

The Doom Of Gautran

By

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CHAPTER I

ADELAIDE STRIVES TO PROPITIATE PIERRE LAMONT

The following night was even darker than the preceding one had been. In the afternoon portents of a coming storm were apparent in the sky. Low mutterings of thunder in the distance travelled faintly to the ears of the occupants of the House of White Shadows. The Advocate's wife shuddered as she heard the sounds.

"There are only two things in the world I am afraid of," she said to Pierre Lamont, "and those are thunder and lightning. When I was a little child a dreadful thing occurred to me. I was playing in a garden when a storm came on. I was all alone, and it was some distance to the house. The storm broke so suddenly that I had not time to reach shelter without getting myself drenched. I dare say, though, I should have run through it had I not been frightened by the flashes of lightning that seemed to want to cut me in two. I flew behind a tree, and stood there trembling. Every time a flash came I shut my eyes tight and screamed. But the storm did not allow my cries to be heard. You can imagine the state I was in. It would not have mattered, except for the wetting, had I kept my eyes closed, but like a little fool, I opened them once, and just at that moment a flash seemed to strike the tree behind which I stood. I can almost hear the shriek I gave, as I fell and fainted dead away. There, lying on the wet grass, I was found. A dreadful looking object I must have been! They carried me into the house, and when I was conscious of what was passing around me, I asked why they did not light the gas. The fact is I was quite blind, and remained so for several days. Was it not shocking? I shall never, never forget my fright. Can you imagine anything more dreadful than being struck blind? To be born blind cannot be half as bad, for one does not know what one loses never having seen the flowers, and the fields, and the beautiful skies. But to enjoy them, and then to lose them! It is altogether too horrible to think of."

She was very gracious to the old lawyer during the afternoon.

"Do you know," she said, "I can't quite make up my mind whether to be fond or frightened of you."

"Be fond of me," said Pierre Lamont, with a queer look.

"I shall see how you behave. I am afraid you are very clever. I don't like clever people, they are so suspicious, pretending to know everything always."

"I am very simple," said Pierre Lamont, laughing inwardly. He knew that she wanted to propitiate him; "and beauty can lead me by a silken thread."

"Is that another of your compliments? I declare, you speak as if you were a young man."

She did, indeed, desire to win Pierre Lamont entirely to her, and she would have endured much to make him her friend instead of her enemy. Christian Almer had told her that the old lawyer had slept in the next room to his, and she had set herself the task of sounding the old fellow to ascertain whether his suspicions were aroused, and whether she had anything to fear from him. She could not help saying to herself what a fool Mother Denisewho looked after the household arrangementswas to put him so close to Christian.

"I do believe," thought Adelaide, "that she did it to spite me."

Her mind, however, was quite at ease after chatting with the old lawyer.

"I am so glad we are friends," she said to him; "it is altogether so much nicer."

Pierre Lamont looked reproachfully at her, and asked how she could ever have supposed he was anything but her most devoted admirer.

"Lawyers are so fond of mischief," she replied, "that if it does not come to them readymade they manufacture it for themselves."

"I am no longer a lawyer," he said; "if I were twenty years younger I should call myself a lover."

"If you were twenty years younger," she rejoined gaily, "I should not sit and listen to your nonsense."

Being called from his side she turned and gave him an arch look.

"All that only makes the case stronger, my lady," he said inwardly. "You cannot deceive me with your wiles."

CHAPTER II

GAUTRAN SEEKS JOHN VANBRUGH

During the chief part of the day Gautran concealed himself in the woods. Twice had he ventured to present himself to his fellowcreatures. He was hungry, and in sore need of food, and he went to a wayside inn, and called for cold meat and bread and brandy.

"Can you pay for it?" asked the innkeeper suspiciously.

Gautran threw down a gold piece. The innkeeper took it, bit it, turned it over and over, rang it on the wooden table, and then set the food before Gautran.

The murderer ate ravenously; it was the first sufficient meal he had eaten for days. The innkeeper gave him his change, and he ordered more meat and brandy, and paid for them. While he was disposing of this, two men came up, eyed him, and passed into the inn; Gautran was eating at a little table in the open air.

Presently the innkeeper came out and looked at him; then the innkeeper's wife did the same; then other men and women came and cast wrathful glances upon him.

At first he was not conscious that he was being thus observed, he was so ravenously engaged; but his hunger being appeased, he raised his head, and saw seven or eight persons standing at a little distance from him, and all with their eyes fixed upon his face.

"What are you staring at?" he cried. "Did you never see a hungry man eat before?"

They did not answer him, but stood whispering among themselves.

The idea occurred to Gautran to take away with him a supply of food, and he called to the innkeeper to bring it to him. Instead of doing so, the innkeeper removed the plates and glasses in which the meal had been served. Having done this, he joined the group, and stood apart from Gautran, without addressing a word to him.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Gautran. "Are you deaf and dumb?"

"Neither deaf nor dumb," replied the innkeeper; "we hear you plain enough."

"Bring me the bread and meat, then," he said.

"Not another morsel," said the innkeeper. "Be off with you."

"When I get the food."

"You will get none here nor would you have had bite or sup if I had known."

"Known what?" demanded Gautran fiercely. "Is not my money as good as another man's?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because there is blood upon it."

If this did not convince him that his name was known and execrated, what next transpired would have enlightened him. The innkeeper's wife came out with a glass and two plates in her hands.

"Are these the things," she asked of her husband, "the monster has been eating out of?"

"Yes," replied the innkeeper.

She dashed them to the ground and shivered them to pieces, and the onlookers applauded the act.

"Why do you do that, Mistress?" cried Gautran.

"So that honest men shall not be poisoned," was the answer, "by eating out of a murderer's dish or putting their lips to a murderer's glass."

And the onlookers again applauded her, and kicked away the pieces.

Gautran glared at the men and women, and asked:

"Who do you take me for?"

"For Gautran. There is but one such monster. If you do not know your own face, look upon it there."

She pointed to the window, and there he beheld his own portrait, cut out of an illustrated newspaper, and beneath it his name "GAUTRAN," to which had been added, in writing, the words, "The Murderer of Madeline, the FlowerGirl."

He could not read the inscription, but he correctly divined its nature. The moment before he saw his portrait, it had entered his mind to deny himself; he recognised now how futile the attempt would be.

"What if I am Gautran?" he exclaimed. "Do you think the law would set me free if I was guilty?"

To which the innkeeper's wife replied:

"You have escaped by a quibble. You are a murderer, and you know yourself to be one."

"Mistress," he said, "if I had you alone I would make you smart."

"How does that sound, men?" cried the innkeeper's wife with excited gestures. "Is it the speech of an innocent man? He would like to get me alone. Yes, he got one poor girl alone, and we know what became of her. The coward! the murderer! Hunt him away, neighbours. It is a disgrace to look upon him."

They advanced towards Gautran threateningly, and he drew his knife and snapped it open.

"Who will be the first?" he asked savagely, and seeing that they held together, he retreated backwards, with his face to them, until a turn in the road hid them from his sight. Then he fled into the woods, and with wild cries slashed the trees with his knife, which he had sharpened in the early morning.

On the second occasion he presented himself at a cottage door, with the intention of begging or buying some food. He knocked at the door, and not receiving an answer, lifted the latch. In the room were two children a baby in a cradle, and a fiveyearold boy sitting on the floor, playing with a little wooden soldier. Looking up, and seeing the features of the ruffian, the boy scrambled to his feet, and rushing past Gautran, ran screaming down the road. Enraged almost to madness, Gautran ran after the child, and catching him, tossed him in the air, shouting:

"What! you, too, brat? This for your pains!"

And standing over the child, was about to stamp upon him, when he found himself seized by the throat. It was the father, who, hearing the child's screams, came up just in time to save him. Then ensued a desperate struggle, and Gautran, despite his boast to the Advocate, found that he had met more than his match. He was beaten to the ground, lifted, and thrown into the air, as he had thrown the child. He rose, bruised and bleeding, and was slinking off, when the man cried:

"Holy Mother! it is the murderer, Gautran!"

Some labourers who were coming across the fields, were attracted by the scuffle, and the father called out to them:

"Here is Gautran the murderer, and he has tried to murder my child!"

This was enough for them. They were armed with reapinghooks, and they raced towards Gautran with loud threats. They chased him for full a mile, but he was fleeter of foot than they, and despair gave him strength. He escaped them, and sank, panting, to the ground.

The Advocate had spoken truly. There was no safety for him. He was known for miles round, and the people were eager for vengeance. He would hide in the woods for the rest of the day. There was but one means of escape for him. He must seek some distant spot, where he and his crime were unknown. But to get there he would be compelled to pass through villages in which he would be recognised. It was necessary that he should disguise himself. In what way could this be done? He pondered upon it for hours. In the afternoon he heard the muttering of the thunder in the distant mountains.

"There's a storm coming," he said, and he raised his burning face to meet the welcome rain. But only a few heavy drops fell, and the wind moaned through the woods as if in pain. Night stole upon him swiftly, and wrapt him in horrible darkness. He bit his lips, he clenched his hands, his body shook with fear. Solitude was worse than death to him. He tried to sleep; in vain. Terrible images crowded upon him. Company he must have, at all hazards. Suddenly he thought of John Vanbrugh, the man he had met the night before on the hill not far from the Advocate's house. This man had not avoided him. He would seek him again, and, if he found him, would pass the night with him. So resolving, he walked with feverish steps towards the hill on which John Vanbrugh was keeping watch.

CHAPTER III

GAUTRAN RESOLVES ON A PLAN OF ESCAPE

The distance was longer than Gautran had calculated, and he did not shorten it by the devious tracks he took in his anxiety to avoid meeting with his enemies. The rainstorm still kept off, but, in spite of the occasional flashes of lightning, the darkness seemed to grow thicker and thicker, and he frequently missed his way. He kept on doggedly, however, and although the shadow of his crime waited upon his steps, and made itself felt in the sighing and moaning of the wind, in the bending of every branch, and in the fluttering of every leaf, the craving for human companionship in which there was something of sympathy, and from which he would not be hunted like a dog, imbued him with courage to fight these terrors. Often, indeed, did he pause and threaten with fearful words the spectre of the girl he had murdered; and sometimes he implored her to leave him, and told her he was going to pay for masses for the repose of her soul. Occasionally he was compelled to take the high road, and then he was grateful for the darkness, for it prevented his face from being seen. At those times he slunk close to the hedges, as though dreading that the slightest contact with a human being would lead to discovery. Terrible as the night was to him, he feared the approach of day, when it would be more difficult to conceal himself from his pursuers. He knew that his life was not safe while he remained in this fatal neighbourhood. He must escape, and in disguise, before he was many hours older. How was this to be accomplished? Once, in the roadway, he followed with stealthy steps two men who were conversing. He would have avoided them, as he had avoided others, had it not been that he heard his name mentioned, and was morbidly curious to hear what they were saying about him.

Said one: "I have not set eyes upon this manmonster, but I shall know him if I meet him in the light."

To which the other replied: "How will you manage that, if you have never seen his face?"

"You ask a foolish question. Have not full descriptions of the murderer been put about everywhere? His features, the colour of his hair, his clothes, from his cap to his bootsall is known. His face he might disguise by a slash of his knife, if he has courage enough for it, or he might stain itand in that way, too, he might change the colour of his hair. But his clothes would remain. The shirt he wears is one in a thousand, and there's no mistaking it. It is blue, with broad yellow bands, which encircle his villainous body like rings. Let him get another shirt if he can. The country is aroused for twenty miles round, and men are resolved to take justice into their own hands. The law has allowed him to slip through its fingers; he shall not slip through ours. Why, he said to a woman this

morning that he would know how to serve her if he had her alone, and not long afterwards he tried to murder a child! Shall such a monster be allowed to remain at liberty to strike women down and murder the helpless? Nowe don't intend to let him escape. Men are on the watch for him everywhere, and when he is caught he will be beaten to death, or hung upon the nearest tree. There is another end for him, if he chooses to take it. He can hide in the woods and starve, and when his body is found, we'll drive a stake through it. Take my word for it, Gautran, the murderer, has not long to live."

Gautran shook with fear and rage.

"I could spring upon them with my knife," he thought, "but they are two to one."

And then, when the men were out of hearing, he shook his fist at them, and muttered:

"Curse you! I will cheat you yet!"

But how? The description given of his shirt was a faithful one; the broad yellow bands were there, and he remembered that, two days before the end of his trial, the gaolers had taken it from his cell in the night, and returned it to him in the morning, washed, with the yellow colour brighter than it had been for months. He knew now that this had been done out of malice, in case he should be acquitted, so that he might be the more readily recognised and shunned, or the more easily tracked and caught if he was again wanted. There loomed upon him a way to foil those who had vowed to kill him. The man he was seeking had spoken in a reckless manner; he had complained of the world, and was doubtless in want of money. He had gold which the Advocate had given him; he would offer to buy the man's clothes, and would give him his own, and one, two, or even three gold pieces in exchange; An easy thing to accomplish. But if the man would not consent to the bargain! He smiled savagely, and felt the edge of his knife. He was thoroughly desperate. He would sacrifice a thousand lives to save his own.

Out of this murderous alternative and out of the words uttered by the man he had overheard, "His face he might disguise by a slash of his knife if he has courage for it" grew ideas which, as he plodded on gradually arranged themselves into a scheme which would ensure him an almost sure escape from those who had leagued themselves against him. Its entire success depended upon certain physical attributes in John Vanbrugh but he would risk it even if these were not as he wished them to be. The plan was horrible in its design, and needed strength and cunning. He had both, and would use them without mercy, to ensure his safety. John Vanbrugh, with whose name he was not acquainted, was probably a stranger in the locality; something in Vanbrugh's speech caused him to suspect this. He would assure himself first of the fact, and then the rest

was easy. Vanbrugh was about his own height and build; he had stood by his side and knew this to be so. Gautran should die this night in the person of another man, and should be found in the morning, murdered, with features so battered as to defy recognition. But he would be attired in Gautran's clothes, and would by those means be instantly identified. Then he, the true Gautran, would be forever safe. In John Vanbrugh's garments he could make his way to a distant part of the country, and take another name. No one would suspect him, for Gautran would be dead; and he would buy masses for the repose of Madeline's soul, and so purge himself of bloodguiltiness. As to this second contemplated crime he gave it no thought, except that it was necessary, and must be done.

CHAPTER IV

HEAVEN'S JUDGMENT

Within half an hour of midnight he arrived at the hill, and saw the shadow of a man who was leaning against a tree. Gautran had been walking for nearly three hours, and during the whole time the storm of thunder and lightning had continued at intervals, now retreating, now advancing; but its full force had been spent many miles away, and it did not seem likely to approach much nearer to the House of White Shadows.

"The man is there," muttered Gautran, "with his face still towards the Advocate's window. What is his purpose?"

He was curious about that, too, and thought he would endeavour to ferret it out. It might be useful to him in the future, for it concerned the Advocate. There was plenty of time before him to accomplish his own murderous design.

John Vanbrugh heard Gautran's footsteps.

"Who comes this way?" he cried.

"A friend," replied Gautran.

"That is easily said," cried Vanbrugh. "I am not in a trustful mood. Hold off a bit, or I may do you mischief."

"Do you not know me?" asked Gautran, approaching closer, and measuring himself with the dark form of Vanbrugh. They were of exactly the same height.

"What, Gautran!" exclaimed Vanbrugh in a gay tone.

"Yes, Gautran."

"Welcome, friend, welcome," said Vanbrugh, with a laugh. "Give me your hand. Veritable flesh and blood. You have a powerful grip, Gautran. I thought we should meet again. What caused you to make yourself scarce so suddenly last night? You vanished like a cloud."

"I had business to do. Have you got any more of that brandy about you?"

"I am not sure whether you deserve it. After emptying my flask, you may make off again. A poor return for hospitality, my friend."

"I promise to remain with you it is what I came for if you give me brandy."

"I take your word," said Vanbrugh, producing a flask. "Drink, but not too greedily."

Gautran took a long draught and returned the flask, saying, "You have no food, I suppose?"

"Why, yes, I have. Warned by previous experiences I supplied myself liberally for this night's watch. I'll not refuse you, though I spent my last franc on it."

"Ah," said Gautran, with some eagerness, for an amicable exchange of clothing would render the more villainous part of his task easier of accomplishment, "you are poor, then?"

"Poor? Yes, but not for long, Gautran. The days of full purses are coming. Here is the food. Eat, rogue, eat. It is honest bread and meat, bought and paid for; but none the sweeter for that. We know which fruit is the sweetest. So you had business to do when you took French leave of me! How runs the matter? I had just pointed out the Advocate's window to you your own special Advocate, my friend, to whom you have so much reason to be grateful when you disappeared like an arrow from a bow. What follows then? That, leaving me so abruptly, your business was important, and that it concerned the Advocate. Right or wrong, rogue?"

"Right," replied Gautran, as he devoured the food.

"Come, that's candid of you, and spoken like a friend. You did not know, before I informed you, that he lived in the villa yonder?"

"I did not."

"I begin to have hopes of you. And learning it from me, you made up your mind on the spur of the moment your business being so important to pay him a friendly visit, despite the strangeness of the hour for a familiar call?"

"You've hit it," said Gautran.

John Vanbrugh pondered a while. These direct answers, given without hesitation, puzzled him. He had expected to meet with prevarication, and he was receiving, instead, straightforward confidence.

"You are not afraid," he said, "to speak the truth to me, Gautran?"

"I am not."

"But I am a stranger to you."

"That's true."

"Why, then, do you confide in me?"

It was Gautran's turn now to pause, but he soon replied, with a sinister look which John Vanbrugh, in the darkness, could not see:

"Because, after what passes between us this night, I am sure you will not betray me."

"Good," said Vanbrugh; "then it is plain you sought me deliberately, because you think I can in some way serve you."

