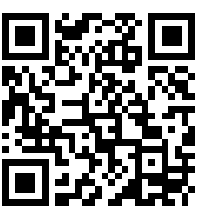

THE MOMENT AFTER.

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THE MOMENT AFTER:

A TALE OF THE UNSEEN.

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

ὦ θάνατε πâιαν !

LONDON:
WILLIAM HEINEMANN.
1890.

PROEM.

I.

BETWEEN the Dead and the Living the veil of the glamour lies,
But softly it melts asunder, just as the Spirit flies.

Wait by the bed of the Dying, wait till the last sharp breath,
Then sit in the silence, watching the eyes that are closed in Death.

Thinkest thou all is o'er, now thy heart stands still for fear?
Nay, something stirs in the silence!—listen, and thou mayst hear!

Thou art closed around by the glamour, its darkness covers thy head,—
But something walks in the chamber, and looks in the face of the Dead!

Wait for a little season—be patient yet for a day—
Before the breath of *thy* going, the veil shall dissolve away;

Thou too shalt stir in the darkness, no man dreaming thee nigh,
And look on thy worn white raiment, before they put it by!

II.

Hast thou counted the stars? hast thou measured the mastodon's bed in the stone?
Rejoice, thou art wise who wast foolish! the days of thy dreaming are done!

Hast thou taken the Cross from thy spirit, and lifted the veil from thine eyes?
Hast thou emptied the heavens of their godhead?—Rejoice, for, O Fool, thou art wise!

And now that thou knowest the Heavens and the Earth, the Beginning
and End,
I will tell thee the last great Secret. . . Lie down on thy bed, and
attend!

Thou lookest, but dost not listen—thou seest, but dost not rejoice—
Thou pickest the coverlit moaning, and shuttest thine ears to my voice.

I bend to thine ear and whisper—thou turnest away with a tear. . .
'Tis but a childish Secret, yet all thou hast yet to hear!

Gather thy senses a moment, and listen, low on thy bed. . .
Now, hearken!—Alas, thou hast fallen asleep, ere the Secret is said!

THE MOMENT AFTER.

CHAPTER I.

"As the scaffold crashed under my feet, as the knot crushed my throat, and a great sharp agony blotted out the bubbling life within me, I heard a roaring as of a tumultuous ocean covering and submerging me; *the moment after*"

. . . . . .

Having read thus far, Redbrook paused somewhat pale; and, simultaneously the bells of the neighbouring church rang out in jubilation—for it was Christmas morning. He looked up—listening. "Peace on earth, goodwill to men!" rang out the bells. If

he heard them at all, it was only as if in a dream; his thoughts were evidently far away.

The light crept in through the window of the room, and shone full upon his powerful features, with their eyeballs somewhat sunken in cavernous sockets. A hard, weatherbeaten face, yet with flying gleams of humour round the edges of the lips. Handsome, too, and still young; though the hair and beard showed straggling gleams of grey.

With an impatient gesture, he passed his hand over his eyes, and then, bending over the manuscript, read on. It was a rough scrawl, so wildly written as to be exceedingly difficult to read; but, clearly it possessed some unusual interest. As he read, he seemed to be held in fascination.

He read on to the end; and then, turning

back to the beginning, read on to the end again. . . . "Peace on earth, goodwill to men!" rang the bells.

The skeleton of a marmoset, standing on the mantelpiece side by side with the skeleton of a human fœtus preserved in spirits of wine, seemed to be gravely regarding itself in the mirror. All round were shelves covered with bottles and phials used in a country doctor's dispensary. The room, indeed, was half-dispensary—or surgery—and half study; for in one corner was a small well-filled bookcase. A bright fire burned in the grate. Outside, the snow was thickly falling.

Redbrook sat at his bureau, facing the window. From that position he could see the gloomy walls of Fordmouth Prison, looming darkly through the falling flakes.

Nervously, almost impatiently, he threw the manuscript down, rose, and began pacing up and down the chamber.

"It is a strange business!" he reflected. "What is most strange of all, is the man's transformation! His tale, such as it is, one may easily refer to diseased cerebration, caused by the horrible shock of that frightful experience; it is not so easy to understand the sudden cessation of the devilish instinct within him."

He raised the manuscript again, and read—

"*The moment after*"

. . . . .

"Peace on earth, good will to men!" rang out the bells. Glancing sidelong towards the window, he saw a slight dark figure moving silently through the snow in the direction of

the prison, and recognised the Rev. Charles Shadwell, the prison chaplain, a pale, spare, clean-shaven man, more resembling a priest of the Roman church than an English clergyman. Quietly, swiftly, with head erect, Shadwell moved through the whiteness of the storm.

"Confound the fellow!" muttered Redbrook. "He haunts the place like a ghost, with as keen a scent for human misery as a vulture has for carrion! I wonder what *he* has to say to this nightmare?"

As he spoke the chaplain approached the prison gates, and vanished within them.

"This will never do!" cried the doctor, looking at his watch. "I must be off upon my rounds, and see if a little sunshine and fresh oxygen will put my nerves in order. I feel as superstitious as an old woman."

So saying, he locked the manuscript in his bureau, and, walking out into the lobby, put on his greatcoat, hat, and gloves, and opened the street door. As he did so he found himself face to face with one of the warders from the prison who saluted him in military fashion, and said—

"You are wanted at once, doctor. . . . Something wrong again in the condemned cell."

CHAPTER II.

In the month of September, 18—, five years before Dr. Redbrook perused the curious manuscript quoted from in my opening chapter, a small shop was opened in one of the narrow streets running at right angles from the shipping port of Fordmouth. The neighbourhood was one of ill repute, the street itself the dingiest and dreariest in an ill-smelling and amphibious quarter, and the shop one of many around it devoted to the sale of marine stores and sailor's clothing. Black and yellow tarpaulins, dingy suits of all sizes, sou'westers, jackboots, were hung in the narrow doorway, articles of the same kind, varied with sample stores of all descrip-

tions, were heaped inside the window, and inside, behind the counter, were flotsam and jetsam of every kind, from jack-knives and squeejees up to a delapidated wooden female bust, which looked like a broken-nosed heathen idol, but had once been part of the figurehead of a foreign brigantine.

Over the shop door was painted in rough letters the words

MAURIZIO MODENA,
Ship's Stores and General Dealer;

and behind the counter, when the shop opened, there appeared the figure of Maurizio Modena himself, tall, gaunt, with jet black hair and beard, full red lips, and a complexion of spectral pallor.

As the name betokened, he was an Italian, and his complexion and features,

combined with a certain dead far-off expression in his large black eyes, showed him to be of Jewish origin. How he had drifted thither, when he had first determined to fight for life in that dismal place, what his antecedents were and whence he had saved the sum of money necessary to start him in that miserable business, no one seemed to know, and still fewer to care. He appeared suddenly, like a spider in the middle of a web, and waited, as it were, for prey.

Yet the few people who ventured into the shop, whether neighbours attracted by curiosity or belated customers of amphibious breed, found him a gentle inoffensive man, who spoke very little English, but managed, with a certain foreign grace of manner, to make himself understood. His age was

midway between thirty and forty, though sometimes he looked much older. He had a high, narrow, not unintellectual forehead, wore a black moustache and beard reaching to his bosom, and had thin, delicate, wax-like hands.

