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# THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND



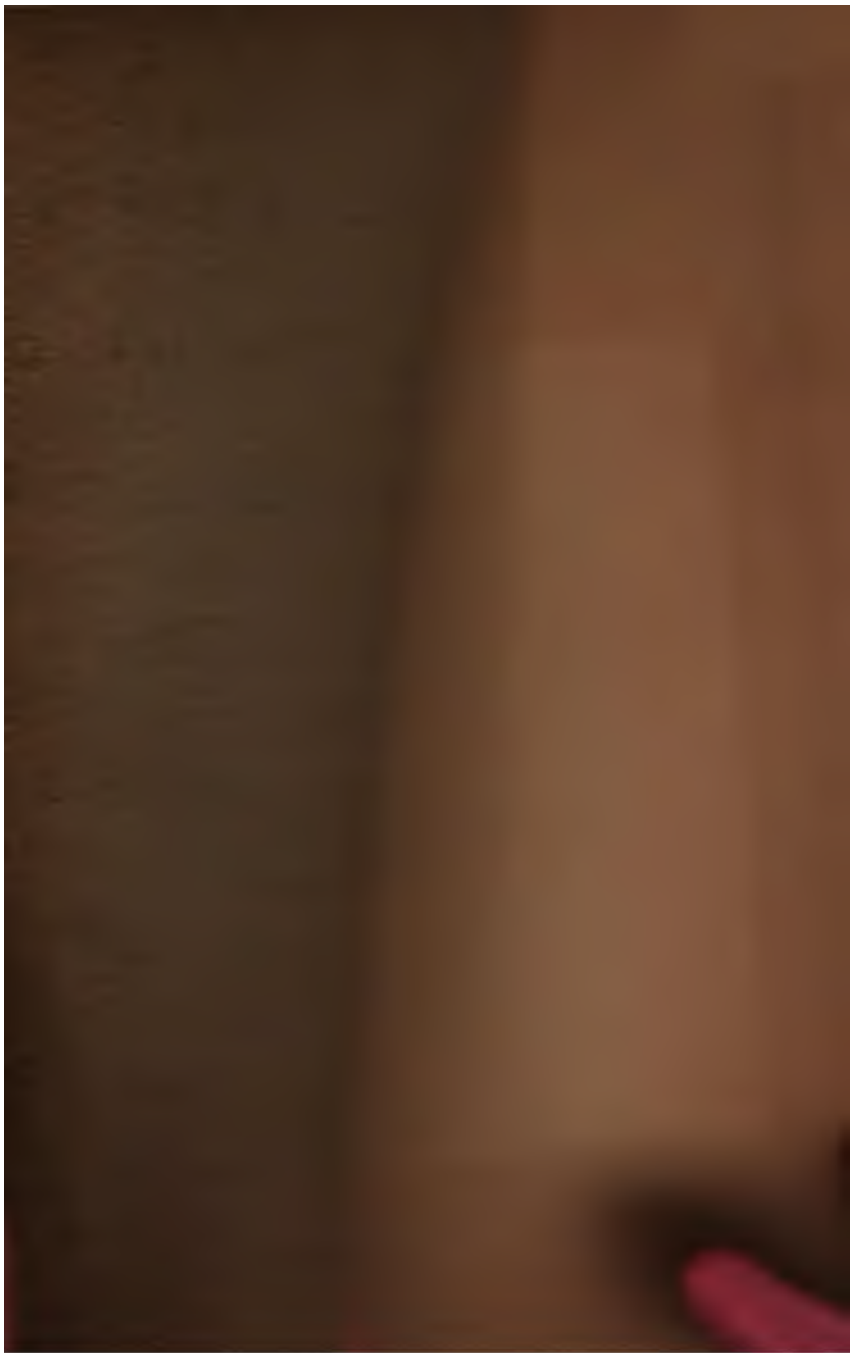
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# THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND

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*G. S. D. Hall*

## THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### A BROTHER'S LEGACY.

**M**R. SAMUEL HOOKHAM was seated in his chambers in the Temple. Among the account-books which littered the table was a ponderous ledger. Over this he was poring with the affectionate air with which a bibliomaniac pores over his most prized black-letter. The sun was shining without, and the voices of the birds in the Temple gardens were heard through the dust-grimed windows. Obviously he was not the sort of man to care for sunshine—or for birds.

“I think I might raise those rents in Badger’s Buildings threepence a week, or even sixpence. It’s twelve months since last I raised them.” He lifted his eyes from the columns of his ledger. “That’s the best of weekly properties. You needn’t give any notice before you raise your rents. Those who don’t want to pay can go.” He stroked his chin. “And

as there is generally nowhere else for them to go to, they have to stay. Few better investments than a good weekly property in the East End of London,—even in these socialistic days.”

Mr. Hookham looked down again at his ledger with something very like a grin. But hardly had he recommenced the absorbing study of its contents than there came from without the unmistakable sound of some one coming up the stairs.

“What fool’s that?”

As Mr. Hookham asked himself this hospitable question, it was obvious that, whoever the fool was, he was in a great hurry to reach his journey’s end. He appeared to be bounding up the stairs three at a time, as though a mad dog were at his heels. Mr. Hookham, who was not fond of promiscuous visitors, was meditating locking his door—there was not time to sport his oak—by way of suggesting that he was not at home, when he was saved the trouble by somebody flinging the door wide open, and entering the room as though he were flying for his life, and dropping, without the least regard to ceremony, into Mr. Hookham’s own particular chair. The visitor was a portly gentleman, clad in black from head to foot, who seemed to be in considerable agitation of mind and body. Mr. Hookham stared at him with not unnatural surprise, and under the circumstances not unjustifiable irritation.

"May I ask, sir, what you mean by entering a gentleman's chambers in this extraordinary manner?"

The visitor seemed scant of breath, which was not remarkable. For a person of his habit of body the haste which he appeared to have made was positively dangerous.

"Are you Samuel Hookham?" he gasped.

"Well, sir, and what if I am? Though I may mention that from strangers I'm accustomed to the prefix Mister. And pray, sir, who are you?"

"I'm an undertaker."

Mr. Hookham rose from his seat, and stared even more than he had stared before.

"A what?"

"An undertaker."

"And may I ask, sir, to what I owe the pleasure of this visit? I suppose you haven't come to bury me?"

"Not to bury you. I buried your brother."

"You——" Mr. Hookham started. "You buried my brother!"

"This day fortnight, in Nunhead Cemetery. Family grave, with fees, £13. Improved funeral car or hearse drawn by four horses, two modern carriages with pairs; elm shell, covered, lined, etc., stout case of polished oak, finished with best brass, mediæval furniture, and engraved inscription plate, with all necessary attendants; complete £20. Total £33. I've brought the bill to you."



The visitor handed Mr. Hookham a blue document of portentous size. Mr. Hookham could scarcely believe his ears and eyes.

“Do I understand you to say that my brother Matthew is dead?”

“Dead as a coffin-nail! Couldn't have had a handsomer funeral if all London had been there to see. He instructed me to bring the bill to you.”

Mr. Hookham became quite excited.

“But, my good sir,—your name, I presume, is—eh”—glancing at the headline of the document he held—“Truelove? You are the Mr. Truelove mentioned here?”

“The same. Established as General Furnishing Undertakers in 1789.”

“Mr. Truelove, I have not seen my brother Matthew for sixteen years. We parted—er—owing to a slight disagreement. What on earth has he been doing all this time?”

“I can guess.” Mr. Truelove sighed. “Particularly after the last fortnight, I can guess.”

“But he was a man of means. What has become of his property? Are you acquainted with his testamentary depositions? Of course I am his natural heir. What has he left?”

“All that he has left is this.” Mr. Truelove produced, very gingerly, between his finger and thumb, a small paper parcel from the recesses of his waist-

coat pocket. "He said that if I gave you this you would see that my bill was paid."

Mr. Hookham took the parcel, with a distinctly doubtful cast of countenance. But when he opened it he gave a start of surprise. And no wonder; for it contained, with no protection but the piece of coarse tissue paper, a crystal, which glittered and gleamed like a veritable mountain of light.

"What—what is this? A diamond?"

"Ah, I should say it was a diamond, and something like a diamond, too; your brother said that it was worth every penny of twenty thousand pounds"

"Twenty thousand pounds? You don't mean to say that he sank the whole of his fortune in a single precious stone?"

"I expect he did; anyhow, he said it had ruined him."

"Ruined him! when you say that it is worth twenty thousand pounds. A man is not ruined who has twenty thousand pounds."

"I can only tell you what he told me. He was lodging three doors off my place of business. When he was dying he sent for me. 'Mr. Truelove,' he said, 'I want you to give me a gentleman's funeral. I have no money with which to pay you,—when I am dead there will be only just enough to pay my landlady's bill,—but I want you to give this to ——— and with that he gave me the dia-

of paper, just as you

twenty thousand pounds. You'll find his address upon this envelope. I want you to give him this letter too.' ”

Mr. Truelove took an envelope from his pocket ; it was not in the cleanest condition, and it had been opened—Mr. Hookham perceived that fact at once.

“ Who opened this envelope ?—you ? ”

“ Yes, me. And I wish I hadn't.” And again Mr. Truelove sighed.

The envelope contained a letter written on one side of half a sheet of note paper. Here it is :—

“ DEAR SAMUEL,—I have told Mr. Truelove to give you the diamond, which you will have with this, after I am dead and he has buried me. Be good enough to pay his bill. Mr. Truelove is a perfect stranger to me. It would seem a rash thing to entrust such a commission to a perfect stranger ; but I have not the slightest doubt that you will get the diamond, sooner or later,—certainly quite soon enough for you. It is called the Devil's Diamond, and is worth, at a trade valuation, at least twenty thousand pounds. It has the pleasing property of bringing ill-luck to its possessor. It has brought the devil's own luck to me. I was a rich man when first I had it ; I am a beggar now, besides having lived the devil's own life into the bargain. If I were to tell you the pranks that cursed stone has played me ! It has at last succeeded in bringing me to an early grave. I have

only had it two years, and it has done for me already. By the way, it possesses another pleasing property,—it is impossible to sell it. Whoever endeavours to do so will have the best of reasons for being sorry that he ever tried. It can only be given away. Knowing your character as I do, I am aware that you will never be able to give away a stone of the value of twenty thousand pounds. It was impossible for me ; how still more impossible will it be for you ! If ghosts are allowed to revisit these earthly plains, I hope I shall be permitted to see the fun—there will be fun, I know.

“ Your affectionate brother,

“ MATTHEW HOOKHAM.”

The letter, which was written in the finest possible hand, took some time to read. When he had finished, Mr. Hookham, looking up, found that Mr. Truelove's eyes were fixed upon him.

“ It's true,” said Mr. Truelove ; “ every word ! ” The undertaker groaned. “ I ought to know. I tried to keep the thing. Twenty thousand pounds—such a prize as that ! I didn't think there was any harm. The time I've had with it ; I wouldn't go through another such a fortnight, not for twenty million pounds.”

Mr. Hookham's manner, as he replied to the undertaker, whose moral standard, to say the least of it, seemed a little vague, was crushingly severe.

“Your conduct, sir, has been disgraceful. You have not only detained and opened a letter not addressed to you, but you have actually endeavoured to steal property of the value of twenty thousand pounds. Your conscience put a bar to your dishonesty; but you can hardly have the presumption to expect me to pay what you are pleased to call your bill.”

Rising from Mr. Hookham's arm-chair, Mr. Truelove began to rub his hands.

“I think you'd better pay it,” he observed—“I think you really had. Mind—I don't ask you to—I don't say do or don't; but I think you really had.”

“I am of a different opinion, sir. I not only think, under the circumstances, that I'd better not, but I beg to say plainly that I won't!”

As Mr. Truelove stood with the handle of the door in his hand, preparatory to taking his departure, he murmured a last proffer of his advice.

“You'd better pay it! you're sure to send it me—I know you will, and then you'll wish you'd paid it now, you know.”

But as Mr. Hookham still seemed to be of a different opinion, Mr. Truelove disappeared.

When he was left alone, Mr. Hookham's ideas, clear enough as a rule, as his debtors knew too well, were, for once in a way, a little confused. To have lost sight of his only brother for sixteen years, and then to hear of him ~~again~~ under, to put it mildly, such peculiar

circumstances, even for a well-balanced mind, *was* confusing. Mr. Hookham and the deceased Matthew had quarrelled all their lives; there was such a strong family likeness between them that they could scarcely help but quarrel. Two keener pairs of eyes for a bargain probably never were encountered. The time which was not spent in getting the better of the world in general they spent in trying to get the better of each other. But there was one thing Matthew had which his brother lacked, and that was a sense of humour,—almost too keen a sense of humour, for he derived quite indescribable enjoyment from watching the troubles of his friends, and even, when occasion offered, of his brother.

Mr. Hookham sat at the table with Mr. Truelove's bill upon his left. "Just like Matthew to leave me to pay his burial bill,—that was his idea of a joke!" Matthew's letter was on his right, and the diamond was in front of him. What a diamond! If he had only been a student of the "Arabian Nights" it would have reminded him of the diamond which was found in the fish's stomach, and which lighted the house at night. But Mr. Hookham despised such lore.

"Twenty thousand pounds!" Mr. Hookham smacked his lips. Such figures as those no man could possibly despise. "What a fool he was! If I'd gone first, I'd have seen him hanged before I left it him; I'd have swallowed it first. As for the stuff and

nonsense in his letter, Matthew always was an idiot! Twenty thousand pounds!" Mr. Hookham took up the letter and glanced at it. "'It is called the Devil's Diamond'!—what a name for a precious stone! christened it himself, I expect; that would be just like another of his ideas of a joke. 'And is worth, at a trade valuation, at least twenty thousand pounds.' Suppose it is not worth twenty thousand pence?"

Mr. Hookham's countenance fell. He realised very keenly indeed that to have played such a trick on him as that *would* have been exactly his brother's idea of a joke, and of a good joke, too.

"Lucky I never paid that fool his bill; shouldn't be surprised if they had got up the story of its value between them to make me pay for burying him. I'll take it round to Schwabe—he'll tell me what it's worth."

Mr. Schwabe was a gentleman of Mr. Hookham's acquaintance, who was in the diamond trade, and whose office was in Hatton Garden. It is some little distance from the Temple to Hatton Garden, and the idea of carrying a stone which might be worth twenty thousand pounds wrapped in a piece of tissue paper loose in his waistcoat pocket did not commend itself to Mr. Hookham. He searched about for some more suitable means of transit. Finally his ideas took the shape of wrapping the stone up in half a dozen newspapers, and cramming the newspapers into a jewel-box, and the jewel-box into a

cash-box, and the cash-box into a Gladstone bag, and, when he was quite sure that the Gladstone bag was strapped and locked, he started off upon his journey.

Hardly, however, had he reached the bottom of the stairs than he was seized with a pain in the side—so violent a pain that he was obliged to lean against the wall to enable him to maintain even a semblance of the perpendicular. While he was in this position a ribald youth, coming across the courtyard, seeing he was in difficulties, mistook the cause of them.

“My hi!” exclaimed this youth. “*Won't* you 'ave 'ot coppers!”

Mr. Hookham, momentarily inarticulate, was obliged to content himself with shaking his fist at this evil-thinking vagabond. In a minute, the pain subsiding, he was able to make his way into Fleet Street. Hardly, however, had his feet touched that classic pavement than the pain returned, if anything with increased intensity. It had been his intention to walk to Hatton Garden. Matthew's legacy might not be worth even twenty thousand pence, and he was not at all the sort of man to pay a cab fare for the mere sake of increasing the circulation of the currency. But it was impossible to stagger through the streets with *that* pain in his side. So Mr. Hookham made a virtue of necessity and hailed a cab, comforting himself with the reflection that it was safer to ride



than to walk—which reflection, in this case, proved signally wrong.

Hansom cabmen are not noted for careful driving. Apparently he had hit upon the most careless driver in the whole of the town, or else ill luck followed him. The man lumbered and blundered from side to side, and all over the place, as though he had laid a wager to bring himself and his cab and his horse and his fare to grief in the shortest possible space of time. Mr. Hookham, sitting inside speechless with pain—for the pain in his side continued all the way—was also green with fright. It seemed to him a miracle that he was still alive when he reached his journey's end. In paying the driver his strictly legal fare he was persuaded, from the expression of his countenance, which really was peculiar, that the man was drunk.

Mr. Schwabe was in. Mr. Hookham was just able to stagger into his office and plump down into a chair. In one respect his mode of entrance bore a strong resemblance to Mr. Truelove's—it was distinctly of an unceremonious kind.

“Hookham!” cried Mr. Schwabe, starting from his seat at sight of him. “Are you ill?”

Mr. Hookham was just able to gasp out one word, and that word was “Brandy!”

Had any gentleman, suddenly overtaken by illness, suggested brandy in Mr. Hookham's rooms, they would have suggested it in vain. But Mr. Schwabe

was cast in a different mould. He immediately produced a bottle from a receptacle, which evidently contained several others of the same, or a kindred, kind. It was only after he had swallowed half a tumbler of neat spirit that Mr. Hookham began gradually to revive. "I can't think what it was. I was never taken like that before. It must have been heartburn."

"I shouldn't like to have that sort of heartburn myself," observed Mr. Schwabe, curiously regarding his friend. "I would have it seen to if I were you."

"Oh, it's nothing. I've been unusually excited, that is all, though it was a smart twinge while it lasted. Are we quite private here?"

Mr. Hookham's eyes wandered round the room and finally rested on the door.

"Quite. That door is both sound- and fire-proof. And my walls have got no ears."

"You know something of diamonds, Schwabe?"

"I ought to. It's my trade. I've lived among them since I was so high." Mr. Schwabe demonstrated the height he referred to by raising his hand about six inches from the ground.

"Eh—what passes between us is confidential, you understand?"

"Certainly." Mr. Schwabe, who knew his friend, began to be amused. "Has anybody been trying to get you to lend them money on their diamonds?"

"No, no. I have something here about which I want to have your opinion."

As he watched Mr. Hookham's proceedings Mr. Schwabe's amusement increased. First the cash-box appeared, then the jewel-box, then the newspapers. When all the wrappers were removed they formed quite a large heap upon the floor.

"How much would you say that was worth?"

As Mr. Hookham asked this question he removed the last of the wrappers and revealed—the mountain of light! When he saw this all traces of mere amusement passed from Mr. Schwabe. His usually immobile face lit up, and he leaned forward as though longing to feast his eyes upon this beautiful thing.

"Great snakes! Where did you get that from? My stars! What a diamond! It's the finest stone I ever saw!"

"How much should you say it was worth?"

"Worth? How can you say how much a stone like that is worth? It's worth a fortune. In former days it would have been worth a king's ransom. There would not have been a crowned head in Europe who would not have endeavoured to grind out of his subjects the wherewithal to purchase it. Let me look at it—it's worth one's while to have lived if only to be able to say that one has handled such a stone."

If such really were Mr. Schwabe's opinion—and

men have held similar opinions about other things, some about a teapot even, and why not about diamonds?—it would appear that he quickly changed his mind. In his enthusiasm he stretched out his hand to tenderly touch the precious thing, but no sooner had he got it in his grasp than he sprang from his seat with a yell which might have shaken the ceiling, and flung it down again upon the floor.

“The devil!” he screamed, hopping about the room like a bear upon hot plates. “Curse your infernal tricks! It would serve you right if I had your life for this!”

Mr. Hookham stared at Mr. Schwabe with most natural surprise. He had passed from fervid enthusiasm to frantic rage with the rapidity of a quick-change artiste. And it was really curious to see a gentleman who scaled a good sixteen stone bounding with so much agility about his office floor. And he had thrown the diamond on to the ground—the stone which was worth the ransom of a king! Mr. Hookham stooped to pick it up. As he did so he did exactly what Mr. Schwabe had done—directly he had it in his grasp he yelled. If he did not fling it immediately from him it was not for want of trying. But the stone actually appeared to stick to the palm of his hand; and it was only after the most frenzied efforts that he was able to haul it from him with a crash upon the floor. When he had succeeded in doing so

he stood in the centre of the room and roared, literally bellowed like a bull.

“Stop that noise!” cried Mr. Schwabe, scandalised at an uproar which was even greater than he himself had made. “Do you want all the neighbourhood in!”

Thus appealed to, Mr. Hookham subsided into what was very much like a state of tears.

“It’s burnt a hole right through my hand!” he whined.

“Serves you right! You shouldn’t try to play your fool’s tricks upon other men. Look at that.”

Mr. Schwabe held out his hand. On the palm there was a scar which had the appearance of having been very recently branded there by a red-hot iron. “Look at that.”

Mr. Hookham held out his. On his palm the scar was even more perceptible than on his friend’s.

“Serve you right! Why didn’t you tell me the thing was hot?”

“Hot!” Mr. Hookham stared. “How was I to know that it was hot? It wasn’t hot when I put it in the bag.”

“Don’t tell your cock-and-bull stories to me! it’s a case of the biter bit, my boy,—I’m not sure I oughtn’t to give you a good sound hiding into the bargain. Pick up the stone and clear out. I want to have my hand dressed,—I wouldn’t lose it for all the diamonds in the world.”

Mr. Hookham did as he was told. He picked up the stone, with the aid of a pair of tongs.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it burnt a hole through boxes and bag and all," said Mr. Schwabe. "It's hotter than a red-hot coal."

Mr. Hookham made no reply. He left his friend's office—bearing the Gladstone bag in his unburnt hand—with something of the air of the cur who carries his tail between his legs. He journeyed back on foot, stopping at a chemist's to have his hand dressed ; the chemist asking questions about the cause of the injury which he found it difficult to answer.

When he reached the Temple he found a small crowd gathered on the landing outside his chambers. Among them was a Mr. Walter Ferrol, a young gentleman who was "reading" with the great Juice, Q.C., on the floor beneath. Mr. Ferrol was a young gentleman to whom Mr. Hookham had a peculiar aversion ; he was therefore not overwhelmed with satisfaction when he came forward to greet him with a bland smile upon his somewhat vacuous countenance.

"Really, Mr. Hookham, quite a pleasure ; I was not aware you had a brother."

Mr. Hookham scowled, but Mr. Ferrol blandly waved his hand towards Mr. Hookham's door. Mr. Hookham's glance followed the direction of the hand, and he saw inscribed right across the panels, in good-

sized letters of red paint, this pertinent—or impertinent—inquiry :

**“WHY DON'T YOU PAY THE MAN  
FOR  
BURYING YOUR BROTHER?”**

Under this there was a true and particular copy, also in what appeared to be red paint, of Mr. Truelove's small account. It was not surprising that it should have attracted the attention of the loungers on the stairs. While Mr. Hookham continued to gaze, Mr. Ferrol, standing at his elbow, continued to address to him a somewhat exasperating string of observations.

“Thirty-three pounds does seem a large sum to have to pay for burying a brother,—one must allow that, don't you know. Still there are some men who would pay more ; and then there's the family grave-room for you ! There must always be a certain satisfaction when you bear that in mind.”

Approaching the door Mr. Ferrol began commenting on the several items of Mr. Truelove's account, in the style of a lecturer addressing a class.

“‘Improved funeral car, or hearse,’—one of those slap-up constructions, we may presume, all gilded corners and plate glass—‘drawn by four horses.’ Four in hand, you see ! regular Derby team ! fancy tooling them along with that plate-glass structure in

the rear. 'Two modern carriages with pairs,'—two, you see, and 'modern,' and 'carriages,' not 'carts,' 'with pairs.' It doesn't say a pair of what, but possibly one fool inside and another fool out; 'elm shell, covered, lined, etc. '; observe etc. 'Etcetera' is a Latin word denoting 'and other things.' Now what other things? Imagination may supply the answer."

"Let me pass!"

Mr. Hookham, who apparently had at last found his tongue, cut Mr. Ferrol's ribaldry short by thrusting him on one side and letting himself into his room. When he was in he locked the door behind him; but he could still hear Mr. Ferrol continuing his remarks without.

"This is that scamp of an undertaker's doing; I'll make him smart for this! If he thinks he is going to get money out of me by means of defamatory libels he has mistaken his man."

Mr. Hookham sat down at his table. His hand still pained him; he felt in a curiously unsettled frame of mind. Had he had some brandy on the premises he would certainly have tried the remedial force of a second internal application. But he had none. While that scurrilous crowd lingered on the landing he felt an odd unwillingness to go out in search of some.

Suddenly he remembered Mr. Schwabe's words about the stone burning a hole through bag and



boxes and all. With hands which actually trembled he unfastened the Gladstone and began eagerly to see if any damage had been done. Apparently not; he could see no sign of any. There was his beauty, the mountain of light, the diamond that was worth the ransom of a king, nestling in a corner of the jewel-box. How beautiful it was! How it sparkled! How it focussed a million rays of light, how it flashed back a myriad rainbow hues! And it was worth the ransom of a king. Mr. Hookham stretched out his hand and touched it gingerly with his finger tip. It *seemed* quite cool. He pressed his finger against it harder. It *was* quite cool; he took it up; his hand was perhaps a little feverish, for it felt deliciously cool and pleasant to the touch. How could it, then, have burnt him—and his friend? Had he not had the evidence of his bandaged and smarting palm he might have supposed that his imagination had played a trick. But there was no disputing such evidence as that. He replaced the diamond in the jewel-case. Taking his brother's letter from his pocket he unfolded it and re-perused it carefully from end to end.

On a second study it made a stronger impression on him than it had done before. The suggestion, however, that he should pay Mr. Truelove's bill excited his ire.

“Pay him! yes, I'll pay him! I'll make him smart for publishing a malicious libel and disfiguring

my door. When those idiots have gone I'll get some water and wash it off,—but he shall smart for it, all the same.”

A little consideration showed that it was singular that Matthew should have entrusted so valuable a stone to a perfect stranger. Even more singular appeared his implicit confidence in the fact that sooner or later it would reach its proper destination. He seemed even to have suspected the trustee's honesty, but his suspicions seemed in no way to have affected his belief that it would reach his brother in the end. And then why had he called it the Devil's Diamond? What an exceedingly unpleasant name! “It has the pleasing property of bringing ill-luck to its possessor.” When Mr. Hookham read that he scowled. It was absurd to suppose that such a property could belong to anything,—and to a stone! Still—well—Matthew was a fool!

“It has brought the devil's own luck to me. I was a rich man when first I had it,—I am a beggar now, besides having lived the devil's own life into the bargain. If I were to tell you the pranks that cursed stone has played me! It has at last succeeded in bringing me to an early grave. I have only had it two years, and it has done for me already.”

This was certainly strange language for a sane man to use. And Mr. Hookham had no reason—no special reason, that is—to suppose his brother to have been

insane. Mr. Hookham laughed—not very pleasantly, but still he laughed.

“I think I’ll let it try its hand on me—I think I will. A diamond worth twenty thousand pounds—Schwabe says it’s worth the ransom of a king, and I suppose that would be fixed at twenty thousand pounds at least—would have to have an uncommonly bad reputation before it became formidable to me. I suppose Matthew got fooling his money away, and then attributed its loss to anything but his own want of common-sense? I’ve heard of that sort of thing before.”

Mr. Hookham laughed—and scowled, in judicious combination—still more when he came to that part of the letter which spoke of its being impossible to sell the stone.

“I never read such nonsense in my life! Not able to sell a stone of the value of twenty thousand pounds! Well, I’m in no hurry to find a purchaser, and I suppose it might be a delicate matter to find one at a moment’s notice for such a stone as that; but I think I know a party who would give me a five-pound note for it, at any rate! If I want to get rid of it I shall have to give it away, shall I? I fancy I shall want to get rid of it very badly indeed before I come to that.”

When he had completed the perusal of the letter  
his dominant expression was a scowl—a scowl of an

altogether unmistakable kind. Matthew's modestly expressed hope that he might be permitted, as a ghost, to revisit these mortal shades "to see the fun," and his firmly-expressed opinion that there would be fun to see, did not appeal to Mr. Hookham's sense—or rather absence—of humour in the least. He folded the letter and placed it in his pocket. Then he listened.

"I wonder if those idiots have gone?"

He stole to the door, and pressed his ear to the panel. All was still. He opened the door and peeped outside. Just at the moment the postman came up the stairs and handed him a letter. The official stared at the inscription on the door, and then at Mr. Hookham. But Mr. Hookham looked grim and wordless; and the postman, perhaps deeming that if speech is silver silence is golden, went silently away.

"I'll sport the oak, and then perhaps I shall be allowed to wash the rubbish off in peace."

When he had sported his oak, Mr. Hookham returned into his room. He read his letter. It was from an insurance company, notifying him that the necessary payment on certain fire policies of his was overdue. He was a little startled.

"How came I to forget that? It was a very careless thing to do—an act of forgetfulness which I never remember to have been guilty of before, and I know

that I got out the cheque-book to write a cheque. However, I will send them one directly I have washed this rubbish off the door."

But washing "the rubbish off the door" was an operation which occupied some time. He brought a basin, and some water, and an old towel, and began; but the "rubbish" declined to come off. He fetched some soap and a scrubbing-brush, and tried scrubbing; still it refused to disappear. His indignation grew apace.

"I'll make that villain smart for this! Now I should like to know what I'm to do!"

But he was a man of resources. Among the odds and ends which his rooms contained was some paint in a can.

"I'll paint it out," he said.

He proceeded to paint it out. The paint in the can was black—a somewhat sombre colour, but anything was better than having Mr. Truelove's bill, with the the pertinent, or impertinent, inquiry overhead, staring the whole world in the face. While he was about it it occurred to him that he might as well make a complete job of the thing. The door wanted painting—it had never been re-painted while he had been there, and he had been an occupant of those chambers for over twenty years—and it was some consolation to think that he was, at any rate, saving the cost of a workman. So he shrouded the whole of the

door, from top to bottom, with the same cheerful funereal hue.

By this time evening was lengthening the shadows. Mr. Hookham's chambers, never very bright, were now dim and ghostly. When he had finished his self-imposed task, where he stood it was quite dark, yet he glanced up as if to admire the fruit of his labours. As he did so he sprang back with a start—well, it was a start of amazement, perhaps. There, on the new black paint, which was still wet, and smelling very strongly, was the inscription shining out through the darkness plainer than ever :—

“WHY DON'T YOU PAY THE MAN  
FOR  
BURYING YOUR BROTHER?”

And under it was Mr. Truelove's account, exact in every item as before, gleaming out at him, as it seemed, in letters of fire. As he stared, speechless, there came a thundering rat-tat-tat at the outer door. Mechanically, really scarcely knowing what he was doing, he opened it. A man, apparently in a high state of excitement, stood without.

“Mr. Hookham!” said this person, in a very husky voice, which seemed to be owing partly to agitation and partly—a considerable part—to gin, “for God's sake come along, sir! The Buildings is on fire!”

"The Buildings on fire? What do you mean? Who are you?"

"Don't you know me, sir? I'm Larry, what sees that none of 'em don't go away without paying their rents. Buildings—Badger's Buildings—is on fire!"

"Very well, I will come directly. You can go."

But the man showed no signs of moving.

"Good Lord deliver us! Whatever's that?"

He was staring with might and main at the fiery letters which flamed upon the newly-painted door.

"It's—it's nothing. It's—it's a little joke of mine. Don't I tell you you can go?"

To make his meaning clear, Mr. Hookham slammed the door in the fellow's face.

As he passed into the room there was a slight thud, as of something falling. Turning, he saw, shining through the darkness—a mountain of light indeed!—the diamond. Matthew's legacy lying on the floor.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LEGACY OBJECTS TO BEING REALISED.

IT was an early hour on the following morning when Mr. Hookham returned to his chambers; but early as was the hour, he found someone awaiting his arrival. It was Mr. Truelove. Mr. Hookham did not seem at all surprised to see him, but looked up at him with lustreless eyes as though it were the most natural thing in the world to receive a visit from an undertaker before the arrival of the morning's milk. No greetings were exchanged, but when Mr. Hookham had unlocked the outer door, and the inscription was revealed, blazing upon the fresh black paint, Mr. Truelove shook his head.

“ Ah ! I knew there'd be something of the kind— I knew there would ! You'd better have paid me as I advised you to, you know.”

He followed Mr. Hookham into the room. When that gentleman sat down, he—altogether uninvited—sat down too. Mr. Hookham, in general one of the



most particular of men as regards his personal appearance, looked wofully unkempt and dirty.

"Since last night I've lost five hundred pounds a year," he groaned.

"What's that? It's nothing compared to what you will lose. Look at him; he lost his life."

Mr. Truelove jerked his thumb over his shoulder. The allusion was to the deceased Matthew. Mr. Hookham went on, apparently unheeding.

"Badger's Buildings produced last year £513 19s. 9d. net." And again he groaned.

"You'll get used to losing things in time. The very first day I had that stone I had a funeral come to grief in the Mile End Road." Mr. Truelove groaned in harmony.

"They were insured for five thousand pounds. I've paid on that policy for eleven years. The half-yearly payment was due ten days ago. For the first time I overlooked it. Last evening I received an intimation of my oversight, and last night they were burnt to the ground!—uninsured."

"It's the stone," said Mr. Truelove. "It's that there Devil's Diamond."

Mr. Hookham, looking up, seemed for the first time to recognise his presence.

"What do you want now?" he peevishly inquired.

"It isn't what I want; it's what you want. Some-

thing kept on telling me all night that you might want to pay that little bill of mine."

"Don't I tell you that since I saw you I am the poorer by five hundred pounds a year? Do you think I am likely to be in a humour for paying bills—and other people's too?"

Mr. Truelove sighed, and shook his head.

"Still, I'd pay it all the same, if I was you."

For some reason the undertaker's words seemed to make an impression on Mr. Hookham's mind. He glanced at his visitor out of the corner of his eyes, and pondered. Then he unlocked a drawer in the table at which he was seated and, taking out a cheque-book, wrote a cheque for three and thirty pounds. When he had written it, he produced Mr. Truelove's account. "Here's your money; receipt your bill." Mr. Truelove did as he was told. "Now you can go."

Without a word Mr. Truelove went. He went, that is, as far as the door; for when he had opened it he paused, the door in his hand.

"There! I knew how it would be. It's gone!" he cried.

"Gone!"

Mr. Hookham started from his chair. He went to the door. It was gone,—the inscription which had, a minute back, been flaming in scarlet letters upon the freshly-painted door. Mr. Hookham grasped Mr. Truelove by the arm.

"Come inside," he said, "and shut the door."

They returned into the room. Mr. Hookham began fumbling with the papers which littered the table, seeming uneasy in his mind.

"What—what makes you think there is anything curious about that stone?"

"It isn't what I think, it's what I know. I wouldn't be the owner of that stone not for a million pounds a year. What would be the use of the money if I had it? I should lose it in no time, and perhaps my life as well. I should be wishing I was dead, at any rate."

Mr. Truelove, who did not seem happy, although he had been paid his bill, took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"Perhaps—perhaps, then, I'd better sell it?"

"Sell it!" Mr. Truelove gasped. "If I was you, I wouldn't try. What do you think I've been doing all the time I've had it? Haven't I been trying to sell it morning, noon, and night? Good Lord! the time I've had."

As he made this frank confession, the perspiration rolled down Mr. Truelove's countenance in streams, apparently called forth by the mere act of recollection.

"You impudent scoundrel! You dare to tell me you tried to rob me of twenty thousand pounds, and then come and ask me to pay your paltry bill!"

"I never asked you—never! I only said I thought you would find it better if you did."

“ Leave my room, sir ! Don't split hairs with me ! If—if I didn't feel unwell this morning, I should give you into the charge of the police. You thief ! ”

Mr. Truelove meekly shook his head, and went—this time right away. Even then Mr. Hookham was half-minded to call him back again, and address to him some fresh inquiries. He was very curious about the stone. But, curious as he was, he felt that he might pay for his curiosity too dear.