"Yes, because you can in some way serve me that is why I am here."

"Then you intend to hide nothing from me?"

"Nothing for the reason I have given."

A flash of lightning seemed to strike the spot on which he and Gautran were conversing, and he waited for the thunder. It came long, deep, and threatening.

"There is a terrible storm somewhere," he said.

"It does not matter," rejoined Gautran, with a shudder, "so long as a man is not alone. Don't mind my coming so close. I have walked many a mile to find you. I have not a friend in the world but you."

"Not even the Advocate?"

"Not even him. He will see me no more."

"He told you that last night?"

"Yes."

"But how did you get to him, Gautran? You did not enter by the gates."

"No; I dropped over the wall at the back. Tell me. It is but fair; I answer you honestly enough. What are you watching his house for? A man does not do as you are doing, on such black nights as this, for idle pastime."

"No, indeed, Gautran! I also have business with him. And strangely enough, you, whom I met in the flesh for the first time within these last twentyfour hours, are indirectly concerned in it."

"Am I? Strange enough, as you say. But it will not matter after tonight."

Some hidden meaning in Gautran's tone struck warningly upon John Vanbrugh, and caused him to bestow a clearer observance upon Gautran's movements from this moment.

"There is a thing I wish to know, Gautran," he said. "Between vagabonds like ourselves there is no need for concealment. It is a delicate question, but you have been so frank with me that I will venture to ask it. Besides, there are no witnesses, and you will not, therefore, incriminate yourself. This girl, Madeline, whose spirit follows you"

Vanbrugh hesitated. The question he was about to ask trembled on his lips, and he scarcely knew how to give it shape in words that would not provoke an outbreak on the part of Gautran. He had no desire to come into open collision with this ruffian, of whose designs upon himself he was inwardly warned. Gautran, with brutal recklessness, assisted him.

"You want to know if I killed her?"

"Why, yesthough you put it roughly."

"What matter? Well, then, she died at my hands."

John Vanbrugh recoiled from the murderer in horror, and in a suppressed tone asked:

"When the Advocate defended you, did he know you were guilty?"

"Aye. We kept the secret to ourselves. It was cleverly worked, was it not?"

"And last night," continued John Vanbrugh, "he received you in his study?"

"Aye and gave me liquor, and food, and money. Listen to it." He rattled the gold pieces in the palms of his hands. "Look you. I have answered questions enough. I answer no more for a while. It is my turn now."

"Proceed, Gautran," said Vanbrugh; "I may satisfy you or not, according to my whim."

"You'll satisfy me, or I'll know the reason why. There is no harm in what I am going to say. You are a stranger in these parts there is no offence in that, is there?"

"None. Yes, I am a stranger in these parts. Heavens! what a flash! The storm is coming nearer."

"All the better. You will hardly believe that I have been bothering myself about the colour of your hair. I hate redhaired men. Yours, now. Is there any offence in asking the colour of it?"

"None. My hair is black."

Gautran's eyes glittered and a flash of lightning illuminated his face, and revealed to Vanbrugh the savage and ruthless look which shone there.

"And your height and build, about the same as mine," said Gautran. "Let us strike a bargain. I have gold you have none. I have taken a fancy to your clothes; I will buy them of you. Two gold pieces in exchange for them, and mine thrown in."

"The clothes of a murderer," said Vanbrugh, slowly retreating as Gautran advanced upon him. "Thank you for nothing. Not for two hundred gold pieces, poor as I am. Keep off. Do not come so near to me."

"Why not? You are no better than I. Three gold pieces! That should content you."

"You have my answer, Gautran. Leave me, I have had enough of you."

"You will have had more than enough before I have done with you," said Gautran, and Vanbrugh was satisfied now, from the man's brutal tones, that it was a deadly foe who stood within a few inches of him, "if you do not do as I bid you. Say, done and done; you had better. By fair means or foul I mean to have what I want."

"Not by fair means, you murderous villain. Be warned. I am on my guard."

"If you will have it, then!" cried Gautran, and with a savage shout he threw himself upon Vanbrugh.

So sudden and fierce was the attack that Vanbrugh could not escape from it; but although he was no match for Gautran in strength, he had had, in former years, some experience in wrestling which came to his aid now in this terrible crisis. The struggle that ensued was prolonged and deadly, and while the men were locked in each other's arms, the storm broke immediately over their heads. The thunder pealed above them, the lightning played about their forms.

"You villain!" gasped Vanbrugh, as he felt himself growing weaker. "Have you been paid by the Advocate to do this deed?"

"Yes," answered Gautran, between his clenched teeth; "he is the fiend's agent, and I am his! He bade me kill you. Your last moment has come!"

"Not yet," cried Vanbrugh, and by a supreme and despairing effort he threw Gautran clear from him, and stood again on the defensive.

Simultaneously with the movement a flash of forked lightning struck the tree against which Vanbrugh had been leaning when Gautran first accosted him, and cleft it in twain; and as Gautran was about to spring forward, a huge mass of timber fell upon him with fatal force, and bore him to the earth where he lay imprisoned, crushed and bleeding to death.

CHAPTER V

FATHER CAPEL DISCOVERS GAUTRAN IN HIS PERIL

Father Capel was wending his way slowly over the hill from the bedside of the sick woman whom he had attended for two nights in succession. On the first night she was in a state of delirium, and Father Capel could not arouse her to a consciousness of surrounding things. In her delirium she had repeatedly uttered a name which had powerfully interested him. "Madeline! Madeline! my Madeline," she moaned again and again. "Is it possible," thought the priest, "that the girl whose name she utters with agonised affection is the poor child who was so ruthlessly murdered?" On this, the second night, the woman whose last minutes on earth were approaching, was conscious, and she made certain disclosures to Father Capel which, veiled as they were, had grievously disturbed his usually serene mood. She had, also, given him a mission to perform which did not tend to compose his mind. He had promised faithfully to obey her, and they were to meet again within a few hours. To his earnest request that she would pray with him, she had impatiently answered:

"There will be time enough after I have seen the man you have promised to bring with you. I shall live till then."

So he had knelt by her bedside and had prayed for her and for himself, and for all the erring. His compassionate heart had room for them all.

For twenty miles around there was no man better loved than he. His life had been reproachless, and his tender nature never turned from the performance of a good deed, though it entailed suffering and privation upon himself. These were matters not to be considered when duty beckoned to him. A poor man, and one who very often deprived himself of a meal in the cause of charity. A priest in the truest sense of the word.

Seldom, in the course of a long, merciful, and charitable career, had he met with so much cause to grieve as on the present occasion. In the first place, because it was an added proof to the many he had received that a false step in life, in the taking of which one human being caused another to suffer, was certain to bring at some time or other its own bitter punishment; in the second place, because in this particular instance, the punishment, and the remorse that must surely follow, were as terrible as the mind of man could conceive.

His road lay towards the hill upon which the desperate conflict between John Vanbrugh and Gautran was taking place. There was no occasion for him to cross this hill; by

skirting its base he could follow the road he intended to take. But as he approached the spot, the wind bore to him, in moments when the fury of the storm was lulled, cries which sounded in his ears like cries of pain and despair. They were faint, and difficult to ascribe to any precise definite cause; they might be the cries of an animal, but even in that case it was more than likely that Father Capel would have proceeded in their direction. Presently, however, he heard a human cry for help; the word was distinct, and it decided his movements. Without hesitation he began to climb the hill.

As he approached nearer and nearer to the spot on which the struggle was proceeding, there was no longer room to doubt its nature.

"Holy Mother!" murmured the priest, quickening his steps, "will the evil passions of men never be stilled? It seems as if murder were being done here. Grant that I am not too late to avert the crime!"

Then came the terrific lightningflash, followed immediately by Gautran's piercing scream as he was struck down by the tree.

"Who calls for help?" cried Father Capel, in a loud voice, but his words were lost in the peals of thunder which shook the earth and made it tremble beneath his feet. When comparative silence reigned, he shouted again:

"Who calls for help? I am a priest, and tender it."

Gautran's voice answered him:

"Herehere! I am crushed and dying!"

This appeal was not coherently made, but the groans which accompanied it guided Father Capel to the spot upon which Gautran lay. He felt amid the darkness and shuddered at the touch of blood, and then he clasped Gautran's right hand. The tree had fallen across the murderer's legs, and had so crushed them into the earth that he could not move the lower part of his body; his chest and arms were free. A heavy branch had inflicted a terrible gash on his forehead, and it was from this wound that he was bleeding to death.

"Who are you?" said Father Capel, kneeling by the dying man, "that lies here in this sad condition? I cannot see you. Is this Heaven's deed, or man's?"

"It is Heaven's," gasped Gautran, "and I am justly punished."

"I heard the sounds of a struggle between two men. Are you one of those who were fighting in the midst of this awful darkness?"

"Yes, I am one."

"And the design," continued Father Capel, "was murder. You do not answer me; your silence is sufficient confirmation. Are you hurt much?"

"I am hurt to death. In a few minutes I shall be in eternal fire unless you grant me absolution and forgiveness for my crimes."

"Speak first the truth. Were you set upon, or were you the attacker in this evil combat?"

"I attacked him first."

"Then he may be dead!" exclaimed Father Capel, and rising hastily to his feet, he peered into the darkness, and felt about with his hands, and called aloud to know if the other man was conscious. "This is horrible," said the priest, in deep perplexity, scarcely knowing what it was best to do; "one man dying, another in all likelihood dead."

He turned as if about to go, and Gautran, divining his intention, cried in a tone of agony:

"Do not leave me, father, do not leave me!"

"Truly," murmured the priest, "it seems to me that my present duty is more with the living than the dead." He knelt again by the side of Gautran. "Miserable wretch, if the man you attacked be dead, you have murdered him, and you have been smitten for your crime. It may not be the only sin that lies upon your soul."

"It is not, it is not," groaned Gautran. "My strength is deserting me; I can hardly speak. Father, is there hope for a murderer? Do not let me die yet. Give me something to revive me. I am fainting."

"I have nothing with me to restore your strength. To go for wine, and for assistance to remove this heavy timber which imprisons you my weak arms cannot stir it cannot be accomplished in less than half an hour. It will be best, perhaps, for me to take this course; in the meantime, pray, miserable man, with all the earnestness of your heart and soul, for Divine forgiveness. What is your name?"

"I am Gautran," faintly answered the murderer.

Father Capel's frame shook under the influence of a strong agitation.

"From the bedside of the woman I have left within the hour," he murmured, "to this poor sinner who has but a few minutes to live! The hand of God is visible in it."

He addressed himself to the dying man:

"You are he who was tried for the murder of Madeline, the flowergirl?"

"I am he," moaned Gautran.

"Hearken to me," said Father Capel. "For that crime you were tried and acquitted by an earthly tribunal, which pronounced you innocent. But you are now about to appear before the Divine throne for judgment; and from God nothing can be hidden. He sees into the hearts of men. Who is ready as you but now admitted to me to commit one murder, and who, perhaps, has committed it, for, from the silence, I infer that the body of your victim lies at no great distance, will not shrink from committing two. Answer me truly, as you hope for mercy. Were you guilty or innocent of the murder of Madeline?"

"I was guilty," groaned Gautran. "Wretch that I am, I killed her. I loved her, father I loved her!"

Gautran, from whose lips these words had come amid gasps of agony, could say no more; his senses were fast leaving him.

"Ah meah me!" sighed Father Capel; "how shall such a crime be expiated?"

"Father," moaned Gautran, rallying a little, "had I lived till tomorrow, I intended to buy masses for the repose of her soul. I will buy them now, and for my own soul too. I have money. Feel in my pocket; there is gold. Take it all and tell me I am forgiven."

Father Capel did not attempt to take the money.

"Stolen gold will not buy absolution or the soul's repose," he said sadly. "Crime upon crime upon sin! Gautran, evil spirits have been luring you to destruction."

"I did not steal the gold," gasped Gautran. "It was given to me freely given."

"Forgiveness you cannot hope for," said Father Capel, "if in these awful moments you swerve from the truth by a hair'sbreadth. Confess you stole the gold, and tell me from whom, so that it may be restored."

"May eternal torments be mine if I stole it! Believe me, fatherbelieve me. I speak the truth."

"Who gave it to you, then?"

"The Advocate."

"The Advocate! He who defended you, and so blinded the judgment of men as to cause them to set a murderer loose?"

"Yes; he, and no other man."

"From what motive, Gautrancompassion?"

"No, from fear."

"What reason has he to fear you?"

"I have his secret, as he had mine, and he wished to get rid of me, so that he and I should never meet again. It was for that he gave me the gold."

"What is the nature of this secret which made him fear your presence?"

"He knew me to be guilty."

"What do you say? When he defended you, he knew you to be guilty?"

"Aye, he knew it well."

"Incrediblehorrible!" exclaimed Father Capel, raising his hands. "He shared, then, your crime. Yes; though he committed not the deed, his guilt is as heavy as the guilt of the murderer. How will he atone for it?how can atone for it? And if what I otherwise fear to be true, what pangs of remorse await him!"

A frightful scream from Gautran arrested his further speech.

"Save me, fathersave me!" shrieked the wretch. "Send her away! Tell her I repent. See, therethere!she is creeping upon me, along the tree!"

"What is it you behold amidst the darkness of this appalling night?" asked Father Capel, crossing himself.

"It is Madelineher spirit that will never, never leave me! Will you not be satisfied, you, with my punishment? Is not my death enough for you? You fiendyou fiend! I will strangle you if you come closer. Have mercymercy! You are a priest; have you no power over her? Then what is the use of prayer? It is a mockerya mockery! My eyes are filled with blood! Ah!"

Then all was silent.

"Gautran," whispered Father Capel, "take this cross in your hand; put it to your lips and repeat the words I say. Gautran, do you hear me? No soundno sound! He has gone to his account, unrepentant and unforgiven!"

Father Capel rose to his feet.

"I will seek assistance at once; there is another to be searched for. Ah, terrible, terrible night! Heaven have mercy upon us!"

And with a heart overburdened with grief, the good priest left the spot to seek for help.

CHAPTER VI

THE WRITTEN CONFESSION

During the whole of this interview John Vanbrugh had lain concealed within two or three yards of the fallen tree, and had heard every word that had passed between Gautran and Father Capel. For a few moments after he had thrown Gautran from him he was dazed and exhausted by the struggle in which he had been engaged, and by the crashing of the timber which had saved him from his deadly foe. Gradually he realised what had occurred, and when Father Capel's voice reached his ears he resolved not to discover himself, and to be a silent witness of what transpired.

In this decision lay safety for himself and absolute immunity, for Gautran knew nothing of him, not even his name, and to be dragged into the light, to be made to give evidence of the scene in which he had been a principal actor, would have seriously interfered with his plan of action respecting the Advocate.

Favoured by the night, he had no difficulty in concealing himself, and he derived an inward satisfaction from the reflection that he might turn even the tragic and unexpected event that had occurred to his own immediate advantage. He had not been seriously hurt in the conflict; a few bruises and scratches comprised the injuries he had received.

Among his small gifts lay the gift of mimicry; he could imitate another man's voice to perfection; and when Father Capel left Gautran for the purpose of obtaining assistance, an idea crossed his mind which he determined to carry out. He waited until he was assured that Father Capel was entirely out of hearing, and then he stepped from his hidingplace, and knelt by the side of Gautran. Having now no fear of his enemy, he placed his ear to Gautran's heart and listened.

"He breathes," he muttered, "there is yet a little life left in him."

He raised Gautran's head upon his knee, and taking his flask of brandy from his pocket, he poured some of the liquor down the dying man's throat. It revived him; he opened his eyes languidly; but he had not strength enough left in him to utter more than a word or two at the time.

"I have returned, Gautran," said John Vanbrugh, imitating the voice of the priest; "I had it not in my heart to desert you in your last moments. The man you fought with is dead, and in his pocket I found this flask of brandy. It serves one good purpose; it will give you

time to earn salvation. You have two murders upon your soul. Are you prepared to do as I bid you?"

"Yes," replied Gautran.

"Answer my questions, then. What do you know of the man whom you have slain?"

"Nothing."

"Was he, then, an absolute stranger to you?"

"Yes."

"You do not even know his name?"

"No."

"There is no time to inquire into your reasons for attacking him, for I perceive from your breathing that your end is very near, and the precious moments must not be wasted. It is your soul that has to be saved! And there is only one way the guilty must be punished. You have met your punishment. Heaven's lightning has struck you down. These gold pieces which I now take from your pocket shall be expended in masses. Rest easy, rest easy, Gautran. There is but one thing for you to do and then you will have made atonement. You hear me you understand me?"

"Yes quick quick!"

"To die, leaving behind you no record of the guilt of your associate of the Advocate who, knowing you to be a murderer, deliberately defeated the ends of justice will be to provoke Divine anger against you. There is no hope for pardon in that case. Can you write?"

"No."

"Your name, with my assistance, you could trace?"

"Perhaps."

"I will write a confession which you must sign. Then you shall receive absolution."

He poured a few drops of brandy into Gautran's mouth, and they were swallowed with difficulty. After this he allowed Gautran's head to rest upon the earth, and tore from his pocketbook some sheets of blank paper, upon which, with much labour, he wrote the following:

"I, Gautran, the woodman, lately tried for the murder of Madeline, the flowergirl, being now upon the point of death, and conscious that I have only a few minutes to live, and being in full possession of my reason, hereby make oath, and swear:

"That being thrown into prison, awaiting my trial. I believed there was no escape from the doom I justly merited, for the reason that I was guilty of the murder.

"That some days before my trial was to take place, the Advocate who defended me voluntarily undertook to prove to my judges that I was innocent of the crime I committed.

"That with this full knowledge he conducted my case with such ability that I was set free and pronounced innocent.

"That on the night of my acquittal, after midnight had struck, and when every person but himself in the House of White Shadows was asleep, I secretly visited him in his study, and remained with him some time.