Before he had been many months in that vicinity, it was well known to his neighbours that he added to his shrewdness in bargaining and patient devotion to the petty details of his trade, a certain empirical skill in preparing drugs which men and women of the nautical class found mysteriously effective. As this branch of his business was illegal, and conflicted with the interests of authorised druggists and practitioners, it was conducted with some secresy, but was nevertheless a source of no little profit and a great deal of reputa-

tion. The result was that, in the course of a couple of years, Modena had acquired a very considerable sum of money. What he did with it, whether he made it the basis of other investments, or suffered it to accumulate in some bank at ordinary interest, was a mystery, like everything else concerning him, but the popular idea was that the money was hidden away somewhere in a mysterious back parlour, where the Italian ate his frugal meals, and slept. Still, though desperate characters swarmed on every side, no attempt was ever made to rob Modena of his hidden treasure. There was something in his manner, despite all its gentleness and equanimity, which convinced even desperadoes that to lay violent hands on his possessions would be a baleful business.

There was another source of profit in addition to those which I have mentioned, and one which was also, to a certain extent, illegal. From time to time, when the occasion offered, Modena advanced small sums of money on portable property or approved security. Many a wild mariner, having spent all his savings in the grog-shop and parted with everything he possessed, reverted to the little shop to get an advance on the papers he had signed for his next voyage. Not a few of such loans turned out badly, those who incurred them vanishing into space and never returning, but others yielded in the long run an enormous interest. A particular transaction of this kind has now to be recorded, as it led directly to the tragedy which it is the business of this book to narrate, and the consequences of which

were, from whatever point of view they may be regarded, in the highest degree extraordinary.

Late one evening, Maurizio Modena sat reading behind the counter by the light of a flaming jet of gas, which flickered and blazed in the wind sweeping through the open door. The street was noisy with the voices of men and women coming and going, and from time to time there was the sound of a man's fierce oath and a woman's shriek. Undisturbed by sounds long familiar, the Italian pored over his book,—an old volume in mediæval Latin, dealing with the qualities and uses of common herbs. So intent was he in the perusal, that he did not notice the entrance of a customer, until, raising his eyes quietly, he saw a weather-beaten face looking down at him,—the face of a young man clad

in a sailor's jersey, loose breeches, and boots reaching to the knee.

"Good evening, mate," said the sailor nodding.

"Good evening, signor," replied Modena, quietly closing his book. While scarcely seeming to look at the new-comer, he took in at one glance every detail of his appearance — the young and handsome face disfigured somewhat by days and nights of dissipation, the light beard and moustache tangled and unbrushed, the rough flowing hair without any hat for covering, the saucy mouth bruised and swollen by a recent blow, marks on the bare neck and breast as of a woman's finger-nails, and in addition to all these physical signs, a general recklessness of demeanour suggestive of semi-intoxication, and a disposition, in beginning the conver-

sation, to touch with trembling fingers the handle of the sailor's knife thrust through his leathern belt.

Modena rose and waited, surveying the sailor through long half-closed lashes.

"Well, mate," said the young man, with a nervous scowl, "it ain't no use beating about the bush. I want some brass, and I've *got* to have it, that's about it. We don't sail for a week, and I'm cleared out, old man!"

The Italian smiled.

"Ah, you are of the sea. *Altro!* You have a ship?"

"No mistake," was the reply. "The *Matamora* down there, unloading, and she's going back in ballast to Brazil. My name's Phil Barton, from Sandford, and them's my articles for next voyage out and home."

He drew the papers from his guernsey, and threw them on the counter. Modena took them up and glanced over them, then handing them back to their owner, he said gently—

"Pardon, but I do not understand. What is it you wish me to do?"

"Oh, stow that, mate," cried the sailor, striking the counter with his clenched fist. "We know all about it! What d'ye take me for? Some beechcomber, eh? Didn't you vittle Billy Somers, when he was last in port, and take nothing for it but Billy's I.O.U.?"

"And he did repay me," returned Modena, shrugging his shoulders, "by never coming back to land!"

"Washed overboard," said the sailor nodding.

"So I did lose my money—*Altro!* Come into my parlour, and I will talk to you."

So saying, he led the way into the room behind the shop—a dingy den, lighted by a swinging ship's lamp and containing, besides a truckle bed, more flotsam and jetsam of the sea. On the mantelpiece were several ugly-looking bottles with Latin labels, and a number of yellow, worm-eaten books.

The sailor followed him, and closing the door placed his back against it, and stood surveying the apartment. There was a curious look on his face, as his eyes turned hither and thither, in search, no doubt, of the mysterious box which was popularly supposed to contain the Italian's treasure.

"You want money?" said Modena. "And vat for do you want money? Ah, yes, I know—to spend!—on de grog-shop, on de

ladies! I know, I know—it would go like de rest, and then"——

He shrugged his shoulders, and took from the chimney-piece an old, metal tobacco-box, which he opened, showing a glimpse of several gold pieces mixed up with silver. The sailor's eyes glittered—

"How much you want?" asked Modena, looking at him with his keen eyes half shadowed by his heavy brows.

"Two quid," returned Barton.

"Quid? ah yes! Two pounds. There will be interest!"

"I know," said the sailor, with a drunken laugh. "You ain't the first landshark I've met."

Modena restored the box to its place, fished out from some dark corner of the room an inkbottle, a pen, and a half-sheet

of dirty paper, and wrote out a form in a not unclerkly hand.

"Put your name there." He indicated the spot with a long waxen forefinger. The sailor, handling the pen as if it had equalled a hedgestake in size and weight, scrawled a clumsy hieroglyphic, and tossed the paper back. He might have signed a pact delivering him body and soul to the other's mercy, for all he knew of the purport of the document. Modena took the two gold pieces from the box and gave them to him. He shook them in his fist with a drunken motion of triumph.

"Come out and wet your whistle, old man," he said, when he again found himself in the outer shop. "Eh?" He did not wait for an answer, nor heed the Italian's excusatory shrug, but suddenly stumbled a step

or two forward, and with his hands to his mouth gave a call which made the rafters ring. "Kitty! Ahoy!"

A female figure, which had a second before flitted past the shop door, returned and stood for a minute at the threshold. The light within the shop fell on her face and figure, and lit them up in strong relief against the darkness of the squalid street. She was tall and fully built, black eyed and black browed, and as she peered into the shop she stood poised in an attitude of stolid and unconscious grace such as women who pass their lives in free exercise of the limbs in the open air can naturally assume. She obviously belonged to the same class as her drunken acquaintance, her dress was poor, her face tanned with sun and wind, but she was undeniably handsome, and something like a

native refinement, of which he showed no trace, was visible in her aspect.

"All right," cried Barton. "Lie to a bit, I've got the brass. Come out and have a gill with me and Kitty," he continued, turning to the Italian.

The latter, with his eyes on the girl, shook his head.

"There's no luck in dry bargains, and if you won't go to the liquor, by ——, the liquor shall come to you. Here, Kitty! go to the Dragon, and get us some of the right stuff."

"Why should I run your errands?" asked the girl.

"Why?" echoed Barton. "Why?"

For a moment he seemed on the verge of brutality in word or act, but went on with a sudden change of manner.

"Because you're the right sort, and because it's me asks you. Here y'are."

He thrust the coin into the girl's hand, and after a scarcely perceptible hesitation, she went.

"What d'ye think o' that for a donna?" Barton asked of Modena, and began to maunder a verse of a sailor's song in praise of a name-sake of the girl's. "Now then, old lantern jaws," he resumed, as the girl re-entered with a flask of rum, "where's your manners? I find the liquor, you find something to put our hind ends on."

Habituated to the eccentricities of his clients, Modena silently led the way to the back-room, standing aside with southern courtesy to allow his guests precedence of entry. Barton staggered in, with his lips to the bottle, and bestowed himself on

the bed. Kitty, invited thereto by a wave of Modena's hand, took the only chair. Modena remained standing.