“ It's all stuff and nonsense,” he told himself. “ The fellow is an impudent thief. He would be only too glad to get it into his hands again. Of course he couldn't sell it ! Who would be likely to buy a stone of that value from such a one as he is ? I was a fool to pay his bill ! ”

But he thought of the inscription which had come and vanished ; and on the last point he was not quite clear in his mind. Perhaps it was as well he had paid it after all. As for not being able to find a purchaser at any price for a stone worth twenty thousand pounds, the idea was most absurd. None the less, at the recollection of his interview with Mr. Schwabe he winced. At the thought of Badger's Buildings, and the lapsed insurance, he winced still more. But then one need not have arrived at Mr. Hookham's age to know what curious coincidences there are in the world.

When he had gone out in response to the sudden call the night before—that call which had summoned

him to witness the loss of five hundred pounds a year—he had put the diamond in his safe; now, with listless air, he took it out. He brightened up as he beheld it. During the night it seemed actually to have increased in size; had he been a speculative man he would have wagered that it at any rate had grown in splendour. It positively blazed with light; it dazzled his eyes; indeed, as he gazed at it, it had a very curious effect on him: he found it difficult to remove his glance; it fascinated him as with some magic spell; it fired his breast with an unwonted passion; he gloated on it as a sensualist might be supposed to gloat on some fair woman; he feasted on its beauty, as it were; drank in its glorious light; it inspired him with a singular delusion; it seemed to speak to him; he seemed to hear its voice.

“Sell me,” it seemed to say. “Turn me into gold. There is a fortune in my smile! I am worth the ransom of a king!”

No harder-headed man than Mr. Hookham, yet the voice of the diamond filled him with a strange delusion. It warmed him through and through; it banished all his listless airs—drove from him the memory of his loss—made a young man of him again.

“Sell me! sell me!” it seemed to say.

“I will!” he cried,—out loud, so that his voice rang through the room; and—was it fancy?—the diamond smiled; nay, not only smiled, it laughed—it

was like the sound of wondrous music in his ears ; and Mr. Hookham, he laughed too.

“ At once ! at once ! ” the diamond cried.

“ At once ! ” cried Mr. Hookham too.

He caught up his hat, and, all dishevelled and dirty as he was, he left the room. He must have been possessed, or he would never have behaved like that. It was not surprising that people stared at him as he passed along the street, he presented such a peculiar spectacle. He had his hand closed on the diamond, and every now and then he opened it to peep at the treasure which it held, and every time he peeped the diamond seemed to smile at him ; and when it smiled he smiled at it again. It is an unusual thing for street passengers to behave like that.

An acquaintance at sight of him and his peculiar “ carryings on ” pulled up and stared.

“ Hullo, Hookham ! Whatever’s the row ? You look as though you have been making a night of it, my friend.”

But Mr. Hookham did not even glance at him ; he simply went on his way and smiled. The acquaintance stared after him and whistled.

“ I should say, from appearances, that old Hookham’s ‘ cracked.’ ”

It was now between eight and nine o’clock, the hour at which the great stream of life sweeps citywards. Mr. Hookham went along the Strand—which is

scarcely the thoroughfare in which the average man would choose to air his eccentricities—through Bedford and Garrick Streets, across Leicester Square. He had not the slightest doubt as to whither his steps were tending. Something — *he* thought it was the diamond—kept whispering in his ear two well-known names, “Ruby and Golden! Ruby and Golden!” over and over again.

Every one knows, at least by reputation, the well-known firm of Messrs. Ruby and Golden. There are no more famous jewellers in the world. It is reported, and currently believed, that in their treasure-house in Bond Street there are gems before which the jewels in Aladdin’s Cave would pale their ineffectual fires. Who so likely to buy a diamond which was worth the ransom of a king? Where else was Mr. Hookham so likely to find a market for it if he could not find it there?

In Bond Street business is not at its flood tide at nine a.m. ; in fact, the shops have scarcely got their shutters down—or up, for nowadays they reverse matters, pulling them up where they used to take them down. Mr. Hookham’s appearance at Messrs. Ruby and Golden’s created a small sensation. An exceedingly well-dressed gentleman favoured him with a supercilious stare.

“ Well, my man, what can I do for you ? ”

Mr. Hookham, who was not accustomed to being

addressed as "my man," gave a little start. He forgot that he had been out all night, and had omitted to make his toilet before he started on his expedition.

"I wish to see one of the firm," he said.

"Well, you can't, because one of the firm's not here. I wouldn't trouble myself to call again, if I were you. Good-day."

But Mr. Hookham was not at all the sort of person to allow a shopman to turn him out of a shop quite so offhandedly as that.

"You jackanapes!" he said. It was the well-dressed gentleman's turn to start. "Your master shall be informed by me as to his servant's demeanour behind his back."

"What is the matter, Wilkinson?"

The well-dressed gentleman became a little pale. Mr. Hookham turned. An individual had entered the shop whose presence seemed to inspire the well-dressed gentleman with reverential awe.

"This—this person wishes to see one of the firm."

The new-comer addressed himself to Mr. Hookham.

"On what business? I am Mr. Golden."

"What I have to say to you must be said in private."

Mr. Golden eyed him up and down, possibly revolving in his mind whether his visitor was something in the commercial line, something new in pencil cases—or braces, perhaps; or, what was even worse,



a tout for a charity, the charity being not impossibly himself.

“It is against my rule to see strangers in private unless I am first acquainted with their business.”

“You will see me.”

Mr. Hookham looking up met Mr. Golden's eyes with a glance which impressed that gentleman with the belief that his bearing was hardly that of a “commercial,” or even of a tout for a charity. Mr. Hookham went on,—

“What I have to say to you is of the first importance. If you will step with me into your private room, I think I shall be able to convince you that I have no desire to trifle with your time.”

Even the most “pushing” traveller in braces or pencil-cases would hardly venture to address a man of Mr. Golden's standing with such words, and in such a tone, as that. Mr. Golden led the way into a room at the back of the shop, which, though not of vast dimensions, was more than comfortably furnished.

“What is it? My time is valuable.”

“I am Samuel Hookham, of Mitre Court, Temple. Although I am personally unknown to you, I believe your are acquainted with my friend Schwabe of Hatton Garden.”

“I know a Mr. Schwabe of Hatton Garden.”

“I believe that Mr. Schwabe is considered an authority on precious stones. I have lately come into

possession of a diamond which he assures me is the finest he has ever seen."

Mr. Golden smiled.

"Mr. Schwabe says that?"

"He does."

Mr. Golden removed his hat, which he had hitherto kept upon his head.

"Sit down, Mr. Hookham." Mr. Hookham sat down; Mr. Golden sat down too. "Since you say Mr. Schwabe is your friend, it is possible he used friendly language. May I ask how you came into possession of this remarkable stone?"

As he said this Mr. Golden was removing his gloves, and continued to smile.

"It was bequeathed me by my brother."

"And your brother?"

"How my brother became possessed of it I cannot tell you. I had not seen him for sixteen years, nor was I aware of the existence of the stone till after his death."

"And he left no explanation of how he came by it? I ask these questions because you must know that all really remarkable stones—and if what Mr. Schwabe says is correct yours must be a very remarkable stone indeed"—and again Mr. Golden smiled—"have a history."

"I am aware of that; but he left none. We were not on good terms, and he simply left the stone."

“And you wish——?”

Mr. Golden paused for Mr. Hookham to supply the words.

“Under certain circumstances I wish to dispose of it.”

“You have it with you?”

By way of answer Mr. Hookham stretched out his left hand, and there was the stone in the palm. Mr. Golden started. The action was a little startling, and he probably thought that it was a rough-and-ready way of carrying about a really remarkable stone. He looked at it; Mr. Hookham looked at it too. Was it a hallucination, or had it really *grown*? It seemed to him to have increased to twice its original size.

“Don't you think that's rather a curious way of carrying a diamond through the streets—in your naked hand?”

Mr. Golden's courteous and rather supercilious tones had all at once grown almost husky, as though he had caught a sudden cold. He did not take his eyes off the diamond on Mr. Hookham's extended palm.

“I knew I should not be robbed. I was not afraid.”

“But suppose some one had struck you a sudden blow, and knocked it out of your hand? Such things are not uncommon.”

“I was not afraid.”

“ Will you permit me ? ”

Mr. Golden put out his hand to take the diamond, so as to submit it to a closer examination. Mr. Hookham made no sign of objecting, and Mr. Golden's finger and thumb closed on the precious stone.

“ Is it fastened to your hand ? ”

“ Not at all. How do you mean ? ”

“ It seems as though it were stuck to your hand.”

Mr. Golden glanced up at Mr. Hookham with rather an acrid smile.

“ How can it be stuck to my hand ? ”

“ I hope, sir, you are playing me no trick.”

“ Playing you a trick ! What on earth do you mean ? Why don't you take it ? ”

“ Because I can't. You know very well I can't.” Mr. Golden's face had become distinctly clouded. “ I don't believe it's a diamond at all.”

“ Not a diamond ? What the dickens do you mean ? ”

“ It's some glutinous composition. Wilkinson ! ”

Mr. Golden raised his voice very authoritatively indeed. The sprucely-dressed gentleman appeared at the door ; the scene he saw was rather a curious one. The elegant Mr. Golden was seated on one chair, the shabby stranger on another just in front of him ; the stranger had his left arm extended, Mr. Golden his right, and Mr. Golden's finger and thumb were touching the centre of the stranger's palm with what at first

sight appeared to be affectionate familiarity. But neither Mr. Golden's countenance nor voice was at all affectionate.

"This person has endeavoured to foist off some glutinous compound as a diamond, and my finger and thumb have got stuck to it."

"Got stuck to it, sir?"

"Got stuck to it! Don't I say it plain enough? I shall have to send for the police." Mr. Golden turned to Mr. Hookham. "Now, sir, will you or will you not release my finger and thumb?"

Mr. Hookham seemed to be in a state of extreme bewilderment.

"I don't understand it; it *is* a diamond."

"Diamond! stuff and nonsense! Don't try any of your knave's tricks on me! Either release my finger and thumb or remove your hand."

"I can't—it's stuck to the palm."

"Stuck to the palm!"

Mr. Golden, full of indignation, persuaded that he was the victim, at the very least, of some hideous practical joke, gave a sudden violent jerk with the intention of releasing his finger and thumb; but instead of succeeding in doing that, he only succeeded in pulling Mr. Hookham, who was a smaller man than himself, and who expected nothing of the kind, out of his seat in a manner which was both singular and surprising.

“Wilkinson!” cried Mr. Golden, as the astonished Mr. Hookham crashed forward on his chest.

The astute Wilkinson grasped Mr. Hookham by both his shoulders. “None of that,” he said. “Don’t you play any of your games here.”

“Games! *My* games!” gasped Mr. Hookham. “He’s almost dislocated my arm.”

“Send for a policeman,” said Mr. Golden, who was very red in the face.

For once in a way a representative of the majesty of the law must have been very close at hand, for in a surprisingly short space of time a constable appeared.

“Officer, I give this man into custody for assault.”

“Assault!” gasped Mr. Hookham.

“What has he done, sir?”

“He’s—he’s fastened my finger and thumb to the palm of his hand.”

The constable stared. Apparently this was a variety of crime which was new to him.

“He’s done what, sir?”

“He’s fastened my finger and thumb to the palm of his hand!”

As he repeated his words it was plain that Mr. Golden was very angry indeed, and, it must be confessed, with cause. But still it seemed that the constable did not completely understand.

“How’s he done that, sir?”

“I don’t know how he’s done it! He has done it,

and that's quite enough for me. He's got some confounded thing, and—and my finger and thumb have got stuck fast to it."

The constable advanced. Mr. Wilkinson advanced too. On the policeman's face there was more than the suspicion of a smile. In spite of his indignation, which was genuine enough, Mr. Golden was evidently conscious of the absurdity of his situation; and Mr. Hookham did seem so overwhelmed by his bewilderment! The policeman addressed him.

"What is that you have in your hand?"

"It's a diamond."

As Mr. Hookham said so—which he did in a tone which seemed to suggest that he was not sure if he were standing on his head or heels—Mr. Golden gave utterance to a sound which might be described as a snort. It was expressive of complete incredulity and unmitigated scorn. Bending over, the policeman tried to see what the thing really was. But with Mr. Golden's finger and thumb above, and the palm of Mr. Hookham's hand below, the diamond was entirely hidden from sight. Grasping Mr. Hookham's wrist firmly with his right hand, the policeman gave it a sudden wrench.

"Don't!" cried Mr. Golden. "Do you want to break my arm, you idiot?"

"I beg your pardon, sir." Then, to Mr. Hookham, "Is it stuck to your hand?"

Mr. Hookham put his right hand to his brow, as though he were endeavouring to collect his thoughts.

“It seems as though it were.”

“Seems!” growled Mr. Golden. “Devilish good seeming!”

“I thought you said it was a diamond.”

“So it is a diamond.”

“If it’s a diamond how’s it got stuck to your hand? With glue?”

“Glue?” repeated Mr. Hookham. “I’ve no more idea how it has got stuck to my hand than the man in the moon. It’s—it’s a remarkable stone.”

“I should think it was a remarkable stone,” said Mr. Golden.

The constable turned his attention to the infuriated jeweller.

“Are you quite sure, sir, that your finger and thumb are both stuck fast?”

“Sure? Of course I’m sure. Do you think I’d stand here if I wasn’t sure?”

“Perhaps you will allow me to see you endeavour to release yourself.”

“Oh, with pleasure.”

Mr. Golden began to go through a series of gymnastics, which seemed a little peculiar in a gentleman of his appearance, which caused considerable inconvenience to Mr. Hookham; but he wholly failed to



release his finger and thumb from their close neighbourhood to Mr. Hookham's palm.

"Perhaps you will allow me to see what I can do. I will only just touch you."

The constable did only just touch him. He very gingerly took hold of Mr. Golden's finger and thumb. Without the slightest difficulty he took them clean away from the palm of Mr. Hookham's hand.

"That's very singular," said Mr. Golden, who seemed amazed at his sudden release.

"Very singular indeed." The policeman's tone was distinctly grim. "I suppose neither of you gentlemen have been having a little joke with me?"

Mr. Golden turned to Mr. Wilkinson.

"That's a nice question to be asked by a policeman! Constable, I don't know if you're aware who I am. I am Mr. Golden, the acting member of this firm. Do I strike you as the sort of person to play little jokes with policemen—before the morning letters have been opened even?"

Mr. Golden waved his hand towards a table which was covered with unopened letters. The policeman made no direct reply. Instead he took the diamond from the palm of Mr. Hookham's hand—an operation which was attended with no more difficulty than his first had been.

"It doesn't seem stuck to your hand now."

Again Mr. Hookham's right hand sought his brow.

“I never thought it was.”

“Oh, you didn’t, didn’t you? Don’t you think it’s rather a pity you didn’t say so before? Well, gentlemen, I suppose you don’t want me any more? I don’t know much about diamonds, but this seems a very pretty bit of glass, if it is glass. Not much the matter with it either—I mean in the glue line.”

“Let me look at it.”

Mr. Golden stretched out his hand; the policeman stretched out his. As he did so there was a flash, a loud report, and with remarkable celerity the policeman let the diamond fall to the ground.

“Good God!” ejaculated Mr. Golden, who had sprung up like a jack-in-the-box. The policeman seemed on the point of losing his temper.

“I don’t know what’s your idea of a joke, but it seems to me that this is carrying a joke a little bit too far. It might have blown my eyes out: as it is, it’s singed my beard.”

In fact, there was a perceptible odour of burning hair. A momentary silence followed this expression of the constable’s mind. The four actors in the scene stared at each other, and at the diamond, which scintillated and glittered as it lay in front of them upon the floor. Mr. Golden turned on Mr. Hookham.

“Who the mischief, sir, are you? And what infernal machine is it that you’ve brought here?”

Before he replied, Mr. Hookham advanced and,

stooping, picked up the diamond—not without exhibiting every appearance of the greatest care in handling it.

“What has occurred is as great a mystery to me as it is to you. I don't understand it at all. When I do it is possible that I shall call on you again.”

Mr. Hookham moved towards the door. The policeman laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

“Where are you going to?”

“Pray, what has that to do with you? I am going away.”

“Shall I let him go, sir?” the policeman asked of Mr. Golden. The jeweller hesitated. He made some notes upon a piece of paper.

“You say your name is Samuel Hookham, of Mitre Court, Temple, and that you are a friend of Mr. Schwabe's of Hatton Garden. I will cause inquiries to be made. Yes, constable, you can let him go, though if my inquiries prove unsatisfactory it by no means follows that he is gone for good.”

## CHAPTER III.

### MADAME NURVETCHKY IS INTRODUCED TO THE LEGACY.

WHEN Mr. Hookham found himself in the street, he was conscious, so far as he was conscious of anything, and for the first few moments that was saying very little indeed, of an emphatically complicated state of mind. He could not, so to speak, unravel his thoughts. Without any clear idea of where it was that he was going, he wandered up towards Oxford Street, the diamond tightly grasped in his left hand. In Oxford Street, almost mechanically, he stopped in front of a newsagent's shop, and his eye was caught by the displayed contents bills of the newspapers of the day. One item of news seemed to be *the* item in all of them. "Awful Accident in a Mine. Appalling Loss of Life." The announcement was repeated in almost the same words on all the bills. Slipping the diamond into his waistcoat pocket, Mr. Hookham went in and bought a paper,—scarcely knowing why, for by this time his own copy awaited

him at home. He opened the paper in the shop. His glance fastened on the displayed headlines which called attention to the accident to the mine. The first few words were enough for him. A famous Cornish mine, which carried its workings far under the sea, had given way overhead, and had been swallowed up by the waves. Mine and miners alike had disappeared. Mr. Hookham's hands dropped to his side.

"I hope there is nothing the matter, sir?" said the woman behind the counter. "I hope no friends of yours were in that dreadful mine?"

Without a word Mr. Hookham staggered out of the shop, clutching the paper in his hand.

"I will go to Schwabe," he told himself. "I will go to Schwabe."

He started at a good round pace to walk towards Holborn, reading the paper by snatches as he went. It was painful reading. Unless the accounts were wildly exaggerated, the Tretullack mine, Wheal Mary, would be no more a mine for ever. The loss of life was terrible, but it was not by any means that which most struck Mr. Hookham. The mine had been a magnificent property. It had been worked for centuries. Among mines it had been regarded almost in the light of Consols. It had been worked on the cost-book system, and Mr. Hookham had been one of the adventurers.

"There goes seven thousand pounds," he repeated to

himself as he hurried along. "There goes seven thousand pounds."

When he reached Hatton Garden he found Mr. Schwabe seated at the writing-table in his private office, engrossed in his morning letters. The diamond merchant looked up when Mr. Hookham entered.

"What, Hookham! Come to play another little joke, eh?"

Mr. Hookham sank into a chair. As Mr. Schwabe continued to look at him he was struck by his appearance, his up-all-night air, his untidy costume, his ill-brushed hat, his disarranged collar and tie, his trousers and boots all splashed with mud. As he beheld these things Mr. Schwabe whistled softly beneath his breath.

"I say, Hookham, where have you been spending the night?"

"At Badger's Buildings."

"Where?"

"At Badger's Buildings, watching them burning. Five hundred pounds a year gone in a single night."

"I don't understand you."

"No? It's plain enough! I've been watching my property being consumed by fire—making a bonfire, with which to warm the neighbourhood, of five hundred pounds a year."

Mr. Schwabe got up and stood with his back to the fireplace.

"I'm sorry to hear that. But perhaps it isn't so bad as you think. Wasn't the property insured?"

"Insured! I've paid on the policy eleven years; the half-yearly payment was due ten days ago. I forgot to take it up, and I've lost policy, and premiums, and property, and all."

"That's bad—very bad indeed."

Although Mr. Schwabe's tone was grave, there was the glimmer of a smile in the corners of his eyes. Perhaps the idea of old Hookham being hit—at last!—struck him as rather a joke. He rattled the keys and coppers in his trousers pockets with quite a cheerful air.

"Have you seen about Wheal Mary—the Tretullack Mine?"

"Dreadful thing—very!"

"It's robbed me of seven thousand pounds. Seven thousand pounds drowned by water, ten thousand pounds burned by fire, all between the evening and the morning of a single day."

"You don't mean that?"

"Don't I mean it!" scowled Mr. Hookham. It was plain that he meant it very much indeed.

"Seventeen thousand pounds! All in a single night! Very odd—very odd indeed!"

"And it's all that cursed stone!"

Mr. Hookham thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket. Withdrawing them he stretched his left arm

out at its full length. He had spoken almost in a shriek. His attitude was grotesquely wild.

“What have you got there? Hollo, that diamond! Cooled off, eh?”

“Cooled off? Curse the thing!”

Mr. Schwabe began to think that his misfortunes had affected his friend's brain. Mr. Hookham stood glaring at the diamond as though it was some creature of flesh and blood on whom he yearned to be revenged.

“I say, Hookham, if I were you I'd take a cooling draught and go home to bed—you're a little upset. I'll send for a cab and let one of my clerks go home with you.”

“Send for a cab! How do you think I'm going to pay for it when I've lost seventeen thousand pounds? Schwabe”—(Mr. Hookham glanced round the room with feverish eyes)—“Schwabe, there's something I want to say to you. I must say it to some one. It's not my habit to make confidences, but I'll make a confidant of you. Sit down.”

“I can listen where I am; and if I were you I wouldn't excite yourself more than you can help—you're excited enough already. What you have to say would be better said another time.”

“I'll say it now,” snapped Mr. Hookham, with quite a rabid snarl. “You see that stone?”

“I do, and know it too. I ought to—look at that!”



Mr. Schwabe stretched out his hand, on which there was still the mark of a scar.

"Look at that!" Mr. Hookham stretched out his. The bandage had gone, and on his palm there was quite an open wound. "But that's nothing to what this—this cursed thing has done. Do you know what this stone is called?"

"A diamond, unless I am a much mistaken man."

"A diamond! *The* diamond! The Devil's Diamond!"

Again Mr. Hookham's voice rose almost to a scream.

"Rather an odd name to call a stone, but then diamonds do, as a rule, get curious names. You know all large stones have some sobriquet or other."

Mr. Hookham had placed the stone upon the table, and was feeling in the inner pocket of his coat.

"That stone reached me yesterday afternoon, and I came at once with it to you."

"Was it hot when it reached you?"

"Hot? No."

"Then did you heat it as you came along? Very kind of you, I'm sure."

"Do you think I'm a fool to play such tricks? Read that letter. Schwabe, I—I want your advice."

Mr. Hookham handed Mr. Schwabe a letter which he had taken from the inner pocket of his coat. It

was his brother Matthew's testamentary epistle. Mr. Schwabe read it carefully to the end.

"Was your brother a lunatic?"

"Not more so than other men."

"And is that the stone referred to?"

"That's the stone."

"Well, and what do you want my advice about? As to the state of your brother's mind? I don't think I should have much difficulty in advising you on that."

"Schwabe, listen to me. That stone was all right when I packed it up to bring to you; it was all right when I unpacked it. When you touched it it was as hot as a red-hot coal. What explanation have you to give of that?"

"Hookham, I don't know if you take me for a lunatic as well."

"That stone was brought to me by a man named Truelove. He was an undertaker; he had buried my brother."

"You must have been very much obliged to him, I'm sure."

"He brought with him an unpaid bill for thirty-three pounds. Do you think I'm the sort of man to pay thirty three pounds for burying a brother who had behaved to me like an unprincipled scamp?"

"I should think that for burying some brothers three-and-thirty pounds was really cheap."

“I refused to pay it. When I got back from you I found the undertaker's bill painted on my door, and over it these words—

‘WHY DON'T YOU PAY THE MAN  
FOR  
BURYING YOUR BROTHER?’”

“I should think that undertaker was connected with Stubbs' agency.”

“Wait a minute. When I was alone I painted it all out with black paint. The instant I had done so it blazed out at me again in letters of flaming fire.”

“Really, this is getting interesting—quite like a ghost story.”

“This morning I paid the undertaker. Directly I had paid him the writing vanished from the door.”

“No! Upon my word, Hookham, you ought to issue this story in penny numbers.”

“Last night, just as the inscription burst through the fresh black paint, I received an intimation that the premium upon the fire policy was overdue. Immediately afterwards I received news that Badger's Buildings were on fire. This morning I hear that seven thousand pounds have been swallowed up by the sea.”

“Ah, now we are coming to something tangible

at last, though I don't see what this has to do with the rest of the tale."

"Don't you see from Matthew's letter that the stone brings ill-luck to its possessor? When I had paid the undertaker I started out to try to sell it."

"An operation not attended with much difficulty, I imagine—that is, if it had cooled off a bit."

"You think not? I took it to Ruby and Golden; I saw Mr. Golden; I showed him the stone."

"What did he say to it?"

"Not much. It stuck to him."

"Stuck to him?"

"It stuck to me first of all. I had it in the palm of my hand like that." (Mr. Hookham stretched out his left hand and placed the stone upon his open palm to demonstrate his meaning.) "Mr. Golden put out his finger and thumb to take it, so that he might examine it closer. It stuck fast to his finger and thumb, and at the same time stuck to the palm of my hand, so there were we two stuck together."

"I say, Hookham, you shouldn't play your tricks with such a man as Golden."

"Do you think I am a fool? It was that cursed stone. They sent for a policeman."

"Sent for a policeman?"

"Without the slightest difficulty he released Mr. Golden's finger and thumb, and removed the stone

from the palm of my hand. He thought we were having a joke with him."

"So I should think. I say, Hookham, you're going it in your old age, you know."

"Mr. Golden, amazed at the ease with which he had been released, asked the policeman to let him look at it. As the policeman was handing it to him it went off with a bang."

"Went off with a bang! What—the stone?"

"Yes, and singed the policeman's beard."

"Singed the policeman's beard! What—the stone? I say, Hookham, have you been taking anything to drown the memory of that seventeen thousand pounds?"

"Don't you see that Matthew says it's impossible to sell the stone? I believe it knows when I am trying to sell it, and—and won't allow me to."

Mr. Hookham took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. It was damp with perspiration. Mr. Schwabe eyed him with a peculiar expression of countenance.

"Oh, you don't think it will allow you to sell it. Would you like to have another try?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you like to sell it to me?"

"At a fair price, Schwabe,—at a fair price I would. You said that it was worth more than twenty thousand pounds."

"I was not aware that I named a figure." Mr. Schwabe approached the table and looked down at the diamond which Mr. Hookham had replaced upon it.

"Sure it's cooled off—eh?"

Mr. Hookham took it up and rubbed it with his fingers.

"It's cool enough,—it's beautifully cool."

"Put it back again." Mr. Hookham put it back upon the table. "I don't know, Hookham, if you're aware that when a diamond has been subjected to very great heat it depreciates in value. Many such stones, when tested by the wheel, have been ground into powder."

"That hasn't been subjected to great heat."

"Hasn't it? It was hot enough yesterday at any rate."

"That—that was nothing. There's nothing the matter with the stone."

"I thought you said there was."

"Perhaps—perhaps that was a hallucination of mine."

"Perhaps it was. I wonder if I dare touch it. Why, Hookham, how you look at me! You seem quite nervous, man. Now just you tell me fairly—you're such an old dodger!—is or isn't this a trick stone?"

"A trick stone? What do you mean?"

“It’s what you mean that I want to get at. I said—and I repeat it—that so far as appearances go, this is one of the finest if not, the finest, stone I ever saw. It appears to be even a finer stone than I thought it yesterday. I don’t say that I would give it, mind, but if it is all that it seems to be I believe that in certain quarters it would fetch even more than twenty thousand pounds. But this is an age of scientific progress, and there are scientific ‘fakes’ about which would deceive Old Nick. Now just you tell me straight out, is it a ‘fake’ or isn’t it?”

“I can only tell you that all I know about that diamond I have told you already. There is Matthew’s letter and there is the stone he refers to.”

“And a real beauty it seems to be. I never saw such colour. If it is a ‘fake’ science has made strides indeed. Well, here goes. It won’t bite me, I suppose.” Although his tone was buoyant Mr. Schwabe took the stone from the table with a degree of caution which was sufficiently evident. “It’s not hot now, it’s beautifully cool—as you said. By Jove, what a stone! it weighs——” Mr. Schwabe paused. Perhaps he was not anxious to enter into too minute details. “I’ve half a mind to go in for the speculation upon my own account. I will give—I will give—what the devil’s the matter with the thing?”

Judging from the expression of Mr. Schwabe’s countenance something was the matter. The bright

look with which he had been regarding the diamond faded all at once from his eyes. The lines about his mouth became rigid, his whole face became fixed and stern. As if involuntarily his fingers closed over the stone, and he gripped it, as it seemed, almost convulsively in his clenched fist.

“Are you up to your infernal tricks again?”

“My tricks!” gasped Mr. Hookham.

It seemed that Mr. Schwabe would speak but could not. His lips were compressed as though they would never again be parted. The arm which held the diamond was stretched out in front of him with what seemed curious rigidity. The muscles began to stand out upon his brow. His face became almost purple in hue. He seemed to struggle for breath. He reeled like a drunken man. With his disengaged hand he clutched at the back of a chair, as though to help him stand.

“What’s the matter, Schwabe? Are you going to have a fit?” With what seemed to be a supreme effort Mr. Schwabe raised the hand which held the stone above his head, unclenched his fist, and flung the diamond from him on the floor.

“My God!” he cried, and sank upon a chair.

“Language! language!”

Mr. Hookham turned. A new-comer was standing in the doorway, holding the open door in her hand. It was a woman, who was carrying one of those



dainty little leather bags which some women carry to hold their handkerchiefs and purses ; she closed the door and entered.

“ I hope I am not intruding, but I'm in a hurry, and wouldn't take your clerk's excuse that you were engaged. Mr. Schwabe, are you ill ? ”

“ I—I don't quite know.”

Mr. Schwabe made no attempt to greet her, not even rising from his chair.

“ What was that that you threw down ? I saw it sparkle in the air.” The new-comer glanced round the room ; her eyes lighted on the stone, which had travelled over the carpet until the wall had stayed its progress. “ Why !—is that a diamond ? ” Moving forward, she bent over it. “ What a lump of light ! May I take it in my hand and look at it ? ” Without waiting for permission she stooped and picked it up. Its splendour seemed to fascinate her. Her face grew radiant. “ What a diamond ! It laughs at me ! ”

“ That's something in your line,” said Mr. Schwabe, who was eyeing her proceedings with considerable curiosity.

“ In my line ? How do you mean ? ” she laughed. “ But of course it's in my line. I should like to know the woman in whose line it wasn't.”

“ That's a magic stone.”

“ A magic stone ? You're jesting ! ” she laughed

again. "But of course it's a magic stone. It's bewitching me already."

Mr. Schwabe turned to Mr. Hookham.

"Hookham, tell this lady your tale, she deals in marvels. This is Madam Nurvetchky, the great magician."

"Mr. Schwabe is satirical, sir,—the great humbug is what he means."

"That is your gloss, not mine. You have heard of the Sphinx's Cave, Hookham, and of Monsieur and Madame Nurvetchky? They present an entertainment which is entitled 'Marvels and Mysteries,'—back seats one shilling. This is Madame, Hookham. Madame Nurvetchky, will you excuse my unceremonious presentation of my friend, Mr. Samuel Hookham?"

Madame Nurvetchky bowed. Mr. Hookham bowed too—rather awkwardly.

"Is this your diamond, Mr. Hookham?"

"It is mine."

Mr. Hookham's tone was constrained. His manner was that of a man who is not at his ease with women.

"It's a magic diamond," said Mr. Schwabe. "It gave me fits just now, I know."

The lady addressed herself to Mr. Hookham.

"What does he mean? He is such a *farceur*—Mr. Schwabe!"

Mr. Schwabe forestalled Mr. Hookham's answer.

"Don't you feel anything peculiar about it yourself?"

"Peculiar! I feel something very peculiar indeed; I feel it is the finest stone I ever saw, and in my time I have seen some fine stones too."

"Would you like to buy it?"

There was a glitter in Mr. Schwabe's eyes as he asked the question.

"Buy it? Ah, would I not! I would give—*mon Dieu!*"

A sound was emitted by the diamond, which resembled nothing so much as the bark of a terrier. It bounded from her hands on to the floor. The lady, who had hitherto spoken in sufficiently pure English, resorted to French for an ejaculation with which to express her surprise.

"I thought you would feel something peculiar soon," said Mr. Schwabe, who seemed himself to be a little startled.

"*Mais c'est extraordinaire!* How did you do it, sir?"

Madame Nurvetchky asked the question of Mr. Hookham. Mr. Schwabe turned to Mr. Hookham too.

"Yes, that's what I want to know. How do you do it?"

"Do it? I don't do it at all! It's a mystery to me!"

"Of course it's a trick, and a good trick too. Can you do it again, to oblige a lady, Mr. Hookham?"

“Supposing you pick it up again.”

Acting on Mr. Schwabe’s suggestion, without the slightest hesitation Madame Nurvetchky picked up the diamond from where it lay upon the carpet. As he watched her, the diamond merchant’s eyes glittered even more than they had done before.

“Would you still like to buy it?” he asked.

The lady was examining it very curiously and closely, as though she were endeavouring to discover from internal evidence how the trick was done.

“If the trick is in the stone itself, I would give—*ciel!*”

She was holding it close to her face. Suddenly something, which seemed to be a tiny serpent, sprang, as it appeared, from the centre of the stone, and hissed at the lady’s nose. With a little scream she dropped the stone to the floor. Immediately the serpent—if it was a serpent—disappeared. The diamond in its glittering beauty lay at her feet.

“It is the best trick I ever saw! It seems marvellous!”

“Yes, it does seem marvellous,” muttered Mr. Schwabe, who had beat a hasty retreat from the near neighbourhood of the stone.

“If you will show me how it is done, I will give you any amount in reason you like to name. Show me, that is, so that I shall be able to perform it on my own account.”

The lady, thus addressing Mr. Hookham, seemed quite excited.

“You do think it is a trick then?” said Mr. Schwabe.

“A trick! Of course it's a trick! What is it if it is not a trick?”

“Hookham, don't you think you had better tell Madame Nurvetchky that tale of yours?”

“Tale! What tale? Is there then a mystery indeed? *Mon Dieu, mon ami.*” Madame Nurvetchky advanced and laid her gloved hand on Mr. Hookham's arm. “If there is a mystery, a veritable mystery, and you tell it to me, I will be your friend unto eternity.”

Mr. Hookham seemed somewhat embarrassed. The lady's hand tightly pressed his arm. Her great blue eyes were fixed eagerly upon his face. She was not bad-looking, and not old either; she did not *look* more than twenty-four or five. She was tall and slender, with ripe, red lips, abundant fair hair, and eyes—eyes which were certainly a very pretty shade in blue. She was charmingly attired. Her little shoes peeped from underneath the hem of her pretty summer dress. She wore the daintiest of bonnets; it was as though a large handful of violets crowned her radiant gold locks. And she was so excited; she inclined so eagerly her charming face towards his. Mr. Hookham felt her breath upon his cheeks.

“Oh, my friend,” she said, “if there is a mystery, tell it me, and I will be your friend into eternity.”

It was a kind of thing to which Mr. Hookham was unaccustomed. Dainty women had not come his way. Probably so exquisite a being's hand had never pressed his arm before. The circumstances were sufficiently peculiar without her adding to his embarrassment. Mr. Schwabe's voice supported Madame's pleading.

“Come, Hookham, tell her the whole tale—mysteries are in Madame's line.”

Thus urged, Mr. Hookham ventured upon articulate speech.