"That he gave me food and money, and bade me go my way.

"That I am ignorant of the motives which induced him to whom I was a perfect stranger, to deliberately defeat the ends of justice.

"That the proof that he knew me to be guilty lies in the fact that I made a full confession to him.

"To which I solemnly swear, being about to appear before a just God to answer for my crime. I pray for forgiveness and mercy.

"Signed."

And here John Vanbrugh left a space for Gautran's name. He read the statement to Gautran, who was now fast sinking, and then he raised the dying man's head in his arms, and holding the pencil in the almost nerveless fingers, assisted him to trace the name "Gautran."

This was no sooner accomplished than Gautran, with a wild scream, fell back.

John Vanbrugh lost not another moment. With an exultant smile he placed the fatal evidence in his pocket, and prepared to depart. As he did so he heard the voices of men who were ascending the hill.

"This paper," thought Vanbrugh, as he crept softly away in an opposite direction, "is worth, I should say, at least half the Advocate's fortune. It is the ruin of his life and career, and, if he does not purchase it of me on my own terms, let him look to himself."

When Father Capel, with the men he had summoned to his assistance, arrived at the spot upon which Gautran lay, the murderer was dead.

CHAPTER VII

THE DISCOVERY OF THE MANUSCRIPT

All was silent in the House of White Shadows. Strange as was the drama that was in progress within its walls it found no open expression, and to the Advocate, seated alone in his study, was about to be unfolded a record of events long buried in the past, the disclosure of which had not, up to this moment, been revealed to man. During the afternoon, the Advocate had said to Christian Almer:

"Now that I have leisure, I intend, with your permission, to devote some time to your father's works. In his day, certainly for a number of years, he was celebrated, and well known in many countries, and I have heard surprise expressed that a career which promised to shed lasting lustre upon the name you bear seemed suddenly to come to an end. Of this abrupt break in the labours of an eminent man there is no explanation as to what led to it, and in what way it was broken off. I may chance upon the reason of a singular and complete diversion from a pursuit which he loved. It will interest me, if you will give me permission to search among his papers."

"A permission," rejoined Christian Almer, "freely accorded. Everything in the study is at your disposal. For my own part the impressions of my childhood are of such a nature as to render distasteful the records of my father's labours. But you are a student and a man of deeper observation and research than myself. You may unearth something of value. I place all my father's manuscripts at your unreserved disposal. Pray, read them if you care to do so, and use them in any way you may desire."

Thus it happened that, two hours before midnight, the Advocate, after looking through a number of manuscripts, most of them in an incomplete shape, came upon some written pages, the opening lines of which exercised upon him a powerful fascination. The only heading of these pages was, "A FAITHFUL RECORD." And it was made in the following strain:

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTIAN ALMER'S FATHER

"It devolves upon me, Ernest Christian Almer, as a duty, to set down here, in a brief form, before I die, the record of certain events in my life which led me to the commission of a crime. Whether justifiable or notwhether this which I call a crime may be otherwise designated as an accident or as the execution of a just punishment for trust and friendship betrayedis for others to determine.

"It is probable that no human eye will read what I am about to write until I am dead; but if it should be brought to light in my lifetime I am ready to bear the consequences of my act. The reason why I myself do nothing to assist directly in the discovery (except in so far as making this record and placing it without concealment among my manuscripts) is that I may in that way be assisting in bringing into the life of my dear son, Christian Almer, a stigma and a reproach which will be a cause of suffering to him. If it should happen that many years elapse before these lines fall into the hands of a human being, if may perhaps be for the best. What is done is done, and cannot be recalled. Even had I the power to bring the dead to life I doubt whether I should avail myself of it.

"My name is not unknown to the small world in which I live and move, and I once cherished a hope that I should succeed in making it famous. That hope is now like a flower burnt to ashes, never more to blossom. It proves the vanity of ambition upon which we pride ourselves and which we imbue with false nobility.

"As a lad I was almost morbidly tender in my nature; I shrank from giving pain to living creature; the ordinary pursuits of childhood, in which cruelty to insects forms so prominent a feature, were to me revolting; to strip even a flower of its leaves was in my eyes a cruel proceeding. And yet I have lived to take a human life.

"My earliest aspiration was to win a name in literature. Every book I read and admired assisted in making this youthful aspiration a fixed purpose when I became a man. Often, as I read the last words of a book which had fired my imagination, would I think, and sometimes say aloud, 'Gladly would I die were I capable of writing a work so good, so grand as this.'

"My parents were rich, and allowed me to follow my bent. When they died I was left sole heir to their wealth. I had not to struggle as poorer men in the profession to which I resolved to devote myself have had to do. So much the worse for me perhapsbut that now matters little. Whether the books I hoped to write would be eagerly sought after or

not was of no moment to me. What I desired was to produce; for the rest, as to being successful or unsuccessful, I was equal to either fortune.

"I made many friends and acquaintances, who grew to learn that they could use and enjoy my house as their own. In setting this down I lay no claim to unusual generosity; it was on my part simply the outcome of a nature that refused to become a slave to rigid forms of hospitality. The trouble entailed would have been too great, and I declined to undertake it. I chose to employ my hours after my own fashionthe fashion of solitude. I found great pleasure in it, and to see my friends around me without feeling myself called upon to sacrifice my time for their enjoyment, knowing (as they well knew) that they were welcome to the best my wealth and means could supply them withthis added to my pleasure a peculiar charm. They were satisfied, and so was I; and only in one instance was my hospitality abused and my friendship betrayed. But had I been wise, this one instance would never have occurred to destroy the hopes of my life.

"Although it is running somewhat ahead of the sequence of events, I may mention here the name of the man who proved false to friendship. It was M. Gabriel. He was almost young enough to be my son, and when I first knew him he was a boy and I was a man. He was an artist, with rare talents, and at the outset of his career I assisted him, for, like the majority of artists, he was poor. This simple mention of him will be sufficient for the present.

"As when I was a lad I took no delight in the pleasures of lads of my own age, so when I was a man I did not go the way of men in that absorbing passion to which is given the name of Love. Those around me were drawn into the net which natural impulse and desire spread for mankind. There was no credit in this; it was simply that it did not happen. I was by no means a womanhater, but it would seem as if the pursuits to which I was devoted were too engrossing to admit of a rival. So I may say what few can saythat I had passed my fortieth year, and had never loved.

"My turn came, however.

"Among my guests were the lady who afterwards became my wife, and her parents. A sweet and beautiful lady, twentyfive years my junior. My unhappiness and ruin sprang from the chance which brought us togetheras did her wretchedness and misery. In this I was more to blame than shemuch more to blame. In the ordinary course of a life which had reached beyond its middle age I should have acquired sufficient experience to learn that youth should mate with youththat nature has its laws which it is dangerous to trifle with. But such experience did not come to me. At fortyfive years of age I was as unlearned as a child in matters of the heart; I had no thought of love or marriage, and the youngest man of my acquaintance would have laughed at my simplicity had the

opportunity been afforded him of seeing my inner life. It was not the fault of the young lady that she knew nothing of this simplicity. No claim whatever had I to demand to be judged by special and exceptional rules. She had a perfect right to judge me as any other man of my age would have been judged. All that can be said of it was that it was most unfortunate for her and for me. If it should happen (which is not unlikely, for the unforeseen is always occurring) that these pages should be read by a man who is contemplating marriage with one young enough to be his daughter, I would advise him to pause and submit his case to the test of natural reason; for if both live, there must come a time when nature will take its revenge for the transgression. The glamour of the present is very alluring, but it is the duty of the wiser and the ripper of the twain to consider the future, which will press more hardly upon the woman than upon the man. With the fashion of things as regards the coupling of the sexes I have nothing to do; fashions are artificial and often most mischievous. Frequently, when the deeper laws of nature are involved, they are destructive and fatal.

"It was my misfortune that during the visit of the young lady and her parents, the father, an old and harmless gentleman, met his death through an accident while he, I, and other gentlemen were riding. In my house he died.

"It occasioned me distress and profound sorrow, and I felt myself in some way accountable, though the fault was none of mine. Before his death he and I had private confidences, in which he asked me to look after his affairs, and if, as he feared, they were in an embarrassed state, to act as protector to his daughter. I gave him the promise readily, and, when he died, I took a journey for the purpose of ascertaining how the widow and the orphan were circumstanced. I found that they were literally beggars. As gently as I could I broke the news to them. The mother understood it; the daughter scarcely knew its meaning. Her charming, artless ignorance of the consequences of poverty deeply interested me, and I resolved in my mind how I could best serve her and render her future a happy one.

"Speaking as I am in a measure to my own soul, I will descend to no duplicity. That I was entirely unselfish in my desire that her life should be bright and free from anxieties with which she could not cope is true; but none the less true is it that, for the first time, I felt myself under the dominion of a passion deeper and more significant than I had ever felt for woman. It was love, I believe, but love in which there was reason. For I took myself to task; I set my age and hers before me; I did this on paper, and as I gazed at the figures I said. Absurd; it is not in nature, and I must fight it down.' I did wrestle with it, and although I did not succeed in vanquishing it, I was sufficiently master of myself to keep the struggle hidden in my own breast.

"How, then, did this hapless lady become my wife? Not, in the first instance, through any steps voluntarily and unreasoningly taken by myself. I had firmly resolved to hold my feelings in check. It was the mother who accomplished that upon which she had set her heart. I may speak freely. This worldly mother has been long dead, and my confession cannot harm her. It was she who ruined at least the happiness of one life, and made me what I am.

"Needless here to recount the arts by which she worked to the end she desired; needless to speak of the deceits she practised to make me believe her daughter loved me. It may be that the fault was mine, and that I was too ready to believe. Sufficient to say that we fell into the snare she prepared for us; that, intoxicated by the prospect of an earthly heaven, I accepted the meanings she put on her daughter's reserve and apparent coldness, and that, once engaged in the enterprise, I was animated by the ardour of my own heart, in which I allowed the flower of love to grow to fruition. So we were married, and with no doubt of the future I set out with my wife on our bridal tour. She was both child and wife to me, and I solemnly resolved and most earnestly desired to do my duty by her.

"Before we were many days away news arrived that my wife's mother had met with an accident, in a part of the grounds which was being beautified by my workmen according to plans I had prepared for the pleasure of my young bride. An accident so serious that death could not be averted. In sadness we returned to the villa. My wife's coldness I ascribed to grief to no other cause. And, indeed, apart from the sorrow I felt at the dreadful news, I was myself overwhelmed for a time by the fatality which had deprived my wife of her parents within so short a time on my estate, and while they were my guests. 'But it will pass away,' I thought, 'and I will be parents, lover, husband, to the sweet flower who has given her happiness into my keeping.' When we arrived at the villa, her mother was dead.

"I allowed my wife's grief to take its natural course; seeing that she wished for solitude, I did not intrude upon her sorrow. I had to study this young girl's feelings and impulses; it was my duty to be tender and considerate to her. I was wise, and thoughtful, and loving, as I believed, and I spared no effort to comfort without disturbing her. 'Time will console her,' I thought, 'and then we will begin a new life. She will learn to look upon me not only as a husband, but as a protector who will fully supply the place of those she has lost.' I was patient very patient and I waited for the change. It never came.

"She grew more and more reserved towards me; and still I waited, and still was patient. Not for a moment did I lose sight of my duty.

"But after a long time had passed I began to question myself I began to doubt whether I had not allowed myself to be deceived. Is it possible, I asked myself, that she married me without loving me? When this torturing doubt arose I thrust it indignantly from me; it was as though I was casting a stain upon her truth and purity."

CHAPTER IX

A DISHONOURABLE CONCEALMENT

"I will not recount the continual endeavours I made to win my wife to cheerfulness and a better frame of mind. Sufficient to say that they were unsuccessful, and that many and many a time I gave up the attempt in despair, to renew it again under the influence of false hopes. Unhappy and disheartened, the pursuits in which I had always taken delight afforded me now no pleasure, and though I sought relief in solitude and study, I did not find it. My peace of mind was utterly wrecked. There was, however, in the midst of my wretchedness, one ray of light. In the course of a little while a child would be born to us, and this child might effect what I was unable to accomplish. When my wife pressed her baby to her breast, when it drew life from her bosom, she might be recalled to a sense of duty and of some kind of affection which I was ready to accept in the place of that thorough devoted love which I bore to her, and which I had hoped she would bear to me.

"Considering this matter with as much wisdom as I could bring to my aid, I recognised the desirability of surrounding my wife with signs of pleasant and even joyful life. Gloomy parents are cursed with gloomy children. I would fill my house once more with friends; my wife should move in an atmosphere of cheerfulness; there should be music, laughter, sunny looks, happy voices. These could not fail to influence for good both my wife and our little one soon to be born.

"I called friends around me, and I took special care that there should be many young people among them. Their presence, however, did not at first arouse my wife from her melancholy, and it was not until the man whose name I have already mentioned M. Gabriel arrived that I noticed in her any change for the better.

"He came, and I introduced him to my wife, believing them to have been hitherto strangers to each other. I had no reason to believe otherwise when I presented M. Gabriel to her; had they met before, it would have been but honest that one or both should have made me acquainted with the fact. They did not, by direct or indirect word, and I had, therefore, no cause for suspicion.

"Things went on as usual for a week or two after M. Gabriel's arrival, and then I noticed with joy that my wife was beginning to grow more cheerful. My happiness was great. I have been too impatient, I thought, with this young girl. The shock of losing her parents, one after another, under circumstances so distressing, was sufficient to upset a stronger mind than hers. How unwise in me that I should have tormented myself as I had been doing for so many months past! And how unjust to her that, because she was sorrowful

and silent, I should have doubted her love for me! But all was well now: comfort had come to her bruised heart, and the book of happiness was not closed to me as I had feared. A terrible weight, a gnawing grief, were lifted from me. For I could imagine no blacker treason than that a woman should deliberately deceive a man into the belief that she loved him, and that she should marry him under such conditions. My wife had not done this; I had wronged her. Most fervently did I thank Heaven that I had discovered my error before it was too late to repair it.

"I saw that my wife took pleasure in M. Gabriel's society, and I made him as free of my house as if it had been his own. He had commissions to execute, pictures to paint.

"'Paint them here,' I said to him, 'you bring happiness to us. I look upon you as though you belonged to my family.'

"In the summerhouse was a room which he used as a studio; no artist could have desired a better, and M. Gabriel said he had never been able to paint as well as he was doing in my house. It gladdened me to observe that my wife, who had for a little while been reserved towards M. Gabriel, looked upon him now as a sister might look upon a brother. I encouraged their intimacy, and was grateful to M. Gabriel for accepting my hospitality in the free spirit in which it was tendered. He expressed a wish to paint my wife's portrait, and I readily consented. My wife gave him frequent sittings, sometimes in my company, sometimes alone. And still no word was spoken to acquaint me with the fact that my wife and he had known each other before they met in my house.

"My child was born a boy. My happiness would have been complete had my wife shown me a little more affection; but again, after the birth of our child, it dawned upon me that she cared very little for me, and that the feelings she entertained for me in no wise resembled those which a loving woman should feel towards a husband who was indefatigable, as indeed I was, in his efforts to promote her happiness. Even then it did not strike me that she was happier in M. Gabriel's society than she was in mine. The truth, however, was now to be made known to me. It reached me through the idle tittletattling of one of my guests; of my own prompting I doubt whether I should ever have discovered it. I overheard this lady making some injurious observations respecting my wife; no man's name was mentioned, but I heard enough to cause me to resolve to hear more, and to put an end at once to the utterances of a malicious tongue.

"During my life, in matters of great moment, I have seldom acted upon impulse, and the value of calm deliberation after sudden excitement of feeling has frequently been made apparent to me.

"I sought this lady, and told her that I had overheard the remarks she had made on the previous day; that I was profoundly impressed by them, and intended to know what foundation there was for even a breath of scandal. I had some difficulty in bringing her to the point, but I was determined, and would be satisfied with no evasions.

"I love my wife, madam,' I said, 'too well to be content with half words and innuendoes, which in their effect are worse than open accusations.'

"Accusations!' exclaimed the lady. 'Good Heavens! I have brought none.'

"It is for that reason I complain,' I said; 'accusations can be met, and are by no means so much to be feared as idle words which affect the honour of those who are the subject of them.'

"I merely repeated,' then said the lady, 'what others have been saying for a long time past.'

"And what have others been saying for a long time past, madam?' I asked, with an outward calmness which deceived her into the belief that I was not taking the matter seriously to heart.

"I am sure it is very foolish of them,' said the lady, 'and that there is nothing in it. But people are so mischievous, and place such dreadful constructions upon things! It is, after all, only natural that when, after a long separation, young lovers meet, they should feel a little tender towards each other, even though one of them has got married in the interval. We all go through such foolish experiences, and when we grow as old as you and I are, we laugh at them.'

"Probably, madam,' I said, still with exceeding calmness; 'but before we can laugh with any genuineness or enjoyment, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the cause of our mirth. When young lovers meet, you said, after a long separation, it is natural they should feel a tenderness towards each other. But we are speaking of my wife.'

"Yes,' she replied, 'of your wife, and I am sure you are too sensible a man so much older than that sweet creature! to make any unnecessary bother about it.'

"She knew well how to plant daggers in my heart.

"My wife, then, is one of those young lovers? You really must answer me, madam. These are, after all, but foolish experiences.'

"I am glad you are taking it so sensibly,' she rejoined. 'Yes, your wife is one of the young lovers.'

"And the other, madam.'

"Why, who else should it be but M. Gabriel?"

"I did not speak for a few moments. The shock was so severe that I required time to recover some semblance of composure.

"My mind is much relieved,' I said. 'There is not the slightest foundation for scandal, and I trust that this interview will put an effectual stop to it. My wife and M. Gabriel have not been long acquainted. They met each other for the first time in this house.'