"Sup, my lass," said Barton, handing the bottle to the girl. She shook her head with a little *moue* of repulsion, and handed it to Modena.

"More o' your tricks," said Barton. "You'd think as she'd never heard the name of rum, wouldn't you, and she can take her whack along of any body. Want to catch this old figurehead, eh, my lady? Rum ain't good enough for *you*." He laughed with drunken sarcasm, then, rising in sudden anger, snatched the bottle from the Italian and presented it anew to the girl. "Drink, ye baggage, when I tell you!"

His manner was so threatening that

Modena, stepping between them, laid a hand upon his shoulder. The touch was not a heavy one, but it overwhelmed him, and he fell back upon the bed. He struggled up, purple in the face, but with his brief anger quite forgotten, and began a wandering encomium of Modena, whom he declared to be his only friend thirty seconds before he challenged him to fight. This offer being silently refused, he drank confusion to all cowardly land-lubbers, and then becoming amorous, called to Kitty to come and sit upon his knee. That invitation meeting no response, he sulkily betook himself to the bottle, and after an interval of inarticulate maundering varied by alternate oaths and laughter, fell into a sodden sleep.

"Sleep do him good," said Modena

to the girl. He felt a curious longing to hear her voice again. "You know him? Friend of yours?"

"He is my cousin," said Kitty. "He goes away next week."

"You live here?" asked Modena.

"No, I live at Morton, three miles out yonder."

"Morton, yes, I know. I have walked there, Sunday. Very pretty."

"It's very dull," said the girl, with a shrug. "I'd rather live here, in the town. There's something to keep you alive here, with the ships, and the sailors, and the people in the streets. This is a funny place," she added, looking round the room. "Have you lived here long?"

"One year."

"You're not an Englishman?"

"No, I come from Napoli, what you call Naples."

"Naples," repeated the girl. "Where's that? In France?"

"No, in Italy. You, Signorina, you have not the air—how you say it?—look not like English. No, Italian."

"Are the Italian girls pretty?" She asked the question with a little coquettish smile, revealing a sudden glimpse of sparkling teeth.

"Altro!" said Modena, with a smile as sudden and bright as her own, which so changed his sombre face as to leave it scarcely recognisable.

"Then I suppose you'll be going back there soon?" with the smile yet lingering demurely about her mouth.

"No," he answered. "Not go back,

stay here. Italy," he said, slowly picking his way through this longer sentence, "not the only country where live the pretty women."

It was said with that native and subtle grace which the poorest bred Italian shares with his countrymen of all grades, and which makes him show so well beside the vulgar of other nations. And then, Modena was not vulgar, even for a poor Italian. The girl began to think him a very handsome and agreeable man.

"And so," he said, "you live at Morton?"

"Yes, our cottage is just beyond the church. There's the ribs of an old boat sticking up in the sand, close by." She gave this information in the most simple and natural fashion in the world. "I must be going, it's getting late. What about

him?" she asked, glancing to where Phil Barton lay slumbering.

"Sleep good for him. Wake by-and-bye, and go."

"Good-night," she said, extending her hand, after a purposed hesitation. Modena took it, and bending quickly, kissed it. She snatched it away with a little laugh, and ran out of the shop. He followed to the door, and stood looking down the dark and noisome street, long after her tall, lithe figure had disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER III.

It was some two months later, in the full heart of summer, when Maurizio Modena came out early one morning into the street, and after carefully locking the door of his shuttered shop, and pocketing the key, walked briskly away. It was Sunday, and a certain atmosphere of Sabbath calm had fallen on the town. Children, unwashed, unkempt, but happy, sprawled on the pavement under the eyes of their mothers, who sat knitting, mending nets, preparing vegetables for the family dinner, or engaged in other household tasks at their thresholds, while the men lounged against the door jambs at their sides, placidly smoking, or

talked in bands in the roadway. Most of them had a nod or word for the Italian, as he stepped lightly along. He was smartly dressed in a new pea-jacket garnished with gilt buttons, a pair of spotless duck trousers, a blue checked flannel shirt, a flaring cravat of vivid scarlet, and an incongruous tall hat, carefully brushed. Fordmouth was not inclined to be finickingly critical on minor points of sartorial art, and thought well of the general effect of Modena's appearance, as did the simple fellow himself. He had not hitherto been known as a dressy man, and the care he had suddenly displayed in his appearance had given rise to considerable discussion in the quarter. Its general reason was obvious enough, but what Modena's neighbours wanted to know, and were not long in discovering, was the

identity of the lady whose charms had converted the shabbily dressed foreign recluse into a kind of local Beau Brummel.

It was noticeable that the improvement in Modena's appearance was almost purely one of dress. If his face had changed at all, it was even more sombre than it had been two months earlier, before the radiant vision of Catherine Merrick had suddenly dawned on the dingy horizon of the poor street in which he dwelt. His great black eyes had an added wistfulness, his cheeks were gaunt and pallid as of old, the momentary smile with which he answered the salutations of his neighbours seemed a purely mechanical muscular effort. He walked with a certain feverish quickness of step, as if in haste to get out of the town, and away from the curious glances

which he felt around him, even when he did not see them.

"He looks as if he was going to bury the gal instead of to court her," remarked one old salt, clad in a shining armour of fish scales.

"Better for him if he was, p'raps," said his wife.

"That's a bitter word, missis," said the old man. "What's the matter with the gal? She's comely enough, and strong enough, and healthy enough."

"Ah! there's more things than strength and comeliness," returned the woman, who was better dowered with the former quality than with the latter. "She's over thick with that drinking lazy ne'er-do-well as went to Brazil the other day, and more of his sort, for my fancy, if I was a man and wanted a wife."

"I don't know as there's much harm in Phil Barton, tho' he's a bit too fond of the liquor, may be. And he's her cousin, missis."

"Ah!" said the woman again, and for the moment said no more.

"He's fur enough away by this time," said the husband, "and getting further every minute."

"The further the better. But he'll come back some day."

"Well, the girl will be safe married by that time," said the old man, who was of a hopeful and optimistic turn of mind.

"Let's hope it'll mend her ways," said the woman, in none too hopeful a tone. "It's better to trip going up the church steps than coming down 'em, I've heard people say."

This brief conversation may be taken as giving the gist of a dozen others of like import held between Modena's neighbours on that and many previous Sunday mornings, as he had passed along the straggling street leading out of the little seaport. A man less reserved could hardly have failed to learn more than he knew of the public opinion on his promised bride, and of the opinions of his neighbours regarding his chances of happiness in his wedded life. Whether such a knowledge would have stirred him one hair's breadth from the path in which he had elected to walk, except to take such vengeance as he might upon the slanderers of the woman he loved, is more than doubtful. The rapid pace at which he left the town, his obvious desire to avoid all communication

with his neighbours, had no such meaning as they read in them. Had he known their suspicions of Catherine he would have fiercely resented them, but he neither knew nor cared to know what any living creature thought of her. He was by nature undemonstrative, and years of solitude had made him awkward in all dealings with his fellow men but those which resulted in shillings and pence. He shrank from the free chaff which is as liberally bestowed in Fordmouth as elsewhere upon the man who goes a-courting; his love was a thing too sacred, too apart from any other influence that had touched his hard life to be gossiped over with the men and women among whom he lived, but with whom he had little enough in common in most respects.