“The fact is, Madame Nur—Nur——”

“Nurvetchky.”

“The stone's as great a mystery to me as it is to you.”

“No! Is that so? You are not a professor too?”

“A professor? By profession I'm a barrister, but I can't say that any briefs have ever come my way.”

Again Mr. Hookham's handkerchief came into play to wipe his brow. His embarrassment was very marked indeed.

“You are not then—what do you call it?—a conjurer?”

“A conjurer! Good heavens, no! What made you think of such a thing?”

“Then as an amateur you are superb, my friend. I

pray you—I conjure you, as one who desires to be your friend” (Madame’s face came very close to Mr. Hookham’s), “tell me how the trick is done.”

“The trick—if it is a trick, and goodness knows if it is a trick, I don’t—is quite as mysterious to me as it is to you. One moment! perhaps you will allow me to explain. That—that stone was bequeathed me by my brother; it was accompanied by a letter. Schwabe, where is Matthew’s letter?”

Mr. Schwabe, who had been watching the little scene between his friend and the lady with what appeared to be considerable enjoyment, was suddenly aroused out of his quiescent attitude.

“Matthew’s letter!” He thrust his hand into his right trousers pocket. From its deepest depths he produced the letter in a very crumpled condition, having apparently put it there in a passing fit of absence of mind. “Hollo! it’s not very presentable.” He smoothed it out. “However, it’s tolerably legible.” He passed it to the lady. “Madame Nurvetchky, allow me to call your attention to Matthew’s letter.”

“Am I to read it?”

“Certainly. Matthew’s letter is the key of the position—at least, as much a key as we have at present.”

She read it to the end.

“I don’t understand it in the least.”

Mr. Schwabe smiled.

"That's not at all surprising, since we don't understand it either."

She read it again.

"Is it possible? can it be? is it really a magic stone?" She turned to Mr. Hookham. "Oh, sir, I beg you, do not laugh at me."

"I don't know if I look as though I were laughing. I don't feel as though I were, at any rate."

"Tell her, Hookham," said Mr. Schwabe, "about those little games you've had."

"Little games? Then it is a jest?"

"Jest!" snarled Mr. Hookham. "I don't know what you call a jest. It is written that it brings ill-luck to its possessor. I became its possessor yesterday, and already I am the poorer by seventeen thousand pounds."

"Seventeen thousand pounds!" the lady gasped, "since yesterday!"

"And it's almost driven me mad, besides."

"It's burnt my hand." Mr. Schwabe held out his palm and exhibited the scar.

"It's burnt mine, too." Mr. Hookham held out his.

"Burnt your hands! It is wonderful."

"And just now it gave me an electric shock," said Mr. Schwabe, "which was on the very verge of demonstrating—if it needed demonstration—the practicality of electrocution."



“ And it stuck to Mr. Golden's finger and thumb.”

“ And singed the policeman's beard.”

“ And, Madame, it barked at you.”

“ And almost bit your nose off,” asserted Mr. Schwabe.

“ But ” (the lady put her hand to her forehead, as if to collect her senses, which were perhaps a little scattered)—“ but how do you make it perform ? ”

“ Perform ! ” Mr. Schwabe laughed. “ It is easy enough to make it perform. The difficulty is to make it cease the performance when it has once begun.”

“ It is certain ” (the lady seemed to be revolving a problem in her mind ; her words came from her sentimentiously—one by one)—“ it is certain that there is such a thing as what the vulgar folks call magic ; that there are mysteries of which we cannot even dream. I know that it is so. Of my own knowledge I know that it is so. Have I not seen, and do I not then know ? *Mon Dieu !* ” (She clasped her hands in a sort of ecstasy, and turned her beautiful blue eyes up towards the ceiling of the room.) “ We will include the performance in the programme for this afternoon.”

She was silent ; the gentlemen were silent too, but for reasons which presumably differed from hers. They were silent because, although they were taken somewhat aback, they had not the faintest notion of what it was she meant. Suddenly she went on :

“This letter”—holding Matthew’s letter in one hand she tapped it with the forefinger of the other—“is not, from the point of view of the *litterateur*, a good letter ; that is, it has no elegance of form, no grace of style, no beauty of expression ; but, from the point of view of truth, it is superb ; it is the letter of a man who has no great powers with the pen, and who simply desires to tell the truth in the fewest possible words. We will placard this letter on every wall in town ! Yes, we will placard it in letters of stupendous size.”

She wagged her finger at Mr. Hookham, as though he had been contradicting her unto the death.

“I don’t think I follow you,” he murmured.

His bewilderment seemed to be excessive ; but Mr. Schwabe began to smile.

“Oh, you shall follow me ; I will make your fortune, and you in your turn shall make mine. I will get you back your seventeen thousand pounds, and seventy thousand at the back of them. Where are paper, pen, and ink ? ”

“You will find them there.”

Mr. Schwabe waved his hand towards his writing-table. His smile was now pronounced. Madame seated herself and prepared to write.

“First——” she paused ; she knit her pretty brows. “But there is no time to have the letter set up and advertised to-day ; we will have it done to-morrow ; and yet—I will tell them to use dispatch.”

She scribbled a few lines upon a sheet of paper. The gentlemen watched her silently,—Mr. Hookham open-mouthed. What use she proposed to make of Matthew's letter it was beyond his capacity to understand. Mr. Schwabe, who had a shrewder notion, seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. The lady ceased to scribble.

“ Now for the bills to be sent out to-day. They must be put on sandwich-men.” She paused ; she glanced at Matthew's letter, which she had laid beside her on the table. “ The Devil's Diamond ! *Quel nom, ciel !* what a name to put upon a double crown, or right across a hoarding by-and-by ! ‘ The Devil's Diamond,’—that to go upon the front of the sandwich-man. ‘ This-Afternoon at Three,’—that to go upon the back of him. Upon the back of alternate sandwich-men—‘ To-Night at Eight.’ Two dozen sandwich-men to go in a row, the first and the last to have, the one in the front, the other at the back of him,—‘ The Sphinx's Cave.’ ”

All this time the lady was continuously writing, and the gentlemen were looking on,—Mr. Hookham continuously open-mouthed. Mr. Schwabe's smile became a very enjoyable smile indeed.

“ We will have two dozen men in a row, on both sides of each street—Piccadilly, Oxford Street, Regent Street, Fleet Street, and the Strand, and as many in the City and the suburbs as we can manage.”

The lady folded what she had written, enclosed it in a large blue envelope, and addressed it. "Mr. Schwabe, can you send this for me to Phillipson and Marks, the printers, immediately?"

Mr. Schwabe touched a handbell; a clerk came in.

"Morris, take that letter round; lose no time; it's an important matter."

The clerk took the blue envelope and disappeared. The lady rose from her seat; she advanced to Mr. Hookham.

"Now to arrange our little programme."

"Arrange our little programme?" repeated Mr. Hookham.

"Of course you understand that that wonderful stone of yours is to be a feature of our entertainment?"

"A feature of your entertainment?"

Mr. Schwabe, who had seated himself on the edge of the writing table from which Madame Nurvetchky had just risen, leaned back and laughed.

"My dear Mr. Hookham, you know who I am. My husband and I conduct an entertainment of marvels and mysteries. You don't suppose that we should allow such a marvel and mystery as that wonderful stone of yours to escape us! No, not for worlds!"

Mr. Hookham took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. The lady turned. With her eyes she searched the floor.

“Where is the stone?”

It lay where she had dropped it. She stooped and picked it up.

“Are you not afraid that it will bite you?” asked Mr. Schwabe.

“Bite me? I wish it would! What, bitten, really bitten, by a diamond! And such a diamond as this! Why, I would make a fortune by showing myself at sixpence a head.”

“Ah, you're a born show-woman, Madame Nurvetchky.”

“I flatter myself I am. Now, Mr. Hookham, to business, if you please.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### “THE SPHINX’S CAVE.”

**M**R. PERCY LEICESTER stood on the steps of the Naval and Military Club. Mr. Leicester was one of the cleverest men in town, and there are so many clever men about just now. He had been everything ; taken all the honours at his university, or most of them ; stroked his boat ; played in the eleven ; made a record at a hundred yards ; created Brutus in the A.D.C. He had begun in the Church ; he had graduated in honours there. Beginning as an evangelical, he had passed on to Rome, and ended by starting a creed of his own, which he had written a novel to prove. He had then gone into the army, figured well in at least one campaign, and invented a new machine-gun. Having invented the gun, he retired from the army and read for the law, as he said, in order that he might obtain some faint insight into the law of his country on the subject of patents ; but that was a joke of his. Everyone knows that that portion of the system of British jurisprudence which

treats of patents and the rights of patentees is so perspicuous that he who runs may read. Just now he was not exactly anything. He wrote a little ; played a little—tennis, cricket, and on various instruments ; sang a little in a really charming tenor ; acted a little, recited, painted ; theorised a little on religious subjects ; laid down laws for the social conduct of the human race ; was an excellent public speaker on all sorts of subjects, from every possible point of view ; in fact, did all things which a respectable man must do nowadays if he does not want to be classed with the beasts of the field.

But there was one subject on which Mr. Leicester was allowed on all sides to be an authority. It was rather a curious subject—conjuring. He had what almost amounted to a genius for—hankey-pankey. With him the art of the conjurer was indeed an art ; his passion for it had not only ante-dated all his other passions, but post-dated them, too ; it had continued to gather strength, while all the others had sickened, if they had not died. In whatever portion of the world he happened to be, he was at once on the track of the nearest conjurer. There was hardly an exponent of the mysteries of legerdemain, professed or otherwise, Eastern and Western, in any portion of the globe, with whom he had not come into actual contact. He had confounded more professors than any man alive. He was abused by theosophists, the terror of

spiritualists, the recipient of all the curses of their media ; he had hunted the latter from pillar to post, even unto twelve months' hard labour. But when a man professed to do a trick, and allowed that it was a trick, and did it well—really well, then he took that man by the hand, if that man would let him, and used him as a brother.

It was on the day that Madame Nurvetchky met Mr. Hookham at Mr. Schwabe's rooms that Mr. Leicester stood on the steps of the Naval and Military Club. He was not alone ; there were with him old Colonel Dewsnap, who was a bad old boy, and therefore popular, and young Willy Panton, on whose commission the ink was not yet dry. Dewsnap and Panton were smoking, but Mr. Leicester was doing nothing, but standing, with his hands behind his back, looking meditatively at the brick wall on the other side of the courtyard.

"Think it's going to rain?" asked old Dewsnap, looking up at the sky.

The appearance of the heavens was not promising. He was meditating a journey to the other end of St. James's Street ; he would not for worlds have wet the soles of his boots—his constitution was too delicate for that. Neither of his companions answered. Panton seemed too much engaged with his cigarette, and Leicester with his thoughts.

"Leicester," continued the Colonel, evidently caring



nothing that he had received no information as to the prospects of fine weather, "what are you going to do with yourself?"

Mr. Leicester answered in his clear, well-bred monotone, still staring at the brick wall which bounded his horizon,—

"I'm going to see 'The Devil's Diamond.'"

"Hollo!" cried young Panton. "What's 'The Devil's Diamond'?"

"I'll let you know when I've seen it."

"Is it a play?" inquired the Colonel.

"No; I should say it was not a play."

"Is it a picture?" demanded Panton.

"No; I should say it was certainly not a picture."

"What is it then?" asked the Colonel. "Is it a secret?"

"Well, in a sense I suppose it is a secret—at present. It's—mind, I have no exact information on the subject, but I imagine—it's a trick."

"A trick? Is there a new conjurer come to town?"

The Colonel's tone was a little supercilious. On at least that one point, conjuring, his friend's tastes and his were not identical.

"Not that I'm aware of. I presume that you would call neither Monsieur nor Madame Nurvetchky a new conjurer, since they are three months old, at least. The fact is, that as I was coming along Piccadilly I

saw the announcement, on a lot of sandwich-men, that there would be ‘The Devil’s Diamond’ this afternoon at three o’clock at the Sphinx’s Cave, and to-night at eight. That’s all I know about it up to now.”

“Awful rot, that sort of thing.”

Willy Panton was very young indeed ; he had only been introduced to Mr. Leicester a couple of days before, or he would scarcely have spoken quite so plainly.

“What sort of thing ?” inquired Mr. Leicester blandly.

“Conjuring, and all that sort of thing.”

Mr. Leicester said nothing. He only gazed abstractedly at the wall across the way. But Mr. Panton felt that something was wrong.

“Do anything in that line yourself ?” he asked, in that affable way in which nowadays youngsters address their fathers, and inferior people generally.

But as Mr. Leicester still continued to say nothing, but only to gaze, the Colonel took upon himself to answer.

“I have always understood that Mr. Leicester is the finest conjurer in the world, whether amateur or professional. I believe, Leicester, that you have made it the study of your life ?”

Yet Mr. Leicester was still silent. So Mr. Panton continued to blunder—always after the manner of youth.

"I hope I have said nothing to hurt your feelings, Mr. Leicester. Now and then I like to do a bit of conjuring myself."

Still perfect peace from Mr. Leicester. He continued to gaze in front of him so intently, and so long, that Willy Panton, in his irreverent way, began to wonder if he was counting *all* the bricks in the wall. Suddenly he turned with that well-bred air of his and slipped his arm through Panton's.

"Come, Mr. Panton, we will see 'The Devil's Diamond' together. I am sure, Dewsnap, you will come too."

So saying he annexed the Colonel on the other side.

"I'm afraid, Leicester, I've an engagement——"

But Mr. Leicester calmly cut him short, marching off his victims in that gentle, courteous won't-take-a-denial way of his which was characteristic of the man.

"I suspect, Mr. Panton, that even you will be amused. Dewsnap, I will answer for you. When I was up in the Indian hills I heard from the natives some rather odd tales about a stone which they called, as we might interpret it, the Devil's Diamond. I could never come across the stone myself. Perhaps it has found its way across the black water. We shall see. In any case M. and Madame Nurvetchky are amusing, even when one looks down upon that sort of thing as beneath one's intellectual level."

Mr. Leicester slightly pressed Willy Panton's arm. Mr. Panton laughed, a little feebly, perhaps.

It was nearly three o'clock when they reached the Sphinx's Cave, and the audience were already arranging themselves for the performance to begin. It was a new hall, the Sphinx's Cave. M. and Madame Nurvetchky had been its first tenants. It had been built, rumour said, specially for them. There was something about their entertainment which had made it, contrary to anticipation, a success,—an element of freshness, perhaps; an element of frankness, perhaps, as well. While they claimed to do some remarkable things they frankly confessed that they were but tricks. They disclaimed all connection with hypnotism, thought-reading, spiritualism, and all the other crazes, and openly avowed that all they did belonged, in some form or other, to that quickness of the hand which deceives the eye.

It was a good-sized hall. There was the usual stage, with the customary carpeted board leading from it, which enables the performer to reach the audience and the audience to reach him. There was a good-sized gallery, which encroached rather over the heads of the two-shilling people on the ground floor. To prevent any suspicion of illusion owing to imperfect light, the whole place was lighted by electricity, and the stage, in particular, by an ingenious arrangement of incandescent lamps was thrown into conspicuous relief.

On the afternoon in question the hall was well filled. Probably this was owing to the intrinsic merit of the entertainment itself, rather than to any special attractive influence attaching to the announcement of the new addition to the programme. At most, the announcement could only have penetrated to a portion of the town. London as a whole, even that section of the whole which interests itself in such things, could not have been aware of the contemplated change. Though it is certain that *some* were in that audience who would not have been present had not Madame Nurvetchky so hastily sent an army of sandwich-men marching through the town.

The new feature had not even found its way to the programme itself. When Mr. Leicester and his friends had procured theirs they found accompanying it a printed slip, on which it was stated, under the heading "Important Notice," that "In the course of this afternoon's entertainment M. and Madame Nurvetchky will introduce THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND."

"Nice sort of name!" commented the Colonel. "The Devil's Diamond! I wonder they don't introduce the old gentleman himself."

"It's only some rubbish or other," remarked Willy Panton, with that infinite wisdom which appertains to youth. "It's only some flash name to draw the people—like the pictures outside the penny shows."

Mr. Leicester said nothing. He sat quietly observing

the audience. It was one of those audiences who do patronise that sort of entertainment, being made up of country cousins and the people who object to a ballet and scarcely ever attend a play, and who yet have a hankering for something a little out of the usual rut of Shakespeare and the musical glasses. A conjurer must like to perform to that kind of people—they are such simple folk. He can hoodwink them so easily, and they are ready, even eager, to swallow all, or nearly all, he has to say ; and they are so appreciative, in a mild, non-applauding kind of way.

The performance began in the usual fashion, with a pianoforte selection—“Reminiscences of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales,” by a gentleman named Briggs. And that audience actually listened—those sort of people listen to everything ; they would listen to the orchestra between the acts of a play. And when Mr. Briggs had finished, they applauded quite as much as they would applaud anything. Only Willy Panton was irreverent, indulging in that vulgarity of speech which is so terrible a sign of the low standard of contemporary morals.

“Well done, old cock !” he observed. “Hit him again. What comes next ?” He examined the programme. “Spoon-springing Extraordinary. That sounds like pretty sport. I shall want my five bob back if they don’t take care.”

Music from piano, Mr. Briggs ; waltz, played in

very slow time, so as to knock all the dancing out of it, and only leave occasional recollections of a plaintive air. The curtain drew up. A table discovered, covered with electro-plated spoons of every sort and kind; saltspoons, eggspoons, teaspoons, dessert-spoons, tablespoons, even soup-ladles of portentous size. Music suddenly changed to "Johnny Comes Marching Home." Enter M. Nurvetchky wearily, as though he were more than half asleep, and painfully bored.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have here upon this table some ordinary spoons of different sizes; what I am about to do with them you can all do too, only it requires a great deal of practice."

He began. It certainly did require a great deal of practice! though it was distinctly a pretty performance, on the whole. Manipulating the spoons with both his hands, by deftly tossing them in continuous streams into the air, he formed all kinds of figures—squares, triangles, circles, globes, anchors. He made running comments by the way.

"A horse," he would say; and straightway in mid-air, outlined by the shimmering spoons, was the figure of a horse. It was not *very* like a horse, perhaps, but still it was like enough to give one an idea. Not the least amusing part of it was, that though his hands were incessantly moving with almost inconceivable rapidity, he still seemed half asleep. He did seem to be so bored!

“Not so dusty,” Willy Panton allowed, when M. Nurvetchky had retired, possibly to sleep it out behind the scenes. “I shan’t want my five bob back this time, anyhow.”

The next item on the programme was simply entitled “The Sphinx.” When the curtain drew up a small automatic figure about eighteen inches in height was discovered ; it was perched in a sitting posture on the top of a plain, or apparently plain, glass tube, which was about six inches in diameter. Madame Nurvetchky came on. She swept the audience a charming curtsy.

“That’s a cunning piece of goods,” observed Willy Panton, in that irrepressibly vulgar way of his.

The wicked old Colonel leered.

“You must introduce me, Leicester, after the performance.”

“This is Sphinx,” said Madame Nurvetchky.

Sphinx did many wonderful things. He discovered and wrote down the names of members of the audience; he wrote down Mr. Panton’s name. Mr. Panton scribbled some lines on a piece of paper, and, without even glancing at them, Sphinx produced them on a sheet of paper too.

“Beggared if I know how it was done!” declared Mr. Panton afterwards. “They were written by a chap I knew at Sandhurst, an awfully clever chap ;



they were the chorus of a comic song he wrote. Here they are, I've got them in my pocket now.

He took a piece of paper from his pocket, and read the lines aloud to an admiring group of friends.

“I always get drunk of a Saturday night,  
And larrup my kids o' Sunday!  
I always get drunk of a Saturday night,  
And whack my wife o' Monday!”

“Funny, aren't they? He was a chap for comic songs! You should have heard him sing them, made you die! But how that little beggar got hold of them beats me; yet he'd got them written down there as right as ninepence!”

In fact, by the time Sphinx had done all he did there was more than one person in the hall who wondered if it *was* all trickery, or if there was not worse behind. Had Madame Nurvetchky lived about a couple of centuries before she did, the question would have been settled in the affirmative upon the spot—it was so very strange!

“Never saw anything like it in my life—never!” declared young Panton, who, for a modern young man, was uncommonly enthusiastic.

Indeed, to speak quite candidly, he was in ecstasies with the whole of the entertainment. As Mr. Leicester said, both M. and Madame Nurvetchky were certainly amusing—and Madame was good-looking, too.

After M. Nurvetchky had concluded some very

remarkable feats with a variety of musical instruments, playing on about a dozen of them at once, and in the most enchanting way, before retiring from the stage he made the following brief announcement, still seeming more than half asleep, and unutterably bored :—

“ Ladies and gentlemen, after a brief interval, which Mr. Briggs will relieve by music ” (bowing to the pianist), “ Madame Nurvetchky and I propose to introduce to you, for the first time on any stage, the Devil’s Diamond.”

Mr. Briggs “ relieved ” the interval with some compositions by a Russian composer, which almost shattered the piano—and it seemed to be a strong piano, too. Still a portion of the audience appeared to listen, and it is certainly a fact that some of them clapped their hands when he had done; but it must be allowed that, under cover of the noise, some of the people talked, and among them was Willy Panton.

“ Well, they’re welcome to my five bob ! ” The five shillings which he had expended on the purchase of a seat seemed to weigh upon his mind. “ If the Devil’s Diamond ain’t much behind the rest I shall say that the money’s been fairly earned.”

Mr. Briggs made a very great noise; but Willy Panton spoke in such a loud, youthful tone of voice, that Mr. Schwabe, who was only divided from him by about eighteen inches of carpeted board, distinctly

heard what it was he said. So Mr. Schwabe ventured on an observation.

“ I think you will find that the Devil's Diamond is at least a devil of a diamond.”

Mr. Panton stared ; then, seeing that the speaker seemed to have the confidence of a decent tailor, he condescended to reply.

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Well, I've heard some rather queer stories about it, that's all.” Mr. Schwabe glanced round upon the audience with an air of grim enjoyment. He raised his palm and looked at it, apparently in a casual kind of way. There was a scar upon it, which Mr. Panton might have seen, as though it had been branded there quite recently. “ I think that it may surprise you, and perhaps some of the other people too.”

“ I'm not easily surprised as a rule, but I confess that I've been surprised by some of the things I've seen already—by that little beggar they call Sphinx, for instance.”

“ Yes, I daresay ; but the Devil's Diamond will surprise you in rather a different kind of way.”

## CHAPTER V.

### THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND MAKES ITS FIRST APPEARANCE IN PUBLIC.

**M**R. BRIGGS ceased. A buzz of expectation went through the hall. People settled in their seats. Mr. Schwabe drew himself together in his fauteuil as though, for the first time, the proceedings had interest for him. The interval, which Mr. Briggs had so effectually relieved, was over. The piano had a rest, as well-deserved a one as piano ever had.

The curtain drew up. There was a small table in the centre of the stage, one of those gimcrack specimens of the upholsterer's art, with slim, ebonised legs, and red-cloth-covered top, which conjurers use. On the table there was a small red-leather case, such as we like to receive from a jeweller's now and then as a present from a friend. On the right of the table sat Madame Nurvetchky. Behind her, resting his hand on the back of her chair, stood the long, lean figure of her husband,—seeming as sleepy as ever, and quite as bored. On a chair to the left of the table sat a figure

such as is not often seen at entertainments of that particular kind.

An old man—he seemed to be an old man just then, a very old man—clad in the garments of every day, garments which were in striking contrast to the well-fitting dress suit and polished shirt-front of M. Nurvetchky, and the glorious attire of his wife. A black frock-coat, and trousers of some grey mixture, ill-brushed, and splashed with mud, which hung upon him as they might have hung upon a scarecrow ; a pair of thick, laced boots, which seemed as though they had not been brushed for a year ; a black silk, old-fashioned neckcloth, which had come untied, and one end of which straggled over his waistcoat. A narrow fringe of grimy, crumpled shirt-cuff protruded from the arms of his coat, and his stand-up shirt collar seemed as though he had slept in it for at least a week. This was not the spruce costume of the average popular “entertainer” ; nor was the effect heightened—from the spruce point of view—by his unbrushed hair, by his obviously unwashed countenance, and by his dirty, ungloved hands.

But, apart from his untidy costume and his uncleanliness, there was something about the old man which at once struck the more observant part of the audience as peculiar. He sat back in his chair with his legs stretched out in front of him, his dirty hands clasped between his knees, his chin hanging forward

on his chest, his eyes staring in front of him with a look which, at least, was singular. If he was posing for effect, then the pose was wonderful. The eyes of the audience were immediately riveted upon him. He had taken the stage with a vengeance. For a moment, to all intents and purposes, there was no figure upon it but his own. His whole bearing was that of a man who has received some sudden and overwhelming shock—and it was so wonderfully life-like too! His face was the face of the haunted wretch who is conscious of some cause for terror which others cannot see; and here, again, the realism was superb!

A pause followed the rising of the curtain. There was no applause. Every person in the hall was staring at the motionless figure huddled upon the chair. Suddenly some one rose at the back of the gallery and addressed himself, in loud, colloquial tones, to the old man seated on the stage.

“It is he! I knew it was directly I saw those sandwiches along the Strand; there couldn't be two Devil's Diamonds in the world. I told myself, 'Good Lord help us if there was!' It's Mr. Samuel Hookham. Didn't I tell you, sir, you would find that diamond a teaser?”

The speaker was a big, fat man, clad in sober broadcloth, who seemed to be perspiring freely. It was Mr. Truelove, the undertaker. Unusual as the interruption unmistakably was, it was almost

unheeded by the audience, whose attention seemed fully occupied by what was passing on the stage.

"Queer-looking old cuss!" whispered Willy Panton to Mr. Leicester. But Mr. Leicester made no answer.

"If that man's acting he does it uncommonly well," commented the Colonel. "It looks real to me. I've seen something like that look on the faces of men in a tight place under fire, with the odds against them, and who can't turn tail and run."

But so far as Mr. Leicester was concerned the Colonel's little *à propos* recollection of his military life was unheeded, as the young soldier's vulgarity had been.

M. Nurvetchky advanced to the edge of the stage. He had what appeared to be an old letter in his hand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, his American accent very pronounced, and his sleepiness and air of boredom more pronounced than his accent, "I am going to tell you a strange story—so strange a story that I shall be neither surprised nor offended if you receive it with incredulity."

As he said this his glance fell, perhaps unconsciously, on Mr. Leicester, a foeman with whom he had measured swords more than once.

"I am going to tell you the story of a diamond,—so much, at least, as I know of it myself,—of a diamond which, if it can boast of nothing else, is of unique beauty, at any rate within my experience, and

I have seen something of precious stones. It will be handed round for your inspection, and you will be able to judge for yourselves if I exaggerate. I do not speak without authority when I say that it is worth more than twenty thousand pounds."

He paused—so as to let the point go home. Twenty thousand pounds ! The people looked at each other. They settled themselves still more comfortably in their seats. Things were getting really interesting at last, —it is surprising what a fillip is given to the average intelligence when one speaks of such a sum as twenty thousand pounds.

"I wouldn't have it if you was to give me twenty millions !" cried the critic in the gallery. "It's killed one gentleman already,—let alone ruining himself to begin with."

M. Nurvetchky paid no attention to the speaker, beyond giving a passing upward glance in his direction. He turned to the motionless figure huddled up on the chair.

"The diamond is the property of our friend here, Mr. Lawrence Stacy——"

"His name's not Lawrence Stacy ! It's Hookham —Samuel Hookham ! I ought to know : I buried his brother."

If it was Mr. Truelove's wish to attract attention, this time he gained his end. When he stated that he had buried Mr. Hookham's brother, the people in



the body of the hall, rising from their seats, looked up to see who this persevering person was. "Hush!" cried some. "Turn him out!" cried others. Mr. Willy Panton's voice was heard loud above the others. "Let's bury him!" he cried. But M. Nurvetchky appeared to be quite unmoved.

"The gentleman in the gallery," he said, "seems to be better acquainted with the subject than I am."

"I ought to; I had it for more than a fortnight. I can't tell you the number of funerals it brought to grief. There was hardly one of them that the coffins didn't come tumbling out upon the road. Once the chief mourner punched my head. He was in liquor, that chief mourner was. Somehow, while I had that stone, my chief mourner always was."

Something more pronounced than a titter went round the hall. M. Nurvetchky addressed himself to Mr. Truelove personally.

"Although, sir, you are evidently better qualified to speak upon the matter than I am, I would still venture to hope that you will allow me to continue my remarks to an end."

Apparently Mr. Truelove at least temporarily acquiesced, and M. Nurvetchky went flowingly on.

"The diamond is the property of our friend who is seated here. For our present purpose his name is immaterial. It reached him no further back than yesterday afternoon. It was a legacy from his brother,

—that brother whom the gentleman in the gallery appears to have buried. It was accompanied by a letter. That letter I hold in my hand. With your permission I will read it to you.”

M. Nurvetchky read the letter.

“ ‘Dear Samuel,’—I should observe that our friend had not seen his brother for sixteen years—‘I have told Mr. Truelove——’ ”

“That’s me !” exclaimed Mr. Truelove up in the gallery.

“ ‘To give you the diamond, which you will have with this, after I am dead and he has buried me. Be good enough to pay his bill !’ ”

“And which Mr. Hookham did this morning, to the tune of three-and-thirty pounds,—I’ve got the money in my pocket now.”

“ ‘Mr. Truelove is a perfect stranger to me. It would seem a rash thing to entrust such a commission to a perfect stranger. But I have not the slightest doubt that you will get the diamond,—sooner or later.’ ”

“Ah ! he needn’t have had no fear of that.”

“ ‘Certainly quite soon enough for you.’ ”

“Which it was now, wasn’t it, Mr. Hookham, sir ? Why, you look like a ghost already.”

“ ‘It is called the Devil’s Diamond’ ”—M. Nurvetchky paused, and glanced, perhaps again unconsciously, at Mr. Leicester,—“ ‘and is worth, at a trade valuation, at least twenty thousand pounds.’ I told

you that I had authority for what I said." M. Nurvetchky read to the end.

"There is the letter, with the one exception of the signature. I think you will agree that that is a remarkable letter to have been written by a sane man upon his death-bed."

"But was he sane?"

The inquiry came in an audible murmur from a gentleman in clerical attire.

"If, sir, his sanity depends upon the truth of what is written here, you will shortly have an opportunity of judging for yourself."

Mr. Leicester put out his hand. He made an interrogative movement with his head. M. Nurvetchky saw the gesture,—in spite of his sleepiness and his air of boredom, he seemed to have his senses about him pretty well, upon the whole.

"You wish to examine the letter? With pleasure. I would only ask you to handle it with care. It appears to have been handled rather roughly already."

Madame Nurvetchky's eye caught Mr. Schwabe's. Mr. Schwabe smiled,—perhaps at the recollection of the undignified usage to which he had subjected the last example of the deceased Matthew's penmanship. M. Nurvetchky handed the letter to Mr. Leicester.

While Mr. Leicester continued to examine it, which he did very carefully from beginning to end, M. Nurvetchky, taking the red-leather case from the

table, advanced with it to the front of the stage. Touching a spring, the case flew open.

“The Devil’s Diamond.”

He held it out at arm’s length, so that all the people could see the contents of the case. There was the diamond reposing on a bed of scarlet silk. So large it was, so radiant, so full of light and colour, that it must have been visible to every person in that hall. The scarlet background formed an excellent foil. It gleamed upon it like some huge drop of magic dew. A buzz of “Oh-h’s!”—that curious sound that the people make at the Crystal Palace upon firework nights—came from admiring throats.

M. Nurvetchky came down the carpeted board with the red-leather case in his hand. He offered it to Mr. Schwabe.

“May I ask you to examine it?”

Mr. Schwabe shook his head. He thrust his hands into his trouser pockets.

“Thank you,” he said ; “I would rather not.”

“You would rather not?”

“I would very much rather not.”

“You’re a sensible man, sir. I wouldn’t touch it for a thousand pound.”

This was from Mr. Truelove in the gallery. M. Nurvetchky continued to address Mr. Schwabe.

“I am sorry that you will not examine it, for I fancy you know something of precious stones.”

“Considering that I’m a diamond-merchant, I may say that I do. I’ve seen that stone before, and, as far as money goes, I should say it was cheap at twenty thousand pounds.”

“Thank you. This gentleman is one of the most famous diamond merchants in the city of London, and you have his statement as to the value of the stone. I told you that I had authority for what I said. Perhaps, sir, you would have no objection to examining it.”

He addressed himself to Mr. Leicester.

“Not the least,” said Mr. Leicester. Returning the letter to M. Nurvetchky, he took the case in his hand.

“I believe, sir, you too know something of precious stones?”

“Something,” Mr. Leicester said. He took the diamond from its silken bed, and examined it as carefully as he had done the letter. “You were quite right in your description of the stone. It is one of the most remarkable diamonds I have seen.”

“I am much obliged to you. Is there any other lady or gentleman who would like to see the stone?”

A clerical gentleman at the back held up his hand.

“May I look at it? I should very much like to see a diamond which was worth twenty thousand pounds.”

The stone was entrusted to him.

"I *don't* know much about precious stones, but that seems to be a pretty toy—a very pretty toy indeed."

A gentleman with iron-grey whiskers and a rubicund countenance took it from him.

"A toy! You call it a toy, do you? I wouldn't mind having a few toys like it. Is it for sale?"

He asked the question of M. Nurvetchky.

"As I am at present advised, sir, it is not for sale."

The stone was handed about from one to another. At last M. Nurvetchky returned with it in triumph to the platform.

"You have seen, ladies and gentlemen, that I did not exaggerate in what I said of the exceeding beauty of the Devil's Diamond. In what I am now about to say I wish you to understand that I also earnestly desire to adhere to the truth. In that portion of our entertainment which we have presented to you, even in its most apparently incomprehensible portion, we frankly own that we have been tricking you. We have only performed certain—what are called conjuring tricks, and we only claim that they are good of their kind. But neither my wife, nor the gentleman sitting on the chair, nor I, have any connection with what is about to take place. We are not able to account for it any more than, I think, you yourselves will be."

"One moment, M. Nurvetchky." The interruption

came from Mr. Leicester. "Do I understand you to say that you claim a supernatural origin for what we are about to see?"

"The gentleman who asks this question—I am sure he will forgive my mentioning it—is Mr. Percy Leicester, himself a first-rate conjurer, and whose name is known to the public as one who has made it his *specialité* to expose the impostures of so-called spiritualists. His presence on this occasion, which is for me an unexpected pleasure, is very fortunate. I can only say that I shall be very glad if he will explain to us how what we are about to see is done. I have only seen the stone myself for the first time within the last few hours, and it is as much a mystery to me as it can be to any person in this hall."

"It ain't a mystery to me! It ain't by any means a mystery to me!"

This again from Mr. Truelove in the gallery. Mr. Leicester persevered.

"Still one moment, M. Nurvetchky. In the face of the statement you have just now made, I presume that I am at liberty to take whatever means I please in order to explain what you are about to show us?"

"Ladies and gentlemen, either Mr. Percy Leicester or any person in this hall is at liberty to take any means he or she pleases which will explain what is now about to take place upon this stage. I will

now replace the stone upon the table, and Madame Nurvetchky will introduce to you some of the peculiar properties of the Devil's Diamond."

He replaced the red-leather case upon the table. As he did so all the lights in the building were suddenly extinguished. In the gloom which followed, the diamond was distinctly seen flashing on its bed of scarlet silk. A bright light streamed from it, throwing a large round disc on the wall at the back of the stage—the sort of disc which is thrown by a magic lantern. In the centre of the disc appeared the words—

“DON'T GO TOO FAR!