"Ah,' cried the lady very vivaciously, 'you want to deceive me now; but it is nonsense. Your wife and M. Gabriel have known each other for many years. They were once affianced. Had you not stepped in, there is no knowing what might have occurred. It is much better as it isI am sure you think so. What can be worse for a young and beautiful creature than to marry a poor and struggling artist? M. Gabriel is very talented, but he is very poor. By the time he is a middleaged man he may have made his way in the world, and then his little romance will be forgottenquite forgotten. I dare say you can look back to the time when you were as young as he is, and can recall somebody you were madly in love with, but of whom you never think, except by the merest chance. These things are so common, you see. And now don't let us talk any more about it.'

"I had no desire to exchange another word with the lady on the subject; I allowed her to rest in the belief that I had been acquainted with the whole affair, and did not wish it to get about. She promised me never to speak of it again to her friends in any injurious way, said it was a real pleasure to see what a sensible view I took of the matter, and our interview was at an end.

"I had learnt all. At length, at length my eyes were opened, and the perfidy which had been practised towards me was revealed. All was explained. My wife's constant coldness, her insensibility to the affectionate advances I had made towards her, her pleasure at meeting her loverthe unworthy picture lay before my sight. There was no longer any opportunity for selfdeception. Had I not recognised and acknowledged the full extent of the treason, I should have become base in my own esteem. It was not that they had been loversthat knowledge in itself would have been hard to bearbut that they should have concealed it from me, that they should have met in my presence as strangers, that they should have tacitly agreed to trick me!for hours I could not think with calmness upon these aspects of the misery which had been forced upon me. For she, my wife, was in the

first instance responsible for our marriage; she could have refused me. I was in utter ignorance of a love which, during all these years, had been burning in her heart, and making her life and mine a torture. Had she been honest, had she been true, she would have said to me: 'I love another; how, then, can I accept the love you offer me, and how can you hope for a return? If circumstances compel me to marry you there must be no concealment, no treason. You must take me as I am, and never, never make my coldness the cause of reproach or unhappiness.' Yes, this much she might have said to me when I offered her my name a name upon which there had hitherto been no stain and no dishonour. I should not have married her; I should have acted as a father towards her; I should have conducted her to the arms of her lover, and into their lives and mine would not have crept this infamy, this blight, this shame which even death cannot efface.

"Of such a nature were my thoughts during the day.

"Then came the resolve to be sure before I took action in the matter. The evidence of my own senses should convince me that in my own house my wife and her lover were playing a base part, were systematically deceiving me and laughing at me.

"Of this man, this friend, whom I had taken to my heart, my horror and disgust were complete. I, whose humane instincts had in my youth been made the sport of my companions, who shrank from inflicting the slightest injury upon the meanest creature that crawled upon the earth, who would not even strip the leaves from a flower, found myself now transformed. Had M. Gabriel been in my presence at any moment during these hours of agonising thought, I should have torn him limb from limb and rejoiced in my cruelty. So little do we know ourselves."

CHAPTER X

M. GABRIEL IS DISMISSED

"I was up the whole of the night; I did not close my eyes, and when morning broke I had schooled myself to the task before me to assure myself of the truth and the extent of the shame.

"I kept watch, and did not betray myself to them, and what I saw filled me with amazement at my blindness and credulity. That my wife was not guilty, that she was not faithless to me in the ordinary acceptation of the term, was no palliation of her conduct.

"Steadfastly I kept before me one unalterable resolve. In the eyes of the world the name I bore should not be dishonoured, if by any means it could be prevented. We would keep our shame and our deep unhappiness within our own walls. In the light of this resolve it was impossible that I could challenge M. Gabriel; he must go unpunished by me. My name should not be dragged through the mire, to become a byword for pity.

"By degrees, upon one excuse and another, I got rid of my visitors, and there remained in the villa only I, my wife and child, and M. Gabriel. Then, in M. Gabriel's studio, I broke in upon the lovers, and found my wife in tears.

"For a moment or two I gazed upon them in silence, and they, who had risen in confusion when I presented myself, confronted me also in silence, waiting for the storm of anger which they expected to burst from me, an outraged husband. They were mistaken; I was outwardly calm.

"'Madam,' I inquired, addressing my wife, 'may I inquire the cause of your tears?'

"She did not reply; M. Gabriel did. 'Let me explain,' he said, but I would not allow him to proceed.

"'I do not need you,' I said, 'to interpose between man and wife. I may presently have something to say to you. Till then, be silent.' Again I addressed my wife, and asked her why she was weeping.

"'They are not the first tears I have shed,' she replied, 'since I entered this unhappy house.'

"I am aware of it, madam," I replied; "yet the house was not an unhappy one before you entered it. Honour, and truth, and faithfulness were its characteristics, and towards no man or woman who has received hospitality within these walls has any kind of treachery been practised by me, its master and your husband. Tears are a sign of grief, and suffering from it, as I perceive you are, I ask you why have you not sought consolation from the man whose name you bear, and whose life since you and he first met has had but one aim to render you happy."

"You cannot comfort me," she said.

"Can he?" I asked, pointing to M. Gabriel.

"You insult me," she said with great dignity. "I will leave you. We can speak of this in private."

"You will not leave me," I said, "and we will not speak of this in private, until after some kind of explanation is afforded me from your own lips and the lips of your friend. In saying I insult you, there is surely a mistaken idea in your mind as to what is due from you to me. M. Gabriel, whom I once called a friend, is here, enjoying my hospitality, of which I trust he has had no reason to complain. I find you in tears by his side, and he, by his attitude, endeavouring to console you. When I ask you, in his presence, why, being in grief, you do not come to me for consolation, you reply that I cannot comfort you. Yet you were accepting comfort from him, who is not your husband. It suggests itself to me that if an insult has been passed it has been passed upon me. I do not, however, receive it as such, for if an insult has been offered to me, M. Gabriel is partly responsible for it, and it is only between equals that such an indignity can be offered."

"Equals!" cried M. Gabriel; he understood my words in the sense in which I intended them. "I am certainly your equal."

"It has to be proved," I retorted. "I use the term in so far as it affects honour and upright conduct between man and man. You can bring against me no accusation of having failed in those respects in my behaviour towards you. It has to be seen whether I can in truth bring such an accusation against you, and if I can substantiate it by evidence which the commonest mind would not reject, you are not my equal. I see that this plain and honest reasoning disturbs you; it should not without sufficient cause. Something more. If in addition I can prove that you have violated my hospitality, you are not only not my equal, but you have descended to a depth of baseness to describe which I can find no fitting terms."

"He grew hot at this. 'I decline to be present any longer,' he said, 'at an interview conducted in such a manner.' And he attempted to leave me, but I stood in his way, and would not permit him to pass.

"'From this moment,' I said, 'I discharge myself of all duties towards you as your host. You are no longer my guest, and you will remain at this interview during my pleasure.'

"He made another attempt to leave the room, and as he accompanied it by violence, I seized his arms, and threw him to the ground. He rose, and stood trembling before me.

"'I make no excuse, madam,' I said to my wife, 'for the turn this scene has taken. It is unseemly for men to brawl in presence of a lady, but there are occasions when of two evils the least must be chosen. Should I find myself mistaken, I shall give to M. Gabriel the amplest apology he could desire. Let me recall to your mind the day on which M. Gabriel first entered my gates as my guest. I brought him to you, and presented him to you as a friend whom I esteemed, and whom I wished you also to esteem. You received him as a stranger, and I had no reason to suspect that he and you had been intimate friends, and that you were already well known to each other. You allowed me to remain in ignorance of this fact. Was it honest?'

"'It was not honest,' she replied.

"'It made me happy,' I continued, 'to see, after the lapse of a few days, that you found pleasure in his society, and I regarded him in the light of a brother to you. I trusted him implicitly, and although, madam, you and I have been most unhappy, I had no suspicion that there was any guilt in this, as I believed, newlyformed friendship.'

"'There was no guilt in it,' she said very firmly.

"'I receive your assurance, and believe it in the sense in which you offer it. But in my estimation the word I use is the proper word. In the concealment from me of a fact with which you or he should have hastened to make me acquainted; in the secret confidences necessarily involved in the carrying out of such an intimacy as yours; there was treachery from wife to husband, from friend to friend, and in that treachery there was guilt. By an accident, within the past month, a knowledge has come to me of a shameful scandal which, had I not nipped it in the bud, would have brought open disgrace upon my name and housebut the secret disgrace remains, and you have brought it into my family.'

"'A shameful scandal!' she exclaimed, and her white face grew whiter. 'Who has dared'

"The world has dared, madam, the world over whose tongue we have no control. The nature of the intimacy existing between you and M. Gabriel, far exceeding the limits of friendship, has provoked remark and comment from many of your guests, and we who should have been the first to know it, have been the last. From a lady stopping in my house I learnt that you and M. Gabriel were lovers before you and I met that you were affianced. Madam, had you informed me of this fact you would have spared yourself the deepest unhappiness under which any human being can suffer. For then you and I would not have been bound to each other by a tie which death alone can sever. I have, at all events, the solace which right doing sometimes sheds upon a wounded heart; that solace cannot unhappily be yours. You have erred consciously, and innocent though you proclaim yourself, you have brought shame upon yourself and me. I pity you, but cannot help you further than by the action I intend to take of preventing the occurrence of a deeper shame and a deeper disgrace falling upon me. For M. Gabriel I have no feelings but those of utter abhorrence. I request him to remove himself immediately from my presence and from this house. This evening he will send for his paintings, which shall be delivered to his order. They will be placed in this summerhouse. And in your presence madam, I give M. Gabriel the warning that if at any time, or under any circumstances, he intrudes himself within these walls, he will do so at his own peril. The protection which my honour not safe in your keeping, madam needs I shall while I live be able to supply.'

"This, in substance, is all that took place while my wife was with us. When she was gone I gave instructions that M. Gabriel's paintings and property should be brought to the summerhouse immediately, and I informed him of my intentions regarding them and the room he had used as a study. He replied that I would have to give him a more satisfactory explanation of my conduct. I took no notice of the threat, and I carried out my resolve which converted the study into a tomb in which my honour was buried. And on the walls of the study I caused to be inscribed the words 'The Grave of Honour.'

"On the evening of that day my wife sent for me, and in the presence of Denise, our faithful servant, heard my resolve with reference to our future life, and acquainted me with her own. The gates would never again be opened to friends. Our life was to be utterly secluded, and she had determined never to quit her rooms unless for exercise in the grounds at such times as I was absent from them.

"After tonight,' she said, 'I will never open my lips to you, nor, willingly, will I ever again listen to your voice.'

"In this interview I learnt the snare, set by my wife's mother, into which we both had fallen.

"I left my wife, and our new life commenced a life with hearts shut to love or forgiveness. But I had done my duty, and would bear with strength and resignation the unmerited misfortunes with which I was visited. Not my wife's, I repeat, the fault alone. I should have been wiser, and should have known apart from any consideration of M. Gabriel that my habits, my character, my tastes, my age, were entirely unsuitable to the fair girl I had married. I come now to the event which has rendered this record necessary."

CHAPTER XI

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

"The impressions left upon me by the tragic occurrence I am about to narrate have, strangely enough, given me a confused idea as to the exact date upon which it took place, but I am correct in saying that it was within a month of the agreement entered into between my wife and myself that we should live separate lives under the same roof.

"I expected to receive a challenge from M. Gabriel, a challenge which for the reason I have given that I would not afford the world an opportunity of discussing my private affairs I firmly resolved not to accept. To my surprise no such challenge reached me, and I indulged the hope that M. Gabriel had removed himself forever from us. It was not so.

"The night was wild and dark. The wind was sweeping round the house; the rain was falling. I had resumed my old habits, and was awake in my study, in which I am now writing. I did no intelligent work during those sad days. If I forced myself to write, I invariably tore up the sheets when I read them with a clearer mind. My studies afforded me neither profit nor relief. The occupation which claimed me was that of brooding over the circumstances attendant upon my wooing and my marriage. For ever brooding. Walking to and fro, dwelling upon each little detail of my intimacy with my girlwife, and revolving in my mind whether I could have prevented what had occurred whether, if I had done this or that, I could have averted the misery in which our lives were wrapt. It was a profitless occupation, but I could not tear myself from it. There was a morbid fascination in it which held me fast. That it harrowed me, tortured me, made me smart and bleed, mattered not. It clung to me, and I to it. Thus do we hug our misery to our bosoms, and inflict upon ourselves the most intolerable sufferings.

"I strove to escape from it, to fix my mind upon some abstruse subject, upon some difficult study, but, like a demon to whom I had sold my soul, it would not be denied. There intruded always this one picture the face of a babyboy, mine, my dear son, lying asleep in his mother's arms. Let me say here that I never harboured the thought of depriving my wife of this precious consolation, that never by the slightest effort have I endeavoured to estrange him from her. The love he bore to me and I thank Heaven that he grew to love me sprang from his own heart, which also must have been sorely perplexed and have endured great pain in the estrangement that existed between his parents. Well, this pretty babyface always intruded itself this soul which I had brought into life lay ever before me, weighted with myriad mysterious and strange suggestions. It might live to accomplish great and noble deeds it might live to inspire to worthy deeds it might become a saviour of men, a patriot, an emancipator. And but for me, it would

never have been. Even the supreme tribulation of his parents' lives might be productive of some great actions which would bring a blessing upon mankind. In that case it was good to suffer.

"After some time not in those days, but later on this thought became a consolation to me, although it troubled and perplexed me to think whether the birth of a soul which was destined to shine as a star among men was altogether a matter of chance.

"A dark, stormy night. I created voices in the sweeping of the wind. They spoke to me in groans, in whispers, in loud shrieks. Was it fancy that inspired the wail, 'Tonight, tonight shall be your undoing!'

"Midnight struck. I paced to and fro, listening to the voices of the wind. Presently another sound a sound not created by my imagination came to my ears. It was as though something heavy had fallen in the grounds. Perhaps a tree had been blown down. Or did it proceed from another cause, which warned me of danger?

"I hastened immediately into the grounds. The sense of danger exhilarated me. I was in a mood which courted death as a boon. Willingly would I have gone out to meet it, as a certain cure for the anguish of my soul. Thus I believe it is sometimes with soldiers, and they become heroes by force of desperation.

"I could see nothing. I was about to return, when a moving object arrested my purpose. I sprang towards it threw myself upon it. And in my arms I clasped the body of a man, just recovering consciousness from a physical hurt.

"I did not speak a word. I lifted the body in my arms it had not yet sufficient strength to repel me and carried it into my study. The moment the light of my lamps shone on the face of the man I recognised him. It was M. Gabriel.

"I laughed with savage delight as I placed him on a couch. 'You villain you villain!' I muttered. 'Your last hour, or mine, has come. This night, one or both of us shall die!'

"I drew my chair before the couch, so that his eyes, when he opened them, should rest upon my face. He was recovering consciousness, but very slowly. 'I could kill you here,' I said aloud, 'and no man would be the wiser. But I will first have speech with you.' His eyelids quivered, opened, and we were gazing at each other face to face. The sight of me confounded him for a while, but presently he realised the position of affairs and he strove to rise. I thrust him back fiercely.

"'Stay you there,' I said, 'until I learn your purpose. You have entered my house as a thief, and you have given your life into my hands. I told you, if you ever intruded yourself within these walls, that you would do so at your peril. What brought you here? Are you a wouldbe thief or murderer? You foul betrayer and coward! So you climb walls in the dark in pursuance of your villainous schemes! Answer me do you come here by appointment, and are you devil enough to strive to make me believe that a pure and misguided girl would be weak enough to throw herself into your arms? Fill up the measure of your baseness, and declare as much.'

"'No,' he replied; 'I alone am culpable. No one knew of my coming no one suspected it. I could not rest.'

"I interrupted him. 'After tonight,' I said gloomily, 'you will rest quietly. Men such as you must be removed from the earth. You steal into my house, you thief and coward, with no regard for the fair fame of the woman you profess to love reckless what infamy you cast upon her and of the lifelong shame you would deliberately fling upon one who has been doubly betrayed. You have not the courage to suffer in silence, but you would proclaim to all the world that you are a martyr to love, the very name of which becomes degraded when placed in association with natures like yours. You belong to the class of miserable sentimentalists who bring ruin upon the unhappy women whom they entangle with their maudlin theories. Mischief enough have you accomplished this night will put an end to your power to work further ill.'

"'What do you intend to do with me?' he asked.

"'I intend to kill you,' I replied; 'not in cold blood not as a murderer, but as an avenger. Stand up.'

"He obeyed me. His fall had stunned him for a time; he was not otherwise injured.

"'I will take no advantage of you,' I said. 'Here is wine to give you a false courage. Drink, and prepare yourself for what is to come. As surely as you have delivered yourself into my hands, so surely shall you die!'"

CHAPTER XII

THE HIDDEN CRIME

"He drank the wine, not wisely or temperately as a coolheaded man whose life was at stake would have done, but hastily, feverishly, and with an air of desperation.

"'You are a good fencer,' I said, 'the best among all the friends who visited me during the days of your treachery. You were proud of showing your skill, as you were of exhibiting every admirable quality with which you are gifted. Something of the mountebank in this.'

"'At least,' he said, rallying his courage, 'do not insult me.'

"'Why not? Have you not outraged what is most honourable and sacred? Here are rapiers ready to our hands.'

"'A duel!' he cried. 'Here, and now?'

"'Yes,' I replied, 'a duel, here and now. There is no fear of interruption. The sound of clashing steel will not fall upon other ears than ours.'

"'It will not be a fair combat,' he said. 'You are no match for me with the rapier. Let me depart. Do not compel me to become your murderer.'

"'You will nevermore set foot outside these walls,' I said; 'here you will find your grave.'

"It was my firm belief. I saw him already lying dead at my feet.

"'If I should kill you,' he said, 'how shall I escape?'