He passed the docks, where the ships

and barges lay idly rocking on a faint swell, black against the glittering expanse of water, and came upon a long reach of empty sand, beyond which the spire of a church announced to those who knew the local landmarks, the locality of the village of Morton. He stuck to the shore line, making something of a detour to avoid the village, and having passed it, came in sight of the ribs of the old wreck, which had been his landmark whereby to find Catherine's cottage on his first visit there, nearly two months before. The cottage stood a little beyond, a stone's throw from the church, which stood slightly on the hitherside of the cluster of houses forming the village, and just beyond the line of sand. Modena entered the church, and within the porch came upon Catherine,

standing beside the heavy oaken settle, on which sat an elderly woman, her mother, with a crutch between her knees.

Catherine was dressed in white, and even in the eyes of a man not in love with her, would have looked beautiful. An inexpressible "Ah!" of admiration came from Modena's lips, and his eyes glanced with a sudden tenderness. The girl flushed a little at the simplicity of his pleasure, and submitted to his embrace, repulsing him afterwards with a little smile of warning and a backward turn of her eyes towards the church. He kissed the old woman too, with less rapture, but with some affection and more respect, took her crutch, and supported her into the building and up to the altar steps. A minute later the clergyman and the clerk appeared from the

vestry, and in ten minutes Maurizio Modena and Catherine Merrick were man and wife.

They passed from the church to the cottage in a silence broken only by the subdued sobbing of the elder woman, which Modena heard with many pitying shrugs and appealing glances at his bride, who seemed not to notice it. At last, when Mrs. Merrick was settled in her armchair by the cottage window, and Catherine had retired to change her wedding dress the Italian tried to console her.

"*Ma madre*, it is but for two days we go away. Then we come back to Fordmouth, and Catherine shall visit you so often as you will." His English had become more fluent, though he still spoke with a strong accent. "And you shall not be alone.

I have spoke to the little girl, she come to-night, she come all the days, cook, wash for you. I pay her."

"Bless you," said the old lady, who seemed naturally a cheerful body enough, "it ain't that as I'm crying for. I know as my gal's got a good husband, though you be a foreigner, and it's a lovely wedding gown as you've given her, and you've sent a duck for dinner, and give me this new gown and bonnet, and you're going to pay the little gal to look after me. I know all that, but Lord bless you, I always did cry at weddin's, and it's only natural to cry when your daughter's married."

"In Italy, no. We dance, we sing. We are what you call jolly."

"I thought it was a heathenish kind o' place," said Mrs. Merrick. "But you're a good man, and I believe you'll take care of her. She wants it, poor thing. She's got no father, and me, I ain't much company for a young gal. She was always wishing she could go and live in the town, and I didn't like her going there so often, but that be all right now she's got a husband. Don't let her have her own way too much. It's always bad for young married women, specially when they're as pretty as Kitty is, and she's been a bit sp'iled with being looked at and talked about."

"She is here," said Modena, as the girl came back. Her lover's generosity was obvious in the dress by which she had

replaced the wedding gown, and in the jet ear-rings and necklace she wore. Modena's eyes, their habitual glitter softened by a wistful content, followed her every motion.

CHAPTER IV.

YET another four months had passed, and Modena's marriage with Catherine, after affording a nine days' topic of comment in the street to which he had brought his bride, had become an old story there. To the girl herself also it had become an old story; yielding little of even what poor measure of romance or glamour she had even expected to find in it. There is a quizzical old proverb to the effect that in all affairs of the heart there is one who loves and one who is content to be loved, and however true that may be of couples in general, it was true here. Catherine

was her husband's idol, his one thought and preoccupation, replacing even his books, in which, before meeting her, he had found his only escape from the monotonous and sordid life to which his poverty had bound him. The passion which had sprung to life full-born at the first touch of her hand grew rather than diminished with the passage of time, and if to be loved is, as more than one poet will have us believe, the summit of feminine felicity, Catherine should have been the happiest woman in England. Her word was law, her slightest wish a command, which her husband never dreamed of disobeying. She was not slow to learn the extent of her power over him, which she had indeed known fairly well before the marriage day, and accepted his passionate

love much as she might have taken the affection of an importunate dog.

A dog with a temper of his own, though, and capable, under certain conditions, of shewing his teeth even to his mistress. Catherine learned, early in her married life, what might be the consequences of trespassing too far upon his uxorious indulgence. Within a stone's throw of their house there was an establishment, half tavern, half music hall, to which the working class of Fordmouth owed such ideas of lyric and histrionic art as they possessed. Modena had never set foot within it before his marriage, his national sobriety made the principal *raison d'être* of the place of no attraction to him, his Italian training had given him too fine an appreciation of music for him to be tempted by the tenth-rate imitations of metropolitan

lions comiques whose strident voices dominated the clink of glasses and roar of polyglot profanity with which the cheaply gaudy barrack was nightly filled. But to the untaught and illiterate girl the place was an attraction. She had been there more than once with Phil Barton, and perhaps with others of her admirers. Modena accompanied her there during their first week of married life. Among the raddled, tawdry female frequenters of the place she looked like a queen in her fresh beauty, and her dress—which Modena would have thought vulgar on any other woman, but which, simply because she wore it, was perfect in his eyes—helped the effect she produced. She enjoyed the coarse incense offered in the glances and whispers of her neighbours. Presently, a young fellow, the

mate of a coasting vessel, swaggered into the room, and seeing vacant a place at the table at which Modena and his wife were seated, took it, and with the gallantry of his kind, lost no time in entering into conversation with his pretty neighbour. How much of his rashness was the result of native impudence, and how much of encouragement from Catherine—he was by no means a bad-looking fellow—is doubtful, but within a quarter of an hour of his first accosting her he had made such progress in his advances that he narrowly escaped strangulation by Modena. The girl had never seen her husband stirred by jealousy. He had known no rival during his courtship—another thing than saying he had had none—and this sudden and murderous blaze of jealousy frightened her. She tried to take a high

tone about it when they got home together. If he was going to try to murder every man who looked at her, a nice life she should have!

"It is done with. It is past. It is finished," said Modena. "See that it happens not again."

"Not happen again? How can I help it happening? I couldn't keep the man from admiring me. He isn't the only one, you old stupid."

She would have put her arms about her husband's neck, but he repulsed her.

"You have encourage him," said Modena. "Did I not see? I am not blind."

She broke out into denials, but he silenced her by a smashing blow upon the table.

"Go you to bed. Leave me, that I calm myself."

His glittering eyes and working face frightened her, and she crept away in silence, and for the first time respecting him. But an hour found him sobbing at her feet, entreating her forgiveness. It was only a fool, a boar, an ass, a mule, a hog, like himself, who could have acted so, only such an angel as she who could pardon such an outrage. She forgave him. It is wonderful what some women can forgive. She was very careful, for a little time, not to encourage the admiration of other men too openly in her husband's presence.

What the eye does not see the heart does not grieve for, and though Catherine was as arrant a flirt as ever walked,

Modena knew nothing for a time, and lulled by his wife's apparent affection, suspected nothing. Apart from the jealousy which made the mere presence of a man in his wife's society a torment to him, he was the least exigent of husbands. He did as much household duty after his marriage as before it, for Catherine, in her own phrase, had not married to be made a slave of, and did as little as she could help doing of any domestic task. She had a quick, though untrained business faculty, and liked to chaffer with her husband's rough customers, who fared worse at her hands than they had done at his, though he was a true Italian in his love for the sunny side of a bargain. Her liking for the business jumped with her husband's wishes, for it left him more

time for his reading and other occupations. The business throve, as a business is bound to do when a pretty woman with a cool head stands at the receipt of custom, and Modena thought himself a lucky man. With a desire to please his wife he had had his dingy premises furbished up and painted. A better class of customers than those with whom he had hitherto dealt began to patronise him.