I'VE HAD HANDLING ENOUGH ALREADY.”

The effect was a little startling. M. Nurvetchky's preliminary remarks had not been without their effect upon the people. Mr. Truelove's voluntary interpositions, and Mr. Schwabe's refusal to touch the stone, had not been entirely unnoticed, while the brief dialogue with Mr. Leicester had lent that element of excitement which the prospect of a coming struggle always does lend. The people stared at the writing on the wall with wondering eyes. As they did so, writing and disc and all disappeared, and the lights flashed bright again. M. Nurvetchky was discovered standing immobile in the centre of the stage.

“It's better worth five bob than I thought it was!”



exclaimed Willy Panton, quite out loud, in that youthful way of his.

"Perhaps, ladies and gentlemen," said M. Nurvetchky, "you will explain how that was done?"

"Perhaps, M. Nurvetchky," retorted Mr. Leicester, in that cool, soft monotone of his, "you are better able to explain than we are?"

"I can only assure you that *I* don't know how it was done."

"It's only a trick," said someone at the back. "Nonsense!" came very audibly from the clerical gentleman. "That's nothing to what you will see," was Mr. Truelove's contribution. "I begin to wish that I had stopped at home."

M. Nurvetchky retired. Madame Nurvetchky rose from her seat.

"I will take the diamond from its case."

She stretched out her hand to do so. There was a report and a flash of light. It was so unexpected that not a few of the audience started. Willy Panton did so very visibly. One or two timid female creatures screamed. Madame Nurvetchky moved—a little hastily—back from the table.

"Leicester, I think we're going to have some fun," remarked old Dewsnap to his friend. "Unless I'm mistaken, she got a little more that time than she quite bargained for."

Indeed, the lady did seem to be a little startled.

"I haven't got the stone," she said ; but the smile with which she said it seemed to be a trifle forced. "I will take it this time instead. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again !"

She again approached the stone, and again stretched out her hand—crack ! There was a louder report than before, and a flash which was twice as vivid. She turned towards the audience with an odd look upon her beautiful face.

"I haven't got it yet !"

"No ; but you will get it, if you persevere,—you'll get it hot."

This was what the Colonel said.

"The third time is always lucky."

Apparently that particular proverb is not always to be depended on. At any rate, if the lady meant that the third time of trying she was sure to get the stone, she was certainly mistaken. Her failure was quite as dire as before. And yet the feat seemed easy enough. There was the diamond, reposing in tranquil beauty on its crimson bed. She had only to put out her hand and take it ; yet when she did put out her hand, a blaze of flame sprang from the quiet-looking stone and *roared* at her. Madame Nurvetchky fell back just in time to avoid its fiery tongue.

The audience did not seem to quite know what to make of it ; a disposition to applaud in the gallery was quickly stifled. There seemed to be a sort of feeling

that the performance had been insufficiently rehearsed, and, therefore, did not work so smoothly as the performers intended. It was difficult not to believe that Madame Nurvetchky's surprise was real. Colonel Dewsnap, for one, was prepared to swear it was,—it was impossible to act surprise quite so naturally as that.

After a momentary pause, the lady turned to Mr. Hookham. Moving to him, she laid her hand upon his shoulder. They made a curious pair, the unclean old man and the beautiful young woman.

“Sir, the diamond is yours.”

He put his hand to his brow, as if to collect his thoughts.

“Yes ; the diamond is mine.”

“Will you let me look at it ?”

He hesitated, peering at her as if to catch her meaning. Then he rose from his seat, steadying himself, or appearing to steady himself, by clutching at the back of his chair. Then he turned to the flashing jewel. He took the red-leather case in his hand. As he stood gazing down at it, it seemed to change colour, assuming a dozen different hues in rapid succession.

“That's a deucedly funny stone,” whispered the Colonel to his friend. “Gad, this is really amusing.”

The old man continued to gaze down at the jewel, as though it exercised upon him some species of fascination.

"This is Matthew's legacy," he said, speaking in a sort of stage whisper, and as if unconsciously.

Suddenly a voice was heard throughout the hall, which gave utterance to two words,—

"Take care!"

It almost seemed as though the voice came from the diamond. Mr. Hookham stood straight up, and with his head thrown back seemed to gaze at the people up in the gallery.

"It spoke to me!"

The words were gasped rather than spoken. The Colonel whispered to his companion,—

"That man ought to be on the regular boards,—he's a great actor."

"That was an uncommonly good bit of ventriloquism,"—this from Mr. Panton,—"uncommonly good—it's worth that five bob down to the ground."

Mr. Leicester said nothing; but he shot a keen side glance at his appreciative young friend. Mr. Hookham turned to Madame Nurvetchky.

"It spoke to me!" he said.

"Do you think it will speak to me? Do you think it will let me touch it? Mr. Hookham"—the lady mentioned his name in possible forgetfulness of her husband's allusion to Mr. Lawrence Stacy—"will you sell it me?"

"Sell it?" his glance returned to the jewel. As it did so a flame—just such another as had roared at the

lady—leaped into the old man's face. He staggered back, clapping his hands to his eyes. The people watched him. It seemed that they held their breath. He removed his hands from before his eyes. "I thought it had blinded me, but I can see." "He began to address the jewel with a bitterness of passion so intense as to approach the grotesque. "Devil, if you are a devil, do you think I care for you? I will sell you if I will!—and I will!"

He addressed the stone, pointing to it with the outstretched index finger of his left hand, as though it were a living thing. As he continued pointing, something, which seemed to the gaping people to be a serpent some six or eight inches in length, issued from the heart of the stone and coiled itself round his finger. He stood staring at it motionless for about ten seconds, and the head of the serpent seemed to stare at him—for it had a head, which was upturned to the old man's face; and a little red tongue, or fang, protruded from its jaws. Then he threw his left hand above his head and flung the serpent from him into the air; the people saw it for a moment, writhing above their heads, and then it vanished from their sight.

"Who'll buy my diamond?"

The old man's voice rang out through the hall in an angry scream. He raised the red-leather case in his right hand, holding it up before them all. Then a

curious thing happened to the stone. It grew perceptibly before their eyes, and grew, and grew, so that they could watch it grow, until it had so increased in size that it was at last a foot in diameter. Never in the whole history of the world, never in all the fairy tales that ever yet were told, was such a diamond seen before. It dazzled their eyes to look at it,—they had to screen them as though they were looking at the sun. Never did such a glorious glittering maze of fantastic colouring flash on mortal eyes.

“Who'll buy my diamond?” rang out the old man's voice again.

He alone of all the people there seemed to be unconscious of what had happened to the stone. But something in the people's faces, the way, perhaps, in which they put up their hands to shade their eyes, broke in upon his frenzy. He turned his head and saw the stone. And when he saw it he began trembling all over. And the glory of its radiance blinded him, and he put up both his hands to veil his eyes. And the stone fell to the stage. And as it touched the floor its new splendour vanished, and there, glittering on the carpet, was the diamond just as it had been before.

There was a pause—a sound as though the people were drawing their breath. Then a tumult of applause filled the hall. Mr. Panton, after the excitable manner of youth—when you have pierced through the

vener of manhood and reached the natural boy—sprang to his feet.

“By Jove !” he cried, “that’s the best trick I ever saw !”

But Mr. Schwabe sat motionless in his fauteuil, and in the gallery Mr. Truelove wiped the perspiration from his brow. And the Colonel stroked his moustache with a meditative air, and Mr. Leicester now removed his glance from Mr. Hookham, who, as if unconscious of the tumult, continued to tremble and to press his hands upon his eyes.

When the applause began to languish, Madame Nurvetchky advanced a step or towards the front of the stage.

“Perhaps you will explain that,” she said.

And immediately the tumult broke out again. The Colonel, still caressing his moustache, gave his friend a curious glance out of the corners of his eyes.

“I wonder if those folks know what they are clapping at? I don’t know what you think, Leicester, but it don’t seem to me as though that old chap felt disposed to take the honour of a call.”

But Mr. Leicester answered never a word.

When the applause again began to die away, Madame Nurvetchky touched the still trembling old man upon the arm.

“Mr. Hookham, do you think your diamond will let me touch it now ?”

The old man took his hands from before his eyes, and glanced round him in a dazed sort of way, as though he were looking for the stone, when his glance lighted on it gleaming on the carpet almost at his feet. He started and stared, as though unable to believe the evidence of his eyes.

“ I thought—I thought it had grown—large.”

He spoke almost in a whisper.

“ It has grown small again, you see. Do you think it will let me touch it now ? ”

“ Why not ? ”

As if taking this for an expression of his opinion in the affirmative, she stooped as though to raise it from the ground. But before she could reach it a voice pealed through the hall—it would scarcely be straining a point to say like a peal of thunder—

“ Take care ! ”

“ By Jove, what a ventriloquist that fellow is ! ” cried Willy Panton. “ I say, Mr. Leicester, I'm awfully obliged to you. This is the best five bob's worth I've ever had. I wouldn't have lost it for a pony.”

But the Colonel, leaning over the side of his seat, muttered to his friend, “ That's the second time of asking. The third time I shouldn't be surprised if we had ructions. You can't go on playing hankey-pankey tricks with Old Nick for ever, don't you know. That's a well-plucked woman, sir,” he added, as



Madame Nurvetchky, regaining a perpendicular position, turned a smiling face towards the people.

The tones of that wonderful voice were still reverberating through the building as she stretched out her hand with a graceful gesture.

“Our friend the diamond can express himself plainly when he pleases.” Laughing gaily she turned to Mr. Hookham. “Your beautiful stone seems to have an objection, sir, to me. I don't know why! Will you raise it from the floor?”

Stooping slowly, Mr. Hookham did as she suggested.

“I thought it had grown larger,” he said, looking at it as he held it in his hand.

“I am particularly anxious,” continued the lady, with a bewitching smile, “to know why your diamond protests so strongly against all hints of selling it. It seems to me to be a little strange. Were mine the wealth of Croesus there is no price I would not give to call it mine. Think! to have it gleaming against my breast, or glittering round my neck, or flashing in my hair.”

She moved forward and snatched it from Mr. Hookham's hand.

“I have it at last!” she cried. “Let us see how it would gleam against my breast.” She pressed it against her breast. “*Ciel!* About my neck!” She put it to her neck. “*Mon Dieu!* In my hair!” She

raised it to her head—in an instant all her beautiful golden hair was in flames.

Although M. Nurvetchky continued to look more than half asleep, and never for a moment lost his air of boredom, it was plain that he kept his presence of mind. He snatched up an Indian rug which was thrown carelessly over the back of a chair. With it he enveloped his wife's beautiful head. Her voice was heard beneath it; she seemed to be laughing. She put up her hands and tore it off again.

“Stefan! Do you wish to smother me? I am only singed!”

She stood before them in all her radiant beauty. A bright smile lit up her face. But though she spoke of being only singed, it was plain that her golden locks had been deprived of more than half their rich luxuriance. A smell of burning hair filled all the place. And on her neck, and on her white bosom, where she had touched it with the stone, were two great scars, as though they had been branded with a red-hot iron.

“Are you not hurt, my wife?”

“It is nothing. It would seem as though the diamond would not make friends with me; would it not seem so, Stefan?”

“Leicester,” whispered the Colonel, “that's the sort of woman to lead a forlorn hope,—she's burnt herself right through the skin!”

And when the people saw how cool and calm she

was, and how she smiled, as though the strange thing which had happened to her was of no account at all, they burst into such a tumult of applause that it seemed as though they would shake the roof. And among the loudest of the clappers the enthusiastic Willy Panton led the van. When the din ceased M. Nurvetchky advanced to the front of the stage:

“Ladies and gentlemen, I do not think that you will accuse me of having used exaggerated language. I think you will agree with me that the Devil's Diamond possesses some peculiar properties.”

“Some very peculiar properties indeed,” chimed in his wife.

“If there is any person here who can offer an explanation of what we have seen, speaking on behalf of my wife, Mr. Hookham, and myself I can only say that we shall be glad to hear it.”

Then Mr. Leicester rose from his seat.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND IS ALMOST TOO SUCCESSFUL.

HE was a tall man, sparely built, yet possessing a breadth of chest which denoted strength. He carried himself with a slight stoop. His face was clean shaven, and his large brown eyes were fixed deeply in his head. He had a trick of fixing his glance on anything which caught his attention, which is found in short-sighted people, though he was not short-sighted, and which made the object stared at wonder if by any possibility this man could blink.

“M. Nurvetchky,”—his voice was another peculiarity. He habitually spoke with almost feminine gentleness, and yet so clearly that his words travelled farther than the utterances of more uproarious speakers,—“do we understand you to say that what we have just now seen owed nothing to your connivance?”

“Certainly.”

“That it is not a trick?”

“If it is a trick we are not the performers. The diamond has acted on its own initiative.”

“ Will you allow me to come on the stage ? ”

“ With the greatest of pleasure. We shall be glad to have you. So keen an inquirer as yourself cannot fail to arrive at a correct conclusion.”

M. Nurvetchky's tone was a little dry. As Mr. Leicester was about to accept this invitation Colonel Dewsnap rose from his seat and caught him by the arm.

“ I think if I were you ”—he stroked his moustache and paused—“ I'd leave this thing alone.”

“ Colonel, you come with me.”

That was Mr. Leicester's answer. The Colonel laughed—a little oddly.

“ I don't mind if I do.”

One after the other they ascended the steps which led to the little gangway and moved towards the stage. Willy Panton seemed to object to being left behind ; he was quite ready to cut a figure on any stage.

“ Can't I come too ? ”

“ I think,” said Mr. Leicester, “ that perhaps you'd better not.”

“ Let me out ! I ain't going to stay here ! I ain't going to have my goose cooked, not for no one.”

It was Mr. Truelove in the gallery. M. Nurvetchky addressed the committee of inspection.

“ Well, gentlemen, what is it you would wish to examine first ? ”

Mr. Leicester replied,—

“Perhaps you will let us examine this table.”

He picked up the red-cloth-covered table, which only weighed a pound or two, and examined it with the minutest care. He rapped the legs, he sounded the top, he searched for signs of any of the appliances of the modern conjurer. The Colonel seemed to think the proceeding superfluous.

“I don't think you will find the secret there.”

Finally Mr. Leicester seemed to think so too. He took the table to the back of the stage. Kneeling down he began to examine the carpet foot by foot. His attitude appeared to strike the audience as ridiculous,—there were, so as to say, almost audible smiles. But Mr. Leicester persevered. When he had gone all over the carpet, almost inch by inch, he rose and looked up overhead. Then with equal care he moved all round the stage and examined the walls. He even opened the door by which the performers entered, and peeped off. Apparently satisfied with the result of his proceedings, he advanced to M. Nurvetchky.

“Now, sir, with your permission, I will examine the diamond.”

All this time the diamond had lain on the floor where it had been dropped by Madame Nurvetchky. Unhesitatingly he stooped and picked it up. It showed none of the signs of aversion to him which it had evinced to the lady.

"I suppose, M. Nurvetchky, you have no microscope of any kind handy?"

"I have a jeweller's glass."

M. Nurvetchky took one from his pocket and handed it to the speaker. Mr. Leicester fitted it into his eye. With its aid he long and carefully peered into the inner mysteries of the diamond. After he had peered for quite a minute he came to the front of the stage. He spoke to Mr. Schwabe.

"I think you said you were a diamond merchant?"

"I am. Here is my card."

Mr. Schwabe took a card-case from his pocket and passed a card up to Mr. Leicester.

"Thank you. I think, too, you said that you had already examined this diamond. You are sure—you will excuse my putting it in that way—but you are quite sure that this is the one that you examined?"

"I am quite sure."

"May I ask if you have noticed any peculiarity in the formation of the stone?"

"If you mean, has it a flaw, it has none. It is one of the most perfect stones, if not the most perfect stone, I ever saw. It is perfect so far as appearances go."

"May I trouble you to explain what you mean by 'so far as appearances go'?"

"It *is* a perfect stone. What I mean you will probably discover for yourself before you have concluded your experiments—if you intend to try any."

As he said this Mr. Schwabe smiled.

"I suppose there is no doubt that it is a diamond?"

"None whatever. As I have said, it would be cheap at twenty thousand pounds if it were possible to buy it."

And Mr. Schwabe smiled again.

"I am obliged to you." Mr. Leicester turned to M. Nurvetchky. "I suppose, M. Nurvetchky, that the wonderful things this stone has done in the hands of others it will be equally ready to do in mine?"

"As to that I cannot inform you. You had better try."

"But how shall I proceed to try?"

"Suppose you address yourself to the owner of the stone? I can only repeat my assurance that I myself know nothing of the matter, either one way or the other."

As Mr. Leicester was turning towards Mr. Hookham Madame Nurvetchky touched him on the arm.

"I do not think, my friend, you know what ground it is on which you are venturing. You see this, and this, and this." She touched the scars on her neck and bosom, and her poor burnt hair. "That stone, which is now so cool to you, has done all this, as you saw with your own eyes. And see, it has burnt me here as well." She held out her hand and showed



him the mark of a scar. "You absolve us from all blame, you take upon yourself all risk in this that you are about to do?"

"I absolve you from all blame. I must dree my weird, Madame."

"Mr. Hookham, let me present to you Mr. Leicester, a famous gentleman."

It was a curious place for an introduction. Mr. Leicester bowed. Mr. Hookham merely looked at him askance. Mr. Leicester held out the diamond.

"I understand that this diamond, sir, is yours?"

"Yes, sir, it is mine."

"You claim for it magic powers?"

"I? I claim for it nothing."

Madame Nurvetchky interposed.

"If you want to produce some manifestations,—I think that I may call them so,—offer to buy it."

"TAKE CARE!"

The words were boomed through the hall with the tumult of a deafening crash of thunder. It was impossible that any human pair of lungs could make that noise. As for a ventriloquist, the notion was ridiculous. It almost cracked the drums of people's ears. The audience started, sprang from their seats, turned pale, and stared at each other in amazement. The sound died away like a *diminuendo* boom in the distance. It was literally some seconds before they could hear each other speak. And when at last some-

thing approaching silence had returned, it was the Colonel's voice that was heard.

"That's the third time of asking. Now look out for ructions."

The Colonel smiled, but he was the only person in the building who seemed inclined to do so. One or two bolder spirits ventured on the *ghost* of a smile. But the prevailing expression of people's countenances seemed to be distinctly doubtful, as though they did not know what to make of it at all.

"Mr. Leicester, don't you think you had better act upon the warning, and take care?"

"Madame Nurvetchky, I have heard that sort of thing done before, though I will do you the justice to admit that I have not heard it done quite so well."

The lady smiled. She favoured him with one of her sweeping curtseys.

"Mr. Leicester, the risk is yours."

"As you say, Madame, the risk is mine."

"Yes; and I wonder what percentage an insurance office would want, to take it?"

This was from the Colonel. Mr. Leicester proceeded to address the owner of the stone.

"I understand that if I wish your diamond to do any more of those wonderful things we have already seen, I must offer to buy it. I am afraid that so valuable a stone is beyond the range of my limited means; but, at the same time, I shall be happy—I

shall be happy"—he paused—"I shall be happy"—he paused again—"I shall be happy——"

There was a convulsive twitching of the muscles of his face. His lips were tightly closed. Then he raised his hand and flung the diamond from him to the floor.

"I wonder how they managed to do that?"

His voice, as he asked the question, was still gentle and courteous. He stood, with his arm stretched out in front of him, gazing at the open palm. Madame Nurvetchky moved to him.

"Has it burned you? I warned you! It seems resolved to leave a brand on everyone that touches it. Oh, your poor hand!"

She bent over Mr. Leicester's palm and smoothed it softly with her own.

"Supposing you show it to the audience," suggested M. Nurvetchky, as sleepy and as bored as before, but drier than ever. "Let them have the satisfaction of seeing that you are really burned."

Mr. Leicester showed his hand to the people.

"It has burned me in the palm."

The people, craning forward in their seats, could see that it was disfigured by an ugly scar.

"Mr. Leicester," observed M. Nurvetchky, "will shortly explain to you how it was done."

"If you will take my advice, sir," said the clerical gentleman at the back, "you will come off the stage."

They will work you a mischief if you do not take care."

"Mischief! I hope they'll remember that my name's Truelove if they want to make arrangements for your burial."

From which remark it appeared that Mr. Truelove had not yet retired from the gallery. Mr. Leicester seemed to pay no attention to either speaker. Turning slowly round he advanced to where the diamond had found a resting-place upon the carpet.

"As I was saying, Mr. Hookham, I shall be happy"—he stooped to pick up the stone. There was a report as though the stone had gone off pop. It was perhaps the suddenness of the thing which induced him to withdraw his hand. "I shall be happy—" He again advanced his hand. There was another report. Possibly more prepared for these little pleasing carryings-on, he did not flinch,—but the stone did. As he was about to grasp it, it gave a little spring and was beyond the reach of his hand. "I shall be happy—" Again he made a snatch at it—again there was a report—and again the stone had hopped away.

Then a curious performance took place—which was not down in the programme. Mr. Leicester went after the stone, and the stone eluded him. Pop, hop, went the stone, and snatch, dash, went Mr. Leicester. The singular chase continued all round the stage. Mr. Leicester's perseverance was unbounded. He had

evidently made up his mind to get hold of the stone, and meant to know the reason why if he failed in doing so. It was funny to look at him, the tall, carefully-dressed man, stooping and grabbing at the popping, hopping piece of crystal—so funny that the people laughed. But his perseverance was destined to be rewarded. Suddenly the diamond ceased its remarkable antics. In an instant Mr. Leicester had it in his hand.

“I have it,” he said, with quiet triumph. “Now, Mr. Hookham, as I was about to remark, I shall be happy——”

It seemed that he was fated not to declare his happiness. He had got so far when a ring of flame sprang up around him—like one of those haloes which we see in old pictures encircling the heads of saints. It in no place touched his body, but it girded him round about as with a belt of flame. He paused to look at it, with a curiosity which might be called excusable.

“I wonder how that's done?” he said, in that quiet, contemplative voice of his.

“Perhaps you will be able to offer an explanation as you go on;” thus M. Nurvetchky, with ever-increasing dryness, as it seemed.

Keeping his eyes on the thin circular red line, Mr. Leicester continued addressing Mr. Hookham.

“As I was observing, sir, I shall be happy”—

pause, instant appearance of a second belt of flame, about half-way up his body—"I shall be happy"—another pause, and a third belt appeared, about the region of his knees.

"Let me entreat you, sir, to pause. That old man means to work you mischief."

The clerical gentleman had risen in his seat and was pointing at Mr. Hookham. Mr. Hookham's attitude did seem singular. He was bent almost double, his hands were knitted together in a convulsive clasp, his eyes seemed starting from his head. He would not have made a bad picture of a man engaged in the act of cursing his enemy. His looks seemed to strike Mr. Leicester.

"Would you work me a mischief?" he asked.

The old man started, as though the words had roused him from a fit of intense pre-occupation.

"I? Work you a mischief! I?" The old man looked round the hall with frightened eyes,—it gave one quite an uncomfortable feeling to see his face, it was so white, and drawn, and haunted. He turned to Mr. Leicester, "Give me the stone!"

"Why?"

"Give me the stone!"

"Not I. The experiments are proceeding admirably. As M. Nurvetchky remarked, if I go on I shall doubtless be able to explain exactly how it's done. As I was observing, Mr. Hookham, I shall be happy——"

The three belts all at once united and became a continuous sheet of flame. Mr. Leicester was standing in a circle of flame some three feet deep,—shaped something like a barrel with both the ends knocked out.

“I protest!” cried the clerical gentleman, who had remained erect upon his feet. “I protest against this exhibition going on!”

“Why do you protest?” inquired M. Nurvetchky.

“That old man means mischief!”

The clerical gentleman brought down his hand with a bang on the back of the seat in front of him, with so forcible a bang that the young lady who occupied it sprang up with a little scream. Possibly, in his growing excitement, he mistook it for the railing of his pulpit.

“Leicester,” murmured the Colonel, “I think you’d better come away.”

“I have warned Mr. Leicester that the risk is his;” this from Madame Nurvetchky, with one of those eloquent gestures of hers, which were at the same time so full of grace.

Mr. Leicester looked first at the clerical gentleman, then at the Colonel, then at Mr. Hookham, who had again assumed one of his peculiar attitudes, and at the lady last of all.

“Yes,” he said, “the risk is mine.” He glanced down at the flame which circled him. “I have been continually interrupted in the observation that I was

about to make to you, Mr. Hookham, to the effect that I shall be happy——”

The flame began to gyrate. Slowly at first, then with ever-increasing velocity. As it went whirling round, it threw out sparks, as a gigantic catherine wheel might throw out a great rain of fire.

“Leicester,” cried the Colonel, on whom some of the sparks had fallen, “come out of it.”

“My dear Dewsnap, you are surely not afraid! Consider how great a portion of my life I have spent in looking for something which might be honestly called remarkable. At last it seems that I have stumbled upon something, by the merest chance—one always stumbles upon the most important discoveries by chance—which may be said to answer that description. You would not have me give up my search just at that moment when I am within measurable distance of success?”

Mr. Leicester's tones were quietly pleasant. But it seemed as though the people were beginning to be restless in their seats.

“As I was observing, Mr. Hookham,” continued Mr. Leicester, “I shall be happy——”

A faint, white smoke began to accompany the sparks which were issuing from the revolving sheet of flame—a faint, white smoke of peculiar pungence. It stole from the stage into the hall. It mounted to the gallery. People began to cough. They began to see



each other through a haze. The clerical gentleman turned to a lady who accompanied him.

“Hester, come away. That old man means mischief; look at him now!” And indeed Mr. Hookham was staring with a strange intensity at Mr. Leicester and the revolving flame. “At least we will not stay to see it done.”

He began to push past the people as though he intended to effect an immediate exit from the hall. His example was contagious. Other people showed signs of going too. There were symptoms of something like a panic. Mr. Leicester, who seemed quite at his ease in the curious position he occupied, appealed to their common sense.

“What are you running from? A conjurer’s trick? Don’t be so foolish. Sit down, and see it out.”

The appeal, which was distinctly audible, even in the gathering confusion, had the result of quieting the people, at least for the moment. Some sat down again. Others remained standing where they were. Even the clerical gentleman paused in his flight.

“As I was observing, Mr. Hookham, I shall be happy”—the smoke suddenly increased in volume—“I shall be happy”—so dense had the smoke become that it obscured the persons on the stage, but through it issued, audible to every creature in the hall, the clear, well-bred tones of Mr. Leicester’s voice,—“I shall be happy to buy your diamond.”

There was silence, just for an instant. People looked at each other's faces, so much, that is to say, as they could see of them, for the smoke in the hall, as on the stage, began to be thick and suffocating. Then a scream rang out—the scream of a human being. They could not see for the smoke who it was that screamed, but they guessed that it was Mr. Leicester, though the acute, agonising scream, which made their blood run cold and their hearts cease beating, was pitched in a different key to the soft, easy tones to which they had just been listening. Then there was silence again.

Then a curious noise began. It came from the stage. It was like the yelping of some strange beast. Yelp! yelp! yelp! Each separate yelp made them shiver in their shoes, and wish they had been anywhere but in the Sphinx's Cave that afternoon. It seemed, from the sound, as though some wild animal had appeared upon the stage. It seemed as though it were tearing something to pieces. It seemed as though it were in an ecstasy of rage, and, in its fury, was yelp, yelp, yelping!

How long it lasted, that uncomfortable visitation from the unseen visitor—if it *was* a visitation, and there *was* a visitor—no one in the hall would have been prepared to say. It seemed to those there that it lasted hours. Possibly it only lasted seconds.

Just as speedily as it came, it went away. All was still.

## CHAPTER VII.

“MURDER!”

THE hall was filled with a dense and suffocating smoke, which penetrated into every nook and cranny, as though the place was on fire. But there were no signs of flame. And in the intense silence which followed the cessation of that remarkable noise which had proceeded from the stage the smoke began to disappear. Nobody seemed to notice where it went, but it did go, and by degrees the air was as clear again as though it had not been.

And as the smoke passed away, the people were revealed, in the clear brilliance of the electric light, all standing up, and with white, frightened faces turned towards the stage. Something very curious seemed to have happened there. The table and two of the chairs were overturned, and on the third chair sat—if such an attitude can be spoken of as sitting—Mr. Samuel Hookham. He had every appearance of having been engaged in some desperate struggle. His coat was torn all down the back, one of the sleeves

seemed to be attached only by a few loose threads to the shoulder, his shirt was ripped open at the neck, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, and there was a great scratch all down one side of his face. He lay, rather than sat, on his chair, which was balanced on its two hind legs. His head, with the blood streaming from the open wound—or scratch—on his right cheek, rested on his chest, and his arms dangled loosely at his sides. On the whole, he did not present at all a creditable picture.

But his was not the only singular figure to be seen upon that little stage, which, for once in a way, might truly claim to have been the scene of an entertainment of mystery and imagination, a scene which had lost none of its piquancy through having been an unrehearsed effect. There was a figure there, the figure of a man, which appealed even more strongly to the imagination than Mr. Hookham's, it lay so very still—right in the centre, full length upon the carpet, with his face turned towards the ground. It was the figure of Mr. Percy Leicester.

Still in silence the people continued to stare. Why did he not get up? And why did he lie on his face there, so very still? In the front stood Colonel Dewsnap, staring down upon his friend. At the back was Madame Nurvetchky, her fists clenched so tightly that one fancied that her finger-nails must be piercing the flesh of her hands. On the right stood her

husband, his tall, lean figure drawn straight up, peering through his sleepy-looking, half-closed eyelids at the man who lay upon the ground.

Suddenly a voice rang out, and so intense and strained had the silence become that the people started at the sound of it.

“Mr. Leicester!” It was Willy Panton. It is possible that he would have allowed that he had had what he called his “five bob’s worth” by now, — his “five bob’s worth” and perhaps a trifle over. No answer. He called again, “Mr. Leicester!”

Still silence. Then M. Nurvetchky made a move.

“Mr. Leicester!”

He stooped over the recumbent figure. Then the Colonel came to his side. Kneeling down, he touched his friend on the arm.

“Leicester!” Then, as the people watched him, scarcely seeming to breathe, he turned him over on his back. “By God, he’s dead!”

The words came from him with unconscious profanity—in the army there are still gentlemen who swear, and he was one of them. As the Colonel uttered that great oath, exclaiming that his friend was dead, a sound went through the hall like a sob. It is possible that some of the women fainted. It is certain that some of them began to cry. Madame Nurvetchky had been a true prophet when she had foretold that

the new addition to the programme would make a big sensation.

“Are you sure that he is dead?” asked M. Nurvetchky.

“Quite sure.” The hand with which the Colonel smoothed his moustache seemed to tremble. “I know death when I see it. Good God, what an awful thing! To think that his love for hankey-pankey should have brought him to such an end as this!”

Even as he was speaking someone in the audience mounted the gangway and came striding on to the stage. It was the clerical gentleman. He seemed half beside himself with excitement. His voice was rendered hoarse by the force of his emotion.

“There has been murder done. That man has killed him!” He pointed an accusatory finger at Mr. Hookham. “But you have shared in the deed!” He turned on M. Nurvetchky. “And that painted woman!” Then he turned on M. Nurvetchky’s wife. “Let the police be sent for! As I live I will see justice done!”

M. Nurvetchky straightened himself very quietly, and looked at him. “Are you a madman, sir?”

“You scoundrel, to dare to ask me such a question, with your victim’s soul still fluttering at the gates of God! Is there a man here who, having witnessed such a deed, can refuse to call on the avenger of blood?”

His language, if his meaning was a little confused,

was sufficiently violent. It was not difficult to believe that he would produce an effect upon a revival platform,—of a certain class. His passionate appeal was answered by the rubicund gentleman, whose rubicund appearance, by the way, was considerably modified. Indeed, he seemed exceedingly ill at ease.

“I—I think I saw the old gentleman attacking him. Indeed, I—I’m sure I did. As a matter of fact, I’m prepared to take my oath that I did, in any place, at any time.”

“There is at least one man who dares to speak out and do the right. Is there but one? Oh, my friends, look upon this man, whom we all saw but a moment back instinct with the breath of life, and who now lies branded with the brand of Cain.” In his excitement the clerical gentleman misplaced “the brand of Cain,” but that was but an oversight. “There is the livid mark about his neck where the life was torn from him by murderous hands. And there is the man who did the deed,”—pointing to Mr. Hookham, who seemed gradually waking to the fact that he *was* being pointed at. “You see how his victim fought for his life—the blood upon his cheeks—his clothes torn all to fragments! And here are his accomplices!”—turning on M. and Madame Nurvetchky, —“the conjurer and his painted wife! But every moment wasted is an added crime. Why are the police not here!”

“Do I understand you seriously to assert that I, or any person here, has had a hand in this man’s death ?”

As he put this question M. Nurvetchky’s air of sleepiness and of boredom seemed temporarily to have disappeared.

“Do not speak to me, you villain ! A minister of the Word can hold no converse with such as you. Send for the police !”

But the clerical gentleman was not to have his own way entirely—and a very interesting way it promised to be—with every prospect of the interest increasing as he went on. The Colonel interposed with some asperity,—

“I think you must be of a sanguine temperament, sir, and see double. I was on the stage, sir, and I saw nothing of any crime.”

“You say that ? And was not this dead man your friend ?”

“Well, sir, and what the devil has that to do with it if he was ?”

“You swear ! With your grey hairs ! In the presence of the dead ? Oh, you are all the same ! Send for the police !”

This summary method of putting him out of court did not seem to exactly please the Colonel,—perhaps the allusion to his grey hairs, for there was not a younger man of sixty-three in town, touched him, too. He looked as though he was about to use some very



strong language indeed. But Madame Nurvetchky took him by the hand.

“The man is mad,” she said. “But do not let us contend in the presence of the dead.”

The lady's opinion of the clerical gentleman's madness was not shared by the audience, or not by all of them, at any rate. The rubicund gentleman in particular was very clear upon the point.

“I was not upon the stage, and I saw a crime, as I am prepared to depose on oath in any court in England.”

And there were cries of “Send for the police!” some of them very ugly cries. But ugly or not, they were unnecessary, since it appeared that somebody had sent for the police already. For presently two members of the force appeared, followed at short intervals by others, so that soon it seemed as though all the people in the hall had been taken into custody. The two first comers went stamping on to the stage with the orthodox policeman's stamp, as though they were shod with lead.

“What is the matter here?” inquired policeman No. 1.

“Matter! Crime! Black crime! Murder is the matter here.”

The policeman did not seem to be so much impressed by the clerical gentleman's melodramatic manner as he ought to have been. Policeman-

No. 2 knelt down by the recumbent figure on the stage.

“He is dead. How came he by his death?” he asked.

“That man killed him.”

The clerical gentleman pointed to Mr. Hookham. Mr. Hookham, apparently fairly roused at last, staggered to his feet.

“It is false! It is a lie!” he gasped.

“And this man and woman were his accomplices,” continued the clerical gentleman, turning to M. and Madame Nurvetchky, heedless of Mr. Hookham’s denial.

“That also is false,” said M. Nurvetchky, quietly.

“It is not false, it is the truth,—I am prepared to swear to it in any court in England.”

This from the rubicund gentleman in the auditorium.

“You hear? There is one witness’s testimony. If it is necessary you should insist upon the testimony of every person here.”

“Do you charge this man with murder?”

The policeman pointed to Mr. Hookham.

“I do.”

“And this man and woman too?”

The policeman pointed to M. Nurvetchky and his wife.

“I charge that man and woman with being his accomplices.”

At this point an inspector, who had been standing at the door observing the scene, unnoticed by those upon the stage, came up the gangway.