"'As best you may,' I replied. 'You are an adept at climbing walls. If you kill me, what happens to you thereafter is scarcely likely to interest me. But do not allow that thought to trouble you. What will take place tonight is ordained!'

"I began to move the furniture from the centre of the room, so as to afford a clear space for the duel. The tone in which he next spoke convinced me that I had impressed him. Indeed, my words were uttered with the certainty of conviction, and a fear stole upon him that he had come to his death.

"I will not fight with you," he said; "the duel you propose is barbarous, and I decline to meet you unless witnesses are present."

"So that we may openly involve the fair name of a lady in our quarrel," I retorted quietly. "No; that will not be. Before witnesses it is I who would decline to meet you. Are you a coward?"

"It matters little what you call me," he said, "as no other person is near. You cannot force me to fight you."

"I think I can," I said, and I struck him in the face, and proceeded with my work.

"My back was towards him; a loaded gun was hanging on the wall; unperceived by me he unslung it, and fired at me.

"I did not know whether I was hit or not. Maddened by the cowardly act, I turned, and lifting him in the air, dashed him to the ground. His head struck against one of the legs of my writingtable; he groaned but once, and then lay perfectly still. It was the work of a moment, and the end had come. He lay dead before me.

"I had no feeling of pity for him, and I was neither startled nor deeply moved. His punishment was a just punishment, and my honour was safe from the babble of idle and malicious tongues. All that devolved upon me now was to keep the events of this night from the knowledge of men.

"There was, however, one danger. A gun had been fired. The sound might have aroused my wife or some of the servants, in which case an explanation would have to be given. At any moment they might appear. What lay on the floor must not be seen by other eyes than mine.

"I dragged a cloth from a table and threw it over the body, and with as little noise as possible swiftly replaced the furniture in its original position. Then I sat on my chair and waited. For a few minutes I was in a state of great agitation, but after I had sat for an hour without being disturbed I knew that my secret was safe.

"I removed the cloth from the face of the dead man and gazed at it. Strange to say, the features wore an expression of peacefulness. Death must have been instantaneous. Gradually, as I gazed upon the form of the man I had killed, the selfish contemplation in which I had been engaged during the last hour of suspensea contemplation devoted solely to a consideration of the consequences of discovery, so far as I was concerned, and

in which the fate of the dead man formed no part became merged in the contemplation of the act itself apart from its earthly consequences.

"I had taken a human life. I, whose nature had been proverbially humane, was, in a direct sense of the word, a murderer. That the deed was done in a moment of passion was no excuse; a man is responsible for his acts. The blood I had shed shone in my eyes.

"What hopes, what yearnings, what ambitions, were here destroyed by me! For, setting aside the unhappy sentiment which had conducted events to this end, M. Gabriel was a man of genius, of whose career high expectations had been formed. I had not only destroyed a human being, I had destroyed art. Would it have been better had I allowed myself to be killed? Were death preferable to a life weighed down by a crime such as mine?

"For a short time these reflections had sway over me, but presently I steadily argued them down. I would not allow them to unman me. This coward and traitor had met a just doom.

"What remained for me now to do was to complete the concealment. The body must be hidden. After tonight unless chance or the hand of Providence led to its discovery the lifeless clay at my feet must never more be seen.

"There was a part of my grounds seldom, if ever, intruded upon by the servants that portion in which, for the gratification of my wife, I had at the time of our marriage commenced improvements which had never been completed. There it was that my wife's mother had met with the accident which resulted in her death. I thought of a pit deep enough for the concealment of the bodies of fifty men. Into this pit I would throw the body of M. Gabriel, and would cover it with earth and stones. The task accomplished, there would be little fear of discovery.

"First satisfying myself that all was quiet and still in the villa, and that I was not being watched, I raised the body of M. Gabriel in my arms. As I did so, a horror and loathing of myself took possession of me; I shuddered in disgust; the work I was performing seemed to be the work of a butcher.

"However, what I resolved to do was done. In the dead of night, with darkness surrounding me, with the rain beating upon me, and the accusing wind shrieking in my ears, I consigned to its last resting place the body of the man I had killed.

"Years have passed since that night. My name has not been dragged into the light for scandalmongers to make sport of. Open shame and derision have been avoided but at what a price! From the day following that upon which I forbade M. Gabriel my house, not a single word was exchanged between my wife and myself. She sent for me before she died, but she knew she would be dead before I arrived. A fearful gloom settled upon our lives, and will cover me to my last hour. This domestic estrangement, this mystery of silence between those whom he grew to love and honour, weighed heavily upon my son Christian. His child's soul must have suffered much, and at times I have fancied I see in him the germs of a combination of sweetness and weakness which may lead to suffering. But suffer as he may, if honour be his guide I am content. I shall not live to see him as a man; my days are numbered.

"In the time to come in the light of a purer existence I may learn whether the deed I have done is or is not a crime.

"But one thing is clear to me. Had it not been for my folly, shame would not have threatened me, misery would not have attended me, and I should not have taken a human life. The misery and the shame did not affect me alone; they waited upon a young life and blighted its promise. It is I who am culpable, I who am responsible for what has occurred. It is impossible, without courting unhappiness, to divert the currents of being from their natural channels: youth needs youth, is attracted to youth, seeks youth, as flowers seek the sun. Roses do not grow in ice.

"Mine, then, the sin too late to expiate.

"I would have my son marry when he is young, as in the course of nature he will love when he is young. It is the happier fate, because it is in accordance with natural laws.

"If he into whose hands these pages may fall can discern a lesson applicable to himself in the events I have recorded, let him profit by them. If the circumstances of his life in any way resemble mine, I warn him to bear with wisdom and patience the penalty he has brought upon himself, and not to add, in the person of another being to whom he is bound and who is bound to him, to an unhappiness most probably a secret unhappiness of his own creating.

"And I ask him to consider well whether any good purpose will be served by dragging into the open day the particulars of a crime, the publishing of which cannot injure the dead or benefit the living. It cannot afford him any consolation to think, if my son be alive, that needless suffering will be brought to the door of the innocent. Let him, then, be merciful and pitiful."

CHAPTER XIII

FALSE WIFE, FALSE FRIEND

Thus abruptly the record closed. To the last written page there were several added, as though the writer had more to say, and intended to say it. But the pages were blank. The intention, if intention there were, had never been carried out.

The reading of the record occupied the Advocate over an hour, and when he had finished, he sat gazing upon the manuscript. For a quarter of an hour he did not move. Then he rose not quickly, as one would rise who was stirred by a sudden impulse, but slowly, with the air of a man who found a difficulty in arranging his thoughts. With uneven steps he paced the study, to and fro, to and fro, pausing occasionally to handle in an aimless way a rare vase, which he turned about in his hands, and gazed at with vacant eyes. Occasionally, also, he paused before the manuscript and searched in its pages for words which his memory had not correctly retained. He did this with a consciousness which forced itself upon him, and which he vainly strove to ignore, that what he sought was applicable to himself.

It was not compassion, it was not tenderness, it was not horror, that moved him thus strangely, for he was a man who had been but rarely, if ever, moved as he was at the present time. It was the curious and disquieting associations between the dead man who had written and the living man who had read the record. And yet, although he could, if he had chosen, have reasoned this out, and have placed it mentally before him in parallel lines, his only distinct thought was to avoid the comparison. That he was unsuccessful in this did not tend to compose him.

Upon a bracket lay a bronze, the model of a woman's hand, from the life. A beautiful hand, slender but shapely. It reminded him of his wife.

He took it from the bracket and examined it, and after a little while thus passed, the words came involuntarily from his lips: "Perfect but cold."

The spoken words annoyed him; they were the evidence of a lack of self-control. He replaced the bronze hastily, and when he passed it again would not look at it.

Suddenly he left the study, and went towards his wife's rooms. He had not proceeded more than half a dozen yards before his purpose, whatever it might have been, was relinquished as swiftly as it had been formed. He retraced his steps, and lingered irresolutely at the door of the study. With an impatient movement of his head it was the

action of a man who wrestled with thought as he would have done with a palpable being he once more proceeded in the direction of his wife's apartments.

At the commencement of the passage which led to the study was a lobby, opening from the principal entrance. A noble staircase in the centre of the lobby led to the rooms occupied by Christian Almer and Pierre Lamont. On the same floor as the study, beyond the staircase, were his wife's boudoir and private rooms.

This part of the house was but dimly lighted; one rose lamp only was alight. On the landing above, where the staircase terminated, three lamps in a cluster were burning, and shed a soft and clear light around.

When he reached the lobby and was about to pass the staircase, the Advocate's progress was arrested by the sound of voices which fell upon his ears. These voices proceeded from the top of the staircase. He looked up, and saw, standing close together, his wife and Christian Almer. Instinctively he retreated into the deeper shadows, and stood there in silence with his eyes fixed upon the figures above him.

His wife's hand was resting on Almer's shoulder, and her fingers occasionally touched his hair. She was speaking almost in a whisper, and her face was bright and animated. Almer was replying to her in monosyllables, and even in the midst of the torture of this discovery, the Advocate observed that the face of his friend wore a troubled expression.

The Advocate remembered that his wife had wished him goodnight before ten o'clock, and that when he made the observation that she was retiring early, she replied that she was so overpowered with fatigue that she could not keep her eyes open one minute longer. And here, nearly two hours after this statement, he found her conversing clandestinely with his friend in undisguised gaiety of spirits!

Never had he seen her look so happy. There was a tender expression in her eyes as she gazed upon Christian Almer which she had never bestowed upon him from the first days of their courtship.

A grave, dignified courtship, in which each was studiously kind and courteous to the other; a courtship without romance, in which there was no spring. A bitter smile rested upon his lips as this remembrance impressed itself significantly upon him.

He watched and waited, motionless as a statue. Midnight struck, and still the couple on the staircase lingered. Presently, however, and manifestly on Almer's urging, Adelaide consented to leave him. Smilingly she offered him her hand, and held his for a longer time than friendship warranted. They parted; he ascending to his room, she descending

to hers. When she was at the foot of the staircase she looked up and threw a kiss to Almer, and her face, with the light of the roselamp upon it, was inexpressibly beautiful. The next minute the Advocate was alone.

He listened for the shutting of their chamberdoors. So softly was this done both by his friend and his wife that it was difficult to catch the faint sound. He smiled again a bitter smile of confirmation. It was in his legal mind a fatal item of evidence against them.

Slowly he returned to his study, and the first act of which he was conscious was that of standing on a certain spot and saying audibly as he looked down:

"It was here M. Gabriel fell!"

He knelt upon the carpet, and thought that on the boards beneath, even at this distance of time, stains of blood might be discerned, the blood of a treacherous friend. It was impossible for him to control the working of his mind; impossible to dwell upon the train of thought it was necessary he should follow out before he could decide upon a line of action. One o'clock, two o'clock struck, and he was still in this condition. All he could think of was the fate of M. Gabriel, and over and over again he muttered:

"It was here he fell it was here he fell!"

There was a harmony in the storm which raged without. The peals of thunder, the lightning flashing through the windows, were in consonance with his mood. He knew that he was standing on the brink of a fatal precipice.

"Which would be best," he asked mentally of himself, "that lightning should destroy three beings in this unhappy house, or that the routine of a nine days' wonder should be allowed to take its course? All that is wanting to complete the wreck would be some evidence to damn me in connection with Gautran and the unhappy girl he foully murdered."

As if in answer to his thought, he heard a distinct tapping on one of his study windows. He hailed it with eagerness; anything in the shape of action was welcome to him. He stepped to the window, and drawing up the blind saw darkly the form of a man without.

"Whom do you seek?" he asked.

"You," was the answer.

"Your mission must be an urgent one," said the Advocate, throwing up the window. "Is it murder or robbery?"

"Neither. Something of far greater importance."

"Concerning me?"

"Most vitally concerning you."

"Indeed. Then I should welcome you."

With strange recklessness he held out his hand to assist his visitor into the room. The man accepted the assistance, and climbing over the windowsill sprang into the study. He was bloody, and splashed from head to foot with mud.

"Have you a name?" inquired the Advocate.

"Naturally."

"Favour me with it."

"John Vanbrugh."

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN VANBRUGH AND THE ADVOCATE

"A stormy night to seek you out," said John Vanbrugh, "and to renew an old friendship"

"Stop there," interrupted the Advocate. "I admit no idea of a renewal of friendship between us."

"You reject my friendship?" asked Vanbrugh, wiping the blood and dirt from his face.

"Distinctly."

"So be it. Our interview shall be conducted without a thought of friendship, though some reference to the old days cannot be avoided. I make no apology for presenting myself in this condition. Man can no more rule the storm than he can the circumstances of his life. I have run some distance through the rain, and I have been attacked and almost killed. You perceive that I am exhausted, yet you do not offer me wine. You have it, I know, in that snug cupboard there. May I help myself? Thank you. Ah, there's a smack of youth in this liquor. It is life to one who has passed through such dangers as have encompassed me. You received my letter asking for an interview? I gave it myself into your hands on the last evening of the trial."

"I received it."

"Yet you were unwilling to accord me an interview."

"I had no desire to meet you again."

"It was ungrateful of you, for it is upon your own businessyours and no other man's that I wished to speak with you. It was cold work out on the hill yonder, watching the lights in your study window, watching for the simple waving of a handkerchief, which would mean infinitely more to you than to me, as you will presently confess. Dreary cold work, not likely to put a man like myself in an amiable mood. I am not on good terms with the world, as you may plainly perceive. I have had rough times since the days you deemed it no disgrace to shake hands with me. I have sunk very low by easy descents; you have risen to a giddy height. I wonder whether you have ever feared the fall. Men as great as you have met with such a misfortune. Things do not last for ever, Edwardpardon me. it was a slip of the tongue."

"Do you come to beg?"

"No for a reason. If I came on such an errand, I might spare myself the trouble."

"Likely enough," said the Advocate, who was too well acquainted with human nature not to be convinced, from Vanbrugh's manner, that his was no idle visit.

"You were never renowned for your charities. And on the other hand I am poor, but I am not a beggar. I am frank enough to tell you I would prefer to steal. It is more independent, and not half so disgraceful. It may happen that the world would take an interest in a thief, but never in a beggar."

"Is it to favour me with your philosophies that you pay me this visit?"

"I should be the veriest dolt. No, I will air my opinions when I am rich."

"You intend, poor as you confess yourself, to become rich?"

"With your help, old friend."

"Not with my help. You will receive none from me."

"You are mistaken. Forgive me for the contradiction, but I speak on sure ground. Ah, how I have heard you spoken of! With what admiration and esteem! Almost with awe by some. Your talents, of themselves, could not have won this universal eulogy; it is your spotless character that has set the seal upon your fame. There is not a stain upon it; you have no weaknesses, no blemishes; you are absolutely pure. Other men have something to conceal some family difficulty, some domestic disgrace, some slip in the path of virtue, which, were it known, would turn the current against them. But against you there is not a breath; scandal has never soiled you. In this lies the strength of your position in this lies its danger. Let shame, with cause, point its finger at you old friend, the result is unpleasant to contemplate. For when a man such as you falls, he does not fall gradually. He topples over suddenly, and today he is as low in the gutter as yesterday he was high in the clouds."

"You have said enough. I do not care to listen to you further. The tone you assume is offensive to me such as I would brook from no man. You can go the way you came."

And with a scornful gesture the Advocate pointed to the window.

"When I inform you which way I came," said Vanbrugh, with easy insolence, "you will not be so ready to tell me to leave you before you learn the errand which brought me."

"Which way, then, did you come?" asked the Advocate, in a tone of contempt.

"The way Gautran came somewhat earlier than this, it is true, but not earlier than midnight."

The Advocate grasped the back of a chair; it was a slight action, but sufficient to show that he was taken off his guard.

"You know that?" he said.

"Aye, I know that, and also that you feasted him, and gave him money."

"Are you accomplices, you two knaves?"

"If so, I have at present the best of the bargain. But your surmise is not made with shrewdness. I never set eyes on Gautran until after he was pronounced innocent of the murder of Madeline. On that night I shall we say providentially made his acquaintance."

"You have met him since then?"

"Yes this very night; our interview was one never to be forgotten. Come, I have been frank with you; I have used no disguises. I say to you honestly, the world has gone hard with me; I have known want and privation, and I am in a state of destitution. That is a condition of affairs sufficient not only to depress a man's spirits, but to make him disgusted with the world and mankind. I have, however, still some capacity for enjoyment left in me, and I would give the world another trial, not as a penniless rogue, but as a gentleman."

"Hard to accomplish," observed the Advocate, with a cynical smile.

"Not with a full purse. No music like the jingling of gold, and the world will dance to the tune. Well, I present myself to you, and ask you, who are rich and can spare what will be the making of me, to hand me from your full store as much as will convert a poor devil into a respectable member of society."

"I appreciate your confidence. I leave you to supply the answer."

"You will give me nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Mind I do not ask it of your charity; I ask it of your prudence. It will be worth your while."

"That has to be proved."

"Good. We have made a commencement. Your reputation is worth much in sober truth as much as it has brought you. But I am not greedy. It lies at my mercy, and I shall be content with a share."

"That is generous of you," said the Advocate, who by this time had regained his composure; "but I warn you my patience is beginning to be exhausted."

"Only beginning? That is well. I advise you to keep a tight rein over it, and to ask yourself whether it is likely considering the difference of our positions that I should be here talking in this bold tone unless I held a power over you? I put it to you as a lawyer of eminence."

"There is reason in what you say."

"Let me see. What have I to sell? The security of your reputation? The power to prevent your name being uttered with horror? Your fame your honour? Yes, I have quite that to dispose of, and as a man of business, which I never was until now, I recognise the importance of being precise. First I have to sell my knowledge that, after midnight, you received Gautran in your study, that you treated him as a friend, and filled his pockets with gold. How much is that worth?"

"Nothing. My word against his, against yours, against a hundred such as you and he."