Things went on in a truly halcyon condition for a time, and Modena's jealousy slumbered, though his fondness for his wife increased with every day they passed together. There are natures which seem not to know the meaning of that saddest of all words, satiety, to which every additional hour spent in the society of the loved object, every fresh caress, is a new

tie, and such a nature was Modena's. It would have seemed, to any third person capable of understanding his nature and his wife's, a strange infatuation which bound him to her. Except for a certain hard and sterile sort of beauty, the woman had scarcely a quality which would have seemed likely to captivate a man like Modena. She was as vain as a peacock, and as idle as a cat. But for her love of bargaining, which besides resulting in profit, gave her opportunities for endless chatter with her customers, she was of no nameable service to her husband. She could not perform the easiest household task; even the cooking of a soup, of meat, or the sewing on of a button was beyond her. She had never willingly opened a book in her life, and indeed many a child of six could read

better, and better understand what she read, than Catherine. Yet she had somehow had the power to change the whole tenour of his life, and alter a shy miserly recluse into a complacent husband, who would have given all the money in the old sea-chest which served him as a strongbox, for one smile from his wife. He was none the less happy because he took his bliss quietly, and to the world at large seemed very much the same as he had always been.

It happened one day that he was down at the docks, chaffering for some odds and ends with the captain of a ship then in the port. The bargain had been amicably settled, and in true waterside fashion the parties were in process of ratifying it with a friendly glass.

"And how's Phil?" asked the captain.

He asked the question with a peculiar smile, which Modena passed unnoticed in his momentary wonder at the question.

"Phil?" he repeated. "What Phil? I know no Phil?"

"Don't know your wife's own cousin, man alive?" cried his companion.

"Ah, yes! Phil Barton. I had forgotten him. It is long since I see him. Five, six months. He went to Brazil, on board the *Matamora*."

"But she's back," said the captain.

"Back? I did not know it."

His companion, with one eye closed, scratched a bristly cheek.

"Yes," he said. "The *Matamora's* back. Got into port on Saturday—three days ago. I should ha' thought as Phil would have looked his cousin up, before now. They

were always pretty thick, you know," he added, with a repetition of the smile with which he had spoken Phil's name.

"If he comes," said Modena, "he is welcome." He noticed his companion's expression, but it meant nothing to him. He was the only man in the port who had no inkling of his wife's pre-marital relations with Phil Barton.

"Oh, you'll see him, safe enough," said the captain. "Phil won't leave port without seeing his cousin."

It was already dusk when Modena turned homewards. The lamps were lit in the streets, and the gas flared in the windows of the other shops, but his was dark, and Catherine was not at the window. A sound of voices was audible from the back-room, low and hurried, and now and then

a laugh was heard. Though he could not catch a single word of the conversation, Modena recognised his wife's voice. The other was the deep baritone voice of a man. The quick jealousy which always smouldered perilously near Modena's calm surface blazed out, and before the couple had heard his footstep he was in the room. The lamp had not been lit, the little window at the back shed so faint a light that all he could make out was the figure of his wife standing close beside the dim outline of a man. They fell apart at his entrance, and for a second or two the only sound that broke the stillness was the heavy breathing of Modena as he stood with clenched hands on the threshold.

"How you frightened me!" said Catherine.

"Here's Phil, Maurizio, just come back from sea."

A long, tremulous breath escaped from the Italian's lips. He passed his hand across his forehead, as if brushing away some film which dimmed his sight, before accepting the hand the sailor offered him.

"How goes it, shipmate?" asked Phil.

"I am well. And you? You are back long?"

"Just paid off. I came in here to see you about getting that bit of paper back, and you might ha' knocked me down with a feather when I saw Kittie standing there behind the counter. She asked me in, and we've been having a talk over old times."

By this time Modena had lit the lamp. He looked at Catherine; she was flushed,

and one heavy coil of hair had escaped from the knot in which she had bound it. She did her best to appear at ease, but her eyes only answered the long look her husband bent upon her for a fraction of a second.

"I must go and light the gas in the shop," she said. "I forgot all about it, seeing Phil so unexpected."

She went out, leaving the two men together. The voyage had considerably improved the young fellow's appearance. The tan upon his face was so deep that his light moustache looked almost white in the lamplight, his eye was clear, his motions easy and vigorous, and altogether he presented so complete a contrast with the sodden wretch who had fallen into a drunken sleep in that room six months

ago that it was difficult to believe they were one and the same.

Modena, from a number of similar scraps of paper in his pocket-book, picked out the bond Phil had given him, and having received the sum, handed the paper to the young sailor, who lit his pipe with it. Catherine returning at that moment, Phil proposed that they should drink together in celebration of the double event of their marriage and his return from foreign parts. Modena produced a bottle of rum from among the miscellaneous lumber of his stores. At first he was silent, and joined little in the talk, but warming, apparently under the influence of the liquor, he grew more communicative, and laughed and talked at random, with a flushed face and excited manner. It was late when

Phil left, but Modena declined to accompany Catherine to bed. He would read for an hour or so, he said, and settled himself at the table with a book, till his wife's footsteps were silent overhead. Then he rose, and began to pace the room.

"He is in port three days. He lies to me and says 'Just come home.' She was with him, alone, in the dark. Close together. His arm round her waist. She could not look me in the face. If it should be—that! I must make sure. There must be no mistake."

He thought long, and the grey dawn was glimmering at the window, before he went upstairs, to find Catherine lying peacefully asleep.

CHAPTER V.

JEALOUSY, like all great passions, when thoroughly aroused, knows how to wait, and the keenest eye would not have detected from Modena's manner during the next few days that any unwonted thoughts occupied his mind. He went about his daily business as usual, and his manner to Catherine underwent no change. Phil Barton came a great deal to the shop, passing there most of the waking hours not monopolised by the public house. Modena made him welcome, drank with him, and one night, under protest of feeling unwell, permitted him to go alone with

Catherine to the theatre. His manner, saturnine and reserved with others, was friendly and even affectionate with Phil. Phil, he said, was the man to whom he owed his happiness; he would never have known Catherine but for him. Neither the false wife nor her paramour suspected anything beneath this parade of friendly feeling, it was so admirably acted, and Phil, even in Modena's presence, indulged in loutish sarcasms regarding the husband's blindness. Before a week had passed, assurance was doubly sure in the Italian's mind. A casual visit to old Mrs. Merrick resulted in the knowledge that for the last fortnight she had not seen her daughter, though three and four times a week Catherine had asked and obtained leave to visit the old woman. Modena knew

that his shame was public property, he felt it in every look that greeted him in the street, in the whispering and laughter which followed his footsteps. But he gave no sign, and the volcanic wrath with which his breast was bursting waited its time. He even took a sullen pleasure in watching his own quiescence, and in wondering how long it would last.

He laid plans by the dozen for bringing his wife and Phil together and surprising them, but their lack of feasibility, or some accident, delayed their execution, till at last chance put a weapon in his hands. The captain of a coasting vessel, who had left a chronometer in pledge with him for an accommodation of money, wrote to him from a seaport some fifty miles away, asking if he would return it in consideration of a lot of

old iron he had bought, and suggested that he might come over and inspect the merchandise before concluding the bargain. Modena consulted his wife. She urged him to go. It was only separation for a day.

"A day!" said Modena. "An eternity, *Mia bella!*"

He played reluctance, without overdoing it, and at last consented to go. He insisted that Catherine should see him off at the station, and made a tender ado about their first separation, which left her completely hoodwinked. He travelled far enough to suit his purpose, and took a return train which brought him back to Fordmouth just before dawn. He made his way through the empty streets towards his dwelling. It was a fine night, the moon was at the

full, and as he turned the corner of the street in which he lived he saw a man cautiously emerge from his house, cautiously close the door, and walk at a brisk but stealthy pace towards him. Modena had stepped back into the shadow of the houses, and after the man had covered the first fifty yards, and saw the street empty before him, he began to whistle. Modena crouched, and as Phil Barton came level with him, sprang at him like a wild cat, and struck with all his force.

