel fell across the lightning-tattered body of the dead doctor, and the noise made him turn his eye to it.

"I must dispose of this, too," hoarsely he muttered. "It will never do to leave this carrion here."

The hunchback's terrible eye roamed round the silent cemetery—now a place of death, indeed! At length it concentrated all its intelligence upon a single object.

That object was a stately tomb; and that tomb was the family-vault of the Mathews race.

The key was in the wards—Broken-back had left it there, when he unlocked the charnel-house, as he had unlocked an hundred others.

The hunchback, smiling grimly, lifted the corpse of the mutilated druggist and bore it, in his distorted arms to the tomb.

He opened the iron door, with the key still in it, and putting it partially back, carried his burden across the threshold and proceeded to deposit it on the floor of the vault, within which darkness reigned.

At he disappeared in the interior, no suspicion crossed his mind of that which was transpiring behind his very back.

He did not see a long, trembling arm, with bony hand and quivering fingers, suddenly appear, inch by inch, above the surface of the filled-up grave I

He did not see a bleeding head, with matted gray hair and gory stains, painfully upheave the earth which covered it.

He did not see a fainting form slowly working its way through the pile of gravel and sand!

He did not see the haggard face rising out of the grave!

No, nor did he once dream that a weak and staggering, blood-stained human figure had left, like the risen phantom, its narrow pit, and, like a silent spectre, was gliding after him!

Why should he suspect that the deadly blow he had given had stunned, not killed; bruized, but not destroyed. Why suspect that insensibility had prevented his victim from suffocation beneath the fatal load; and desperation enabled the buried man to push his way up through the loose earth and the soft, yielding soil, which had been so hastily heaped upon him, three feet below the level of the ground?

What should the assassin know of this? — nothing! And, knowing nothing, the hunchback had entered the tomb!

He never came out again!

Leaving tracks of blood at every step, silent, stealthy as a spirit of the sepulchre, the arisen tenant of the grave stole on. He might have been mistaken for the shadow of the man he was following!

Broken-back had laid down the corpse on the stone floor of the darkened tomb, and was just preparing to turn upon his heel and quit the spacious sepulchre to which he had dragged the corpse, when, from an unseen hand, he received a sudden and violent impulse in the back, that sent him headlong forward into the tomb, prostrating him across the body of the mangled druggist.

Before the hunchback could leap up from his bruized knees, the ponderous iron door of the vault clanged to, with a rattling clash, and Broken-back distinctly heard the lock springing into its massive socket, before the strong pressure of the key he had left in the wards!

Like an ague-chill, like an earthquake shock, the terrible truth struck home to his hard heart. The unknown push, the closing door, the turning key—it was too awfully plain; he was imprisoned; in the toils; and, God of Heaven! what a prison!

Hell itself, in the hunchback's thoughts, was a thousand times to be preferred!

Gasping for breath in the fœtid atmosphere—to respire which was like inhaling fire—the horrified hunchback sprang to the tomb door, shook it, and dashed his feet and hands against it.

Those iron gates would have defied a dozen men!

He staggered back, faint as death—the horrible exhalations of the vault taking away his strength far more than his most exhausting exertions had done.

A deadly sickness came over him. The dreadful effluvia assailed him on every side, poisoning the very fountains of life. The blood in his veins swelling till they threatened to burst; his brain throbbing and reeling beneath his bristling hair, the stifling wretch staggered again to the pitiless door—not to repeat his efforts to break through its iron barrier—not to seek a second time to escape, but to press his parched lips to the key-hole of the marble vault!

Indescribably delicious was the breath of pure air he drew through the blessed crevice, sweeter than the Musselman's first night in the peri's paradise.

In this way, this way, only, could he escape from the pestilential atmosphere, —to breathe which was certain death.

But, alas! for him, —the unseen hand stopped up the orifice with clay, and the fatal key!

The pestiferous air, without an outlet, now encircled him —sickened him—maddened him!

Then a species of insanity seized upon him. He tore out his hair by handsfull; beat his breast till the blood followed his blows, and rushed round the tomb's confined space, like a famishing lion in his cage.

He dashed the mangled corpse of the druggist, in a paroxysm of fury, again and again, against the iron gate, till the blood and brains were sprinkled over him.

He howled, cursed, raved, and hurled himself repeatedly against the granite walls of his deathlike prison, that loathsome charnel-house!

At length these appalling cries ceased, and in their place, only low moans and groaning sighs issued from the fatal vault.

From outside the tomb, low, exulting laughs reached the ears of the dying hunchback.

Then the merciless minister, who had now taken so fearful a vengeance, bleeding and wounded, but triumphant over his attempted assasinator, dragged himself slowly from the cemetery, one of whose marble sepulchres had been made the prison and grave of the only remaining human being who could prove his his [*sic*] identity with the cholera-propagator of New York.