"You would deny it?"

"Assuredly to protect myself." As he made this answer, it seemed to the Advocate as if the principle of honour by which his actions had been guided until within the last few days were slipping from him, and as if the vilest wretch that breathed had a right to call him his equal.

"We will pass that by," said Vanbrugh, helping himself to wine. "Really, your wine is exquisite. In some respects you are a man to be envied. It is worth much to a man not only to possess the best of everything the world can give, but to know that he has the

means and the power to purchase it. With that consciousness within him, he walks with his head in the air. You used to be fond of discussing these niceties; I had no taste for them. I left the deeper subtleties of life to those of thinner blood than mine. Pleasure was more in my way and will be again."

"You are wandering from the point," said the Advocate.

"There is a meaning in everything I say; I will clip my wings. Your word against a hundred men such as I and Gautran? I am afraid you are right. We are vagabonds; you are a gentleman. So, then, my knowledge of the fact that you treated Gautran as a friend after you had procured his acquittal is worth nothing. Admitted. But put that knowledge and that fact in connection with another and a sterner knowledge and fact that you knew Gautran to be guilty of the murder. How then? Does it begin to assume a value? Your silence gives me hopes that my visit will not be fruitless. Between men who once were equals and friends, and who, after a lapse of years, come together as we have come together now, candour is a useful attribute. Let us exercise it. I am not here on your account, nor do I hold you in such regard that I would trouble myself to move a finger to save your reputation. The master I am working for is Self; the end I am working for is an easy life, a life of pleasure. This accomplished by your aid, I have nothing more to do with you or your affairs. The business is an unpleasant one, and I shall be glad to forget it. Refuse what I ask, and you will sink lower than I have ever sunk. There are actions which the world will forgive in the ignorant, but not in men of ripe intellect."

He paused and gazed negligently at the Advocate, who during the latter part of Vanbrugh's speech, was considering the dangers of his position. The secret of Gautran's guilt belonged not alone to himself and Gautran; this man Vanbrugh had been admitted into it, and he was an enemy more to be dreaded than Gautran. He saw his peril, and that he unconsciously acknowledged it to be imminent was proved by the thought which intruded itself against his will, as it seemed whether it would be wise to buy Vanbrugh off, to purchase his silence.

"It is easy," he said, "to invent tales. You and a dozen men, in conjunction with the monster Gautran"

"As you say," interrupted Vanbrugh, gently nodding his head, "the monster Gautran. But why should you call him so unless you knew him to be guilty? Were you assured of his innocence, you would speak of him pityingly, as one undeservedly oppressed and persecuted. 'The monster Gautran!' Thank you. It is an admission."

"May invent," continued the Advocate, not heeding the interruption, but impressed by its logic, "may invent any horrible tale you please of any man you please. The difficulty will be to get the world to believe it."

"Exactly. But in this case there is no difficulty, although the murderer be dead."

"Gautran! Dead!" exclaimed the Advocate, surprised out of himself. Gautran was dead! Encompassed as he was by danger and treachery, the news was a relief to him.

"Yes, dead," replied Vanbrugh, purposely assuming a careless tone. "Did I not tell you before? Singular that it should have escaped me. But I have so much to say, and in my brightest hours I was always losing the sequence of things."

"And you," said the Advocate, "meeting this man by chance"

"Pardon me. I asked you whether I should consider our meeting providential."

"It matters not. You, meeting this man, come to me after his death, for the purpose of extracting money from me. You will fail."

"I shall succeed."

"You killed Gautran, and want money to escape."

"No. He was killed by a higher agency, and I want no money to escape. You will hear tomorrow how he met his death, for all the towns and villages will be ringing with it. I continue. Say that Gautran at the point of death made a dying confession, on oath, not only of his guilt, but of your knowledge of it when you defended him; say that this confession exists in writing, duly signed. Would that paper, in conjunction with what I have already offered for sale, be worth your purchase? Take time to consider. You are dealing with a man in desperate circumstances, one who, if you drive him to it, will pull you down, high as you are. You will help me, old friend."

"It may be. Have you possession of the paper you speak of?"

"I have. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes."

Vanbrugh moved, so that a table was between him and the Advocate, and taking Gautran's confession from his pocket read in a clear voice:

"I, Gautran the woodman, lately tried for the murder of Madeline the flowergirl, being now at the point of death, and conscious that I have only a few minutes to live, and being also in the full possession of my reason, hereby make oath and swear:

"That being thrown into prison, awaiting my trial, I believed there was no escape from the doom I justly merited, for the reason that I was guilty of the murder.

"That some days before my trial was to take place, the Advocate who defended me voluntarily undertook to prove to my judges that I was innocent of the crime I committed.

"That with this full knowledge, he conducted my case with such ability that I was set free and pronounced innocent.

"That on the night of my acquittal, after midnight had struck, and when every person but himself in the House of White Shadows was asleep, I secretly visited him in his study, and remained with him for some time.

"That he gave me food and money, and bade me go my way.

"That I am ignorant of the motives which induced him, to whom I was a perfect stranger, to deliberately defeat the ends of justice.

"That the proof that he knew me to be guilty lies in the fact that I made a full confession to him.

"To which I solemnly swear, being about to appear before a just God to answer for my crime. I pray for forgiveness and mercy.

"Signed, Gautran."

Without comment, John Vanbrugh folded the paper, and replaced it carefully in his pocket.

"The confession may be forged," said the Advocate.

"Gautran's signature," said Vanbrugh, "will refute such a charge. He could write only his name, and documents can certainly be found bearing his signature, which can be compared with this."

"With that document in your possession," said the Advocate, speaking very slowly, "are you not afraid to be here with me alone knowing, if it state the truth, how much I have at stake?"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Vanbrugh. "What likenesses there are in human nature, and how thin the line that divides the base from the noble! Afraid? No for if you lay a hand upon me, for whom you are no more than a match, I will rouse the house and denounce you. Restrain yourself and hear me out. I have that to say which will prove to you the necessity, if you have the slightest regard for your honour, of dealing handsomely with me. It relates to the girl whose murderer you set free to Madeline the flowergirl and to yourself."

CHAPTER XV

A TERRIBLE REVELATION

Without requesting permission, John Vanbrugh filled his glass with wine, which he drank leisurely with his eyes fixed on the Advocate's pale face the while. When he spoke, it did not escape the Advocate that he seemed to fling aside the flippancy of manner which had hitherto characterised him, and that his voice was unusually earnest.

"I do not ask you to excuse me," he said, "for recalling the memory of a time when you did not despise my companionship. It is necessary for my purpose. We were, indeed, more than companions we were friends. What it was that made you consort with me is just now a mystery to me. The contrast in our characters may have tempted you. I, a careless, lighthearted fellow who loved to enjoy the hours; you, a serious, coldhearted student, dreaming perhaps of the position you have attained. It may be that you deliberately made a study of me to see what use you could make of my weakness. However it was, I lived in the present, you in the future. The case is now reversed, and it is I who live in the future.

"I have said you were coldhearted, and I do not suppose you will trouble yourself to deny it. Such as you are formed to rise, while we impulsive, reckless devils are pretty sure to tumble in the mud. But I never had such a fall as you are threatened with, and scapegrace, vagabond as I am, I am thankful not to have on my conscience what you have on yours.

"Now for certain facts.

"I contemplated no, I mistake, I never contemplated I settled to go on a tour for a few weeks, and scramble through bits of France, Switzerland, and Italy. You will remember my mentioning it to you. Yes, I see in your face that you are following me, and I shall feel obliged by your correcting me if in my statement of facts I should happen to trip. The story I am telling needs no effort of the imagination to embellish it. It is in its bare aspect sufficiently ghastly and cruel.

"When I was about to start on my tour, you, of your own accord, offered to accompany me. You had been studying too hard, and a wise doctor recommended you to rest a while, if you did not care to have brainfever, and also recommended you to seek new scenes in the company of a cheerful friend whose light spirits would be a good medicine for an overworked brain. You took the doctor's advice, and you did me the honour to choose me for a companion. So we started on our little tour of pleasure.

"To shorten what I have to say I will not dwell upon the details of our jaunt, but I fix myself, with you, at Zermatt, where we stayed for three weeks. The attraction what was it? The green valley the grandeur of the scenery? No. A woman. More correctly speaking, two women. Young, lovely, inexperienced, innocent. Daughters of a peasant, whose cottage door was always open to us, and who was by no means unwilling to receive small presents of money from liberal gentlemen like ourselves. Again I slip detail the story becomes trite. We captivated the hearts of the simple peasant maidens, and amused ourselves with them. In me that was natural; it was my way. But in you this circumstance was something to be astonished at. For just as long as you remained at Zermatt you were a transformed being. I don't think, until that time, I had ever heard you laugh heartily. Well, suddenly you disappeared; getting up one morning, I found that my friend had deserted me.

"It was shabby behaviour, at the best. However, it did not seriously trouble me; every man is his own master, and I think we were beginning to tire a little of each other. It was awkward, though, to be asked by one of our pretty peasant friends where my handsome friend had gone, and when he would return, and not be able to give a sensible answer.

"This girl, who had been in your presence always bright and joyous and happy, grew sad and quiet and anxious looking in your absence, and appeared to have a secret on her mind that was making her wretched. I stayed on at Zermatt for another month, and then I bade goodbye to my sweetheart, promising to come again in a year. I kept my promise, but when I asked for her in Zermatt I heard that she was dead, and that her sister and father had left the village, and had gone no one knew whither.

"It will be as well for me here to remind you that during our stay in Zermatt we gave no home address, and that no one knew where we came from or where we lived. So prudent were we that we acted as if we were ashamed of our names.

"Three years afterwards in another part of Switzerland I met the woman to whom you had made love; she had lost her father, but was not without a companion. She had a little daughter your child!"

"A lie!" said the Advocate, with difficulty controlling himself; "a monstrous fabrication!"

"A solemn truth," replied Vanbrugh, "verified by the mother's oath, and the certificate of birth. To dispute it will be a waste of breath and time. Hear me to the end. The mother had but one anxiety to forget you and your treachery, and to be able to live so that her shame should be concealed. To accomplish this it was necessary that she should live among strangers, and it was for this reason she had left her native village. She asked me

about you, and I well, I played your game. I told her you had gone to a distant part of the world, and that I knew nothing of you. We were still friends, you and I, although our friendship was cooling. When I next saw you I had it in my mind to relate the circumstance to you; but you will remember that just at that time you took it into your head to put an end to our intimacy. We had a few words, I think, and you were pleased to tell me that you disapproved of my habits of life, and that you intended we should henceforth be strangers. I was not in an amiable mood when I left you, and I resolved, on the first opportunity, to seek the woman you had brought to shame, and advise her to take such steps against you as would bring disgrace to your door. It would be paying you in your own coin, I thought. However, good fortune stood your friend at that time. My own difficulties or pleasures, or both combined, claimed my attention, and occupied me for many months, and when next I went to the village in which I had last seen your peasant sweetheart and your child, they were not to be found. I made inquiries, but could learn nothing of them, so I gave it up as a bad job, and forgot all about the matter. Since then very many years have passed, and I sank and sank, and you rose and rose. We did not meet again; but I confess, when I used to read accounts of your triumphs and your rising fame, that I would not have neglected an opportunity to have done you an ill turn had it been in my power. I was at the lowest ebb, everything was against me, and I was wondering how I should manage to extricate myself from the desperate position into which bad luck had driven me, when, not many weeks since, I met in the streets of Geneva two women. They were hawking nosegays, and the moment I set eyes upon the elder of these women I recognised in her your old sweetheart from Zermatt. You appear to be faint. Shall I pause a while before I continue?"

"No," said the Advocate, and he drank with feverish eagerness two glasses of wine; "go on to the end."

"It was your sweetheart from Zermatt, and no other. And the younger of these women, one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld, was known as Madeline the flowergirl."

The Advocate, with a sudden movement, turned his chair, so that his face was hidden from Vanbrugh.

"They were poor and I was poor. If what I suspected, when I gazed at Madeline, was correct, I saw not only an opportunity for revenge upon you, but a certainty of being able to obtain money from you. The secret to such a man as you, married to a young and beautiful woman, was worth a fair sum, which I resolved should be divided between Pauline—that was the name adopted by the mother of your child—and myself. You cannot accuse me of a want of frankness. I discovered where they lived. I had secret speech with Pauline. My suspicion was no longer a suspicion—it was a fact. Madeline the flowergirl was your daughter."

He paused, but the Advocate made no movement, and did not speak.

"How," continued Vanbrugh, "to turn that fact to advantage? How, and in what way, to make it worth a sum sufficiently large to satisfy me? That was what now occupied my thoughts. Madeline and her mother were even poorer than I supposed, and from Pauline's lips did I hear how anxious she was to remove her daughter from the temptations by which she was surrounded. In dealing with you, I knew it was necessary to be well prepared. You are a powerful antagonist to cope with, and one must have sure cards in his hand to have even a chance of winning any game he is playing with such a man as yourself. Pauline and I spoke frequently together, and gradually I unfolded to her the plan I had resolved upon. Without disclosing your name I told her sufficiently to convince her that, by my aid, she might obtain a sum of money from the man who had wronged her which would enable her to place herself and her daughter in a safer positiona position in which a girl as beautiful as Madeline would almost certainly meet with a lover of good social position whom she would marry and with whom she would lead a happy life. Thus would she escape the snare into which she herself fell when she met you. This was the mother's dream. Satisfied that I could guide her to this end, Pauline signed an agreement, which is in my possession, by which she bound herself to pay me half the money she obtained from you in compensation for your wrong. Only one thing was to remain untouched by her and mea sum which I resolved to obtain from you as a marriage portion for your daughter. Probably, under other circumstances, you would not have given me credit for so much consideration, but viewed in the light of the position in which you are placed, you may believe me. If you doubt it, I can show you the clause in black and white. This being settled between Pauline and me, I told her who you werehow rich you were, how famous you had grown, and how that you had lately married a young and beautiful woman. The affairs of a man as eminent as yourself are public property, and the newspapers delight in recording every particular, be it ever so trivial, connected with the lives of men of your rank. It was then necessary to ascertain what proof we held that you were the father of Madeline. Our visit to Zermatt could be provedher oath and mine, in connection with dates, would suffice. Then there would, in all likelihood, be living in Zermatt men and women whose testimony would be valuable. The great point was the birth of the child and the date, and to my discomfiture I learnt that Pauline had lost the certificate of her daughter's birth. But the record existed elsewhere, and it was to obtain a copy of this record, and to collect other evidence, that Pauline left her daughter. Her mission was a secret one, necessarily, and thus no person, not even Madeline, had any knowledge of its purport. What, now, remains to be told? Nothing that you do not knowexcept that when Pauline left her daughter for a few weeks, it was arranged that she and I should meet in Geneva on a certain date, to commence our plan of operations, and that I, having business elsewhere, was a couple of hundred miles away when Gautran murdered your hapless child. I arrived in Geneva on

the last day of Gautran's trial; and on that evening, as you came out of the courthouse, I placed in your hands the letter asking you to give me an interview. I will say nothing of my feelings when I heard that you had successfully defended, and had set free, the murderer of your child. What I had to look after was myself and my own interest. And now you, who at the beginning of this interview rejected a renewal of the old friendship which existed between us, may probably inwardly acknowledge that had you accepted the hand I offered you, it is not I who would have been the gainer."

Again he paused, and again, neither by word or movement, did the Advocate break the silence.

"It will be as well," presently said Vanbrugh, "to recapitulate what I have to sell. First, the fact that you, a man of spotless character so believed deliberately betrayed a simple innocent girl, and then deserted her. Inconceivable, the world would say, in such a man, unless the proofs were incontestable. The proofs are incontestable. Next, the birth of your child, and your brutal pardon me, there is no other word to express it, and it is one which would be freely used negligence to ascertain whether your conduct had brought open shame and ruin upon the girl you betrayed. Next, the knowledge of the life of poverty and suffering led by the mother and the child, while you were in the possession of great wealth. Next, the murder of your child by a man whose name is uttered with execration. Next, your voluntary espousal of his cause, and your successful defence of a monster whom all men knew to be guilty of the foul crime. Next, your knowledge, at the time you defended him, that he was guilty of the murder of your own child. Next, in corroboration of this knowledge, the dying declaration of Gautran, solemnly sworn to and signed by him. A strong hand. No stronger has ever been held by any man's enemy, and until you come to my terms, I am your enemy. If you refuse to purchase of me what I have to sell the documents in my possession, and my sacred silence to the last day of my life upon the matters which affect you and for such a sum as will make my future an easy one, I give you my word I will use my power against you, and will drag you down from the height upon which you stand. I cannot speak in more distinct terms. You can rescue me from poverty, I can rescue you from ignominy."

The Advocate turned his face to Vanbrugh, who saw that, in the few minutes during which it had been hidden from his sight, it had assumed a hue of deadly whiteness. All the sternness had departed from it, and the cold, piercing eyes wavered as they looked first at Vanbrugh, then at the objects in the study. It was as though the Advocate were gazing, for the first time, upon the familiar things by which he was surrounded. Strange to say, this change in him seemed to make him more human seemed to declare, "Stern and coldhearted as I have appeared to the world, I am susceptible to tenderness." The mask had fallen from his face, and he stood now revealed a man with human passions and human weaknesses, to whom a fatal sin in his younger days had brought a

retribution as awful as it was ever the lot of a human being to suffer. There was something pitiable in this new presentment of a strong, earnest, selfconfident nature, and even Vanbrugh was touched by it.

During the last halfhour the full force of the storm had burst over the House of White Shadows. The rain poured down with terrific power, and the thunder shook the building to its foundations. The Advocate listened with a singular and curious intentness to the terrible sounds, and when Vanbrugh remarked, "A fearful night," he smiled in reply. But it was the smile of a man whose heart was tortured to the extreme limits of human endurance.