Barton screamed with sudden fear and pain, but the clutch he took of the assassin told Modena that his first stroke had failed of its deadly intent. The supple, muscular young fellow shook him off for a second, and as he came at him again with his long blade gleaming and dripping in the

moonlight, countered with a heavy left-hander which would have sent any man less desperately resolved to the ground, but checked Modena's onslaught scarcely at all.

The knife flashed, and with another cry, midway between a sob and a shriek, and Barton fell.

At his first cry windows had been raised, and a score of ragged heads were clamouring at them. The uproar grew as Modena stood above his victim looking down at him and watching, with a savage exultation, the lengthening track of blood on the dry, white pavement.

Steps hurriedly approaching the spot, cries and shrieks from all sides warned him that his time was short, and only half his task of vengeance completed. He

ran like a hare to his own door, opened it swiftly and softly, closed, locked, barred and bolted it with rapid caution, and mounted the stairs leading to his bedroom. A broad splash of light lay on the floor, leaving the bed in semi-darkness. He lit a candle at the bed head, and saw his wife, white as the pillow in which her head was nestled, lying with closed eyes as if asleep.

"Get up!" he said quietly, in a voice hardly above his breath. She made no answer.

"Get up!" he repeated, in a scarcely higher key.

The eyes opened slowly and looked at him with an awful terror in them. Phil Barton's blood had spurted on his face, which else was ghastly white, and in his

cavernous eyes were a meaning which the guilty wife could have read even without that dreadful stain.

He stood gazing at her as she rose slowly, looking in her deadly pallor like a corpse called back to life by the enchantment of the eyes which dwelt on her. She would have cried, have protested her innocence, but her tongue clove to her palate, her brain reeled. The clamour in the street was louder, it approached the house, and a heavy summons fell upon the door. She found her tongue at that, and answered with a pealing scream.

"Cry!" said Modena. "Cry again! Call for him! He is not long gone. He cannot be far. He will come to help you. Cry again, my child!"

The knocking had ceased for a moment,

but at Catherine's scream it was renewed, and echoed thunderously through the house. The nearness of help, and her desperate fear, nerved the wretched woman to an attempt for life. She darted from the bed and made for the stairs, but Modena, with a horrible laugh of exultation, seized her by the hair, and struck. She fell, moaning, imploring his mercy, but her voice would have been powerless to stir him, could it even have reached his brain through the mad pulsing of the blood in his ears. He rained blows upon her, stabbing at random, blind with the sudden loosening of his pent-up wrath, till his arm was numbed, and he could strike no longer.

He staggered back to a chair, and falling upon it, stared blindly at the mangled body.

The face had escaped injury—perhaps in the very tumult and insanity of his rage some instinct had kept him from wounding it. He stared at it with cheeks as pallid as its own, and falling suddenly beside the body, began to weep with a violence almost as terrible as his anger had been.

Suddenly his tears and sobs ceased.

He raised the mutilated body in his arms, bore it to the bed, hid with the bedclothes the horrible traces of his crime, and crossed the dead hands over the bosom. He had scarcely completed this task when the street door yielded with a loud rending sound, and the noise of feet came up the stair.

The steps stopped at the door of the room.

"Come in, gentlemen," said Modena, in his ordinary voice. "You see it is over, and if you want me I am at your service."

CHAPTER VI.

BROUGHT up before the magistrates, Modena preserved the same calm, self-possessed demeanour which he had shown when taken red-handed by his wife's body. Popular feeling ran high against him, and, had an opportunity occurred, he would certainly have been carried off by the populace and lynched. He pleaded guilty, and was committed for trial at the ensuing sessions.

While he lay in Fordmouth Prison awaiting his trial for wilful murder, the man remained calm and impenetrable as before. His health, however, suffered. Sitting alone in his cell, he would talk to himself for

hours in his own tongue, and when spoken to by the prison officials would answer like a man whose mind was wandering. He took little or no food. At last he became so feeble that it was deemed advisable that he should be seen by the medical officer, and Dr. Redbrook accordingly made his appearance.

Redbrook at first accosted him in English, but receiving unsatisfactory or ambiguous answers, addressed him presently in Italian. The moment he did so the man's pale face lighted up, and his lethargy departed.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the doctor. "They tell me that you refuse to take your food."

"Yes, signor. Why should I eat, seeing that I have so soon to die?"

"You have not been tried yet, my man."

The prisoner looked at him sharply and eagerly.

"Do you think, signor, that they will hang me?"

"That is not the question. Answer mine. Are you trying to starve yourself to death?"

"No, signor," said the man, with a curious smile, "I have no wish to die. But I do not expect to receive justice here in England, and as you see, I am prepared."

The words were lucid enough, but the speaker's manner was peculiar. Modena sat on the side of his pallet, with face half averted, his eyes fixed on the wall of his cell, his lips murmuring as if he were talking to himself. His pulse was feverishly quick though feeble.

"There doesn't seem to be much the matter with you," said Redbrook. "Take my advice, and eat and drink properly, if you can."

And he turned to leave the cell.

"One moment, signor," cried Modena suddenly. "Have they *buried* her?"

"Your wife? Of course."

"She did not speak again? She was quite dead? Ah, yes, I remember. Signor, I killed her! It was the best way. You should have heard how she shrieked when the knife went into her heart! It was music to me. If it was all to do again, I would do the same—like this."

With flashing eyes, he waved his right arm in the air, as if he were stabbing his victim. At that moment he looked more like a wild beast than a man; but while

the doctor looked at him in wonder, he became quite calm, and laughing nervously, began again muttering to himself.

When the day of trial came, and Modena appeared in court, he seemed to have grown years older. Clinging to the edge of the dock, he looked round with a dazed, wondering expression, but the moment his name was called he drew himself together, folded his arms on his breast, and smiled calmly. Arraigned for wilful murder, he at once pleaded guilty. Asked whether he had any reason to offer against the pronouncement of the sentence of death, he began a wild, rambling statement, a record of his wife's infidelities and his own wrongs, which was interrupted by his own counsel, engaged for him by the Italian consul, who put in the plea of

insanity. The prison doctor was called. Asked if he had examined the prisoner, and if he had discovered any indication of aberration of intellect, Redbrook answered in the negative. In his opinion, Modena was sane enough to be responsible for his actions.

"Thank you, signor," cried Modena, with a smile.

The only extenuating circumstance in the case was the degraded character of the dead woman. It was clear, however, that Modena had acted with cold-blooded deliberation, had laid a trap into which his victims had fallen, and had carefully planned the murder.

He was thereupon sentenced to death.

Even then, he preserved his self-command. With arms folded on his breast, he

faced his judge and listened to the sentence. But, as he turned to leave the dock, he reeled, caught at the air, and fell to the ground in a dead swoon.

CHAPTER VII.

STILL insensible, Modena was carried to his cell. When he recovered consciousness, he found Redbrook bending over him.

"I was right, then," he murmured in Italian, looking feebly up into the doctor's face. "They will hang me, signor? How soon—tell me, how soon?"

"I do not know," answered Redbrook. "All you have to do *now*, is to make your peace with God!"

"There is no hope—none?"

"None."

The prisoner gave a low, hysterical laugh.