To fly from the city; to seek perfect safety in distance and flight, was now his only object. Away, away from the last resting-place of his four dead wives, the hypocrite preacher hastened, with what speed he might, in his wounded state.

Broken-back had horribly perished by suffocation, in the self-same pestilential atmosphere which he had brought, like the plagues of Egypt, upon the unsuspecting and devoted city, where raged the dread cholera in its wrath!

Inscrutible Providence! Inscrutible retribution. Thus miserably perished the *Cholera-Fiend!*

CHAPTER XIV. EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY.

A year has gone by, reader, since the date of the last chapter—and more than twelve months have rolled past, dating from that eventful first of May on which commenced this dark tale of the Pestilence and its mysteries, this terrible revelation of the Cholera and its Causes in 1849.

The Scourge has long since vanished from among us; but with the returning summer of 1850, is returning, also, the *dread* and the *season* of its re-appearance.

Thousands who shudder at the recollection of the horrors of the dread visitant of 1849, are looking forward with startled apprehension to the possible advent of the Asatic [*sic*] Stranger, during the present year!

Much has been suspected, but little ever really known, of the secret agency of the fiendish propagators and propogation [*sic*] of the pestilence. It has been reserved for us, in the foregoing pages, to faintly shadow forth the truth.

Should the fatal traveller, however, once more cross the wide ocean which separates us from the land of his Asiatic birth, and a third time, leave the fearful impress of his footsteps upon our shores and cities,—the keen-eyed ministers of the law will then, at least, turn a jealous and watchful eye upon the inhuman conspirators who conceive such infernal means to fan the flame, and add fuel to the fire.

But the reader of these pages has already been a witness of the awful retribution which had overtaken two, at least, of the horrible CHOLERA-FIENDS.

But one of the terrible trio remains, living, and at liberty.

This is the profligate priest, —the guilty clergyman, whose career of crime we have followed and marked. Compelled to fly from a deluded congregation and an outraged community, the *reverend husband of five wives* seeks a refuge in distant cities for his dishonored *grey-hairs*, there to pursue, a little while longer, the career of hypocricy and sin which the world now associates generally with his name, though a few infatuated followers of the fugitive-minister still blindly cling to the belief of his innocence, and call him a ‘persecuted man.”

Were we writing a mere romance, for the mere romance-reader’s amusement, we might easily have found some adequate retribution to be dealt out to the hoary hypocrite, whose full punishment has yet to come.

But the *Reverend Newton Mathews* is too true a character—and as such will be recognized—for us to deal in fictitious refinements. The sinner is left to his God. On Earth, or in Heaven, the account must one day be settled; and then —Woe to the last of the Cholera-fiends!

Happy is the contrast of Honor, Uprightness, Virtue, to the wickedness of this wicked world!

Clinton and Alice are married. The guilty minister's sister-in-law is now the honored wife of his step-son. The loveliness and innoce [*sic*] which priestly licentiousness remorselessly coveted, are now the sole treasures of our hero.

Alice Clinton has not yet ceased to mourn her sister's untimely fate, but it is the only cloud that rests on her happiness, and Grie[*sic*] is a cloud that the Sun of Time, ever brightens, gradually.

In his own, and his young wife's happiness, Francis Clinton has not, however, forgotten that of others.

Elizabeth and her son are now residing in Boston, with, a liberal allowance from their young benefactor; it having been thought best that they should remove from a city where the mother, at least, was too well known, to render her longer residence a happy one.

She has realized every hope of reform which Clinton had indulged for her; and the druggist's daughter adds another to the proofs, that even fallen woman may not be too utterly lost to seek, through Penitence, oblivion from the past, and tranquil trust in the future.—Shame on the stony-hearted philosophy that in cold blood could refuse it!

As it may regard our good friend, Mark, the common offspring of Elizabeth and the clergyman, the most convincing proof of his welfare that we could possibly give, is by assuring the reader that good-eating, good clothing, and good usage, and one year's time, have wonderfully improved his condition, and concerted him into a stout, well-grown boy of 15,—as mischievous and saucy as ever, and whose only matter of uneasiness and astonishment is,—

"How old 'Lihu Quackenboss can possibly make himself out his grand-father!"

As respects Mark's ebony acquaintance and *quondam butt*, Gumbo, the unlucky victim of so many direful maladies, it must be sufficient to say, by way of relieving all unnecessary apprehensions on his account, that though he miraculously recovered from his incipient attack of the 'Cholerum,' and has not yet fallen a prey to that sanguinary tape-worm, he nevertheless religiously persists in forswearing 'clam-soup,' particularly when seasoned with 'pepper-sauce,' which no persuasion wilt ever prevail upon him again to have anything more to do with.

The last time we had the distinguished honor of hearing from the gentleman in question, he was very busy masticating a mess of pigs' feet, in the kitchen along with old Dinah, and criticising one of 'DEACON SNOWDALL'S last sermons, divided into nineteen 'divisions,' and, one more, which makes—

THE END.