“You are my prisoner.” He spoke to Mr. Hookham. “And you, sir, and madame, too.” This to M. and Madame Nurvetchky. “If you will give me your words that you will go quietly to the station, I will see that you are treated with all possible courtesy.”

M. Nurvetchky slipped his wife's arm through his. He faced the inspector with a smile.

“For my wife and for myself, I give you my word, that we will go as quietly as you please. The man is a madman. His charge is a preposterous one.”

“As to that I know nothing. I can only hope, for your own sake, that what you say is true. What is that you've picked up there?”

The question was addressed to Mr. Hookham.

“My diamond.”

“Give it to me.”

Mr. Hookham gave it to him, with something almost approaching a grim smile about his lips.

“It was that which killed that man, not I.”

“This?” The inspector looked at the diamond, then at Mr. Hookham, then at the diamond again.

Colonel Dewsnap advanced with his cardcase in his hand.

“My name is Colonel Dewsnap; there is my card, Inspector. The dead man, Mr. Percy Leicester, was

my friend. But though he was my friend, I believe that what Mr. Hookham says is true,—that diamond killed him, not the hand of any living man.”

The inspector, with the diamond in one hand and the card in the other, looked the Colonel steadily in the face.

“I don’t understand you. The diamond killed the man? How did it do that?”

“It is some cursed magic stone, endowed with all the powers of hell.”

The inspector smiled.

“I see. It’s like that? Well, Colonel Dewsnap, you will have an opportunity to say what you have to say elsewhere.”

Then Mr. Schwabe advanced.

“Inspector, here is my card. My name is Schwabe. I am a diamond merchant. I can endorse what Colonel Dewsnap has said,—it was the diamond killed the man.”

“But I don’t understand you. How do you allege that it did that?”

“It strangled him.”

“Strangled him?—this stone?”

“I am not actually prepared to swear that it strangled him.”

“No, I should imagine you were not.”

“But by whatever means that man has met his death, it was through the agency of that stone.”

“ Well, gentlemen, you will be afforded an opportunity to give your evidence elsewhere. In the meantime, I must see that the prisoners are removed.”

The inspector turned to give instructions to the constables. As he was engaged in doing so Mr. Hookham spoke to him.

“ I think you had better give me that diamond.”

“ I think differently. It will be quite safe with me.”

“ It is for your own sake I make the suggestion, not mine.”

“ I am obliged by your solicitude, but I can take care of myself. I have no fear of its strangling me.”

The inspector said this in the well-known official way which is intended to infer that the last possible word on the subject has once and for all been said. He possibly intended, too, a mild joke by his allusion to strangulation. But no sooner were the words out of his mouth than he gave vent to an ejaculation which was very like an oath, sprang right off his feet, raised his arm, and flung the diamond with violence to the ground. Then he swung round on his heels and glared at the amazed bystanders with a very furious countenance.

“ Who did that ? ” he demanded, not by any means in an official tone of voice.

An innocent constable, who stood just behind him, meeting the full fury of his eye, took the question

as being specially addressed to him. He almost choked himself in his anxiety to make a prompt reply.

“ Did what, sir?—Never moved a finger, sir ! ”

The inspector stretched out his arm in front of him and stared at the open palm,—stared as though he could scarcely believe his eyes.

“ Well—I’m——” he was certainly going to say “damned,” but his sense of official propriety came to his rescue in the very nick of time, and he said “hanged” instead.

Seeing the inspector continuing to gaze so intently at his hand, one or two of the constables crowded round him, and even Colonel Dewsnap and Mr. Schwabe joined in the stare. It was undoubtedly most annoying. There, in letters an inch in length—the inspector had a good broad hand—was branded, right in the centre of the palm, with exasperating distinctness, the one word—

“ Fool ! ”

Mr. Schwabe, when he saw it, smiled ; but the inspector did not seem to be at all in a humorous frame of mind.

“ Burned you, has it ? You should have acted on Mr. Hookham’s suggestion and made him responsible for the safe custody of the stone. I wouldn’t touch it for a thousand pounds.”

“ But it must have been red hot.”

“That’s nothing, my good sir. If you care to try a few more experiments with the stone you will soon come to understand how it killed that man. He tried experiments with it, till he tried one too many.”

Mr. Schwabe pointed at the figure, which lay in significant silence at their feet. The inspector turned to Mr. Hookham.

“Pick up that thing!”

Mr. Hookham picked up the “thing,”—by which term the still irate inspector alluded to the diamond.

“Is it still hot?”

“It is quite cool to me. But perhaps you would like to feel it for yourself?”

Mr. Hookham, in whom the stress of circumstances seemed to have roused some faint glimmerings of humour, though of a grimly uncomfortable kind, held out the stone for his examination. The inspector glared. He kept giving sidelong glances at his hand,—on which the word “Fool,” in its aggressive plainness, must have smarted in more senses than one.

“Mind, I hold you responsible for the safe custody of that stone, if it is a stone!”—here the inspector positively snarled—“and shall require you to produce it for purposes of evidence in this case whenever required.”

Mr. Hookham said nothing. But he slipped the diamond into his waistcoat pocket.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MR. FAIRLIGHT.

**M**R. HOOKHAM dined in his cell. A cell in a well-ordered police-station is not such an utterly comfortless apartment as some people—principally those without experience, for experience is the great teacher—may perhaps imagine. True, it has one drawback. It is not, to put it very mildly indeed, overstocked with furniture. But if one can content oneself with a board to sit down upon and a board for a bed—and what avail all the teachings of philosophy if one cannot, just for once in a way?—one might go farther and fare worse.

Mr. Hookham, who was by no means habituated to luxurious living, and eating, and sleeping in his chambers in Mitre Court, was quite at his ease. He made a hearty meal, and seemed to enjoy it, too. He had fasted for so long that one might have thought his appetite had gone for ever ; but recent events had brought it back again. It seemed as if he had made up his mind to put away at one and the same time, on



the principle of "better late than never," all the food that was overdue. He gave a lavish order to the constable, which that constable lavishly interpreted; yet he did full justice to that constable's interpretation. If that constable—since constables are but mortal—thought that there would be any pickings left for himself out of such a feast, he was woefully mistaken.

After Mr. Hookham had dined, he had a visitor. This visitor was a slightly-built gentleman, clothed in gorgeous attire. He wore patent leather shoes; light grey trousers, faultlessly cut,—as the tailors say, well "arched" over the instep,—a frock-coat, whose perfect fit *almost* conveyed a suspicion of stays; a beautiful red necktie, and the most elegant lavender kid gloves. And he wore an eyeglass, which was adjusted in its place; and there was such a jet-black eye behind it, which was a perfect match to the other eye on the other side of his nose. And that nose was a prominent feature; it was Semitic. In fact, the whole gentleman was Semitic, though there was something about him which seemed to announce that he intended to assure you, by his mere appearance, that he was nothing of the kind. This gorgeous being was ushered in in quite an unceremonious way. The door was flung open; the policeman's voice was heard announcing,—

"Some 'un to see you!"

The resplendent vision appeared, and the door was

banged. The visitor did not remove his hat—it was a beautiful top hat, looking as though he had just taken it out of a shop before he came through that door. Mr. Hookham, who was not expecting a visitor, looked up at him.

“ Mr. Hookham ? I have just had an interview with your friend Mr. Schwabe. I am Frank Fairlight.”

Mr. Hookham knew who his visitor was without this announcement of the name. He had had a great deal to do with the law-courts in his time, not as a practising barrister, but on his own account, and he knew that there was no more famous solicitor living than Mr. Frank Fairlight. In criminal matters many folks believed, not without a show of reason, that his support meant victory.

As Mr. Hookham eyed this famous man, he told himself that, since Mr. Schwabe had sent him, he hoped that Mr. Schwabe would pay him, too. But he did not utter his thoughts aloud ; which was, perhaps, as well.

“ You are in rather an awkward position, Mr. Hookham. I understand that there are some curious features in your case, which is perhaps the reason why I am so promptly here. I like to handle curious cases. I knew Mr. Percy Leicester very well.”

Mr. Fairlight put his gloved hands behind his back, and beamed down on Mr. Hookham. It was said that there were even magistrates who liked to have him

beam on them. His was not a beaming manner as a rule.

“You are charged with murder. I suppose they will word it so as to make it actual murder. I suppose we may take it for granted that you are not—you are not guilty?”

Although Mr. Fairlight said that they might take it for granted, there was a certain amount of inquiry in his eye.

“I am not guilty.”

“Tell me all about it.”

Since Mr. Hookham occupied the only article of furniture which might be classified under the heading “chairs,” Mr. Fairlight sat down on the board which was to serve as a bed, and which was raised some three feet from the ground. Mr. Hookham’s plates and dishes were at one end, and Mr. Fairlight was at the other; yet he seemed as much at his ease as though he were seated in one of those glorious drawing-rooms with whose splendours his appearance would have harmonised so well.

“I understand that this afternoon you assisted at M. and Madame Nurvetchky’s entertainment,—on whom, by the way, I am shortly about to pay a call. I am told that you and they are neighbours. By the way, Mr. Schwabe tells me something about a diamond of yours, a diamond which has—shall we say some little peculiarities?”

“ Well ? ”

Although Mr. Fairlight had requested Mr. Hookham to tell him all about it, it was evident that he himself would have to set the ball a-rolling. Mr. Hookham seemed to be in a taciturn frame of mind.

“ He tells me that Mr. Percy Leicester, whose craze for that sort of thing was notorious, came on to the stage to examine your diamond, and that in the course of his examination he was killed. The question is, who killed him ? Did you ? ”

“ No.”

“ I see you look as though you had received rough handling. Did you struggle with Mr. Leicester ? ”

“ I never touched him.”

“ Did Mr. Leicester struggle with you ? ”

“ Nor did he touch me.”

“ Did you struggle with the police ? ”

“ Not such a fool ! ”

“ I suppose there is nothing so foolish as to struggle with the police. Then how do you account for the state that you are in ? I suppose you are aware that your clothing is all torn, and that your face is all covered with blood ? ”

“ I will tell you about it—all that there is to tell—in a minute or two.”

Mr. Hookham got up from his stool and began to pace the cemented floor of his cell. Mr. Fairlight watched him. Mr. Hookham, as he was then seen by

the keen-eyed lawyer—with his wonderful experience—had not a presentable appearance. He was dirty, ragged, and covered with blood. He had a hangdog look. There were hardness and cruelty about his eyes and his mouth. Although he did not look a coward as far as he was himself concerned—there was too much doggedness about him for that—he did look as though he were the sort of man who would not hesitate to take a fair or unfair advantage of either friend or foe. Mr. Fairlight decided that at his best his client was not, as the great Doctor would have said—Mr. Fairlight had heard of Boswell—a “clubbable” man.

“You say,” said Mr. Hookham, speaking as he continued his promenade, “that Mr. Schwabe told you about the diamond?”

“He did; that is, he told me something about a diamond.”

“Did he tell you how it came to me, and about my brother Matthew’s letter?”

“I believe he did say something about a letter.”

“M. Nurvetchky has it. You must get it from him.”

“I will make a note of it.”

Mr. Fairlight did make a note of it, in a note-book which he took from the inner pocket of his coat. Mr. Hookham paused and looked at him. As the lawyer met his client’s eyes he was conscious, for the

first time, of what curious eyes they were—eyes which then, at any rate, looked as though they would stick at nothing.

“This charge is absurd upon the face of it. It needs, it can need, no argument,—you must be aware of that. I am a man of property, of standing, of reputation, of character. I can prove it by the testimony of a thousand mouths. Is it conceivable that I should kill, on a public stage, a man I never saw, or heard of, in my life before,—why?”

“There have been motiveless crimes.”

“But not such a motiveless crime as that would be. No sensible man would listen to such trash.”

“Not in the face of evidence?”

“What evidence?”

“I understand that there are already two men who have offered to swear that they saw you do it. By to-morrow, out of such an audience as filled the Sphinx’s Cave—I hear that it was crowded—there may be two hundred.”

As Mr. Fairlight said this Mr. Hookham scowled at him and resumed his promenade. In spite of what Mr. Schwabe had told him, the lawyer began to wonder if his client were not guilty. When men descended to special pleading he always had his doubts.

“I tell you frankly, Mr. Hookham—frankness is rather a fault of mine—that if you have said all that

there is to be said, you are now standing within measurable distance of the gallows. Here is a man killed—I suppose there is no doubt that he is killed—and we shall have to give some idea as to how it is that he was killed—or they will give their idea, which may turn out unfortunate for you.”

“It was the diamond did it.”

“The diamond! Come, Mr. Hookham, you don't expect me to go into court and say, ‘Your worship, here's a man been murdered, foully murdered, and my client's diamond murdered him.’ I've done some bold things, but I hardly think that I could bring myself to manage that. Where is this diamond of which I've heard? I suppose the police have got it?”

“No, they haven't.”

As Mr. Hookham said this something like a sour smile darkened—rather than lightened—his blood-grimed features.

“No? Who has?”

“I have.”

Mr. Fairlight whistled, very softly, and doubtless quite in a professional way, but still he whistled.

“Did you hide it when they searched you?”

“Not I.”

“Do you mean to say that they let you keep it?”

“I do. I think they rather thought that I was obliging them by doing so.”

Mr. Fairlight eyed his client very intently.

“Let me look at it.” Mr. Hookham produced it from his waistcoat pocket. “Mr. Schwabe tells me that it would be cheap at twenty thousand pounds.”

“So Mr. Schwabe tells me too.”

“I suppose it’s all right? I may touch it? I daresay it is not so very dreadful after all.”

“What am I to say to you? I tell you it has killed a man, and you ask me if it’s so very dreadful after all.”

“Tell me quite frankly how it is you say it killed him.”

“Hasn’t Mr. Schwabe told you?”

“Never mind what Mr. Schwabe told me; you tell me too.”

Then Mr. Hookham told his story, and on the whole he told it well. He told it very slowly, seeming to ponder before each word, so that each one, when it came, seemed to carry weight. And he told it doggedly. When a man is in earnest—and Mr. Hookham was unmistakably in earnest—there is something about doggedness which is impressive, especially when the tale which the man happens to be telling is a difficult one to, let us put it, satisfactorily digest.

“This man Leicester—they say his name is Leicester, though I never saw or heard of him in my life before—came on to the stage to see if this stone was not part and parcel of a conjurer’s trick. When



first he came on to the stage it shouted out, 'Take care !' "

" What shouted out 'Take care' ? "

" The stone."

Mr. Hookham glared at the lawyer as though he defied his contradiction.

" Go on."

" He thought it was a trick, and he went on to try if he could find it out. Then the stone burned his hand. Then it sprang on to the floor, and when he tried to pick it up it eluded him."

" Do you mean to tell me that the stone did all this without the connivance of your friends, M. and Madame Nurvetchky ? "

" They are not friends of mine. I never saw them before this morning; Mr. Schwabe will tell you that I met the woman in his office. But let me tell my story first, and I will answer your questions afterwards.—At last he picked it up, he wouldn't be warned. Then one circle of fire sprang up round him, then a second, then a third. Then the three united and became a continuous flame. Then the flame began to revolve, and a dense smoke came from it, and so filled the whole place that you couldn't see your hand before your eyes. When those men who were in the body of the building tell you that they saw what was passing on the stage they tell a lie. I doubt if they could have seen what was passing a

foot in front of them. If that smoke had not gone as quickly as it came not one of us would have come out alive. Leicester was standing where you are, I was standing here." Mr. Hookham took up his position about three feet from the lawyer. "When the smoke grew dense a noise began like the yelping of some wild beast. I saw something appear in front of Leicester. Something—it felt like a hand covered with hair—scratched my cheek and caught me by the throat. I suppose I must have struggled, for when the smoke had gone, and I came to, I was as you see me now. But the man was dead."

There was silence when Mr. Hookham ceased. The lawyer had heard some remarkable stories in his time, but scarcely one quite so remarkable as this. He kept his keen eyes fixed on the narrator. But Mr. Hookham never flinched.

"You are aware that you have told me a very curious story?"

"I have told you so curious a story that I find it difficult to believe in its truth myself. If it were not that the man *is* dead, I should say that I had had a nightmare."

"Have you ever been subject to illusions?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you, for example, be willing to undergo an examination by a specialist?"

"A specialist? You think I am mad? I thought

you were a better judge of men than that. There is not a saner man in England than I am—the proof of which is that all that I have gone through during the last four-and-twenty hours has failed to drive me mad.”

“Mr. Hookham, it is my duty to tell you that if your life depends upon my, or upon any man, being able to convince an English jury of the truth of the tale which you have just now told me, you are doomed to die.”

“I don't believe it. Throw up the case, and I will convince the magistrate to-morrow.”

“You will find it a difficult matter. You failed to convince those people this afternoon, else how comes it that you now stand charged with murder?”

“Mr. Fairlight, you have not been retained by me, though I am quite prepared to avail myself of your services if you choose to continue them,—I know their value. But should you prefer to withdraw, I am quite prepared to act as my own advocate.”

As Mr. Fairlight hesitated, glancing from the stone to Mr. Hookham and from Mr. Hookham back to the stone, a young man appeared, standing close to his side. He was quite an ordinary-looking young man, seemingly about twenty-six or seven. He had curly brown hair and clean-shaven cheeks, and was dressed in the usual costume of everyday life,—he was a commonplace, middle-class sort of young man. Yet

Mr. Hookham and Mr. Fairlight stared at him as though their eyes would start from their sockets—as though they had never seen such a sight in their lives before.

The young man laid his hand lightly on the lawyer's shoulder,—which was rather a familiarity, in the case of so famous an individual from so young a man,—and spoke to him.

“Carry the case through.” He paused. “You will astonish them to-morrow.” He paused again. Then he quoted, or rather misquoted, the “divine William,” which, under the circumstances, was perhaps a singular thing to do. “‘There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in *man's* philosophy.’”

Then, while they continued to stare at him, possibly expecting him to speak again,—which was a flattering attention upon their part, always remembering the youth of the stranger,—the young man vanished.

His disappearance was surprisingly sudden — so sudden that, as if unable to believe the evidence of their own eyes, they continued staring at nothing in a way which, to an onlooker, if there had been one, would have seemed ludicrous. Then their eyes met, and they gasped. Then the lawyer asked a question.

“Who was that?”

“I don't know.”

“ Where did he come from ? ”

“ God knows.”

It was perhaps because the name of God sounded strangely from such lips as Mr. Hookham's, or perhaps because the accidental mention of that great Name at such a moment—for it was doubtless accidental—led their thoughts into strange channels, that both men shuddered. For they did shudder, as though a sudden cold wind had gone right through them.

Then Mr. Fairlight went to the door and twisted a handle, which set a bell ringing. A constable appeared.

“ Did you just now let anybody into this cell ? ”

“ Let anybody into this cell ? No—except you.”

“ Did you see anybody just now come out ? ”

“ Nobody did come out. The door has never been unlocked since I unlocked it for you ; the key has never left my belt. Are you getting at me, sir ? ”

“ That will do.”

The constable went, doubtless wondering inwardly. But he was too wise to ask unnecessary questions of Mr. Fairlight, the great criminal lawyer. Perhaps that gentleman might have the handling of him one day.

When the constable had gone, Mr. Fairlight sat down on the only stool the cell contained,—subsided on

it, would perhaps be the correcter term. He seemed so overwhelmed.

“ Well I’m —— ”

Then he gave utterance to the word which that inspector had checked in time.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CASE IS OPENED.

WHEN the case of the "Sphinx's Cave Mystery" —as the papers had already christened it— came on for hearing, the court was crowded. Not that it requires a large number of people to fill a London police-court ; some of them, when they contain the prisoner, the magistrate, and the counsel, the reporters and the officials, have about as much as they can manage ; but as many as could squeeze in, squeezed in, and a crowd hung about outside.

The charge sheet was "light" that day, so that when about a dozen "drunks" had been disposed of, and one or two of the more pressing of the applicants, who apply to the magistrate for advice on every matter beneath the sun—in the same way in which the people apply to the "Correspondence Editor" of the *Family Herald*—and the prisoners in the "Mystery" case were brought into the dock, the hour was still an early one.

There was at first some slight hesitation as to where they should be placed, but finally they were ushered into the ordinary position occupied by prisoners—the dock. A chair was provided for the lady. The gentlemen elected to stand. It was at once apparent that M. and Madame Nurvetchky had managed to obtain a change of apparel. They were not doomed to figure in a police-court in evening dress. The elaborate shirt front, and splendid clawhammer, of the gentleman had disappeared, and instead he was attired in the usual costume in which the English gentleman—apparently preferentially—elects to walk Pall Mall at noon. M. Nurvetchky was so very tall, and so very thin, that the long frock coat, tightly buttoned across his chest, had rather a funereal aspect, there seemed to be so much of it. He had, too, rather a peculiar face. A long, thin nose, hooked like a bird's—like the American eagle's, for example—high, prominent cheek-bones, hollow cheeks, high, narrow forehead, and a moustache which was so profuse and straggling as to conceal almost the whole lower portion of his face. How he ever managed to eat soup—and it is reasonable to suppose that all men do eat soup at times—with that moustache is a secret known only to himself. His eyes were large, unnaturally large, seeming to stretch right across his face. Yet it was with difficulty that one made out their colour, since they were continually shaded by the eyelids,—indeed, M.



Nurvetchky seemed to be always on the point of falling fast asleep.

But if the gentleman was—well, not beautiful, his wife was just the sort of woman to take the heart of the British juryman by storm. It is not for a mere mortal to describe her costume—how she ever got into it in a cell at a police-station is one of the seven wonders of the world; but her—we *must* fly to our French dictionary—her *tout ensemble* was entrancing. And her bonnet! O ye gods—of the Parisian bonnet shops! As she bowed to the constable who handed her a chair, and as she sat down upon the chair itself, everybody felt that here was a veritable great lady, of—certainly not of the old school. She glanced round the court with her beautiful blue eyes, and nodded her dainty head to Mr. Schwabe, and to Colonel Dewsnap, and even to Willy Panton,—who had managed to find his way into court, possibly with the intention of working out the remainder of his “five bob’s worth,”—and to Mr. Fairlight. She glanced at the magistrate, and for a moment it was doubtful whether she was not about to nod to him. But she refrained, and smiled, revealing such a pair of rosy lips, and such a set of teeth!

Mr. Hookham presented a very different figure. He had had a wash and brush-up—possibly a shave—but *he* had not made a change of costume. His shirt and collar were still torn open at the neck, a fact which he

made no attempt to conceal by turning up the collar of his coat. His coat was itself a ruin; the sleeve still dangled by a loose thread or two. Although the blood had disappeared, the scratch upon his cheek was unpleasantly conspicuous,—a very ugly scratch it seemed. Altogether, Mr. Hookham did not present the spectacle of a well-dressed man.

Yet there was something about him which seemed to suggest that he was completely at his ease,—that what was coming had no terrors for him. He stood with one hand resting on the rail in front of him, his head jerked forward, with a gesture which seemed habitual, and he gazed, from under his rugged eyebrows, from one person to another, until his glance rested on the magistrate with a look of almost savage scorn.

Soon after he had taken up his position in the dock Mr. Fairlight stood up and whispered to him. The onlookers perhaps thought that some important communication was taking place between the lawyer and his client, but what Mr. Fairlight said was this :—

“Don’t glare at the man like that,—he’ll think you want to kill him too.”

Then Mr. Hookham glared at his lawyer instead.

“What case is this?” asked the magistrate, when the prisoners had settled in their places.

One may guess that the magistrate knew very well

what case it was—for magistrates *do* read the papers—but still he asked the question. In these matters magistrates and judges do feign such seraphic innocence.

A superintendent of police—Superintendent Bray—rose up in the body of the court.

“Your Worship, this is a case of murder. The prisoner, Samuel Hookham, is charged with the murder of Percy Leicester. The prisoners, Stefan Nurvetchky and Nina Nurvetchky, his wife, are charged with being accomplices before the fact.”

The usual preliminaries were gone through, and the superintendent went on.

“Your Worship, the affair only happened late yesterday afternoon, and we have not yet been able to communicate with the Treasury. I only propose on this occasion to offer sufficient evidence to justify a remand.”

“Which I shall strenuously oppose. What do you call sufficient evidence, I should like to know? There is not the slightest foundation for the charge. If the police had troubled themselves to make a few inquiries it would never have been made.”

This burst of eloquence was from Mr. Fairlight. The habit of making little impromptu speeches—when he ought not to—was one of his eccentricities. Magistrates, as a rule, found it better to allow him considerable latitude,—he was really irrepressible when they tried to put him down,—and Mr. Mansell in particular,

the magistrate of the day, was a very old and, in these matters, a very long-suffering man.

“Whom do you appear for, Mr. Fairlight?” he asked in his mildest way.

“I appear for Mr. Hookham. And I hope, sir, that you will insist upon the Superintendent offering some very sufficient evidence indeed before you allow my client to continue in the false position in which a blunder of the police has placed him.”

Mr. Mansell turned to the superintendent with rather a severe air. He knew from experience that Mr. Fairlight really never did use that sort of language unless he had something very strong to go upon.

“What do you say?”

“I will at once call evidence, your Worship. Call Inspector James Robins!”

The inspector who had effected the arrest at the Sphinx’s Cave appeared in the witness-box. After he had been sworn—

“What do you know about this?” asked the superintendent.

Then the inspector started off in the usual stereotyped, cut-and-dried policeman’s way. When he had said his say, Mr. Fairlight rose.

“Inspector, hold out your hand.”

The inspector held it out.

“Not that one, the other. You know very well what I mean.”

The inspector held out the other.

“What is that upon the palm?”

“A word.”

“What word?”

“‘Fool.’”

The inspector said this in rather a dissatisfied tone of voice. Some of the people laughed. Several of them craned their necks to look at the inspector's hand.

“What does he say he has upon his hand?” the magistrate asked.

“What do you say you have upon your hand, Inspector?”

“The word ‘fool,’ your Worship.”

“The word ‘fool’? What does he mean? Come here and let me see.”

The inspector went up to the bench. The magistrate, who was a very short-sighted old gentleman, put his spectacled old eyes very close to the inspector's hand. That “active and intelligent” officer did not seem to be quite at his ease. A good many people in the court were on the titter.

“Dear me! how did that come there?”

“If you will allow me, that is the question I am about to put.”

“Certainly. Has this anything to do with the case, Mr. Fairlight?”

“A very great deal, as I will soon show you.

Inspector, how does the word 'fool' come to be upon your hand?"

"That is what I should like you to tell me."

"Don't speak to me like that, sir. Answer my question. As an inspector of police—you are dressed like an inspector of police—I suppose you have some faint notion of your duty as a witness. How does the word 'fool' come to be upon your hand?"

"I believe that the prisoner Hookham played me a trick."

"Oh, you believe that my client, *Mr. Hookham*"—emphasis on the "*Mr.*"—"played you a trick. Perhaps you will tell me the grounds for the faith that is in you."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, you don't understand me, don't you? I ask you on what grounds you state that the gentleman whom I have the honour to represent played you a trick?"

"Well, when I took him into custody I saw him pick up something from the ground ——"

"Stop one moment. What did you see him pick up from the ground?"

"I believe it was a diamond."

"You believe. Don't you know it was a diamond?"

"I was told it was. I don't know much about diamonds myself."

"Oh, you don't know much about diamonds! Go on."

"I asked him to give it to me. He did so. Directly I got it into my hand I found that it was red-hot. I threw it down. When I looked at my hand to see if the thing had burned me, I found the word 'fool' branded on the palm."

"Weren't you surprised?"

"I was very much surprised indeed. I was more than surprised."

There was "laughter" in court. The magistrate mildly interposed.

"Is all this material to the case, Mr. Fairlight?"

"It is absolutely vital. Perhaps after that statement, Mr. Mansell, you will allow me to conduct my own case, at my own risk, in my own way. There is a man's life at stake."

Mr. Mansell meekly bowed his head.

"In all this, Inspector, where did the trick come in?"

"I believe the whole thing was a trick."

"Say plainly what you mean. Do you mean that Mr. Hookham branded that word upon your hand himself?"

"No. He couldn't have done. He never touched me."

"Do you mean to say then that the diamond acted as a brand?"

"I do. It must have done."

"Be careful, Inspector. You are on your oath.



The diamond is in existence, and can be produced in evidence. Will you swear that the letters 'f, double o, l' were on that diamond so that it might act as a brand?"

"They must have been."

"Attend to my question. Will you or will you not swear that those letters, or any letters, were on the diamond so that it might act as a brand?"

"I say they must have been,—else how could they have branded me?"

"Confine yourself to answering my question. Will you swear they were?"

The inspector hesitated.

"No."

"You can go down. Don't leave the court. I may probably want you again."

The superintendent rose.

"Call William Lloyd Skene."



## CHAPTER X.

### A WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION.

“WILLIAM LLOYD SKENE” turned out to be the clerical gentleman of the Sphinx’s Cave. He entered the witness-box as though he were fully conscious of the importance of the occasion—a little too conscious, perhaps. Mr. Fairlight watched him with his eagle eye—or eye-glassed eye, which was the same thing. Mr. Skene belonged to the florid order of men ; he was big and bulky, with large, black whiskers, a red face, and jet-black hair, which was parted down the middle ; he was clad in shining apparel, the gloss on his “superfine blacks” suggesting that he at least received, if he was not “worthy” of, his “hire.” He brought his hat with him—a glossy “topper”—and seemed to experience a certain amount of difficulty in knowing what to do with it. He finally consigned it, with great urbanity, to the usher who bore the book, who immediately rubbed the nap the wrong way by bringing it into contact with his gown. His bearing, in taking the oath, was, if

we may so describe it, one of proud humility ; he peeped over the edge of the book at the magistrate in front of him ; then he put his hands behind his back, and thrust his chest well forward, in the village infant school style.

Then the superintendent began.

“ Your name is William Lloyd Skene ? ”

“ It is.”

“ What are you ? ”

“ I am pastor of the Primitive Methodist Chapel, in Shorrolds Road, Turnham Green. I am also a revival preacher.”

“ Where were you yesterday afternoon ? ”

“ I was at the Sphinx’s Cave.”

“ Tell the court what you saw there.”

Mr. Skene put his hands, which were large, and plump, and white, on the rail in front of him, and began to sway his body gently to and fro, doubtless in the way he was wont to do when he commenced his sermons.

“ I went to the Sphinx’s Cave yesterday afternoon, accompanied by my wife, who is here in court—— ”

“ Then she had better get out of court. I must ask you, sir, to order that all the witnesses for the prosecution do attend outside.”

Mr. Mansell ordered as Mr. Fairlight suggested and the discomfited witnesses went out in a crowd

“ Go on,” said the superintendent.

But the witness's plumes were a little ruffled.

"As I was saying, I went to the Sphinx's Cave yesterday afternoon, accompanied by my wife——"

"Has he learnt it by heart?" inquired Mr. Fairlight, in a stage aside.

"No, sir, I have not learnt it by heart. I must ask you to allow me to continue."

"I allow you to continue! What do you mean by addressing me, sir?"

"I heard you make a remark."

"You will hear me make a good many remarks before you leave that box."

"I think the witness may continue," meekly murmured Mr. Mansell.

The witness continued.

"To see an entertainment of magic and mystery—of conjuring, in short. There was an item on the programme—I have the programme in my pocket."

"Let me look at it," said the magistrate. The programme was handed up, and the old gentleman spent a couple of minutes in deciphering its contents.

"Is this the programme?"

"That is the programme; but the item to which I am about to allude is not in the programme."

"Not in it! Then what did you give me this thing for?—wasting time!"

"I was about to explain. The item to which I allude is referred to on a printed slip which was

enclosed in the programme. I have it in my pocket also. With your permission I will read it aloud."

"Give it to me. I'll read it for you." The magistrate did read it, with some difficulty, and in a somewhat inaudible tone of voice.

"'Important notice: In the course of this afternoon's entertainment M. and Madame——' What's the name?"

"Nurvetchky."

"Never saw such a name in my life!—' will introduce the Devil's Diamond!' What's this rubbish?"

"I was about to explain——"

The magistrate addressed the superintendent with sudden ire.

"How long are you going to let your witness go drivelling on? Make him keep to the point! We're not here to fool with programmes!"

"I believe that you will find, your Worship, that what the witness is referring to does bear upon the case."

"Oh, does it? Then why doesn't he go on?"

The witness went on.

"I was about——perhaps your Worship will allow me to tell the story in my own way?"

"Tell what story your own way, sir!"

"The circumstances were rather peculiar, but I can make the matter quite clear to the court. I think the court it will be necessary——"

The magistrate interrupted the witness in a way to which the reverend gentleman was evidently unaccustomed—it disconcerted him so much. Mr. Mansell threw himself back in his seat and extended his arms on either side of him.

“Is the man making a speech? Superintendent Bray, if this man is your witness why don’t you examine him?”

The superintendent acted on the magistrate’s suggestion.

“Will you tell the court what happened during that portion of the entertainment to which you are alluding?”

“The curtain drew up.” The witness paused. His visage was distinctly soured. “The curtain drew up.”

“Well, the curtain drew up! Come, we’re getting on! I suppose, if we wait long enough, the curtain will draw down again.”

Laughter in the court. The magistrate was a famous wit and humorist, in his way.

“The curtain drew up,” repeated the witness, taking firm hold, with both his hands, of the rail in front of him.

“How many times, Superintendent Bray, are we to be told that the curtain drew up?”

“What happened when the curtain drew up?” asked the superintendent.

“The three prisoners were on the stage.”

“What did they do?”

“They performed some tricks with a diamond.”

“Then what took place?”

“M. Nurvetchky asked people from the audience to come upon the stage to see if they could find out how the tricks were done.”

“Did anybody go on to the stage?”

“Yes, two persons—Mr. Percy Leicester and a gentleman whom I have since been told was a Colonel Dewsnap.”

The superintendent interpolated a remark or two.

“Perhaps, your Worship, I should have previously explained that the murdered man, Mr. Percy Leicester, was well known as a gentleman who spared no pains in exposing the pretensions of so-called spiritualists.”

“Were there any such pretensions set up here?”

“Mr. Skene, tell the magistrate what was stated from the stage upon the subject.”

“M. Nurvetchky claimed for the diamond certain mysterious powers, and in effect alleged that the tricks were not tricks at all, but had a supernatural origin.”

“I see, and then he asked some of the audience to come up and inquire into the truth of his allegations?”

“That is so; but although M. Nurvetchky invited them, I perceived that Hookham, who was stated to

be the owner of the stone, resented their coming very much."

"So much," said the superintendent, taking up the strain, "that you thought it necessary to warn Mr. Leicester?"

"So much that I, seated in my seat, called out to Mr. Leicester that if he was not careful the man would do him a mischief. I called out twice."

"Did Mr. Leicester hear you?"

"Certainly. Everybody in the hall heard me. I shouted."

"Did Mr. Leicester persist in trying to find out how the tricks were done?"

"He did. He was determined to expose the fraud. I never saw greater determination. It was that which irritated Hookham."

"What happened then?"

"The stage was filled with a thick smoke."

"How was that?"

"It was a trick. All at once Hookham rose from his seat, sprang at Mr. Leicester, and caught him by the throat."

"Do you mean to say that this took place right in front of you without you offering the slightest interference?" This from the magistrate.

"I should have stated that when I called out for the second time, and saw that Mr. Leicester paid no attention to my warning, I rose from my seat and

prepared to leave the hall, with my wife. I cried out that I, for one, would no longer countenance with my presence so scandalous an exhibition. Other people rose at the same time I did. When Hookham actually attacked Mr. Leicester, Mrs. Skene and myself were on the very point of leaving the hall,—we were at the door.”