"And you ask me to make my peace with God! That is to speak to me as if I were a child. You are a learned man, signor, and you must smile with me at such superstition. Do you think, if there had been any God, I should have killed Catherine? No; I should have left her for God himself to punish. I knew better. I knew that I could blot her out for ever from life, from the world. As I would crush a snail under my heel I abolished that woman. And you—you can talk to me of God!"

"Tell me this," said Redbrook. "In what faith have you been reared?"

"My father was a Protestant, signor."

"Then you will be visited by the chaplain of the prison."

Modena laughed again.

"I will die as I have lived," he replied.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will listen to no lies. I say that there is no God, and you, a learned man, a man of science, cannot contradict me. Do you think that I have read nothing, that I know nothing? Do you think that I could rest here if I knew that what I have done could be undone, and that Catherine could live again?"

"The man is raving," said the governor, who stood looking on. "You had better leave him. He shall see the chaplain."

As the day of execution drew near, the prisoner became calmer and calmer. Having quite made up his mind that there was no hope of reprieve, he relapsed

into lethargy, almost into indifference. He made no objection, however, to the ministrations of the chaplain, who visited him at frequent intervals, and offered him the usual consolations of religion. He seemed, indeed, rather amused than annoyed by the perfervid zeal of the young clergyman, but again and again, when urged to express his belief and repentance, he expressed his utter contempt for the teachings of Christianity, and avowed his total atheism.

It was an anxious time for the Rev. Charles Shadwell. Never in his brief experience had he encountered a prisoner so quietly indifferent to everything he himself considered sacred. He prayed with the prisoner, reasoned with him, argued with him—all in vain. It was

all "foolishness," Modena said; death was the end of all, and that being quite certain, he was perfectly prepared to die.

Nor could he be persuaded to express the slightest penitence for the deed he had committed; he remained firm in asserting that he had acted within his rights, and that, under the same circumstances, he would do the same again. The threat of everlasting punishment, and the promise of heavenly forgiveness, were alike unheeded by him. The chaplain remained helpless to assist him, and was full of horror and despair.

Once or twice, it became necessary for Modena, whose state of physical health remained very feeble, to see Dr. Redbrook. On each of these occasions he reverted to

his former professions of absolute and defiant contempt for religion, and appeared to fancy that he had in the physician, by very virtue of his office, a secret sympathiser. And if the truth must be told, Redbrook had strong materialistic leanings. Nevertheless, the whole character and temper of Modena revolted and disgusted him. "Religion or no religion," he thought, "the fellow is a wild beast, and only fit for strangling."

The day fixed for the execution came —a chill morning in early winter. The evening previous Modena was informed that that was to be his last night on earth. He received the information with a shrug of the shoulders, supped heartily, and throwing himself down upon his bed slept heavily and soundly, watched by two

warders. Awakening about midnight, he found the chaplain seated by his side, and greeted him with a savage nod.

"You have come early," he said. "What is the hour?"

"Twelve o'clock," returned the chaplain, "and in a few hours more"——

"I shall sleep so sound that no living man shall me awaken. Altro! But your own night's rest will be disturbed. I will beg you now to go away."

"I shall not leave you now until your time comes," returned Shadwell, trembling violently.

"You are very good. You are very anxious about my poor soul? Well, before this time to-morrow my soul will be gone like a breath of foul air. Have I not told you, one hundred times, that

you do waste your time? Why will you not suffer me to die in peace?"

"It is in order that you may die in peace that I am here. Miserable man! I beseech you to repent in time. If you will do so, if you will cast yourself on the mercy of Him who is all merciful, you may yet save your soul alive."

Thus far the chaplain, in a voice full of tears, with a face ghastly pale, with eyes full of infinite faith and pain as infinite, when Modena, with a furious gesture, interrupted him.

"Enough! I have heard all that before; I heard it when I was a child; I heard it there in Italy; I have heard it here in England; I have heard it all over the world. But I tell you again, it is all false, and I believe it not. I laugh at

it; I shall laugh at it even with the rope around my neck. Away with your God, with all your gods! I am a man. I came from dust, to dust I shall return."

So saying, he threw himself again upon his bed, turned his back upon the chaplain, and seemed to sleep. White as death, the young clergyman remained watching him. Presently he threw himself on his knees and prayed aloud.

A prayer out of the depths of his gentle suffering heart, phrased in words so beautiful that even the warders were almost moved to tears. As he prayed it seemed as if his face was transfigured. At last he ceased to utter his prayer aloud, and, covering his eyes with his hands, continued in silence.

"What are you doing?" suddenly asked the prisoner, not looking round.

"I am praying."

"Have you not prayed enough? You waste your time. I do not heed you. God does not hear you. Let me sleep."

"Sleep, then, and I will pray," said the chaplain.

From that time forward for several hours Modena made no sign. To all intents and purposes he was asleep. At five o'clock he stirred, sat up, and saw the chaplain still upon his knees, but almost immediately Mr. Shadwell rose, and said—

"I am glad you have slept well."

A warder now asked the prisoner if he would have his breakfast, but he declined to eat, and asked for a pipe of tobacco,

which, at the chaplain's urgent request, was given to him. He sat on the bedside quietly smoking, with his eyes fixed on vacancy.

Presently the chaplain made another ineffectual attempt to wring from him some sign of faith or penitence. At last the prison officials appeared. Among them was Dr. Redbrook, whom the prisoner appeared pleased to see. Even when the executioner entered the cell and shook hands with him, Modena still preserved his self-command.

The usual hideous formalities were gone through. Modena was pinioned. The prison bell began to toll. As the procession moved from the cell, the chaplain, trembling like a leaf, read the service for the dead.

Out into the cold wintry morning, across the prison yard, up the steps of the rudely extemporised scaffold, the man moved with a firm tread, while the chaplain, with uplifted voice, followed by his side. The faint, dim dawn was beginning to break, as he stood in his place, with the black cap drawn over his face, waiting.

"Pray to God!" murmured the chaplain in his ear. "Pray to God!—and may He have mercy on your soul!"

The governor of the prison gave the signal, the drop fell, the heavy body of the prisoner sank downwards, and almost simultaneously, the rope snapped like a thread!

A cry of agony went up from the mouth of the chaplain, who tottered and seemed about to faint, as he gazed down upon

the pinioned form lying on the ground beneath him. The executioner sprang down, raised Modena in his arms, and lifted the cap from his face. He was alive, almost uninjured, and struggling like a man awaking from nightmare.

A horrible scene ensued. The governor denounced the executioner, who defended himself volubly. Opening his eyes and looking round him, Modena uttered a shriek of horror, which was answered by a pitiful cry from the chaplain. With the aid of his assistant, the executioner raised the prisoner bodily, and dragged him up again to the scaffold, where he stood in the red light of morning, struggling in his pinions, and wailing in terror.

"It is infamous!" cried the chaplain.

"Take the man back to his cell. This cannot go on."

But even while he was speaking, the hangman had adjusted a fresh rope, placed it round the victim's neck, and readjusted the black cap. The signal was once more given, once more the drop fell, the body of the condemned man lurched forward, and then. . . . The rope, instead of snapping, yielded strand by strand, until the man's feet slipped to the ground, and there, half supported and half suspended, the body, with horrid convulsions, spun slowly round and round!

For the second time the hangman had failed to carry out the sentence of the law, and Maurizio Modena still lived.

CHAPTER VIII.

STILL lived? But did he live, indeed? All at once the convulsive movements ceased, and he hung sidelong without motion, suspended by the lax rope. A cry of horror went up from those who were looking on, while the chaplain, half swooning, sank upon his knees.

Again the governor addressed the hangman in indignant terms, and that functionary, now as discomposed as every one there, but moved by very different feelings, again defended himself volubly. Fortunately, the execution was a private one, only two reporters being present; other-

wise, there would certainly have been a popular tumult. Even the prison officials were full of indignation.