Once again he filled a glass with wine, and raised it to his mouth, but as the liquor touched his lips, he shuddered, and holding the glass upright in his hand, he turned it slowly over and poured it on the ground; then, with much gentleness, he replaced the glass upon the table.

"What has become of the woman you speak of as Pauline?" he asked. His very voice was changed. It was such as would proceed from one who had been prostrated by long and almost mortal sickness.

"I do not know," replied Vanbrugh. "I have neither seen nor heard from her since the day before she left her daughter."

"Say that I was disposed," said the Advocate, speaking very slowly, and pausing occasionally, as though he was apprehensive that he would lose control of speech, "to purchase your silence, do you think I should be safe in the event of her appearing on the scene? Would not her despair urge her to seek revenge upon the man who betrayed and deserted her, and who set her daughter's murderer free?"

"It might be so but at all events she would be ignorant of your knowledge of Gautran's guilt. This danger at least would be averted. The secret is ours at present, and ours only."

"True. You believe that I knew Gautran to be guilty when I defended him?"

"I am forced to believe it. Explain, otherwise, why you permitted him to visit you secretly in the dead of night, and why you filled his pockets with gold."

"It cannot be explained. Yet what motive could I have had in setting him free?"

"It is not for me to say. What I know, I know. I pretend to nothing further."

"Do you suppose I care for money?" As the Advocate asked the question, he opened a drawer in the escritoire, and produced a roll of notes. "Take them; they are yours. But I do not purchase your silence with them. I give the money to you as a gift."

"And I thank you for it. But I must have more."

"Waitwait. This story of yours has yet to be concluded."

"Is it my fancy," said Vanbrugh, "or is it a real sound I hear? The ringing of a bell and now, a beating at the gates without, and a man's voice calling loudly?"

Without hesitation, the Advocate went from his study into the grounds. The fury of the storm made it difficult for him to keep his feet, but he succeeded in reaching the gate and opening it. A hand grasped his, and a man clung to him for support. The Advocate could not see the face of his visitor, nor, although he heard a voice speaking to him, did the words of the answer fall upon his ears. Staggering blindly through the grounds, they arrived at the door of the villa, and stumbled into the passage. There, by the aid of the rose lamp which hung in the hall, he distinguished the features of his visitor. It was Father Capel.

"Have you come to see me?" asked the Advocate, "or are you seeking shelter from the storm?"

"I have come to see you," replied Father Capel. "I hardly hoped to find you up, but perceived lights in your study windows, and they gave me confidence to make the attempt to speak with you. I have been beating at the gates for fully half an hour."

He spoke in his usual gentle tones, and gazed at the Advocate's white face with a look of kindly and pitying penetration.

"You are wet to the skin," said the Advocate. "I must find a change of clothing for you."

"No, my son," said the priest; "I need none. It is not the storm without I dread it is the storm within." As though desirous this remark should sink into the Advocate's heart, he paused a few moments before he spoke again. "I fear this storm of Nature will do much harm. Trees are being uprooted and buildings thrown down. There is danger of a flood which may devastate the village, and bring misery to the poor. But there is a gracious God above us" he looked up reverently "and if a man's conscience is clear, all is well."

"There is a significance in the words you utter," said the Advocate, conducting the priest to his study, "which impresses me. Your mission is an important one."

"Most important; it concerns the soul, not the body."

"A friend of mine," said the Advocate, pointing to Vanbrugh, who was standing when they entered, "who has visited me tonight for the first time for many years, on a mission as grave as yours. It was he who heard your voice at the gates."

Father Capel inclined his head to Vanbrugh, who returned the courtesy.

"I wish to confer with you privately," said the priest. "It will be best that we should be alone."

"Nay," said the Advocate, "you may speak freely in his presence. I have but one secret from him and all men. I beg you to proceed."

CHAPTER XVI

PAULINE

"I have no choice but to obey you," said Father Capel, "for time presses, and a life is hanging in the balance. I should have been here before had it not been that my duty called me most awfully and suddenly to a man who has been smitten to death by the hand of God. The man you defended Gautran, charged with the murder of an innocent girl is dead. Of him I may not speak at present. Deathbed confessions are sacred, and apart from that, not even in the presence of your dearest friend can I say one further word concerning the sinner whose soul is now before its Creator. I came to you from a dying woman, who is known by the name of Pauline."

Both Vanbrugh and the Advocate started at the mention of the name.

"Fate is merciful," said the Advocate in a low tone; "its blows are sharp and swift."

"Before I left her I promised to bring you to her tomorrow," continued the priest, "but Providence, which directed me to Gautran in his dying moments, impels me to break that promise. She may die before tomorrow, and she has that to say which vitally concerns you, and which you must hear, if she has strength enough to speak. I ask you to come with me to her without a moment's delay, through this storm, which has been sent as a visitation for human crime."

"I am ready to accompany you," said the Advocate.

"And I," said Vanbrugh.

"No," said the priest, "only he and I. Who you are I do not seek to know, but you cannot accompany us."

"Remain here," said the Advocate to Vanbrugh; "when I return I will hide nothing from you. Now, Father Capel."

It was not possible for them to engage in conversation. The roaring of the wind prevented a word from being heard. For mutual safety they clasped hands and proceeded on their way. They encountered many dangers, but escaped them. Torrents of water poured down from the ranges great branches snapped from the trees and fell across their path the valleys were in places knee deep in water and occasionally they fancied they heard cries of human distress in the distance. If the priest had not been

perfectly familiar with the locality, they would not have arrived at their destination, but he guided his companion through the storm, and they stood at length before the cottage in which Pauline lay.

Father Capel lifted the latch, and pulled the Advocate after him into the room.

There were but two apartments in the cottage. Pauline lay in the room at the back. In a corner of the room in which they found themselves a man lay asleep; his wife was sitting in a chair, watching and waiting. She rose wearily as the priest and the Advocate entered.

"I am glad you have come, father," she said, "she has been very restless, and once she gave a shriek, like a deathshriek, which curdled my blood. She woke and frightened my child."

She pointed to a babygirl, scarcely eighteen months old, who was lying by her father with her eyes wide open. The child, startled by the entrance of strangers, ran to her mother, who took her on her lap, saying petulantly, "There, there be quiet. The gentlemen won't hurt you."

"Is Pauline awake now?" asked Father Capel.

The woman went to the inner room and returned. "She is sleeping," she said, "and is very quiet."

Father Capel beckoned to the Advocate, who followed him to the bedside of the dying woman. She lay so still that the priest lowered his head to hers to ascertain whether she was breathing.

"Life appears to be ebbing away," he whispered to the Advocate; "she may die in her sleep."

Quiet as she was, there was no peace in her face; an expression of exquisite suffering rested on it. The sign of suffering, denoting how sorely her heart had been wrung, caused the Advocate's lips to quiver.

"It is I who have brought her to this," he thought. "But for me she would not be lying in a dying state before me."

He was tortured not only by remorse, but by a terror of himself.

Notwithstanding that so many years had passed since he last gazed upon her, she was not so much changed that he did not recognise in her the blooming peasant girl of Zermatt. Since then he had won honour and renown and the admiration and esteem of men; the best that life could offer was his, or had been his until the fatal day upon which he resolved to undertake the defence of Gautran. And now how stood the account? He was the accomplice of the murderer of his own child—the mother of his child was dying in suffering—his wife was false to him—his one friend had betrayed him. The monument of greatness he had raised had crumbled away, and in a very little while the world would know him for what he was. His bitterest enemy could not have held him in deeper despair than he held himself.

"You recognise her?" said the priest.

"Yes."

"And her child, Madeline, was yours?"

"I am fain to believe it," said the Advocate; "but the proof is not too clear."

"The proof is there," said the priest, pointing to Pauline; "she has sworn it. Do you think knowing that death's door is open for her to enter knowing that her child, the only being she loved on earth, is waiting for her in the eternal land—that she would, by swearing falsely, and with no end in view that could possibly benefit herself, imperil the salvation of her soul? It is opposed to human reason."

"It is. I am forced to believe what I would give my life to know was false."

"Unhappy man! Unhappy man!" said the priest, sinking on his knees. "I will pray for you, and for the woman whose life you blighted."

The Advocate did not join the priest in prayer. His stern sense of justice restrained him. The punishment he had brought upon himself he would bear as best he might, and he would not inflict upon himself the shameful humiliation of striving to believe that, by prayers and tears, he could suddenly atone for a crime as terrible as that of which he was guilty.

"Father Capel," he said, when the priest rose from his knees, "from what you have said, I gather that the man Gautran made confession to you before he died. I do not seek to know what that confession was, but with absolute certainty I can divine its nature. The man you saw in my study brought to me Gautran's dying declaration, signed by Gautran himself, which charges me with a crime so horrible that, were I guilty of it, laden as I am

with the consequences of a sin which I do not repudiate, I should deserve the worst punishment. Are you aware of the existence of this document?"

"I hear of its existence now for the first time," replied the priest. "When I left the bedside of this unhappy woman, and while I was wending my way home through the storm, I heard cries and screams for help on a hill near the House of White Shadows, as though two men were engaged in a deadly struggle. I proceeded in the direction of the conflict, and discovered only Gautran, who had been crushed to the earth by the falling of a tree which had been split by the storm. He admitted that he and another man were fighting, and that the design was murder. I made search, both then and afterwards, for the other man, but did not succeed in finding him. I left Gautran for the purpose of obtaining assistance to extricate him, for the tree had fallen across his body, and he could not move. When I returned he was dead, and some gold which he had asked me to take from his pocket was gone; an indication that, during my absence, human hands had been busy about him. If Gautran's dying declaration be authentic, it must have been obtained while I was away to seek for assistance."

"I can piece the circumstances," said the Advocate. "The man you saw in my study was the man who was engaged in the struggle with Gautran. It was he who obtained the confession, and he who stole the gold. In that confession I am charged with undertaking the defence of Gautran with the knowledge that he was guilty. It is not true. When I defended him I believed him to be innocent; and if he made a similar declaration to you, he has gone to his account with a black lie upon his soul. That will not clear me, I know, and I do not mention it to you for the purpose of exciting your pity for me. It is simply because it is just that you should hear my denial of the charge; and it is also just that you should hear something more. Up to the hour of Gautran's acquittal I believed him, degraded and vile as he was, to be innocent of the murder; but that night, as I was walking to the House of White Shadows, I met Gautran, who, in the darkness, supposing me to be a stranger, would have robbed me, and probably taken my life. I made myself known to him, and he, overcome with terror at the imaginary shadow of his victim which his remorse and ignorance had conjured up, voluntarily confessed to me that he was guilty. My error call it by what strange name you will dated from that moment. Knowing that the public voice was against me, I had not the honesty to take the right course. But if I," he added, with a gloomy recollection of his wife and friend, "had not by my own act rendered valueless the fruits of a life of earnest endeavour, it would have been done for me by those in whom I placed a sacred trust."

For several hours Father Capel and the Advocate remained by the bedside of Pauline, who lay unconscious, as if indeed, as the priest had said, life was ebbing away in her sleep. The storm continued and increased in intensity, and had it not been that the little hut which sheltered them was protected by the position in which it stood, it would have

been swept away by the wind. From time to time the peasant gave them particulars of the devastation created by the floods, which were rushing in torrents from every hill, but their duty chained them to the bedside of Pauline. An hour before noon she opened her eyes, and they rested upon the face of the Advocate.

"You have come," she sighed.

He knelt by the bed, and addressed her, but it was with difficulty he caught the words she spoke. Death was very near.

"Was Madeline my daughter?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Pauline, "as I am about to appear before my God!"

The effort exhausted her, and she lay still for many minutes. Then her hand feebly sought her pillow, and the Advocate, perceiving that she wished to obtain something from under it, searched and found a small packet. He knew immediately, when she motioned that she desired him to retain it, that it contained the certificate of his daughter's birth. The priest prayed audibly for the departing soul. Pauline's lips moved; the Advocate placed his ear close. She breathed the words:

"We shall meet again soon! Pray for forgiveness!"

Then death claimed her, and her earthly sorrows were ended.

CHAPTER XVII

ONWARD TO DEATH

Late in the afternoon the Advocate was stumbling, almost blindly, through the tempest towards the House of White Shadows. Father Capel had striven in vain to dissuade him from making the attempt to reach the villa.

"There is safety only in the sheltered heights," said the priest. "By this time the valleys are submerged, and the dwellings therein are being swept away. Ah meah me! how many of my poor are ruined; how many dead! Not in my experience have I seen a storm as terrible as this. It is sent as a warning and a punishment. Only the strongest houses in the villages that lie in the valleys will be able to withstand its fury. Be persuaded, and remain here until its force is spent."

He spoke to one who was deaf to reason. It seemed to the Advocate as though the end of his life had come, as though his hold upon the world might at any moment be sapped; but while he yet lived there was before him a task which it was incumbent upon him to perform. It was imperative that he should have speech with his wife and Christian Almer.

"I have work to do," he said to the priest, "and it must be done today."

An unaccustomed note in his voice caused Father Capel to regard him with even a more serious attention than he had hitherto bestowed upon him.

"There are men," said the priest, "who, when sudden misfortune overtakes them, adopt a desperate expedient to put an end to all worldly trouble, and thus add sin to sin."

"Have no fear for me," said the Advocate. "I am not contemplating suicide. What fate has in store for me I will meet without repining. You caution me against the storm, yet I perceive you yourself are preparing to face it."

"I go to my duty," said the priest.

"And I to mine," rejoined the Advocate.

Thus they parted, each going his separate way.

The Advocate had not calculated the difficulties he was to encounter; his progress was slow, and he had to make wide detours on the road, and frequently to retrace his steps for a considerable distance, in order to escape being swept to death by the floods. From the ranges all around the village in which the House of White Shadows was situated the water was pouring in torrents, which swirled furiously through the lower heights, carrying almost certain destruction to those who had not already availed themselves of the chances of escape. Terrific as was the tempest, he took no heed of it. It was not the storm of Nature, but the storm within his soul which absorbed him. He met villagers on the road flying for safety. With terrorstruck movements they hurried past, men, women, and children, uttering cries of alarm at the visitation. Now and then one and another called upon him to turn back.

"If you proceed," they said, "you will be engulfed in the rapids. Turn back if you wish to live."

He did not answer them, but doggedly pursued his way.

"My punishment has come," he thought. "I have no wish to live, nor do I desire to outlast this day."

Once only, of his own prompting, did he pause. A woman, with little children clinging to her, passed him, sobbing bitterly. His eyes happening to light upon her face, he saw in it some likeness to the peasant girl whom in years gone by he had betrayed. The likeness might or might not have been there, but it existed certainly in his fancy. He stopped and questioned her, and learned that she had been utterly ruined by the storm, her cottage destroyed, her small savings lost, and all her hopes blasted. He emptied his pockets of money, and gave her what valuables he had about him.

"Sell them," he said; "they will help to purchase you a new home."

She called down blessings on his head.

"If she knew me for what I am," he muttered as he left her, "she would curse me."

On and on he struggled and seemed to make no progress. The afternoon was waning, and the clouds were growing blacker and thicker, when he saw a man staggering towards him. He was about to put a question to him respecting the locality of the House of White Shadowshis course had been so devious that he scarcely knew in what direction it laywhen a closer approach to the man showed him to be no other than John Vanbrugh.

"Ah!" cried Vanbrugh, seizing the Advocate's arm, and thus arresting his steps, "I feared we had lost you. A fine time I have had of it down in your villa yonder! Had it not been for the storm, I should have been bundled before a magistrate on a charge of interloping; but everybody had enough to do to look after himself. It was a case of the devil take the hindmost. A scurvy trick, though, of yours, to desert a comrade; still, for my sake, I am glad to see you in the land of the living."

"Have you come straight from the villa?" asked the Advocate.

"Straight!" cried Vanbrugh with a derisive laugh. "I defy the soberest saint to walk straight for fifty yards in such a hurricane. Three bottles of wine would not make me so unsteady as this cursed wind enough to stop one's breath for good or ill. What! you are not going on?"

"I am. What should hinder me?"

"Some small love of life a trivial but human sentiment. There is no one in your house. It is by this time deserted by all but the rats."

"My wife"

"Was the last to leave, with a friend of yours, Christian Almer by name. He and I had some words together. Let me tell you. I happened to drop a remark concerning you which he considered disparaging, and had I been guilty of all the cardinal sins he could not have been more angered. A true friend but probably he does not know what I know. Well for you that I did not enlighten him. You will meet them a little lower down on the road, but I advise you not to go too far. The valleys are rivers, carrying everything, headlong, in their course."

"There was an old lawyer in the house. Do you know what has become of him?"

"I saw him perched on the back of a fool, and by their side a girl with the sweetest face, and an old woman I should take to be her grandmother."

"Farewell," said the Advocate, wrenching himself free. "Should we meet again I will pay you for your friendly services."

"Well said," replied Vanbrugh. "I am content. No man ever knew you to be false to your word. A woman perhaps but that lies in the past. Ah, what a storm! It is as though the end of the world had come."

"To those whose minutes are numbered," said the Advocate between his set teeth, "the end of the world has come. Farewell once more."

"Farewell then," cried Vanbrugh, proceeding onward. "For my sake be careful of yourself. If this be not the Second Deluge I will seek you tomorrow."

"For me," muttered the Advocate, as he left Vanbrugh, "there may be no tomorrow."

Bearing in mind the words of Vanbrugh that he would meet his wife and Christian Almer lower down on the road, he looked out for them. He saw no trace of them, and presently he began to blunder in his course; he searched in vain for a familiar landmark, and he knew not in which direction the House of White Shadows was situated. Evening was fast approaching when he heard himself hailed by loud shouts. The sounds proceeded from a stronglybuilt stone hut, protected on three sides from wind and rain, and so placed that the water from the ranges rolled past without injuring it. Standing within the doorway was Fritz the Fool.