“ But there were other people there. Do you mean to say that they saw a man being murdered before their eyes and that no one moved a hand ? ”

“ The whole thing occupied only a second or two. There was a great smoke and a great confusion. Before people were able to realise what was happening the whole thing was over, and the smoke had cleared away.”

“ What happened when the smoke had cleared away ? ”

“ Mr. Leicester was lying on the floor. Hookham was on a chair, his clothes all torn, and the blood running from an open wound on his cheek. Mr. Leicester was lying on his face. Colonel Dewsnap turned him on to his back ; he cried out that he was dead. I went on to the stage and denounced the murderer.”

“ Let me understand you.” The magistrate, who appeared to have taken the conduct of the examination entirely out of the superintendent’s hands, settled his spectacles on his nose and eyed the witness with his



most inquisitorial glance. "Who was on the stage besides Hookham and Leicester?"

"There were M. and Madame Nurvetchky, and there was Colonel Dewsnap."

"Well, and did they stand quietly looking on while this man was being murdered?"

"I don't know what they did. My whole attention was engaged by Hookham."

"But they must have seen what was taking place?"

"Certainly."

"And could have interfered if they had chosen to?"

"I should say so—certainly."

"You say they were on the stage—how large is the stage?"

"It is a very small stage. Both the Nurvetchky's and Colonel Dewsnap were standing within five or six feet of the actual spot on which the murder took place."

"And yet they never interfered to save this man?"

"There was no interference offered of any kind?"

"Would there have been time to save him if they had interfered?"

"I should say so. If they had caught hold of Hookham, as they certainly might have done, Mr. Leicester might be living now."

The magistrate leaned back in his seat and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets. His air seemed

to say that he, at any rate, had done his part. The superintendent asked a few questions.

“ You saw Hookham seize Leicester by the throat ? ”

“ I did.”

“ You have no doubt of that ? ”

“ Not the slightest.”

“ The smoke was not too thick to prevent you seeing ? ”

“ It was not.”

“ Did he seize him with much violence ? ”

“ With great violence. I never saw such violence. As I have said, in his passion he screamed like some wild beast.”

“ Judging from his manner, what should you say was Hookham’s object in attacking Leicester ? ”

As he asked this question, Superintendent Bray glanced at Mr. Fairlight from the corners of his eyes, as though he dared his challenge. But that gentleman, as though unconscious of the superintendent’s glance, sat motionless, his eye-glassed eye fixed on the witness.

“ He meant to murder him.”

Sensation in the court.

“ You have no doubt of that in your own mind ? ”

“ Not the slightest.”

The superintendent sat down, and Mr. Fairlight rose.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. FAIRLIGHT BEGINS HIS CROSS-EXAMINATION.

**T**H**ERE** are several ways of rising. One may spring from one's seat with a bound, as when one sits on a pin ; or one may rise ponderously, as when one weighs twenty stone ; or one may rise doubtfully, as when a man has to make a speech and feels that he would rather—much rather—not ; or one may rise pompously, as when he who rises is impressed by the belief that among God's creatures he is the first, and better than that ; or one may rise *nastily*, as when a man, being a man of much coolness, great resolution, and having a boundless disregard for human life, holding a revolver, loaded, in his hand, has every intention of distributing its contents into at least one object before he again sits down. Mr. Fairlight rose like that ; and, having risen, stood motionless for some moments, fixing Mr. Skene with his eye-glassed and un-eyeglassed eyes, very much as the supposititious gentleman alluded to might have pointed his shooting-iron at his victim's head. The witness did his best

to meet the lawyer's gaze. But the attempt was not entirely successful. In his demeanour there was a suspicion of bluster; in the lawyer's there was not. *His* bearing was quite cool, even uncomfortably passionless.

Then Mr. Fairlight began; and though his questions could not be described as fraught with courteous suggestions, the tone in which they were put was courtesy itself—too courteous, in fact, to be nice.

“Can you give me a definition of perjury?”

“I can.”

“Do so.”

“To swear falsely.”

“Are you aware that the man who commits perjury commits a criminal offence?”

“I am.”

“And that the offence is not lessened by the man having attempted to falsely swear away a fellow-creature's life?”

Mr. Skene was silent.

“Do you hear my question?”

“I do. If you are suggesting that I have committed perjury you are prostituting an advocate's privilege by suggesting what is false.”

Slight applause in court, which, as the newspapers say, was “immediately suppressed.”

Mr. Fairlight paid no heed to the retort; but he never moved his eyes from the witness's face.

"Your name is William Lloyd Skene?"

"It is."

"You are a clergyman?"

"I am. I am minister of the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Shorrolds Road, Turnham Green."

"Do you teach your congregation to weigh their words, and examine their hearts, before they bear witness against their neighbour?"

"To the best of my ability I do."

"You say that Mr. Hookham took part in the performance at the Sphinx's Cave?"

"I do."

"Would it surprise you to learn that that was his first appearance upon any stage?"

"I know nothing at all about it."

"Did he strike you as being a good performer?"

"If it was he who worked the tricks, most decidedly."

"Worked what tricks?"

"The tricks with the diamond."

"I understood you to say just now, in answer to the magistrate, that it was he who worked the tricks."

"I suspect that it was. He was stated to be the owner of the stone. If it was not he, who did then?"

"You ask me for information. Is that because you have none upon that particular point?"

"I say that I suspect, strongly suspect, that it was he."

“ Will you swear that it was he ? ”

“ I will swear this—I will swear that he either worked the tricks himself, or was in association with whoever did work them.”

“ You swear that it was by his connivance the tricks were worked ? ”

“ I do.”

“ You swear that solemnly ? It is fitter, Mr. Skene, that I should warn you here that this is a matter on which we are prepared to offer testimony.”

“ I swear that I believe it was by his connivance the tricks were done.”

“ Do you swear that you *know* it was ? ”

“ Certainly not. Beyond all doubt the tricks were very cleverly performed. They baffled Mr. Leicester, who, I understand, was an authority upon these matters. I am not a conjurer.”

“ Do you say that Mr. Hookham is a conjurer ? ”

“ I know nothing about it.”

“ But let me understand you. You say that the tricks were very cleverly performed. Could they have been performed by anybody but a conjurer ? ”

“ I should say not.”

“ Would it surprise you to learn that Mr. Hookham not only never saw a conjurer’s entertainment in his life before, but never even witnessed a conjurer’s trick—that he is entirely ignorant of the elements of the conjurer’s art ? ”

“It would surprise me very much indeed.”

“If I were to tell you that Mr. Hookham is engaged in commercial pursuits, that he is known to, and respected by, multitudes of persons in every rank of life, that he is a man of great wealth, and possessed of large independent means, would that surprise you too?”

“I know nothing about it. I can only speak of what I know.”

“But that is exactly what you have not been speaking of. Are you aware of the importance of what you have admitted?”

“Admitted! What do you mean?”

“You know, Mr. Skene, that in your evidence in chief you built up an ingenious little theory. You told us that when Mr. Leicester and Colonel Dewsnap—you probably recognise Colonel Dewsnap on my left here—came on to the stage Mr. Hookham resented their coming because he feared that they would find out how the tricks were done. Now you tell us that you are not even prepared to swear that Mr. Hookham himself knew how they were done. Whence his resentment?”

“I say I swear I suspect he did them himself!”

“You suspect! Do you, a clergyman, on your oath, in a court of justice, attempt to swear a man's life away upon suspicion? I ask you, will you swear that Mr. Hookham knew how the tricks were done?—answer me yes or no!”

“ I say——”

“ Will you swear?—Yes or no.”

“ Answer the question, yes or no.” This from the magistrate.

“ I will not swear.”

“ Then whence the resentment?”

“ I have already explained——”

“ Mr. Skene, do you know what you are doing? Look into your heart and see if it is not so. You are trying to swear a man's life away on what you suspect, not on what you know. You have already told us that you decline to swear that Mr. Hookham knew how the tricks were done; and let me tell you, sir, that you were wise in so declining. Now tell us what caused you to suppose that he resented those gentlemen coming on to the stage?”

“ I judged he did by his manner, and the way in which he looked at them, especially at Mr. Leicester.”

“ By his manner, and the way in which he looked at them? Were those the only signs of his resentment?”

“ He killed Mr. Leicester.”

“ But you have told us that he showed signs of his resentment before he killed Mr. Leicester.”

“ A man may express resentment by his bearing.”

“ Enough to lead you to suppose that he **medi** murder? What a master of his bearing **that**



must be!" The witness was silent. "About these tricks with the diamond, what were they?"

The magistrate interrupted.

"By the way, where is this diamond? We have heard a great deal about it."

The expression on Mr. Fairlight's countenance was childlike and bland.

"No doubt in the possession of the police."

The superintendent contradicted him.

"The diamond is in the possession of the prisoner Hookham." Mr. Fairlight started—most effectively.

"In the possession of Mr. Hookham! What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"How comes it in his possession?" inquired the magistrate.

"I understand that it was never taken from him."

"Never taken from him?"—still the magistrate.

"How was that? Couldn't it be found?"

"On that point, your Worship, I propose to call the inspector, who searched the prisoner, a little later on. If the prisoner is not a conjurer, all I can say is that he must be something very much like it."

"Who was the inspector who searched the prisoner?"—this time Mr. Fairlight.

"Inspector Clifford—he's in the court now—there he is."

The superintendent pointed to the inspector, who occupied a position at the back of the court.

“Inspector Clifford, come to the front.” The inspector came to the front. Mr. Fairlight addressed the magistrate. “Our whole case is based upon this diamond. In the face of what the superintendent has just now said, I ask you, sir, to require from this man an immediate explanation as to why he allowed it to remain in the possession of my client.”

The magistrate put the inspector through his facings.

“Why didn’t you take this diamond from the prisoner?”

“I did take it—at first.”

“You did take it! Did you return it to him then?”

“Yes.”

“Good gracious me! Why? Weren’t you aware what an important bearing it had upon the case?”

“Well, for one thing——”

The inspector hesitated.

“Go on!” said the magistrate.

“For one thing, it burned my hand.”

“Burned your hand? Why, didn’t the other inspector say it burned him too?”

“Yes, and it burned me in exactly the same way. It branded the word fool in the centre of my palm. It’s there yet.”

The inspector held out his hand, so that the

magistrate could see. The old gentleman peered at it through his glasses.

“Dear me! Quite plain! That’s very awkward for you, inspector—and for the other inspector too. Where is this remarkable stone?”

“Here.” And with that reply—which was sufficiently curt and to the point—Mr. Hookham produced the diamond from his waistcoat pocket.

“Is it cool now?”

“Perfectly cool.”

“Let me look at it.”

Mr. Fairlight interposed.

“Now that the diamond has appeared upon the scene, and before you touch it, Mr. Mansell, I judge it better to inform you what is the nature of the defence that we intend to offer.” He paused. His manner was most impressive. “We allege that the deceased man, Percy Leicester, met his death by handling that diamond. We allege that that diamond killed him. And, further, we allege that that diamond is possessed of what are commonly, and in this case correctly, called supernatural powers.”

“Sensation” in court,—in fact, the word “sensation” is inadequate to express the effect which Mr. Fairlight’s words produced. The magistrate, leaning forward on his desk, settled his spectacles on his nose. He did not look as though he understood,—indeed, he owned that that was so.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Possibly not. I own that what I say is surprising. For a lawyer, desiring to retain his reputation for sanity, to stand up in open court and plead MAGIC for his defence is a venturesome thing to do. Or it would be venturesome were I not prepared, as I am, to prove my case up to the hilt. To so prove it, disdaining all resort to legal quibbles, that even sceptics shall believe."

"Pray, Mr. Fairlight, make yourself quite plain. You are aware, I presume, that to lay claim to magic powers is still an indictable offence?"

"I am prepared to take all risks."

"Very well. Then, in the meantime, perhaps I may be allowed to see this—eh—eh—under the circumstances—*really* remarkable stone?" Mr. Fairlight held out his arm—like a semaphore. His tone was solemn.

"Mr. Mansell, I warn you that that diamond has already killed one man. I warn you that my client is in no way accountable for its actions, which are as mysterious to him as they are to all who have witnessed them."

"As you yourself say, Mr. Fairlight, I am prepared to take the risk. Even in my boyhood I had a taste for the weird and wonderful. I don't think that I should object to witness a few manifestations of magic now that I am old." Mr. Mansell beckoned to

Mr. Hookham. "Bring that diamond up here!"

Mr. Hookham advanced to the bench, the diamond in his hand. "I suppose it won't kill me?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Put it down there and let me look at it."

Mr. Hookham placed the diamond on the magistrate's desk and returned to the dock. There was silence. For some moments the magistrate continued to gaze at the diamond. Then he glanced at Mr. Fairlight over the top of his spectacles.

"It is a diamond, I suppose?"

"It is. It is believed to be one of the finest diamonds in existence. Its value, at a trade valuation, is considerably over twenty thousand pounds."

"Sensation" in court,—nothing like the mention of a good round sum to produce a "sensation" anywhere.

"It looks as though it were a valuable diamond. Well, as it has not at present shown any marvellous attributes it can remain upon my desk. Suppose you continue your cross-examination of the witness?"

Mr. Fairlight continued.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND ENTERTAINS THE MAGISTRATE.

“WITH reference, Mr. Skene, to what you call the ‘tricks’ with the diamond. Tell us exactly what took place. When the curtain drew up did M. Nurvetchky make any remarks?”

“He did.”

“Tell us, to the best of your recollection, what it was that he said.”

“I cannot give you the exact words, but the effect was this. He said that he was going to tell us a strange story about a diamond.”

“Did he say to whom the diamond belonged?”

“He said that it belonged to the prisoner Hookham, though that was not the name he called him by. I think——”

“Did he say how long it had been in the possession of Mr. Hookham?”

“He said that it only came into his possession yesterday.”

The magistrate interposed.

"Yesterday? When was that?"

Mr. Fairlight explained.

"The diamond came into the possession of Mr. Hookham the day before yesterday. The statement to which the witness refers was made by M. Nurvetchky yesterday afternoon."

The magistrate nodded and the examination went on.

"Did M. Nurvetchky say how the diamond reached Mr. Hookham?"

"He said it was a legacy from his brother."

"A what?"—this from the magistrate, putting his hand to his ear.

"A legacy from his brother," repeated the witness, raising his voice.

"Did he say that it was accompanied by anything?"

"By a letter."

"Did M. Nurvetchky read the letter to the audience?"

"He read what he alleged to be the letter."

"Is this it?"

Producing a paper from among a heap of others lying on the table in front of him, Mr. Fairlight handed it to the witness.

"To the best of my belief it is. At any rate, the wording appears to be the same."

"I am going to read this letter, Mr. Skene. Just attend carefully while I do so. 'MY DEAR SAMUEL,'—

I should mention, what I believe M. Nurvetchky mentioned yesterday, that my client had not seen his brother, whose letter I now hold in my hand, for sixteen years,—‘I have told Mr. Truelove to give you the diamond, which you will have with this, after I am dead and he has buried me. Be good enough to pay his bill!’”

“Who is Mr. Truelove?” inquired the magistrate.

“Mr. Truelove is an undertaker. If necessary we are prepared to call him at the proper time. ‘Mr. Truelove is a perfect stranger to me. It would seem a rash thing to entrust such a commission to a perfect stranger. But I have not the slightest doubt that you will get the diamond—sooner or later. Certainly quite soon enough for you!’ I ask your particular attention, Mr. Skene, to what follows. ‘It is called the Devil’s Diamond——’”

“Called the what?” asked the magistrate.

“The Devil’s Diamond.”

Snap! There was a sound in court as though some one had snapped a pistol. “What was that?” demanded Mr. Mansell.

“I think it was the diamond,” said Mr. Fairlight, with his eyes fixed upon the stone.

“Indeed? So our friend is showing signs of life at last. Perhaps it objects to be called such names. Go on.”

“‘It is called the Devil’s Diamond, and is worth, at



a trade valuation, at least twenty thousand pounds. It has the pleasing property of bringing ill luck to its possessor.' ”

Sna-a-arl! This time there was a sound in court which resembled the snarling of a dog.

“I believe that was the diamond,” observed Mr. Mansell, keeping his spectacles fixed curiously upon the stone.

“I believe it was,” said Mr. Fairlight, and then read on. “ ‘It has brought the devil’s own luck to me. I was a rich man when first I had it. I am a beggar now, besides having lived the devil’s own life into the bargain. If I were to tell you the pranks that cursed stone has played me!’ ”

Yah-h! There was no mistake about it this time. A sound resembling a snarl issued from the diamond with so much force as to cause the magistrate to precipitately withdraw his face from its near neighbourhood.

“Bless my soul! Most surprising! There appears to be something the matter with the internal economy of this precious stone of yours, Mr. Fairlight. It sounds to me as though it suffers from indigestion. Go on.”

“ ‘It has at last succeeded in bringing me to an early grave. I have only had it two years, and it has done for me already. By the way, it possesses another pleasing property,—it is impossible to sell it.’ ”

The magistrate interrupted.

“It’s just as well the writer didn’t omit to mention that. Impossible to sell it, is it? It appears to be a precious thing among precious stones.”

“‘Whoever tries to do so will have the best of reasons for being sorry that he ever tried. It can only be given away. Knowing your character as I do, I am aware that you will never be able to give away a stone of the value of twenty thousand pounds. It was impossible for me—how still more impossible will it be for you! If ghosts are allowed to re-visit these earthly plains I hope I shall be permitted to see the fun. There will be fun, I know. Your affectionate brother, MATTHEW HOOKHAM.’”

Mr. Fairlight ceased, and Mr. Mansell began.

“The writer of that letter must have been a pleasant kind of man. I should like to have known him. In what lunatic asylum did he die?”

“The writer of that letter was as sane as either you or I.”

“Was he indeed? I must beg, Mr. Fairlight, that in such a matter you will speak for yourself, and not for me. Let me look at it.” The letter was handed up. “And do you mean to say, Mr. Fairlight, that you expect me to consider this farrago of absurdities seriously?”

“Take care, sir!”

There was a cry in court. The magistrate looked up.

“What’s the matter?”

“The letter will be on fire if you don’t take care, sir.”

The magistrate started back, only just in time. A thin white flame had risen from the diamond, and was already blackening one of the edges of the letter. As the magistrate started back, taking the letter with him, the flame vanished. The old gentleman settled his spectacles on his nose and regarded the diamond intently.

“That’s a curious stone,—a very curious stone indeed. I wonder if it often behaves like that.” He again leaned forward, and resumed his examination of the letter. “I don’t want to say anything which you might construe harshly, Mr. Fairlight, but at the same time, referring to this letter, I am bound to say,—”

“Take care, sir!”

Again the cry rang out, issuing from the throats of half the people in the court. Again the magistrate started back. Again he was only just in time. The better to examine the letter he held it right over the diamond—just as he had done before—so that when the thin white flame again issued from the stone the edge which had been previously blackened began immediately to smoulder. In another instant it would have been in flames. Mr. Mansell stared at the diamond, from which all appearance of flame again

had vanished, and then at the letter with its cindery edge.

“A curious stone! very curious stone indeed!” The old gentleman’s tones were dry, as dry as M. Nurvetchky’s could be upon occasion. He addressed himself to Mr. Hookham. “It is a somewhat curious question to be addressed by a magistrate on the bench to a prisoner in the dock, but may I ask if you claim to be a wizard, or a conjurer only?”

Mr. Hookham eyed the magistrate intently, his face, to speak figuratively, all ablaze with scorn.

“Neither,” he shortly said.

“Indeed! Then let me tell you that you will not improve, but injure, your case by following the course of conduct you seem to have mapped out for yourself.”

Mr. Fairlight intervened.

“Do I understand, sir, that you attribute what has just now happened to the action of my client?”

“I attribute nothing; only let the man take care. This remark I will make.” Mr. Mansell made it with his eyes fixed on Mr. Hookham. “It is a serious thing to trifle with a court of justice, and so long as I occupy this place, I will take care that the man, be he whom he may, who trifles with this court has cause to regret his conduct.”

Such pronouncements from the bench are generally effective, in one way if not in another. This one had the effect of turning all eyes towards Mr. Hookham.

For a moment it seemed as though Mr. Fairlight did not intend to allow the magisterial remarks to remain unanswered ; but, on second thoughts apparently, he held his peace, standing motionless, with his eyes upon the magistrate. That worthy gentleman, having relieved his mind, returned to the examination of the letter. This time he eschewed the neighbourhood of the diamond, contenting himself with leaning back in his chair, with the epistle held close up to his spectacles. The examination was a lengthy one, the old eyes probably finding a difficulty, even with the aid of the spectacles, in deciphering the cramped, close writing. Mr. Fairlight remained silent while it continued. By degrees people's eyes wandered from Mr. Hookham to the magistrate. They were rewarded by what they saw, for while Mr. Mansell continued engrossed in his scrutiny what seemed to be a spark of fire sprang from the diamond on to the letter. In an instant it was in flames, and consumed—consumed so utterly that not even any ashes remained.

The magistrate's face and attitude, when this surprising thing took place, literally underneath his nose, would have been replete with suggestions for an artist blessed or cursed with a decided sense of humour. He sat with his hands still held out in front of him, as a short-sighted man does sit who holds a letter to his nose—evidently quite unable to believe the evidence of his own short-sighted eyes. The letter was certainly

not there ; but he continued to stare as though it were. Then his countenance, cheeks, chin, forehead, neck, ears, bald head and all assumed the colour of a soldier's red coat—its colour, that is, when the said soldier is anxiously expecting a new issue—what we may describe as a dirty red. Then he looked up with a gasp. Then he sprang to his rheumatic old legs with a bound. Then he brought his gouty old hand down on to his desk with a bang. He glared at Mr. Hookham.

“How dare you, sir !” he yelled.

Although the words came from a magistrate's throat, they were delivered with a vigour which certainly amounted to a yell. Then followed what the newspapers describe, in their graphic way, as a “scene.”

“I am prepared to take my oath,” said Mr. Fairlight, not at all in a whisper, “that my client had nothing to do with what has just now happened.”

“I am prepared to swear that too,” observed M. Nurvetchky—from the dock—which was certainly irregular.

“And I,” said Madame Nurvetchky, rising from her seat—which action on her part, although emanating from so charming an example of her sex, did not diminish the irregularity.

“And I,” said Mr. Schwabe,—also assuming his perpendicular.

Of course, in anything approaching a "scene" such a gentleman as Mr. Panton was bound to be there. He was—with a vengeance. This is what he observed, in a metropolitan police-court, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets—by no means in a modulated tone of voice,—

"I'll bet ten to one in fivers that that blessed stone played that little caper off its own bat!"

"Silence!" roared the usher, regaining his senses at last.

The magistrate glared at the excitable speakers, and particularly at Mr. Panton, who was the most excitable of all.

"Is this a court of justice?" he gasped. "Am I in a bear-garden, or in a English court of law? In the whole course of my experience I never witnessed anything so scandalous. If anything approaching it occurs again, I will have the court instantly cleared." Then he concentrated his glare on Mr. Hookham. "What has become of that letter, sir? How dare you play me such a trick!"

"I don't know what has become of the letter. Nor did I play you a trick. It was the diamond."

Mr. Hookham's tones were harsh and cold,—scornful even. The magistrate sank down into his seat, possibly overcome by the force of his emotions. Mr. Fairlight intervened.

"How can my client, who has never moved from his

position in the dock, have done what we have just now seen? And if you refuse to credit the evidence of your own senses, how am I to convince you of his entire innocence of all complicity?"

"I don't need to be convinced. I've had conviction enough. I've half a mind," added Mr. Mansell, testily, "to adjourn the case at once."

"Then it is my duty, Mr. Mansell, to assure you that in that case you will be guilty of an act of grave injustice. My client, a gentleman of high standing in the city of London, is entirely innocent of the crime with which he is charged. I hope to prove it to you even out of the mouth of the witness for the prosecution who now occupies the box."

"Then prove it."

Taking out his handkerchief, the magistrate wiped his bald old head; but he glanced at the diamond out of the corners of his poor old eyes. Something like order having been obtained again in court, Mr. Fairlight resumed his cross-examination of Mr. Skene.

"You are still quite sure that Mr. Hookham killed Percy Leicester?"

"I am."

"That you still swear?"

"I do."

"Without the slightest fear of perjury before your eyes?"



“ I'm telling the simple truth.”

“ Tell us exactly what it is you swear.”

“ I swear that I saw, with my own eyes, the prisoner  
Hookham kill Mr. Percy Leicester.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE MAN WHO WAS KILLED.

“**E**XCUSE me for interrupting you,—but that is a mistake.”

There is a method of formulating a statement in the fewest, and simplest, possible words which is yet, in its result, extremely effective. For example, if A, being a small and peace-at-any-price man, gives to B, who is a large and extremely pugilistic man, the lie direct,—if he says, for instance, “You’re a liar,”—he could hardly formulate that statement in curter, or simpler, language, yet the result would be undoubtedly effective. The statement contained in the few words which commence this chapter could scarcely have been expressed, with any regard to courtesy, in a briefer or simpler form, yet it produced a most unmistakable effect upon those who heard it. Perhaps that was owing—not to place too much to the credit of the method, for *all* results have complex causes—in a measure to the speaker.

He—the speaker—was standing by the witness-box,

a little to the rear of the witness. He was leaning forward, and his face was turned upward, so that he looked at Mr. Skene.

“Excuse me for interrupting you,—but that is a mistake.”

When those words were spoken, the witness, with a start which was quite perceptible, turned round to look at the speaker. And when he saw who it was, though there was absolutely nothing strange about the outward guise of the man, to use an extremely vulgar phrase he “tumbled all of a heap.” He gave a sort of a gasp, and clung, with both his hands, to the rail in front of him, as though he were clinging for his life. His lower jaw fell, leaving his gaping mouth wide open, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and every lineament of his extensive countenance was expressive of horror and alarm. Then, with what seemed a supreme effort, he relinquished his hold of the rail in front of him, and turned to flee, as from the wrath to come. But the speaker, whose brief utterance had caused this sudden collapse, caught him by the arm and stayed him.

“You need not be afraid.”

Mr. Skene seemed to think he need. But however great his fear might be, it was plain that he would not persevere in his attempted flight while that grasp was on his arm.

Nor was the effect produced by the few words, and

those such simple ones, which the speaker had spoken, confined to Mr. Skene. The prisoners in the dock were staring as though they could not believe their eyes. Mr. Hookham had thrust his body half over the rail in his amazement. Madame Nurvetchky had risen from her seat, and almost lay on Mr. Hookham's back. Her husband was awake at last. His enormous eyes were open to their widest extent,—he seemed to be all moustache and eyes. Colonel Dewsnap, with his whole length extending right over the table, was staring as he had never stared in his life before. Willy Panton looked as though he were meditating the operation of jumping out of his skin,—he had got his “five bobs' worth” at last. While Mr. Fairlight had done, what he never remembered to have done before,—in his astonishment he had let his eyeglass tumble out of his eye.

But there was another actor on the scene which evinced—well, if it was not surprise, it was something else,—the diamond. That curious and beautiful example of the mineral world, so soon as those few words were spoken, became enveloped in a luminous haze. For a space of two feet above and around the stone there was a sort of golden fog, which seemed to consist of myriads of faintly scintillating golden sparks.

It was this, rather than the appearance of the speaker, which seemed to surprise the magistrate.

Let others stare at the newcomer if they pleased, he was content, and appeared in fact to be compelled, to stare at this new exhibition of eccentricity on the part of the stone. And he continued to stare so long as the exhibition lasted. It was only when it faded into nothingness that he looked up, with a gasp, to inquire into the cause of the commotion. He looked at the newcomer, who still detained Mr. Skene by the arm.

“ Who are you, sir ! ”

“ I am Percy Leicester.”

“ Eh ? ”

The newcomer's answer was given in a low but perfectly clear tone of voice, and it was probably owing to the partial state of stupefaction to which the worthy old gentleman had already been brought that he failed to catch the speaker's words.

“ I am the man who was killed.”

Then—it is really distressing to observe *how* expressive these vulgar phrases are—*then*, the magistrate—“ sat up.” It is surprising to be told by a person that he is the man who was killed, because we do not, in the ordinary course of things, expect that such an individual will impart the information. But when such an item of news, proceeding from so unusual a source, came as a climax to Mr. Mansell's varied experiences of his morning's sitting, it is not at all derogatory to his fame as a magistrate to confess that the old gentleman *almost* “ went off his head.”

“Who do you say you are?” he cried, in a sort of strangled scream.

“I am the man who was killed.”

“Oh, you’re the man who was killed! Well!” Then the magistrate brought down both his fists on the desk with a bang. “If there’s any other person present who wishes to make a similar observation, I hope that he’ll address the court at once.”

Then the people—not exactly laughed, for there was a feeling in the air that it was not a time for laughter—but they smiled, beneath their breath. The irate magistrate leaned forward on his desk and thundered at the stranger,—

“How dare you, sir, trifle with this court!”

“It is far from my intention to trifle with this court. At the same time, I am the man who was killed.”

“Good—good heavens! Arrest that man, some one! Six months’ hard labour!”

Whether the magistrate intended to sentence the stranger out of hand to six months’ hard labour, it is fortunately unnecessary to inquire, for Mr. Fairlight intervened in the nick of time.

“One moment, Mr. Mansell. What this gentleman says is true,—he is the man who was killed!”

“I am not surprised, Mr. Fairlight, to hear you say so. After what I have heard from you already I am

prepared for anything. Why doesn't somebody arrest that man?"

But Mr. Fairlight stuck to his point.

"Mr. Mansell, that gentleman is Mr. Percy Leicester."

"And who is Mr. Percy Leicester?"

"Mr. Percy Leicester is the gentleman whom my client, Mr. Hookham, is charged with having murdered."

"Are—are you joking, Mr. Fairlight?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life."

Colonel Dewsnap addressed the magistrate.

"I, sir, am Colonel Dewsnap, of the Hussars. That gentleman standing there is my friend Percy Leicester, who was with me yesterday at the Sphinx's Cave, and whom Mr. Hookham now stands charged with having murdered."

The magistrate threw himself back into his seat with a groan. Metaphorically—it was necessarily metaphorically—he tore his hair.

"Is this—is this some wild dream! What does it mean? Is it a police case? Or a farce? Superintendent Bray, perhaps you can give me some information?"

"I can only state, your worship, that this gentleman is a stranger to me."

"But he isn't a stranger to me!"

A newcomer thrust himself forward into the body

of the court. He was a short, thick-set man, who appeared to be in a state of considerable perturbation, and who was clad in some sort of official garb.

“And who, sir, are you?”

“I’m the keeper of the mortuary. This here gentleman was brought in dead yesterday afternoon, and this morning he came to life again.”

“Came to life again! What—what do you mean?”

“What I say. I was a-getting ready for the post-mortem, when the corpse—that’s this here gentleman—sat up, and took a squint at me.”

“But, good gracious! man, weren’t you amazed?”

The keeper of the mortuary scratched his head.

“Amazed! I should think I was! Amazed ain’t in it.”

“But what happened next?”

“Well, the corpse—that’s this here gentleman—he says to me, ‘What’s up?’”

“‘Well,’ I says, ‘it seems that you’re up for one, and that’s more than you can say for most of ’em what comes in here. And,’ I says, ‘it’s lucky you is up, considerin’ they’re just going to hold the post-mortem, and the jury’s coming along to sit upon the body; it don’t seem to me, from the look of it, as though there’s going to be much sitting upon you. And there’s another thing what’s up,’ I says: ‘they’re a-trying of a chap for being the death of you.’ ‘What!’ he says. ‘Yes,’ I says, ‘his name’s ’Ookham, and they’ll ’ook



him if something ain't done soon.' 'Call a cab!' he says. So I called a cab and came along of him; and what that there jury 'll say, when they come to sit upon the body and find me missing, and the corpse as well, is more than I quite care to think."

"Well," said the magistrate, when the laughter had subsided, for there was a certain quaintness in the fashion of the mortuary-keeper's story which appealed to the risible nerves of those who heard him, "I never heard anything more amazing in my life. I suppose there is no doubt that this is Mr. Leicester?"

Mr. Fairlight answered.

"No doubt in the world. Mr. Leicester and I have been friends for years. Mr. Leicester, allow me to be the first to shake your hand."

Mr. Fairlight was the first to shake Mr. Leicester's hand,—that is, supposing no one had shaken it before. Mr. Mansell followed—on the same side.

"Mr. Leicester, I congratulate you on your presence here, and on your strange, and still to be explained, restoration to life. Are you aware that you have figured here as the murdered man in a case of murder?"

Mr. Leicester turned towards Mr. Hookham, speaking in the familiar gentle, well-bred tones.

"If any person has said that Mr. Hookham used to me any sort of violence, or touched me with his hands, that person has lied."

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“Do I understand you to say, Mr. Leicester, that—eh—Mr. Hookham never touched you?”

“That is so. He never touched me, never once.”

“But”—here the magistrate glanced at Mr. Skene—“what has this man been saying?”

Mr. Fairlight spoke.

“I am not sure that I ought not at once to apply for a warrant for perjury.”

“Do you apply? I shall certainly grant it if you do.”

“I ought first to confer with my client.”

Mr. Hookham interposed.

“Let the man go,” he said.

“Mr. Hookham,” cried the magistrate, “you are doing what not one man in your position in a thousand would do; and though your action is worthy of admiration, I am not sure that I ought to allow you to so lightly excuse this man’s offence. A grosser case of perjury, and that from a man who calls himself a minister of the gospel, I never yet encountered.”

Mr. Skene endeavoured to obtain a hearing.

“Sir, I protest —”

“You protest! How dare you protest! I have listened to too many of your protestations already. You have deliberately endeavoured to swear away a fellow-creature’s life, and were it not for what amounts almost to a miracle you might have his blood upon your soul. When next Sunday you stand in a pulpit,

if you do stand in a pulpit—and if I had my way you should never stand in a pulpit again—make confession of your sin in the face of your assembled congregation. Then, and not till then, dare to ask an honest man to excuse you. Put that person out of court.”

A constable put his hand on Mr. Skene's shoulder, and “put” him out of court.

During this short interlude Mr. Leicester had retained his position by the side of the witness-box, seeming, with his air of well-bred indifference, as though the proceedings had no interest for him. When, however, the reverend gentleman had made so undignified and unclerical an exit, he addressed the magistrate—so soon, that is, as that pillar of the state exhibited signs of having regained some slight portion of his mental equilibrium.

“It would appear advisable under what I understand to be the existing state of affairs that I should offer some explanation of my presence here. I am prepared, with your permission, to make a statement now.”

Mr. Mansell settled his spectacles upon his nose.

“Eh—I'm bound to say—eh—that some explanation would be advisable. In fact, Mr. Leicester, I shall be glad to listen to any statement you may wish to make.”

Mr. Leicester slightly bowed. He entered the witness-box. He began his tale.

“I should observe, as a preliminary, and as some

justification of the course of action which the police have taken, that I was killed."

The magistrate gave a slight start.

"Eh—what is that you say?"

"I was killed."

Again the magistrate settled his spectacles upon his nose. He looked round the court with a somewhat vacuous expression of countenance, a dim doubt appearing again to cross his mind as to whether he was not being made the victim of some elaborate and astounding practical joke. It seemed as though he looked to see who might be laughing. But, so far as he could judge, the bearing of every one within the court was grave, and Mr. Leicester was gravest of all.

"Well, I have seen and heard some remarkable things in the course of my life, and I have lived to a ripe old age, but it would seem that the most remarkable have been reserved for the evening of my days. Did I understand you to say that you were killed?"

"That is so."

"Oh, well! Go on."

"To make my explanation quite plain it is necessary that I should go back a little."

"Oh, well, if you're going to make your explanation *quite* plain you can go back as far as you like."

"When I was stationed at Simla there were stories current among the natives concerning a diamond—a diamond to which were attributed supernatural powers.