Thinking his wife might have sought shelter there, the Advocate made his way to it, and found therein assembled, in addition to Fritz, old Pierre Lamont, Mother Denise and her husband Martin, and their pretty granddaughter Dionetta.

"Welcome, comrade, welcome," cried Pierre Lamont. "It is pleasant to see a familiar face. We were compelled to fly from the villa, and Fritz here conveyed us here to this hospitable hut, where we shall be compelled to stay till the storm ceases. Where is 'your fair lady?'"

"It is a question I would ask of you," said the Advocate. "She is not here, then?"

"No. She left the villa before we did, in the company of your friend"the slight involuntary accent he placed upon the word caused the Advocate to start as though he had received a blow"Christian Almer. They have doubtless found another shelter as secure as this. We wished them to stop for us, but they preferred not to wait. Fritz had a hard job of it carrying me to this hut, which he claims as his own, and which is stored with provisions sufficient for a month's siege. I have robbed the old house of its servantsDionetta here, for whom" (he dropped his voice) "the fool has a fancy, and her grandmother, whom I shall pension off, and Fritz himselfan invaluable fool. Fritz, open a bottle of wine; do the honours of your mansion. The Advocate is exhausted."

The Advocate did not refuse the wine; he felt its need to sustain his strength for the work he had yet to perform. He glanced round the walls.

"Is there an inner room?" he asked.

"Yes; there is the door."

"May I crave privacy for a few minutes?"

Pierre Lamont waved his hand, and the Advocate walked to the inner room, and closed the door upon himself.

"What has come over this man?" mused Pierre Lamont. "There is in his face, since yesterday, such a change as it is rare in life's experience to see. It is not produced by fatigue. Has he made discovery of his wife's faithlessness and his friend's treachery. And should I not behave honestly to him, and make him as wise as I am on events within my knowledge? What use? What use? But at least he shall know that the secret of Gautran's guilt is not his alone."

In the meantime the Advocate was taking advantage of the solitude for which he had been yearning since he left the bedside of Pauline. It was not until this moment that he could find an opportunity to examine the packet she had given him.

It contained what he imagined the certificate of the birth of his child. He read it and mentally took note of the date and also of certain words written on the back, in confirmation of the story related to him by John Vanbrugh. No room was there for doubt. Madeline was his child, and by his means her murderer had escaped from justice.

"A just Heaven smote him down," he thought; "so should retribution fall upon me. I am partner in his crime. Upon my soul lies guilt heavier than his."

Within the certificate of birth was a smaller packet, which he had laid aside. He took it up now, and removed the paper covering. It was the portrait of his daughter, Madeline the flowergirl. The picture was that of a young girl just budding into womanhood a girl whose laughing mouth and sparkling eyes conveyed to his heart so keen a torture that he gave utterance to a groan, and covered his eyes with his hand to shut out the reproach. But in the darkness he saw a vision which sent violent shudders through him such a vision as had pursued Gautran in the lonely woods, as he had seen in the waving of branch and leaf, as had hovered over him in his prison cell, as he stood by his side in the courthouse during the trial from which he emerged a free man. Bitterly was this man, who had reached a height so lofty that it seemed as if calumny could not touch him, bitterly was he expiating the error of his youth.

He folded the portrait of his child within the certificate of birth, and replaced them in his pocket. Then, with an effort, he succeeded in summoning some kind of composure to his features, and the next minute he rejoined Pierre Lamont.

"You will remain with me," said the old lawyer; "it will be best."

"Nay," responded the Advocate, "a plain duty lies before me. I must seek my wife."

"She herself is doubtless in a place of shelter," said Pierre Lamont, "and while this tempest is raging, devastating the land in every direction, you can scarcely hope to find her."

"I shall find her," said the Advocate in a tone of conviction. "Stern fate, which has dogged my steps since I arrived in Geneva, and brought me to a pass which, were you acquainted with the details, would appear incredible to you, will conduct me to her side. Were I otherwise convinced I must not shrink from my duty."

"Outside these walls," urged Pierre Lamont, "death stares you in the face."

"There are worse things than death," said the Advocate, with an air of gloomy and invincible resolution.

"Useless to argue with such a man as yourself," said Pierre Lamont. He turned to Fritz. "Go, you and your friends, into the inner room for a while. I wish to speak in private with my friend."

"One moment," said the Advocate to the fool as he was preparing to obey Pierre Lamont. "You were the last to leave the House of White Shadows."

"We were the last humans," replied Fritz.

"In what condition was it at the time?"

"In a most perilous condition. The waters were rising around the walls. It had, I should say, not twelve hours to live."

"To live!" echoed Pierre Lamont, striving to impart lightness to his voice, and signally failing. "How do you apply that, Fritz?"

"Trees live!" replied Fritz, "and their life goes with the houses they help to build. If the walls of the old house we have run from could talk, mysteries would be brought to light."

"You have been my wife's maid," said the Advocate to Dionetta, as she was about to pass him. Dionetta curtsied. "Has she discharged you?"

Dionetta cast a nervous glance at Pierre Lamont, and another at Mother Denise. The old grandmother answered for her.

"I thought it as well," said Mother Denise, "in all respect and humility, that so simple a child as Dionetta should be kept to her simple life. My lady was good enough to give Dionetta a pair of diamond earrings and a diamond fingerring, which we have left behind us." Fritz made a grimace. "These things are not fit for poor peasants, and the pleasure they convey is a dangerous pleasure."

"You are not favourably disposed towards my wife," said the Advocate. Mother Denise was silent. "But you are right in what you say. Diamonds are not fit gifts for simple maids. I wish you well, you and your grandchild. It might have been" The thought of his own child, of the same age as Dionetta, and as beautiful, crossed his mind. He brushed his hand across his eyes, and when he looked round the room again, he and Pierre Lamont were alone.

"A fool of fools," said Pierre Lamont, looking after Fritz. "If he and the pretty Dionetta wed it will be a suitable match for beauty to mate with folly he will be father to a family of fools who may, in their way, be wiser in their generation than you and I. Your decision is irrevocable?"

"It is irrevocable."

"If you do not find your wife you will endeavour to return to us?"

"I shall find her."

"And then?" asked Pierre Lamont with a singular puckering of his brows.

"And then?" echoed the Advocate absently, and added: "Who can tell what may happen from one hour to another?"

"How much does he know?" thought Pierre Lamont; "or are his suspicions but just aroused? There is a weight upon his soul which taxes all his strength. It is grand to see a strong man suffer as he is suffering. Is there a mystery in his trouble with which I am not acquainted? His wife I know about her. Gautran I know about him. But the stranger he left in his study in the middle of the night a broken down gentleman vagabond, with a

spice of wickedness in him who is he, and what was his mission? Of one thing I must satisfy myself before I am assured that he is worthy of my compassion." Then he spoke aloud. "You said just now there are worse things than death."

"Aye."

"Disgrace?"

"In a certain form that may be borne, and life yet be worth the having."

"Good. Dishonour?"

"It matters little," said the Advocate; "but were the time not precious, I should be curious to learn why you desire to get at the heart of my secrets."

"The argument would be too long," said Pierre Lamont with earnestness, "but I can justify myself. There are worse things than death. Pardon me, older man than yourself, and one who is well disposed towards you for asking you bluntly whether such things have come to you?"

"They have. You can read the signs in my face."

"But if you have a secret, the revealing of which would be hurtful to you, cannot the mischief be averted? As far as I can expect you have been frank with me. Frankness for frankness. Say that the secret refers to Gautran and to your defence of him?"

"I have been living in a fool's paradise," said the Advocate with a scornful smile. "To whom is this known?"

"To Fritz the Fool, and to me, through him. He saw Gautran in your study after the trial"

"Have I been watched?"

"The discovery was accidental. He was moved by some loveverses I read to him, and becoming sentimental, he dallied outside Dionetta's window, after the manner of foolish lovers. Then the lights of your study window attracted him, and he peeped through. When Gautran left the villa, Fritz followed him, and heard him in his terrified soliloquies proclaim his guilt. Were this to go out to the world, it would, according to its fashion, construe it in a manner which might be fatal to you. But Gautran is dead, and I can be silent, and can put a lock on Fritz's tongue for in my soul I believe you were not aware the wretch was guilty when you defended him."

"I thank you. I believed him to be innocent."

"Why, then, my mind is easy. Friend, shake hands." He held the Advocate's hand in his thin fingers, and with something of wistfulness, said: "I would give a year of my life if I could prevail upon you to remain with us."

"You cannot prevail upon me. So much being said between us, more is necessary. The avowal of my ignorance of Gautran's guilt at the time I defended him I learnt it after the trial, mind you will not avail me. A written confession, sworn upon his dying oath, exists, which accuses me of that which the world will be ready to believe. Strange to say, this is my lightest trouble. There are others of graver moment which more vitally concern me unknown to you, unless, indeed, you possess a wizard's art of divination."

"Comrade," said Pierre Lamont, slowly and with emphasis, "there breathes not in the world a woman worth the breaking of a man's heart."

"Stop!" cried the Advocate in a voice of agony.

In silence he and Pierre Lamont gazed upon each other, and in the old lawyer's face the Advocate saw that his wife's faithlessness and his friend's treachery were known.

"Enough," he said; "there is for me no deeper shame, no deeper dishonour."

And he turned abruptly from Pierre Lamont, and left the hut staggering like a drunken man.

"Fritz, Fritz!" cried Pierre Lamont. "Come quickly!" Fritz instantly made his appearance from the inner room. "Look you, Fritz," said the old lawyer, in hurried, excited tones, "the Advocate has gone upon his mad errand has gone alone. After him at once, and if you can save him from the consequences of his desperate resolve if you can advise, assist him, do so for my sake. Quick, Fritz, quick!"

"Master Lamont," said Fritz, "are you asking me to do a man's work?"

"Yes, Fritz you can do no more."

"Well and good. As far as a man dare go, I will go; but if a madman persists in rushing upon certain death, it will not help him for a fool to follow his example. I am fond of life, Master Lamont, doubly fond of it just now, for reasons." He jerked his thumb over his

shoulder to the room which contained Dionetta. "But I will do what can be done. You may depend upon me."

He was gone at least two hours, and when he returned he was exhausted and panting for breath.

"I was never born to be drowned," he said, and he threw himself into a chair, and sat there, gasping.

"Well, Fritz, well?" cried Pierre Lamont.

"Wait till I get my breath. I followed this great Advocate as you desired, and for some time, so deep was he in his dreams, he did not know I was with him. But once, when he was waist high in water, not that he cared, it was as though he was inviting death, and I, who was acquainted with the road through which he was wading, pulled him suddenly back and so saved his life, he turned upon me savagely, and demanded who I was. He recognised me the moment he spoke the words I will say this of him, that in the presence of another man he never loses his selfpossession, and that, in my belief he would be a match for Death, if it presented itself to him in a visible, palpable shape. 'Ah,' said he, 'you are Fritz the Fool; why do you dog me?' 'I do not dog you,' I replied; 'Master Lamont bade me guide and assist you, if you needed guidance and assistance. He is the only man for whom I would risk my life.' 'Honesty is a rare virtue,' he said; 'keep with me, then, for just as long as you think yourself to be safe. You saw my wife and Mr. Almer leave the House of White Shadows. Is it likely they took this road?' 'They could take no other, and live,' I said, 'but there is no trace of them. They must have turned back to the villa.' 'Could they reach it, do you think?' he asked. 'A brave man can do wonders,' I replied; 'some hours ago they may have reached it; but they could not stop in the lower rooms, which even at that time must have been below watermark. I will not answer for the upper part of the house at this moment, and before morning it will be swept away.' 'Guide me as far on the road as you care to accompany me,' said he, 'and when you leave me point me out the way I should go.' I did so, and we encountered dangers, and but for me he would not have been alive when I left him. We came to the bridge which spans the ravine of pines, two miles this side of the House of White Shadows. A great part of it had been torn away, and down below a torrent was rushing fierce enough to beat the life out of any living being, human or animal. 'There is no other way but this,' I said, 'to the House of White Shadows. I shall not cross the bridge.' He said no word, but struggled on to the bridge, which all that was left of it consisted of three slender trunks half hanging over the ravine. It was nothing short of a miracle that he got across; no sooner was he upon the other side than the remaining portion of the bridge fell into the ravine. He waved his hand to me, and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness. I stumbled here as well as I could. Master Lamont, I never want another

journey such as that; had not the saints watched over me I should not be here to tell the tale. This is the blackest night in my remembrance."

"Do you think he can escape, Fritz?" asked Pierre Lamont.

"His life is not worth a straw," replied Fritz. "Look you here, Master Lamont. If I were to see him tomorrow, or any other day, alive, I should know that he is in league with the Evil One. No human power can save him."

"Peace be with him," said Pierre Lamont. "A great man is lost to us; a noble mind has gone."

"Master Lamont," said Fritz sententiously, "there is such a thing as being too clever. Better to be a simpleton than to be overwise or overconfident. I intend to remain a fool to the end of my days. I have no pity for such a man. Who climbs must risk the fall. Not rocky peaks, but level ground, with bits of soft moss, for Fritz the Fool."

He slept well and soundly, but Pierre Lamont tossed about the whole of the night, thinking with sadness and regret upon the downfall of the Advocate.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DOOM OF THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS

An unerring instinct guided him; a superhuman power possessed him; and at midnight though he could keep no count of time he found himself within the gates of the House of White Shadows. Upon his lips, contracted and spasmodic with pain and suffering, appeared a pitiable smile as he gazed at a window on the upper floor, and saw a light. It was reflected from the window of Christian Almer's room.

"There they are," he muttered; "I shall not die unavenged."

The water was breast high. He battled through it, and reached the open door of the villa. Slowly he ascended the stairs until he arrived at the landing above. He listened at Christian Almer's door, but heard no sound. Enraged at the thought that they might, after all, have escaped him, he dashed into the room, and called out the names of his wife and friend. Silence answered him. He staggered towards the lamp, which stood on a table covered with a shade which threw the light downward. Before the lamp was a sheet of paper, with writing upon it, and bending over it the Advocate saw that it was addressed to him, and was intended for his perusal.

A steadier survey of the room brought its revelations. At the extreme end of the apartment lay a woman, still and motionless. He crept towards her, knelt by her, and lowered his face to hers. It was his wife, cold and dead!

A rosy tint was in her cheeks; a smile was on her lips; her death had brought no suffering with it.

"Fair and false," he said. "Beauty is a sinful possession."

Her clothes were wet, and he knew that she had been drowned.

Then, turning, he saw what had before escaped his notice the body of Christian Almer, lying near the table. He put his ear to Almer's heart and felt a slight beating.

"He can wait," muttered the Advocate. "I will first read what he has written."

He was about to sit at the table when he heard a surging sound without. He stepped into the passage, and saw the waters swaying beneath him.

"It is well," he thought. "In a little while all will be over for those who have sinned."

This reflection softened him somewhat toward those who lay within the room, and by whom he believed himself to have been wronged. Was he not himself the greatest sinner in that fatal house? He returned to the table and read what Christian Almer had written.

"Edward:

"I pray that these words may reach your eyes. Above all things on earth have I valued your friendship, and my heart is wrung with anguish by the reproach that I have not been worthy of it. Last night, when your wife and I parted, I knew that you had discovered the weak and treacherous part I have played towards you, for as I turned towards my room at that very moment, looking downward, I saw you below. I did not dare to come to you I did not dare to show my face to the man I had wronged. It was my intention to fly this morning from your presence and hers, and never to see you more; and also to write to you the words to which, by the memory of all that I hold sacred, I now solemnly swear that the wrong I have done you is compassed by sentiment. I do not seek to excuse myself; I know that treachery in thought is as base between you and me, as treachery in act. Yet in all humbleness I implore you to endeavour to find some palliation, though but the slightest, of my conduct in the reflection that sometimes in the strongest men even in such a man as yourself, whose mind and life are most pure and noble error cannot be avoided. We are hurried into wrong by subtle forces which wither one's earnest endeavours to step in the right path. Thus it has been with me. If you will recall certain words which were spoken in our conversation at midnight in the room in which this is written, you will understand what was meant when I said that I flew to the mountains to rid myself, by a happy chance, of a terror which possessed me. You who have never erred, you who have never sinned, may not be able to find it in your heart to forgive me. If it be so, I bow my head to your judgment which is just, as in all your actions you are known to be. But if you cannot forgive me, I entreat you to pity me.

"You were not in the house today when we endeavoured to escape to a place of shelter in which we should be protected from this terrible inundation. We did not succeed we were beaten back; and being engulfed in a sudden rush of waters, I could not save your wife. The utmost I could do was to bear her lifeless body back to this fatal house. It was I who should have died, not she; but my last moments are approaching. Think kindly of her if you can.

"Christian Almer."

Had he not been absorbed, not only in the last words written by Christian Almer, but by the reflections which they engendered, the Advocate would have known that the floods were increasing in volume, and that, in the short time he had been in the house, the waters had risen several feet. But he was living an inner life in which the spiritual part of himself was dominant.

He stepped to the body of his wife and said:

"Poor child! Mine the error."

Then he knelt by the side of Christian Almer, and raised him in his arms. Aroused to consciousness by the action, Almer opened his eyes. They rested upon the Advocate's face vacantly, but presently they dilated in terror.

"Be not afraid," said the Advocate, "I have read what you have written. I know all."

"I am very weak," murmured Christian Almer. "Do not torture me; say that you pity me."

"I pity and forgive you, Christian," replied the Advocate in a very gentle voice.

"Thank God! Thank God!" said Almer, and closed his eyes, from which the warm tears gushed.

"God be merciful to sinners!" murmured the Advocate.

When daylight broke, the House of White Shadows, and all that it contained, had been swept from the face of the earth. A bare waste was all that remained to mark the record of human love and human ambition.

THE END