Such stories are not uncommon in India, and in this, as in other cases, it was difficult to pin the narrators down to any given facts. Although their faith was genuine, their grounds for that faith were vague. But certain details I did arrive at. The diamond, which was one of great value, was being continually passed from hand to hand, always as a gift. Men welcomed it with effusion, then passed it from them in despair. It always brought ill luck to its possessor. It could not be sold. It must be given away. If it were not given quickly it brought ruin, even death, upon its owner. There were stranger things told about the diamond than this, such as that an attendant devil went always with the diamond; but these were wild and visionary, and were scarcely to be focussed into concrete statements. I left no means untried to get a sight of the diamond; but I never saw it once."

Again the magistrate gave an impatient twitch to the spectacles upon his nose.

"No, I can quite believe you never did."

"But I carried the stories with me in my mind. When I saw that M. and Madame Nurvetchky were about to introduce at the Sphinx's Cave what they called the Devil's Diamond, those stories recurred to me at once. Nor had the introduction proceeded far when I began to believe that I had lighted on the stone at last."

“What, the stone you had heard the tales about in India?”

“The same. I have devoted a great deal of my time to what I may call the science of conjuring. I do not speak lightly when I say that I do not believe there is a conjurer living who could deceive me by the exercise of his art. It was not long before I saw that what was taking place on the stage at the Sphinx’s Cave did not come within the domain of what are known as conjuring tricks.”

“What were they then?”

“In the first place, I believed what M. Nurvetchky said, that neither he, nor his wife, nor Mr. Hookham, could offer an explanation of what we saw. In the second, I thought it possible that it might have a supernatural origin.”

“A supernatural origin? The tomfool tricks we’ve heard about?”

“I do not know what you have heard about. I thought that what I saw upon the stage at the Sphinx’s Cave probably had a supernatural origin.”

“But I understood Mr. Fairlight to say that you went upon the stage because you believed that the whole thing was an imposture.”

Mr. Fairlight interposed.

“I said nothing of the kind. What I did say was all the other way. The impression in my own mind

was that Mr. Leicester went on to the stage because he believed."

Mr. Mansell leaned back in his seat with a gasp; the proceedings were becoming,—indeed, they had become from the first,—too much for him. Mr. Leicester went on in his quiet, equable, well-bred tones, as though he were dealing with the most ordinary banalities.

"I have for years been aware that there are existences apart from our own, that there are forces, under ordinary circumstances, not visible to the naked eye. Charlatans, with an eye to plunder, pretend to be in communication with these powers—powers for which men have not yet suggested a sufficient name. When I saw that diamond it was not long before I perceived that an opportunity had presented itself for me to place myself in communication with one, at least, of those powers—in that communication to which charlatans only pretend. It was with the intention of doing so that I went upon the stage."

"Oh, that was the intention with which you went upon the stage? I see. To place yourself in communication with—eh—something, I don't quite understand what—but no matter. Did you succeed?"

"I did, almost too well. I will not go into details of what I did, you have probably already heard sufficient upon that point from other  
As I proceeded with my experiments; I béc

that the something with which I was in communication was distinctly hostile. I even felt that if I persisted the result might be a tragedy. But my love for inquiry must, I fancy, be greater than my love for life. I continued. At a certain point the something with which I was in communication materialised. In the confusion, and owing too, in some measure, to the sudden strain upon my nerves, my faculties of observation were blunted. But it seemed to me that it assumed, in its materialised state, the form of an ape, an ape which, so far as my experience goes, was of unusual size. I was conscious that it made an unpleasant noise. It seemed enraged. With one hand it caught me by the throat, it pressed its mouth to mine. It sucked—I was disgustingly conscious of the act of suction—and choked the life right out of me. I was dead.”

Mr. Leicester paused. And, so to speak, the people in the court paused too. There was an audible silence.

To hear a man say, in such a matter-of-fact tone of voice, that he was dead, partook of the nature of a new experience.

“And in my state of death the thing went with me. I saw it, in infinite space, in the figure of an ape. I saw the diamond. The ape sat on the diamond. And I saw it seem to me that the diamond did was really dead. I followed it to the station. I saw it when it was who had killed the



spector. I followed it to the cell. I saw the ape assume the guise of a young man, I saw it stand by Mr. Fairlight's side, and I heard it say, as plainly as you hear me now—and it laid its hand on Mr. Fairlight's shoulder—'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in man's philosophy.'"

Mr. Leicester paused again. Mr. Fairlight looked at Mr. Hookham, and an odd glance was exchanged between them. But the people in the court seemed to hold their breath. As for the magistrate, he sat with his mouth wide open, and his eyes peering through his spectacles with the fixed rigidity of an owl's.

"I followed it to this court, I saw it seated upon the stone on the magistrate's desk, exulting in the tricks it played. On a sudden it left the stone and came to me and kissed me on the mouth, and I was no longer dead, I was alive. I found that I was in the dead-house, and that the keeper of the dead was standing by my side."

Mr. Leicester ceased, and silence followed. Silence which was broken by the magistrate.

"Well, I—I think we'd better adjourn—until to-morrow."

Mr. Mansell said this like a man in a dream, as though he himself were not aware of what it was that he said. While the old gentleman

continued to gape and to stare, Mr. Leicester spoke again.

“What I have said seems strange.”

The magistrate opened his eyes, if possible, still wider than before.

“*Seems strange!*” he said.

“But that is only owing to our imperfect knowledge. What we do not know we wonder at. Ignorance esteems all things strange. It is even an attribute of some natures to be fearful of what is wonderful and strange. But because we know that some unnamed thing, with undefined powers, sits, in the form of an ape, on the diamond, which, sir, is now upon your desk——”

The magistrate awoke with a start. His countenance assumed quite a pasty hue. He rose from his seat in haste. With a degree of agility which was remarkable in one so aged, he put as much space as the exigencies of his position would admit between himself and the diamond, which glittered in its tranquil beauty on his desk.

“The—the case is dismissed. In fact, there’s no case to dismiss; there’s—there’s been a misapprehension from the first. Officer, remove that—that diamond.”

Mr. Mansell pointed to the stone with a finger which actually trembled. His instruction was a trifle vague, at least no one seemed to apply it to him. Mr. Hookham’s harsh tones were heard.

“ Am I free to go ? ”

“ Free ? Free ? Good gracious, yes ! There's—there's no case at all.”

“ Then I suppose I may have my diamond ? ”

“ Take it, my good sir, I do beg you'll take it. There—there are some remarks I—eh—wish to make upon—eh—this curious case, but I'll postpone them till to-morrow.”

The magistrate not only postponed his remarks until to-morrow, but he disappeared himself, through the door which led into his private room, in a way which might appropriately, if irreverently, be described as “ bolting.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MR. HOOKHAM RETURNS TO MITRE COURT.

WHEN Mr. Hookham at last returned to Mitre Court, he made himself fast within his chambers. He sported his oak, bolting, barring, and locking it and securing it by every means within his power. Then he went through a similar process with the inner door, and when he had made his fortress what he deemed sufficiently impregnable, he stood for a moment, listening. There was not a sound. All was still. Then he turned, and let his eyes travel round the room.

It was certainly a large room, and it was certainly ill-furnished—the light of the solitary tallow candle revealed so much as that. At the opposite end of the room was a door, which led into his sleeping-room. Next to the door was an ancient carved oak mantelpiece. It was not a bad mantelpiece in its way, but it added to the sombre appearance of the room. There was a huge old-fashioned open grate, large enough, in the colloquial phrase, to roast an ox. Just then it

was red with rust, and littered with odds and ends and scraps of paper. It looked desolate and dirty. There was no carpet on the floor, Mr. Hookham dispensed with such a luxury as that, and the floor itself was worm-eaten and old ; it looked as though it had never been washed for years. The principal article of furniture the room contained was a large old oak table, which occupied the centre. It had doubtless originally been intended to serve as a dining-table, but since those days it had apparently done duty in a nursery or schoolroom, for it had been scarred by knives, covered with names and initials, which had been cut, and in some cases burnt, deep into the wood, and blotched with ink. A ragged old couch stood at one side against the wall ; three ordinary chairs, and one arm-chair—it was such a ruin of an arm-chair !—occupied positions about the room. And, if we except the safe, that was all the furniture the place contained. The safe was half built into the wall. It had once been painted green, but the paint had long since gone. Small patches of it were visible here and there, but for the most part the safe, which appeared to have been constructed of cast iron, was as rusty as the grate.

Nor was the cheerless look of the apartment lessened by the indescribable state of litter it was in. The floor was half hidden beneath an extraordinary conglomeration of contrasting articles. Among them

were two or three tin boxes, with their locks wrenched off, a cash-box in the same condition, account-books, odds and ends of clothing, crockery, the greater part of it shattered into fragments, scraps of food, and a great host of papers and documents, of every size, shape, and colour; in one place a paint-pot, half full of black paint, had been turned upside down; probably it was the same paint which Mr. Hookham had used to cover the inscription on the door. In another a lamp had been broken. The presence of the oil which had been issued from it was unpleasantly perceptible. On the table, which was covered with the same incongruous collection, a quart bottle of ink had been emptied. It seemed as though some malignant sprite had set himself to work as much confusion and do as much mischief as was possible.

Mr. Hookham stood, in grim silence, observing this unpleasant state of things. As he gradually took in the various details, and began to fully realise the effect of the whole, his features became, if possible, harder and sterner than before.

“If I knew the lad who had done this, he should have a lifer.”

There could be no doubt, judging from the tone and manner in which the words were spoken, that if he had anything to do with it the lad referred to would. He moved to the table.

“The lamp broken! What shall I do?”

He looked at the candle. It was one of those tallow "dips," which we scarcely see nowadays, except in chandlers' shops in out-of-the-way places.

"I must manage with that. When it is done for, I'll go to bed."

Hitherto he had not removed his hat. This seeming to occur to him all at once, he took it off. Putting up his hand, he passed his fingers through his thick growth of iron-grey hair. Going to the safe, he threw the door wide open. His eye caught the open cash-box lying on the floor. His glance wandered round the room. It lighted on an old red-leather box. He picked it up. It was empty,—shattered almost into fragments.

"Nearly nine hundred pounds' worth of jewels! Curse the thief!"

Dropping the fragments of the red-leather box, he began examining in hot haste the litter on the floor. At last he came on a sheaf of long narrow slips of blue paper, tied round with a piece of red tape. They were bills of exchange,—another form of security in which he dealt. He snatched them up. He ran through them, with eager eyes and fingers.

"Safe! The fool!"

That was the form of thanks with which he recorded the fact that they had not gone with the jewels.

"I'll put them in my pocket, for the present they'll

be better there. To-morrow I'll deposit them in Chancery Lane. I ought to have put them there before, but I never thought of burglars, so I always kept them ready to my hand."

He suited "the action to the word and the word to the action" by putting them into the inside breast pocket of his coat. Then he stood, silently looking round the room. As if unconsciously, his hand wandered to his waistcoat pocket. The fingers slipped inside. When they came back they brought the diamond with them. He looked down at it.

"The ape," he said.

He laughed. He had not laughed for years,—perhaps that was why his laugh had grown so rusty. If laughter with him meant emitting such a sound, one could but hope, either that he would oil the works or never laugh again.

"Is all this owing, then, to you?"

It was difficult to credit, hard to believe, that that rare and wondrous gem, almost seeming a miracle in its great beauty, could bring anything but pleasure in its train.

"Must I, after all these years, believe that fairy tales are true?"

He raised his eyes from the stone. Slightly throwing back his head, he seemed to look into space with a long, unflinching gaze, as though he were looking for something which was there.



“ True, true ! ”

He shook his head with an impatient gesture.

“ Bah ! If fairy tales are true, how I've wasted all those years ! ”

He went to the safe, the door of which was still wide open. He put the diamond upon the lower shelf and closed the door.

“ Stay there awhile. I don't think I need be afraid of being robbed of you. ”

His glance travelled again about the room. He began to rummage among the chaos on the floor. After considerable searching, he unearthed from under a heap of papers a short squab account-book, which was secured by two locks. He eyed this with evident satisfaction. He took his handkerchief from his pocket and carefully wiped the covers. Tucking it under his arm, he went to the table. Clearing a space upon it, by the simple process of sweeping off whatever was in the way on to the floor, he put the account-book down. Fetching the candle from where it stood, he placed it close by the book. He got himself a chair. Taking a bunch of keys from his pockets he opened the locks, for each lock using a separate key. Then, seating himself, he began studying the pages of his book.

His studies occupied him a considerable time. He was continually adding up columns of figures and jotting down the totals on a piece of paper at his side.

These, in their turn, he added up again. Finally, he rested his elbow on the table and shaded his eyes with his hand.

“I’m a rich man,” he said. “A rich man.”

He rose from his seat and began strolling round the room.

“A rich man! A rich man!”

He repeated it two or three times, as he paced on and on.

“Yes, I’m a rich man, even as riches go. As I stand, I’m worth more than a million pounds.”

A million pounds! That is a large sum, even in these days of many millions. He did not look as though he were a millionaire. Nor did the room look as though it were a room in which a millionaire resided. But then we know that some of the richest men possess the simplest tastes. They dine for ninepence, or even less, ride in penny ’buses, and wear shocking hats. If Mr. Hookham ever had a biographer, possibly the historian—especially if he were a believer in the “Self Help” doctrine, “Live on sixpence a day and die worth a hundred thousand pounds”—might record, as one of his hero’s finest characteristics, a beautiful simplicity.

When Mr. Hookham had sufficiently digested the fact how rich he was, he went to the safe, and took out the diamond again.

“So you’re going to ruin me, are you? It will

take a good deal of ruining, more than a million. Especially invested as I've invested mine."

He placed the diamond beside his account-book on the table. He seated himself. He leant back in his chair. And thought.

It never occurred to him that any of that million was ill-gotten—he was not that sort of man. It never occurred to him that in getting it he had wasted opportunities ; he could conscientiously lay his hand upon his heart and say that he did not think he ever had. It never occurred to him that there was any value, which he had lost, in such trifles as a home, a wife, children, friends, reputation. The whole volume of sentiment which those things represent was a sealed book to him,—he would not have unsealed it if he had had the chance. There is a school of writers who tell us—yes, and over and over again—that every man has "a romance" in his life, that he is bound to be "mixed up" with women, or, at any rate, with one. It is the purest nonsense. There are multitudes of men in whose lives women, to put it very gently, take a secondary place,—in Mr. Hookham's life they had had no place at all. He had never kissed a girl in his life,—and never wanted to.

Each man has his own idea of happiness. Why not ? And who shall judge between them ? The writers of the love-tales—French, American, or English ? O ye gods and little fishes ! Mr. Hookham found

happiness in getting money,—not in the money when it was got, but in the getting it; in the race, and not the prize. He honestly did not care for any of the material delights which money buys. There are men like that, though it be neither you nor I—it is certainly not I! But he did find pleasure in plotting, scheming, ferreting out methods by means of which his money might be made to increase and to prosper. Just as the gardener delights in “nursing” his plants—and what love, patience, and science are needed to properly do that!—so Mr. Hookham delighted in “nursing” his gold.

What did occur to him, as he sat thinking there, was this: it occurred to him to plan for the future. There was the diamond in front of him. He realised that it was a new factor in his life,—a factor which must be at once considered.

A million pounds! One can do so much with a million. Mr. Hookham told himself that he could do much with his: what should he do? Should he live up to it? Should he leave it where it was, and draw the interest, and spend it? How? Then there passed in array before Mr. Hookham’s mind the various ways in which one could spend the interest of more than a million,—say twelve hundred thousand pounds. One could buy a house, or several houses, and furnish them—with what? Well, with nothing that he cared for. One might spend a certain amount

on the pleasures of the palate, but Mr. Hookham cared nothing for them. He could eat boiled beef and carrots with any man, but he had never heard, nor wished to hear, of *la haute cuisine*. He had a general idea that one could fool a deal of money away on women,—indeed, he had heard of many who had done so, of many who were doing so still,—but what pleasure they found in it always had been, and always would be, a mystery to him. He might marry a wife—she could spend his money for him if he liked—but he told himself quite candidly that he would sooner dance on the tight rope than marry a wife. Then there were horses: there were idiots who lost their money in what was popularly called “racing”; but he protested inwardly that he had not got down *quite* so low as that. Or he might gamble—but he had been a gambler all his life; he had always played to win—to lose was agony. What was there left? He was a man of limited education, and for the life of him he could not tell.

And yet—what was it which made him lean forward and gaze with eager eyes at the diamond?—and yet there must be some means of enjoying the wealth which he had gained. He had read somewhere about the “potentialities of riches.” The writer had been speaking of the almost boundless realms of pleasure, of happiness, which great wealth commanded. How strange that he could think of none of those rich

men's kingdoms, those royal roads to remunerative spending, now. Twelve hundred thousand pounds ! Why, with such a sum as that, a man could do anything. Yes, but what ? What anything that was something to him ? Youth has pleasures which age has not ; and even such pleasures as age has require cultivation. You don't like olives when first you taste them. You can't spring to the complete enjoyment of an exquisite wine at a single bound. Such men as Mr. Hookham, if they can find enjoyment in what are called pleasures at all, can only find it in simple ones. And you cannot spend the interest of twelve hundred thousand pounds upon simplicity. This seemed a little hard.

As he began to realise this—the fact, which he had never faced before, that the spending of his money, if it brought him anything, would bring him pain—his ears caught a sudden sound. He glared at the diamond. It came again : it was the sound of laughter ; it came from the stone. Was the diamond laughing at him, then ?

He rose from his seat with an angry movement ; he began again to pace the room. Throughout his life he had flattered himself upon one thing—that he was not as other men, a fool. Was he, then, going to become a fool now that he was old ? Was he going to be frightened by a piece of stone—a diamond ? Was he going to allow so trivial a cause to alter the whole end

and purpose of his life? He loved—he held his hands out in front of him in a sort of paroxysm—he loved, how he loved! getting money. The plotting, the planning, and the scheming; the over-reaching of his fellows, the measuring of wits, the keenness of the strife,—as the hunt to the hound these things were to his nostrils as the breath of life. If it came to that, he would give the diamond away to-morrow.

And yet—twenty thousand pounds! He suffered a sense of physical pain at the idea of giving anything. It violated a fundamental law of his existence. He never had given a beggar a penny in his life; but he had seen other men doing it, and he had suffered for their sin. The sight of such an action made him ill at ease, just as an honest man is ill at ease by being made the involuntary witness of a crime. And for him spontaneously, voluntarily, of his own free will, to give away such a sum as twenty thousand pounds,—he couldn't do it! He shuddered as he only thought of it. His heart died within him; he was afraid, just as the wretch is afraid who meditates, in the dark hours of the night, on some hideous crime.

He set himself to think out a method by which he could escape the difficulty by, so to speak, some side door. He realised that it would be vain openly to attempt to sell the stone; he realised, too, that it would be equally vain to think of keeping it. If it did not bring him ruin, it might work him incon-

venience ; and had he not already suffered actual loss? No, while he feigned to give it away, he must think of some means by which he might secure for himself an actual *quid pro quo*.

That was the problem which he set himself to solve.



## CHAPTER XV.

### TWO VISITORS FROM—WHERE?

TO and fro he paced, up and down, and round and round, trying to find the solution to the problem.

As he persisted in his "sentry go"—for that problem was hard to solve—he was conscious of something; what it was he himself could not quite make out. It seemed—it was only seeming, for he looked about him and saw that it was so—that there was some one with him in the room. It was not an altogether pleasant sensation, and it was a ridiculous one to boot. But as he turned the problem over and over in his mind, he thought that he heard once, and then again, rather a curious sound, like the sound of a chuckle. He thought at first it was the diamond. He paused in his perambulations and glared at it. It had shown itself capable of so many pleasing little eccentricities—he could have sworn that it had already laughed at him once—that nothing would have surprised him which came from that direction. But it seemed to him that the sound

of that chuckle did not come from the neighbourhood of the stone.

He had heard it first when he had been coming from the mantelpiece towards the door. He was passing the table on his left, and the diamond was on the table just in front of him. The chuckle—if it was a chuckle, it was very faint, so that it was hard to make quite sure—came from behind. It was so unexpected that he wheeled right round to see if any one else had made a sudden appearance in the room ; but there was no one there. Then he glared at the diamond ; it looked innocent enough, as it lay in its tranquil beauty on the table.

He told himself he was mistaken. His brain was in a highly sensitized condition. He fancied things, as who would not who had gone through his experiences of the last few hours ? He continued his prowlings to and fro.

The sound again. It was odd, very odd indeed. This time it was more distinct than before, resembling the chuckle which might be supposed to issue from a feeble pair of lungs. This time Mr. Hookham was advancing towards the mantelpiece, and it came from in front, not from behind. He started. He looked up. There was no one there. He glanced at the diamond. It seemed still ; besides, the sound did not come from its neighbourhood at all. Could there be any one in the room beyond ? He caught up the

candle from the table and advanced to see. Opening the door of his bedroom he passed in. There was no one there. What could it be ?

As he moved to replace the candle on the table he was aware of quite a strange sensation,—as though he had passed a living thing. He had felt nothing,—nothing tangible, that is,—and yet, if you pass close to a person in the dark, though you neither touch, nor see, nor hear him, you are quite capable of being made conscious that there is something there. In the same way Mr. Hookham was conscious that there was something there just then.

But of course it was hallucination. In this case it was not dark, but light, light enough, at any rate, to see. And Mr. Hookham saw,—he *saw* that there was nothing there. That should have been sufficient to content him. Possibly it was.

“If I don't take care I shall be ill. If I die the diamond will be credited with the honour of having been the death of me. I had better go to bed.”

But he did not go to bed. He continued pacing to and fro. But he could not fix his mind upon the problem, not at all. It annoyed him, and not wholly without cause. There are few things so irritating as not being able to concentrate one's thoughts at will. He was conscious, too, of an odd reluctance to advance too near to that end of the room which contained the mantelpiece. As he approached slowly, step by step,

he found himself raising his head and glancing eagerly in front of him with, so to speak, all his eyes. There was nothing to glance at, nothing but vacancy, and the objects which he had beheld day after day, year after year.

At a certain point he stood quite still, he hardly knew why, but he did. His form was slightly bent, his head was thrown forward, and he stared, as though he would resolve something out of nothing. And as he stared the sound came again,—the sound of the chuckle. It came from just in front of him. One might have said that he could have put out his hand and touched the chuckler, only there was no chuckler to be seen. And almost in the same instant the diamond laughed,—there was no mistake about it,—the two sounds were quite distinct. The chuckle was a trifle wheezy, the laugh was the most musical of sounds. Mr. Hookham whirled round like a teetotum set spinning. He glowered at the diamond. There lay the stone, on the old oak table, serenely still.

It was most absurd. Was he again going to be victimised by its elfish pranks and capers? Could he not have one night in peace? He moved towards the table, intending to take the diamond and replace it in the safe. The instant he moved the chuckle came again. As if involuntarily he caught hold of the edge of the table and stood quite still.

What made his heart suddenly cease, or seem to

cease, its action? After what he had gone through there was nothing which could be called surprising, even in the chuckle of an unseen chuckler. Yet he seemed more terrified than he had been at the Sphinx's Cave, and with a different kind of fear. As he clung to the table's edge he trembled as with palsy. It was more than a minute before the fit passed away. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from off his brow.

"I—I could have sworn I'd heard that voice before." He turned to the diamond with sudden rage. "What trick are you going to play me now?"

As he stood glaring at the crystal with what was apparently unreasonable rage, the sound came again—the sound of the chuckle. And now it was not one chuckle, but several,—a sort of continuous cackling, more a cackling than a chuckling. Mr. Hookham turned an ashen face in the direction of the unseasonable mirth, and the look returned to it which had been so noticeable at the Sphinx's Cave,—the look of extreme old age. "It's his voice," he gasped.

The sound ceased. All was still. But he had localized the spot from whence it seemed to issue—the old arm chair. His own arm chair, the only one the room contained. And a fine mockery of an arm chair it was.

As if fascinated, Mr. Hookham continued to gaze at it. He might never have seen it in his life before.

It might have been the most marvellous unique which ever ravished the eyes of a lover of *bric-à-brac*. By degrees he regained his calmness—he had been trembling like a leaf—and something of the appearance of extreme senility passed from him, but only for a moment. For while he continued to look something happened which—if it were not an optical delusion, and even if it were an optical delusion—was calculated to shake the nerves of the strongest man.

The chair was empty. That was plain enough at first. But as he still stood staring, something—a shadowy outline—began to appear about the neighbourhood of the seat. Mr. Hookham's hair came as near to standing up on end as ever a man's came yet. He told himself that it was a delusion; still his flesh began to creep, for the worst of it was that it was a delusion from which it was impossible to take his eyes away. The outline deepened. He saw outlined the figure of a man who seemed to be squatting on the seat. The outline gradually filled in. Mr. Hookham's sensations, as he beheld that outline slowly taking the form, shape, and substance of a man, are not to be described in words.

It seemed to him that the process of materialisation lasted hours; but then it is proverbial how slowly the time does crawl when we are not enjoying ourselves to any great extent, and no man ever enjoyed himself

to a less extent than did Mr. Hookham then ; but when it was finished, there, in the arm chair, was seated what seemed to be a man. An old man, a little old man, clad in a suit of rusty black. He made a bad fit for the chair,—there was room in it for at least two of him,—though it must be allowed that Mr. Hookham found there was quite enough with one. He was sitting forward in the chair, by no means in an upright position—as though his back were weak—and his elbows rested on the arms of the chair. He had a long, narrow, clean-shaven face, which was very white and drawn,—it looked a very cruel one, and it was by no means the face of a man whom one would take for a friend. His hair, of which there was a great deal, was long and snowy white. It was drawn back from his mean, receding forehead—which style of wearing it by no means added to the generally pleasant appearance of his countenance. And he was grinning—it would be a libel on laughter to call the mirthless grin which convulsed his face a smile—and as he grinned, he chuckled ; it was the sound which had first startled Mr. Hookham's ears.

When the process of materialisation, if we may write it so, was finished, Mr. Hookham turned, and clutched at the edge of the table, and sank on his knees, and hid his face on the board.

“ Matthew ! ” he gasped, and then was still.

The figure on the chair continued chuckling. It

seemed almost mechanical, as though it were a trick he had. He kept his keen, cruel eyes, which were as bright as a lad's at twenty, bright with an almost unnatural brightness, fixed on the old man cowering by the table.

“Sammy,” he said.

He spoke in a harsh, grating voice which harmonised with his general appearance—it was curious what a strong resemblance it had to Mr. Hookham's. When Mr. Hookham heard it he gave a groan, and seemed to cling closer to the table. The figure in the chair continued,—

“I told you I would come and see the fun.”

And he chuckled as a hen cackles—as though he never could leave off.

There was silence, a silence which lasted some three or four minutes. During the whole of it Mr. Hookham trembled with a trembling which was quite perceptible, and that in spite of the support afforded by the table. The sight of his distress seemed to afford the figure in the chair the keenest satisfaction. He never ceased his chuckling, though the sound of his mirth would have conveyed anything but a mirthful feeling to sensitive nerves. He repeated his words again,—

“I told you I would come and see the fun—he, he, he, he, he, he, he, he, he!”

His “he, he, he's!” bade fair to stretch out and



bridge eternity. But the sight of Mr. Hookham's abject misery seemed to pall upon him after a time.

"Get up!" His voice had rather the sound of a snarl, but he continued chuckling all the time. "Let me see your face, my Sammy!"

After a further momentary interval of silence, which the chuckler did not seem to take altogether pleasantly, Mr. Hookham did get up, and as he regained his feet he turned his face towards the figure on the chair. He looked at him steadily. As he looked his calmness gradually returned. The look of dreadful fear passed from him, and instead there came a look which was not love.

"So it's you!"

As he uttered the three little words his voice reminded one of the grating of a saw.

"Yes; it's me."

The figure on the chair had evidently no regard for the niceties of grammar. They looked at each other long and steadily, the two old men. And as he looked, on Mr. Hookham's face there began gradually to appear such a look of hatred that one almost wondered that the other could bear to face it.

"I thought it was you when I heard you first."

"Good brother, to remember his brother's voice for more than sixteen years."

“ I was not likely to forget it, if it had been sixty.”

Mr. Hookham turned, and began slowly to pace towards the opposite end of the room.

The old man watched him as he went.

“ You look old and worn and thin.” The criticism was uttered with a sort of indescribable glee. Mr. Hookham sneered ; but he said nothing. “ You’re not talkative, Sammy. One would think that brothers would have a good deal to say to each other, re-meeting, for the first time, after an absence of more than sixteen years.”

Mr. Hookham turned. He advanced close to the figure on the chair. Then, pausing, he stood quite still, regarding the person seated there with such a look of resolute hatred that the old man seemed to have doubts as to his intentions. He rose from the chair with a scream.

“ Don’t touch me, or I will strike you dead ! ”

Mr. Hookham never quailed, although the other’s passion was diabolical.

“ I am not afraid of death. Nor am I, now, afraid of you.”

“ Are you sure ? ”

The newcomer thrust out his hand and placed it on the other’s shoulder. As he felt the touch Mr. Hookham shuddered quite perceptibly.

“ Ah, Sammy, don’t you be too sure ! ”

But Mr. Hookham’s tranquillity almost immediately

returned. The look of hatred had never left him for a moment.

“ I am sure. I never feared you living.”

“ But you fear me dead ! ”

“ Nor do I fear you dead.”

The two men stood face to face. You could see then what a curious likeness there was between them. It extended not only to the voice, but to the form and features,—only Samuel was on a somewhat larger scale than Matthew. He was a little taller, a little stouter, a little broader across the chest. He looked a little younger too ; his hair was iron-grey, and he wore it on his forehead, while Matthew pushed his off his brow, and its hue was snowy white. But the likeness unmistakably was there. There was no mistaking them for anything but brothers. They stood regarding each other for some moments silently. Then Matthew thrust his brother from him with such force that he sent him reeling half across the room.

“ You devil ! ”

“ Nay, it is you who are the devil, Mat, not I.”

“ Yes ! ” cried Matthew, with a chuckle which was very like a scream, “ I am the devil's own ! ”

“ That is so. You are the devil's own—living or dead.”

They stood again contemplating each other silently ; then Samuel turned and began pacing, to and fro, up

and down the room. Matthew watched him from his perpendicular position for a time. Then, reseating himself, he continued to watch him from his position on the chair.

“I told you I would come and see the fun.” Samuel sneered, but he vouchsafed no other answer. “It’s the diamond has brought me.” Samuel sneered again.

“What do you think of the diamond, Sammy?”

Samuel stood still. He looked at Matthew, then at the diamond, then again at Matthew.

“I find it rather a good example of a stone.”

“He, he! Yes, it is rather a good example of a stone.” Samuel resumed his pacing to and fro. “It’s something to be the owner of such a stone, isn’t it, Sammy? Look at it, Sammy, look at it now!” Matthew was leaning over the side of his chair; his eyes were fixed upon his brother, but with his outstretched hand he pointed towards the stone. Samuel followed the direction of his brother’s finger. He, too, looked at the stone.

The diamond was on the table. A singular thing had happened; one of those numerous singular things which were always happening. The diamond had not disappeared,—for it was visible enough,—but on it, or over it, for it was difficult to say if it actually touched it, was a figure—the figure of an ape. Not of any recognised species of ape—it was not even the “missing link”—but it was an amazing kind of beast which

bore, so far as form went, a fantastic resemblance to an ape. It was squatted on its haunches. Its hands were clasped about its belly. Its head was distinctly ape-like. Its two eyes were fixed on Mr. Hookham, sparkling and flashing as though they themselves were diamonds.

But the most curious thing about this very curious creature was its colouring. It absolutely palpitated with colour—not with one hue, but with all the hues of the rainbow,—only the brilliancy of the rainbow was as nothing compared to the brilliancy of that strange creature. As Mr. Hookham looked at it, he saw the colours come and go, flash and vanish, one moment dazzling the eyes, the next becoming, in their subdued radiancy, and in the marvellous magic of their combinations, like the glorious dream of some great colourist.

Yet there was nothing beautiful about the creature,—that is, if a thing of beauty *is* a joy even for a moment, or if every beautiful thing has its own peculiar charm. For there was nothing either joyous or charming about that fantastic caricature of a baboon, or ape,—and that in spite of all its gloriously glittering array. On the contrary, Mr. Hookham, as he looked at it, was conscious of a very strong feeling of disgust, of nausea; nay, more, he was conscious that its mere presence there made the whole room repulsive. Nor was the effect lessened by his brother's

repetition of his words, in the tone which, metaphorically, went all down his back.

“Look at it now, Sammy, look at it now!”

Mr. Samuel Hookham did look at it, and he might have been excused if he had straightway turned tail and fled, it did fill him with such a dreadful sense of nauseous disgust. But, fortunately or unfortunately, he was made of different stuff. The dogged nature of the man would have forbidden him to turn tail even on the devil himself—and certainly forbade him to absolutely flee from one of his mere minions. He went to the window, giving a wide berth to the table by the way. Flinging the casement open he thrust his head out to get a breath of air. The ape—if it was an ape, and Matthew—or Matthew’s ghost, both followed him with their eyes. As he observed his brother’s discomfiture, Matthew—or his ghost—became hideously jocose.

“He, he, he! What do you think of the diamond, Sammy, what do you think of it now?”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE LOVE THAT LIVED.

“**M**AT,” said Samuel, at last, coming back into the room, his harsh voice seeming harsher than its wont, “would it please you to see me ruined?”

Matthew plainly thought the question superfluous,—the answer too self-evident. His mirth was quite hysterical.

“Please me!” he screamed; “why, I shall forget all I suffered in the pleasure!”

Mr. Samuel Hookham craned his head forward,—somewhat in the fashion of the bird of prey which collects itself to dart upon its victim.

“Then you won’t see it,” he said.

“Oh yes, I shall, Sammy,—oh yes, I shall!”

“You won’t.” Something in Samuel’s voice seemed to avert Matthew’s attention. He looked at his brother. “Shall I tell you why?”

“Oh, do, Sammy—do! do!”

“Because”—Mr. Samuel Hookham clearly enunciated

his words, even paused between each—"because—I—shall—give—the—diamond—away."

Matthew's mirth became a little less pronounced.

"Give the diamond away?"

"Give the diamond away—to ruin some other fool as it ruined you."

"Oh no, you won't! It's worth more than twenty thousand pounds, you know—more than twenty thousand pounds! That's what I used to say I'd do, but I never could when it came to the point; how much more impossible will it be for you!"

"Mat, you say I am a fool,—well, I'll show you at any rate that I'm not so big a one as you. Were you aware of the peculiar properties of the stone?"

"Yes," said Matthew, a little uneasily, "I knew them; that was almost the worst of it,—I knew them all the time."

"And you still held on?" Samuel held his hands above his head with a gesture which was more eloquent than words. "What a fool!"

"I was not the first who knew of them and still held on. I was not the first fool, any more than you will be the last of them."

"Do you know what is one reason which would induce me to give it away, if there were not another in existence?"

"What reason's that?"

"For the sake of spiting you!"



“Spiting me?”

Matthew's complexion was becoming green again. All his merry humour was passing away. As Matthew's spirits became depressed, his affectionate brother's seemed to rise.

“For the sake of spiting you. You say it would give you pleasure to see me ruined. I've deprived you of many of your little pleasures before to-day, and now I'll deprive you of the greatest and the latest, the very last pleasure of them all. For that reason, if for no other, I'll give the diamond away, so that I may deprive you of the last pleasure that will ever come your way.”

Matthew rubbed his hands together, and he chuckled; but the chuckle was a feeble one, and his hands trembled as he rubbed them.

“Oh no, Sammy, you—you won't give the diamond away!”

“I will,—and you know I will! I would if it were worth two hundred thousand pounds! And you'll never come to see the fun again, or, if you do, it will be fun, not from your point of view, but mine; you will come and see me rich and prosperous, the happiest of men,—you will come and see me what you would have been, if you had not been a fool. Why, Mat, you're a fool even now you're dead—your ghost's a fool—or you never would have come to see the fun so soon. If I hadn't known—and I never should have

known if I had not seen you with my eyes, and heard you with my ears—that you were watching me, enjoying yourself, rubbing your hands, chuckling all the time, I might have gone blundering, blundering on; for, as you say, more than twenty thousand pounds is a biggish sum to give away, even for a millionaire like myself. But now that I do know my pains and your pleasures, why, the bubble's blown! I prick it—it is gone. Ha, ha, ha! Why, Mat, even your ghost's a fool!”

While Mr. Samuel Hookham delivered himself to this effect in an energetic and even boisterous tone of voice, his brother's enjoyment did not seem to increase to any appreciable extent. He even shivered, as though Samuel's fraternal heartiness was almost more than he could bear. And though he still continued to rub his hands and chuckle, it was plainly not because his heart was merry, but rather because he had got into a groove, and seemed to experience some difficulty in getting out of it. He had no effective retort ready to his lips even when Samuel's pausing did give him an opportunity to “hit him back.”

“Oh no, Sammy, you won't give the diamond away—you won't give it away!”

That was what he continued to say, as though he were a mechanical toy, only constructed to deliver itself of a given form of words. Samuel's manner as he commenced to reply was in striking contrast to his

brother's; he spoke very earnestly, holding out his hand as an orator does.

“ I tell you, Mat, that so soon as you are gone——”

Matthew rose from his seat with a cry.

“ Oh, Sammy, don't speak of that ! ”

Samuel seemed a little startled. He stared at his brother.

“ Don't speak of what ? ”

“ Don't speak of my going ! For as soon as you speak of my going—I'm gone.”

Samuel stared still harder. Then he threw his hands above his head with a laugh,—a laugh which was even more discordant than his first had been. At the sound of it the creature on the table actually shuddered. Matthew shuddered too.

“ Why, Mat, as a ghost you're a greater fool even than before ! Why didn't you tell me the trick of it at first ? Did you think I wanted you to stay ? ” Samuel held out his hand in front of him again. “ Why, Mat, I tell you that so soon as you are gone——”

Matthew gave a deprecatory gesture with his arms ; but Samuel repeated his words—“ so soon as you are gone—and may it be soon !—I'll give the diamond away ! ”

Samuel's voice had increased almost to a roar ; but at the last word it sank into a whisper. For no sooner had he expressed his wish that Matthew

would not stand upon the order of his going, than—Matthew was gone! Vanishing like a flash of lightning before his eyes. While he continued staring at his brother with looks which were not looks of love, there was no brother to be stared at.

The disappearance was so sudden that at first Samuel thought he had been played a trick. He momentarily expected him to reappear behind his back or above his head, standing on his shoulders, for all he knew, a novel variety of the Old Man of the Sea,—of whom, by the way, Mr. Samuel Hookham certainly had never heard. He remained motionless, gazing. But as the moments passed, and nothing, and no one, came, he ventured to look round. He turned with a shudder, for he expected that his eyes would light upon the creature on the table. But he was agreeably disappointed; the creature was gone.

As he recognised this fact—that, so far as seeing went, he was alone in the room—he found himself in darkness. The tallow candle, it would almost seem with a rush at the last, had burned itself out.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RESOLVED—AT LAST!

**M**R. SAMUEL HOOKHAM'S position, "when the light went out," was not, from all points of view, an agreeable one. To begin with, he was "in the dark"; and he was not only in the dark—which is never an agreeable thing to be in when one prefers the light—but he was in the dark without knowing if he were alone, or who his companions were, if he had any. He had just been in the presence of a ghost, as full-flavoured a ghost as was ever visible to mortal eyes—and the ghost was accompanied by—well—by not a nice companion. When a man has just seen the last of two such visitors he does not care to find himself all at once in the dark. A little light upon the subject—and the surrounding objects—would tend to make things clearer, and ease his mind.

When Mr. Samuel Hookham found himself in the dark, the darkness was very complete indeed: "Egyptian darkness" (from our childhood upwards we hear so much about "Egyptian darkness") which

“you could cut with a knife,”—like pease pudding, or, from the French point of view, a London fog. However, there was one spot of light. But whatever that spot of light may have done actually, metaphorically it certainly did not make things brighter; and in this “conjunction” metaphor was the stronger of the two; for that spot of light came from the diamond. And it was hardly to be expected that, at that particular moment, the sight of the diamond should have made Mr. Samuel Hookham’s heart feel lighter.

The worst of it was that Mr. Hookham’s eyes were riveted by that spot of light. He could not take his glance away. Abstractly, it was beautiful. There was a mystic glamour about its glittering radiance,—“light in the darkness”—which might have turned on the poetic tap in the case of a man who was “built” that way, but Mr. Hookham was not; and even if he had been, he had seen too much about the diamond—and too recently—to feel poetic, anyhow. Even in the gloom he strained his eyes to see if the creature—the guardian, the evil genius, of the stone,—was anywhere about. It was not a pleasant thing to know that it might be there—probably was—although he could not see it. Nor was it any pleasanter to feel that Matthew’s ghost was behind his back. So strong did this feeling presently become—that Matthew’s ghost was there—that he turned, and cried aloud in the darkness,—

“Matthew!”

But there was no answer, nor any sign that there was any there that heard. Still Mr. Samuel Hookham did not feel by any means easy in his mind.

“I’ll go into the bedroom and see if I can’t find a light; there must be something there, and I can’t stop here in the dark.”

He began to grope his way to his bedroom. But hardly had he moved than he came into violent contact with something,—it was the arm-chair. The sudden shock made him utter a cry of alarm.

“Matthew,” he asked, in what writers of the better class call a “sepulchral” whisper, “are you there?”

But if Matthew was there he did not mention it. He held his peace, allowing Samuel to call on him in vain. Mr. Samuel Hookham, as he rubbed his knee, which had come with undesirable force against the chair, could not but feel that if Matthew was there he was having one more moment of enjoyment, at any rate. As he thought of it he muttered maledictions beneath his breath. Then he pursued his voyage in search of his bedroom.

Finding the door, he groped for the handle. He turned it, with a hand which trembled slightly. He passed inside, he entered,—there was outer darkness too. He felt his way to the chest of drawers. In one of the drawers—in that in which he kept his shirts

and collars—he found what he was looking for, a piece of “composite” about a couple of inches long. It was one of his careful ways—a fresh illustration of the simplicity of millionaires—to keep his candle-ends. He had kept this one for months,—after long keeping it came in handy now. He routed out—from the same receptacle—a box of matches. Lighting his piece of candle, he held it above his head,—still with a hand which trembled. The room was empty. Returning into the adjoining chamber, that, so far as he could see with his finite vision, was empty too.

He put the piece of candle down upon the table. Standing close beside it, he commenced to rub his hands as Matthew had done—only not so cheerily. He kept giving furtive glances round him.

“I wonder,” he asked himself beneath his breath, “if Matthew’s here?”

He was by no means certain he was not. Such an uncertainty was not a pleasant one. The simplest of millionaires does not bear himself—does not wish to bear himself—in the presence of a spectator, even though that spectator is a brother’s ghost, as he would do were he quite alone. But as Mr. Samuel Hookham had no means of making sure—the Psychical Research Society not having yet suggested a process of testing for the presence of ghosts—he was obliged to make the best of it. He turned to the diamond.



There it lay, in its tranquil, glittering beauty—which has been so often spoken of before.

“The ape!” said Mr. Hookham.

As he spoke of the ape he shuddered, and glanced round the room again. He went to the window, which was still open, and looked out. He leaned his arms upon the sill. The only thing visible without was the flickering lamp in the court below; but even that, seen through the misty haze, gave him the feeling of society. He was not alone while the lamp was there. He could hear, too, as he listened, the subdued rumble of the Fleet Street traffic. But, although the time was summer, the night was cool. A chilly air came from the river. He shivered, and returned into the room. Yet he was loth to close the window, being reluctant to lose the companionship of the lamp. Shrugging his shoulders, he told himself he was a fool—it will be observed that the epithet was one to whose use he was addicted; it was the one measure of his standard of right and wrong. Pulling the window to with a bang, he fastened the latch. Turning, he allowed his eyes to rest for a moment on the stone.

Then he began, as he had done before the advent of his visitors, to pace to and fro, up and down, and round and round the room. He recalled all that had happened to him since the arrival of the stone,—all, down to the minutest detail. And as, in his mind's eye, he went through it all over again, his anger began to rise.

He began to lose his sense of awe. The feeling of personal injury became strong within him. All at once it became so strong that, pausing, he shook his clenched fist at the stone upon the table. And he muttered—something that was not a prayer.

Matthew's visit was the climax of it all. To think that his brother was dead, and yet could come to life again, to gibe and jeer at him,—the thought was insupportable! Better ruin almost than that! For all he knew Matthew's ghost, in some invisible form—for who can tell of what forms such ghosts are capable?—was actually present and chuckling at him now. The reflection stung him to fury. If the retaining of the diamond in his possession involved such a persecution—better that the first beggar he met in the street should be its owner rather than he! He snatched up the stone from the table. How cool it felt to the touch! How beautiful it was! How it gleamed and glittered! How it concentrated in itself such a radiance of light! How large it was! Was ever such a stone before? It was worth the ransom of a king!

Involuntarily two words rose to his lips.

“The ape!” he said.

As he said it he shuddered. He arrived at a sudden resolution. He closed his squab account-book, locked its two locks, and slipped it into his breast coat pocket. He took up his hat and put it on. He opened

the two doors, first the inner, then the outer one. He blew out the candle, putting a box of matches in his pocket. Then he went out, locking the door behind him as he went, pocketing the key.

All the time he held the diamond in his hand. He meant to give it to the first beggar he met in the street.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A RECIPIENT FOR A GIFT OF A FORTUNE.

**A**N opportunity immediately presented itself to put his resolution into practice, as, when we have formed resolutions, opportunities often do. A man was crouching against the wall, at the entrance to the court. Mr. Hookham paused and looked at him.

“Go away!” said the man. “Get along away with yer! I’m waiting for a friend.”

In spite of the uncertain light, Mr. Hookham immediately recognised the speaker,—it was his laundress’ “pore James”—the “pore James” who, according to his fond mother, was “doing time”; the very man who, Mr. Hookham suspected, in his absence had ransacked his rooms. As he glared at him, rage for a moment made Mr. Hookham speechless. Either “pore James” was a much-wronged man, or else his presence there showed that he was possessed of an amount of impudence which was quite refreshing,—only Mr. Hookham did not seem to think that it was

at all refreshing then. He appeared about, for this occasion only, to hold the scales, and treat "pore James" to an illustration of "justice" which was not "law." Only for the moment he stayed his hand.

One thing was clear,—Mr. Clisby had been drinking, not wisely, but too well. He was just sober enough to stand,—with the help of the wall. By degrees there began to dawn on his muddled faculties a vague impression that he had seen the person in front of him somewhere before. At last he settled his identity to his apparent satisfaction.

"Strike me lucky!" he murmured; "it's 'Ookham!"

"Yes," said Mr. Hookham, mimicking "pore James," "it's 'Ookham. You scoundrel! What are you doing here?"

"Tha—that's what I'd like to know! I'm waiting for a friend."

Mr. Hookham looked Mr. Clisby up and down. A thought was germinating in his mind. How could he punish him better, to begin with, than by presenting him with the Devil's Diamond? Afterwards, when the diamond had done with him, if there was anything of him left to punish, he might punish him by process of law.

"You have committed a burglary in my chambers."

"O—only a little thing," hiccuped Mr. Clisby, who was evidently one of those whom drink makes confidential, "along o' my mother."

“ Oh, your mother had a hand in it, did she ? ” Mr. Hookham sincerely hoped that she might have a hand in handling the diamond. “ With what I know against you I might, if I chose, get you penal servitude for life.”

“ What’s the odds if you do ? ” asked Mr. Clisby, —with sublime indifference to the terrors of the law.

“ But I’m in a merciful mood to-night.” Mr. Hookham spoke with such bitter irony that one would have thought that it must have been even perceptible to the drink-sodden wretch in front of him. “ I not only forgive you, but I’m going to make you a present of more than twenty thousand pounds.”

“ Pore James ” lurched away from the wall, almost falling into Mr. Hookham’s arms.

“ What’s that ? ” he said.

“ I say that I’m going to make you a present of over twenty thousand pounds.”

“ Don’t come playing the softy over me.”

“ I’m doing nothing of the kind. Do you see that diamond ? ”

Mr. Hookham held it out between his finger and thumb. Mr. Clisby looked at it with his drink-blurred eyes.

“ Give us hold on it ! ” he said.

He held out his hand to take it, but a sudden lurch against the wall somewhat destroyed his purpose.

“ You shall have it. It is worth more than twenty thousand pounds.”

“ Stow it ! ” hiccuped Mr. Clisby.

“ It is a fact, as you may ascertain for yourself by taking it to any receiver of stolen goods of your acquaintance. It's worth more than twenty thousand pounds,—infinitely more than those jewels of mine which you have stolen, and the proceeds of which you are devoting to bringing on an attack of delirium tremens. I give it you freely. Take it. It is yours.”

Mr. Hookham held out the diamond to Mr. Clisby ; but “ pore James ” did not rise to the bait with so much enthusiasm as Mr. Hookham had expected. He seemed a little shy.

“ Why don't you take it ? ” repeated Mr. Hookham. “ It is yours. Are you too drunk to understand what I am saying ? I say that it is worth more than twenty thousand pounds.”

As Mr. Hookham continued to hold out the diamond, and “ pore James ” continued to hesitate, there came a sound as of something falling on the pavement. Mr. Hookham looked down ; something yellow was lying at his feet—it was a sovereign. With a degree of alacrity which was a little surprising in one who was presenting to a confirmed criminal and an habitual drunkard a gift of the value of more than twenty thousand pounds, he stooped down to pick it up. As he did so, another fell,—it seemed to him that it fell

from the diamond,—and then another, and another ; he kept his eyes upon the stone, and he distinctly saw that they fell from the diamond. There they were, a little heap of bright sovereigns, gleaming pleasantly as they lay upon the ground. Mr. Hookham began to pick them up.

But, by this time, “ pore James ” was also alive to the fact that something unusual was going on. He, too, had heard the ringing of coin, than which few sounds were sweeter to his ears ; nor was he too drunk to observe the fact of Mr. Hookham’s suddenly stooping down.

“ What’s up ? ” he hiccuped.

He joined Mr. Hookham in stooping down to see. He was not, however, sober enough to stoop down neatly. He came down, so to speak, with a run—a run which landed him on the top of Mr. Hookham. Mr. Clisby was a young man, but he was constructed on a generous scale, and he was heavy,—particularly so when drunk. Mr. Hookham collapsed beneath him like a pack of cards. He lay flat on the ground, and Mr. Clisby lay on top of him, using language which seemed to infer that he was under the erroneous impression that he was not the aggressor but the aggrieved.

Mr. Hookham seemed to think that Mr. Clisby had added to his other crimes an attempt to commit robbery with violence.



"Help! Thieves! Police!" he screamed as loudly as he could with the small quantity of breath Mr. Clisby had still left in him.

A constable came round the corner, with three or four stragglers at his heels.

"What's up here?" he asked.

A policeman always asks that question—just as a cabman, who is dissatisfied because he has not been paid more than twice his legal fare, always demands, "What's this?"—as if he didn't know.

Having asked his question, the policeman proceeded to supply the answer by seizing Mr. Clisby by the collar of his coat, and dragging him to his feet. Then Mr. Hookham got up too.

"My name is Hookham," he explained. "This man's name is James Clisby. I have chambers here. He has robbed them, burglariously. Now he has attempted to rob me, with violence."

Mr. Clisby seemed subdued. Perhaps, after the manner of some of his kind, he felt safe in the arms of the police. The constable screwed his captive round to the light. A flattering recognition of "pore James" immediately ensued.

"Oh, it's you, is it? It's not the first time I've had hold of you. Do you charge him, sir?"

"Certainly I charge him."

A second constable now came. "Pore James'" prospects did not look roseate.

“Is that your money lying on the ground, sir?” asked constable Number 2.

Mr. Hookham said that it was. The diamond was lying on the ground as well ; he stooped and picked it up, and with it twelve sovereigns too. Mr. Clisby was borne away, supported by the friendly arms of the two gentlemen in blue, an admiring throng following on his heels. Mr. Hookham was left alone. He had the diamond still in his hand, and the twelve sovereigns too. He made a movement as if to slip them into his pocket, but something in the feel of them caused him to pause. Stretching out his hand, holding it open in the light, he looked at its contents. He must have been mistaken—there were no sovereigns there ; he held a handful of dirt. He threw it from him with an oath, and went out into the street to look for a more worthy recipient of his princely generosity.

The multitude had gone with Mr. Clisby ; but one man remained behind. He came up now to Mr. Hookham, touching his ragged apology for a cap. It was Larry, the “caretaker” of Badger’s Buildings—he who had brought to Mitre Court the first news of the fire.

“Mr. ’Ookham, sir, will you give me a copper, sir? All my sticks was burnt in the fire, sir, and these two days I ain’t ’ad a drop to eat nor drink.”

Here was a fresh opportunity for Mr. Hookham to bestow his splendid charity ! The man looked

miserable enough. He was a picturesque conglomeration of rags—picturesque from the artist's point of view, if not from the wearer's—and he was shivering as with cold.

"Give you a copper?" said Mr. Hookham, in response to the man's appeal. "Why, you drunken beast! it was through you the Buildings were burned; you robbed me of five hundred pounds a year."

"Send I may die, Mr. 'Ookham, sir, you're wrong! I was as sober that afternoon——"

"As you are now," observed Mr. Hookham, cutting him short.

"God knows I'm sober now."

"Sober!" Mr. Hookham caught him by the arm. "Why, you've got the 'shakes' this very moment. I suppose you'll tell me it's with hunger or with cold? It's the drink—drink, you brute!"

"You're a 'ard man, Mr. 'Ookham, sir."

"You think I'm a hard man, do you?" Mr. Hookham paused. He looked the fellow closely in the face. "What would you say if I were to make your fortune?"

"You might do it, sir, and yet never feel the want of it, that's sure and safe enough."

"Suppose I were to give you more than twenty thousand pounds?"

The man looked furtively up and down the misty street. The hour was getting late. That part of

Fleet Street was pretty well deserted ; yet he instinctively drew more into the shadow of the wall.

“ You’re joking, Mr. 'Ookham, sir.”

“ Did you ever know me joke ? ”

“ I can’t say rightly, sir, I ever did.”

“ Then, take my word for it, I’m not joking now. Do you see that ? ” Mr. Hookham held out the diamond—as he had done in his brief interview with Mr. Clisby—between his thumb and finger. “ Do you know what that is ? ”

Larry shook his head.

“ That’s a diamond.”

“ A diamond, is it ? ”

Larry sighed.

“ That’s one of the finest diamonds in the world. It’s worth the ransom of a king—more than twenty thousand pounds.”

“ That’s a ’eap of money, sir, for a little thing like that.”

“ It is a heap of money, yet what I tell you is true. You ask me for a copper. I give you this. Take it.” Mr. Hookham held out the diamond, but Larry shrank away. “ What’s the matter with the fool ? Why don’t you take it ? ”

“ I don’t think, sir, diamonds is in my way.”

“ What do you mean—in your way ? Aren’t twenty thousand pounds in your way ? and you could get it for that diamond to-morrow.”

“I don't know where I'm going to get it from, unless it's from the landlord o' the 'Dun Cow.' And he wouldn't give it me, that I swear. More like to bash me with a pewter.” Larry sighed again. “And—Mr. 'Ookham?”

“Well?”

“If it's worth all that you say, how comes it, Mr. 'Ookham, sir, you wants to give it me?”

There was a sound—very much like a ripple of musical laughter—which seemed to come from the stone.

“What's that?” said Larry.

“I don't know what it is. Do you hear what I tell you? Take the diamond, you fool!”

Mr. Hookham did not speak at all as though he were bestowing a favour, but rather as though he were issuing an imperious command. Still Larry shrank away.

“If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd rather not.”

Mr. Hookham was thunderstruck.

“Don't you hear that it's worth more than twenty thousand pounds?”

Far from his repetition of the value of the diamond increasing Larry's desire to become its possessor, it seemed rather to act in a contrary direction. He actually commenced to slink away—without even pressing his appeal for a copper!—muttering as he went,—

“ Thank you kindly all the same.”

Mr. Hookham hurried after him. He seized him by the shoulder.

“ Look here, my man, if you don't take this diamond I'll give you into custody for setting fire to Badger's Buildings ! ”

“ Then, sir, you'll be doing me a cruel wrong.”

“ Never mind about that, I'll do it. Now are you going to take this diamond, or am I to summon the police ? ”

Larry looked furtively around. Then he bent forward, almost whispering in Mr. Hookham's ear,—

“ Mr. 'Ookham, sir, did yer nick it ? ”

Mr. Hookham started back.

“ Nick it ! Do you take me for a thief ? ”

“ Well, sir, I don't rightly know, but I do know this—if it's worth anything like the 'arf of what you say it is, nor yet the quarter, nor yet tuppence, unless there's something uncommon queer about it some'ow, you wouldn't want to give it me, I know you too well for that.”

Again there came the sound which they had 'heard before—like the ripple of musical laughter. Again it seemed to come from the stone. Larry crossed himself.

“ What's that ? ” he gasped. Mr. Hookham could see that he was shivering even more than he had been before,—this time with a different kind

of "shakes." "I do believe the devil's in the thing!"

No sooner had the words been spoken—which they were with a degree of earnestness which was ludicrous even—than there rang out, through the misty air of Fleet Street, what was surely one of the most musical bursts of laughter which ever yet was heard. There was no mistake about it this time, for it lasted both loud and long. Mr. Hookham stared at the diamond, from the heart of which it seemed that the merriment proceeded, in dumb amazement. Long before the laughter ceased Larry was out of sight. At the first round of that laughter he had fairly taken to his heels and fled. When Mr. Hookham perceived that this was so, "Curse the thing!" he cried, after the manner of the transpontine villains. "Can't it even be given away?"

But such a supposition was, on the face of it, absurd. Not only had Matthew stated, in his letter, that it could be given, but the mere hearing of Samuel's resolution to give it had depressed his spirits even as a ghost. If he had not been fully aware that it could be given away, whence his depression? If Mr. Hookham had twice attempted, and twice failed, it was owing, first, to the pure natural "cussedness" of the thing, and, second, to his own bad choice of a subject to whom it might be given. Mr. Clisby was drunk, and, as Mr. Hookham came to think of it, he was

persuaded that it was owing to the liquor that was in him, rather than to his desire to commit robbery with violence, that "pore James" had landed himself on top of him. If Mr. Hookham had only had a little patience "pore James" might have been the proud possessor of a diamond worth more than twenty thousand pounds, instead of being on the road to durance vile. His impatience was blunder number one.

As for Larry—he was mad! As superstitious as a pig, Mr. Hookham told himself, though of the amount of superstition to be found in the porcine nature he was perhaps scarcely qualified to judge. Then, if he had told him that it was worth twopence—as Larry had himself suggested—instead of twenty thousand pounds— But, in fact, in his interview with Larry he had blundered throughout.

On the other hand, as he walked past the Law Courts towards the Strand, Mr. Hookham began to realise that it might not, from the very nature of things, be easy to give away a diamond worth more than twenty thousand pounds. Where he was now a stream of people was continually passing by. He could not stop the first and say,—

"Here's a diamond! Take it—with my blessing."

Larry had suggested he had "nicked" it. The stranger might make the same suggestion in a more disagreeable fashion still. He decided that he would wait until he came upon a beggar; then he would slip



it into his hand, as though it were of no account,— a halfpenny, or some small coin. Before the beggar could discover what it was that had been given him, the donor would have mingled with the crowd and be out of sight. It was rather an unostentatious mode of bestowing such a princely gift, but Mr. Hookham felt in a particularly unostentatious mood just then.

As he got farther and farther into the Strand he found it thronged with the usual variegated multitude which crowds that thoroughfare at night. The throng was a little thinner, perhaps, than it generally is on a summer night, for the elements were unpropitious, but still there were enough and to spare. There were the women who are ironically called "gay,"—one of them addressed herself to Mr. Hookham. He had a sudden impulse to give the stone to her. So far as could be seen in the uncertain light she was a pretty creature, simply dressed, young and innocent-looking,—there are some of them like that. What a fortune twenty thousand pounds would be to her! But Mr. Hookham thought better of it. He passed on. There were some boys selling the latest editions of the evening papers.

"The Sphinx's Cave Mystery! The Devil's Diamond Performs in Court!"

The words fell on Mr. Hookham's ears like shot corns. There was a tiny urchin dancing about on the curbstone like a demon in the pantomime. He had a

bundle of papers under his arm. He held out the contents bill in front of him. It was not difficult, in spite of the defective light, to make out what was on it. The words which the lad was vociferating were displayed in letters black, bold, and burly. Seeing Mr. Hookham pause, the lad thrust a paper into his hand.

“Ere yer har, sir!” The words were gabbled with the orthodox rapidity. “Hextra Speshil!”

Mr. Hookham felt in his pockets for a coin. They were empty. He had come out penniless.

“I don’t want your paper,” he said.

But if he did not want it, others did. The lad was doing a roaring trade.

A little farther on another newsboy was proclaiming the attractions of a rival print,—*The Midnight News*.

“The Devil’s Diamond Plays the Devil’s own Games!”

The newsboy roared out each word separately with the full strength of a very powerful pair of lungs. As he heard them Mr. Hookham’s blood congealed—this was fame! If he were only to reveal his own identity! If some acquaintance were only to announce that the veritable owner of the Devil’s Diamond was at that moment threading his way through the curious crowd! If he were only to be detected with the stone in his hand what a sensation there would be!

He turned down one of the streets which lead from the Strand to the river, slinking along it as though he

were a fugitive from justice. What was he to do with the accursed stone? He dare not give it away. Suppose he were detected in the act—what fresh tragedy might not take place amidst the tumult which would probably ensue?

He reached the Embankment. The cool air from the river whispered past his cheeks. A thought suddenly occurred to him—a thought which seemed to him as though it were an inspiration. Why not give the diamond to the river? Why not present it, with his love, to the guardian of the waters? He paused. He leaned on the stone parapet. He looked out across the stream. A policeman sauntered by, eyeing him keenly as he passed. He apparently suspected him of harbouring nefarious designs,—possibly of suffering from an attack of suicidal mania, and of an intention to take advantage of the foggy night. Mr. Hookham was conscious of a wild impulse urging him to give the stone to the policeman, but experience had taught him that it would be unwise to yield to such an impulse as that.

He poised the diamond on the centre of the palm of his hand.

“I give you to the river!”

He hurled it, with all his force, out over the misty waste of waters. It gave a little scream, as of rage as it passed through the air. Then he heard it fall, with a splash, into the stream.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### GIVEN—TO WHOM?

THERE were several visitors to Mr. Hookham's chambers in Mitre Court during the course of the following day. But all of these went away, if not mourning, then at least without having attained the object of their coming, for Mr. Hookham was invisible. The oak was sported, and no amount of hammering produced the slightest effect. If Mr. Hookham was at home, it was not to visitors.

The same thing happened on the next day: people came, and went dissatisfied away. Only on that day a card was affixed, in a prominent position, to the oak, on which was written—

“Mr. Samuel Hookham will be at home to-morrow.”

On that morrow, at a quite matutinal and most unfashionable hour, certain visitors returned again; there were two of them, M. and Madame Nurvetchky. Young as the day was, the oak, unsported, stood hospitably open. A tap upon the panel of the inner

door produced an invitation—from within—to enter. M. and Madame Nurvetchky entered.

The room was not at all in the condition in which we saw it last. It was as neat as it was possible, with the appliances Mr. Hookham had at hand, to make it. All the *débris* had disappeared, everything was in its proper place, the spirit of order permeated the apartment. Still, in spite of that, it was not a cheerful room, even for the simplest of millionaires, and, although, in some mysterious way, a ray of sunshine had straggled through the casement.

Mr. Hookham was seated at the oak table—which table was neatly arranged in due and decorous order. He was writing. As his visitors entered he looked up at them. It was immediately apparent that his appearance had improved with the appearance of the room. His clothes were certainly not of the latest fashion, either as regards cut, hue, or texture. Nor were they exactly new. But they were neat and tidy. For one thing, he had had a wash. His hands were clean, his hair was decently brushed and parted at the side, his boots were blacked, so much of his shirt and collar as was visible evinced a quite recent acquaintance with the tender mercies of a laundress—a genuine laundress, not one of “pore James’” mother’s stamp.

Madame Nurvetchky entered with a radiant smile—that charming smile which she seemed to be able to summon up at will. She advanced to Mr. Hookham

with both hands held out. Laying down his pen, without rising from his seat, Mr. Hookham contented himself with very gingerly touching one.

“How do you do, Madame Nurvetchky?” His voice was cold, quiet, and self-possessed—the voice of the Mr. Hookham who used to be in pre-historic times. He nodded to the lady’s husband, who, as usual, seemed more than half asleep, and not nearly so radiant as his wife.

“How do *you* do?” exclaimed the lady. “My dear friend, these two days we came to have a peep at you, and these two days we went broken-hearted away.”

“Indeed!”

Mr. Hookham passed his hand across his chin in a casual kind of way. Evidently the lady’s broken heart had no interest for him. She went radiantly on.

“Do you know that you have reached the topmost pinnacle of fame?”

“Fame? I see some libels in the papers”—Mr. Hookham laid his hand on a pile of neatly-folded newspapers which was at his side—“if you call that fame.”

“Libels! Why, the newspapers are full of nothing else but you. Is that not to be famous? What, then, do you call fame?”

“I am afraid I am not good at definitions. You will find a dictionary somewhere in the room.”

“May I come in?” The door was opened again.

Some one put his head in. It was Mr. Leicester. His request not being answered by an immediate negative, he took silence for consent, and entered. "Mr. Hookham, I am glad to see you. On each of the last two days I have endeavoured to do so, but each time I found you were invisible."

Mr. Hookham did not answer,—he merely nodded his head. Madame Nurvetchky turned to Mr. Leicester.

"I have been telling our friend that the newspapers have made him famous, and he talks of libel!"

"Fame, from a newspaper point of view, is sometimes synonymous with libel." Mr. Leicester turned from the lady to address himself to Mr. Hookham. "Has the diamond favoured you with any further manifestations?"

"Oh, the dear diamond!" cried the lady, and she clasped her hands.

"Has it materialised again?"

"Mr. Hookham, we are in treaty for Olympia; we have arranged for letter blocks twelve feet in height,—'The Devil's Diamond,'—just those three words, no more. When shall we announce its reappearance? This week, or next? We only wait for a word from you to have everything *en train*."

Mr. Hookham had been bending over what he had been writing. He now looked up with a little start, as though he had not been paying attention to what was being said.

“Of what are you speaking?”

“Of the Devil’s Diamond,—the dear, dear diamond!”

“The Devil’s Diamond?” Mr. Hookham knit his brows, as though he were endeavouring to recall something to his mind. “Do you allude to that stone I had?”

“Stone you had!” cried Mr. Leicester.

“Stone you had!” exclaimed Madame.

M. Nurvetchky ran his fingers through his moustache, as another man, a commonplace person, runs his fingers through his hair. Mr. Percy Leicester leaned over the table; he was evidently in an agitated frame of mind.

“Have you lost it?”

“Was it stolen?” screamed Madame.

Mr. Hookham leaned back in his chair. He was evidently quite at his ease, and apparently not much interested either.

“Lost? No, no. Nor was it stolen. I gave it away.”

Gave it away?” chorused his three visitors, as it were with a single breath,—this time even M. Nurvetchky found his voice.

“Yes,” repeated Mr. Hookham quietly, as though he were a trifle bored, “I gave it away.”

Mr. Percy Leicester, who seemed to have lost his equilibrium for once in a way, caught Mr. Hookham by the shoulder.



"Whom did you give it to?" he asked.

"I am afraid you ask more than I can tell you."

"More than you can tell me? Do you mean that you gave it to a stranger?"

"A perfect stranger."

"Where? Here? Or in the street?"

"In the street."

The trio of visitors looked at each other in profound amazement. Their number had been recruited by the arrival of two more. Mr. Fairlight and Mr. Schwabe had come in together. Mr. Fairlight now came forward.

"So you have given it away? I have looked in on my way to the office. The best thing you could do with it."

Mr. Schwabe also advanced. He slapped his friend, in his hearty way, upon the back.

"The best thing you could have done with it, Hookham, my boy; I wish the present owner joy of it, although it is worth more than twenty thousand pounds!"

But Mr. Leicester did not seem to be at all of the same mind.

"I shall advertise for the present owner to apply to me. To allow such a stone to be lost to the cause of scientific inquiry would be a crime unparalleled in history."

"I don't think," observed Mr. Fairlight, "you need

advertise for the owner. If the stone maintains its character, I should say that, very shortly, he will advertise himself."

"But—consider!" Madame Nurvetchky stretched out her arms in that expressive and excitable way she had. "It is not to be believed! We are pledged to produce the Devil's Diamond! We are in treaty for Olympia! We have already ordered the letter blocks twelve feet in height! What, then, is to become of us?"

She paused for a reply. For some moments there was none forthcoming. Then Mr. Hookham gently shook his head, and half closed his eyes,—as though the subject was wholly without attractions for him.

"I am not good at riddles," he said.

## CHAPTER XX.

MR. HOOKHAM PREPARES HIS FUN SOME DISTANCE IN  
ADVANCE.

WHEN his visitors had gone—and there were quite a number of dramatic little scenes before they went—Mr. Hookham returned to his writing. He was writing something on a sheet of blue foolscap paper. When he had finished he read what he had written, revising and correcting as he read. Then he made a clean copy of the “revise” on another sheet of paper. When he had done that, laying down his pen he leaned back in his chair.

This is what he had written :—

“ £20,000.—Lost : A Diamond ! On the night of Wednesday, the 5th of July, 18—, I, Samuel Hookham, threw into the River Thames a diamond. The diamond is known as the ‘ Devil’s Diamond,’ and is of the value of more than twenty thousand pounds. I was standing on the Embankment, in front of the Savoy Hotel. I tossed it, as I judge, straight in front of me, a distance of some thirty feet. It was at half tide, and the tide was coming in. I desire, after I am

dead, that this advertisement shall appear, daily, in four of the leading papers, until the diamond is found. And I further desire that the finder, on presenting himself at the office of the undermentioned firm of solicitors, with the Diamond, shall be paid the sum of One Hundred Pounds weekly, so long as it remains in his possession. A clause will be found in my will setting apart, for that special purpose, a sum sufficient to make such payments."

Mr. Hookham picked up from the table the sheet of blue foolscap paper, and contemplated it with what was, apparently, considerable satisfaction.

"I'll sign it, and have it witnessed. And when I'm dead it shall appear, regularly, in the papers. Plenty of fools will soon set about looking for the stone. When one of them has found it, as Matthew said he'd do I'll come back and see the fun. Only I'll do the thing more cleverly than Mat,—I won't spoil myself by showing my hand. Properly managed, I ought to have quite a lively time."

Mr. Hookham laid down the paper again, and rubbed his hands softly,—one against the other. The spasm which distorted his saturnine visage was possibly intended for a smile. But then his idea of a smile was about on a par with what seemed to be his idea of a lively time.

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