Was he living or dead? that was the question. All gazed in stupefaction at the moveless body. Perhaps, after all, the law had been vindicated in spite of the hangman's bungling! This faint hope was soon dispelled by a cry from the chaplain.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed. "Can you not see that the man is living? Release him, in God's name!"

He pointed down at the body, and all eyes, following his finger, saw that a faint tremor, like a thin electric shock, was running through the suspended frame. At a word from the governor, the hangman sprang down and supported the man in his arms, while his assistant released the

rope; then the knot was loosed, the cap drawn up, and Modena, without a movement or a sound, rolled heavily upon the ground.

"It was no use interfering," muttered the hangman. "He is done for, after all."

But Dr. Redbrook, who had approached at the governor's request, and was bending over the prostrate form, looked up angrily.

"He has not been hung at all," he said. "The spinal column is not broken, and though I can find no pulsation, he is possibly alive."

The governor stood horrified and perplexed, while the chaplain, approaching him, addressed to him words of indignant reproach. Every one of the officials seemed paralysed. Meantime Redbrook had torn

open Modena's vest and shirt and placed his hand upon his heart.

"I was right," he cried suddenly. "The man is not dead. He is recovering!"

Then the governor, shaking off his indecision, ordered the postponement of the execution. The hideous mockery of justice should proceed no further. Modena should be carried back to his cell, and left there to the ministrations of the doctor; and in the meantime a communication of the facts of the case should be made to the Home Secretary.

A little later the Italian was lying in his cell, still to all intents and purposes in a ghastly trance. His face and hands were bloodless and white as marble. His eyes were wide open and fixed on vacancy. On his throat, where the knot had pressed,

there was a vivid bloodshot mark, as of the strangling clutch of death.

Redbrook bent over him, administering restoratives, while the chaplain stood by, looking on.

At last there were signs of returning animation. The heart began to beat faintly, the frame to quiver in faint muscular vibrations. But the eyes still remained wide open and fixed on vacancy, and there was no contraction of the expanded pupils.

Redbrook looked at the chaplain.

"When he recovers," he said in a low voice, "the man will in all probability be either an idiot or a maniac. It is a most unfortunate affair!"

"Unfortunate? it is an infamy!" returned the chaplain. "Such things are an outrage on humanity, on God. But surely after

such torture, he has purchased back his life."

"You mean that he will be reprieved?"

"If he is not, there is no justice in the world. He must and shall be."

"Why should he live?" said Redbrook dryly. "The man is a wild beast, and the law is perfectly right to obliterate him. What I object to is the hideous machinery which is capable of such bungling. In the hospital, when cases are hopeless, they manage such things better—quietly, with no pain. The victim does not even know that he is hanging over the brink of annihilation. One wave of the hand, one little push, and over he goes—disposed of for ever."

Stepping nearer, with his blue pitiful eyes fixed on Modena's ghastly face, the

chaplain answered in a low voice just above his breath—

"Annihilation? If you are a Christian you know there is no such thing. You may dispose of the body, but you have no right to torture the soul. Look! He is awaking. He is speaking!"

The man lay now on his back breathing audibly. His lips moved, framing unintelligible words. Suddenly a faint light grew upon his face. He stretched out his arms tremulously. Curiously enough, his features showed no indication of pain; they were, on the contrary, bright and almost tranquil.

Several minutes passed, during which he continued to talk volubly but indistinctly to himself, and to keep his eyes fixed as if on some strange sight invisible to the

bystanders. Then, suddenly, his eyes closed, and he seemed to lie in a peaceful sleep.

"It is over now," said Redbrook. "He will soon recover."

For a quarter of an hour the man slept on quietly. At the end of that time his face was contorted, his body convulsed, as if by some hideous nightmare. He struggled, moaned, uttered a stifled shriek, and awoke, bathed in perspiration.

Rolling his eyes wildly, he looked round the cell, at the dark walls, at the open door, at the faces of the chaplain and the doctor. The pupils contracted to the light, but the face was blank and unintelligent. He moaned wearily, and turned his head from side to side.

Then the first intelligible word came from his panting lips.

"Catherine!" he said. "Catherine!"

The name of his murdered wife.

The doctor bent over him, and moistened his lips with brandy. He struggled, pulled away the doctor's hand, and sat upright in bed—with a face white and wobegone, and large dilated eyes. Then he looked round the cell again, and from face to face. Stirred to the depths, the chaplain sank by the bed, and prayed aloud.

Modena seemed to hear. Raising the forefinger of his right hand, he listened. Again that faint brightness fell upon his haggard face. The chaplain, still praying, reached up and took his left hand, which closed eagerly upon his own trembling fingers.

"God have mercy upon him! Christ have mercy upon him! Lord of quick

and dead, in thine infinite compassion, look down upon him a sinner!"

There could be no doubt now that the prisoner heard — indeed, he was listening intently, but he kept his eyes steadily fixed on vacancy, as if the sound he heard came from some form he saw in the far distance.

"Catherine!" he cried again.

The chaplain rose to his feet pale and trembling, and bent over the bed.

"Modena!" he murmured gently.

Modena looked up into his face, but without any sign of recognition.

"Who calls?" he answered faintly, in Italian. "Is it thou, Catherine? and who is that standing behind thee? I am dead, woman, yet I live. The priest did not lie to me. Cover thy throat — take my handkerchief, and staunch the bleeding.

There is a pool of blood at thy feet, rising, and the great sea behind thee is red too. Who are these that walk upon it, and what are they singing?"

"What does he say?" asked the chaplain, turning to Redbrook.

"He is raving," was the reply. "The man's brain is turned, as I feared."

But suddenly, with a wild gurgling sob, Modena clutched at the chaplain, and looked up into his face.

"Madonna! is it over? Am I dead or living?" he cried, with wild tears streaming down his face.

"You live, Modena," said Redbrook.

"Live! live! live!" echoed the Italian, with a shudder that ran through his frame. "Is this life? Is this the world? Why

have you brought me back? Where am I—where?"

"You are in Fordmouth Prison," answered Redbrook.

"Not dead! not dead!" sobbed the man. "Was it a dream, then? I thought—I thought—ah, God in heaven, have mercy!" he continued, raising his voice to a shriek, and rolling over upon the bed, where he lay for a long time shuddering and moaning, in a paroxysm of horror and pain.

CHAPTER IX.

It is one of the merciful provisions of our glorious system of Government, and a beautiful illustration of the perfection of our jurisprudence, that the responsibility of the death-penalty, in cases of difficulty, is shifted from one shoulder to another until it reaches the shoulders of the one human being unfitted by nature and temperament to support it.

A criminal, for example, is convicted by a jury of his countrymen of Murder, with a strong "recommendation to mercy" on account of extenuating circumstances; which simply amounts to saying that, in the

opinion of the only tribunal fitted to decide the question, he is *not* to be executed. In this case, it would be presumed by one ignorant of our institutions that the matter is ended, that the judge, a paid official, has simply to pronounce a sentence commensurate with the decision, and omit the death-sentence. Law, however, in the modern state, being merely organised contradiction, decides otherwise. The judge puts on the black cap and sentences the criminal to death, using a shibboleth of religion in which he generally disbelieves, adding that he will forward "the recommendation to the proper quarter."

That proper quarter, we all know, is the Office of the Home Secretary, the official of a political party temporarily in power, and frequently selected, less for his intelli-

gence and humanity, than for his skill in party debate and his services to the reigning Government. He, a political weathercock, has to decide the question already decided by the verdict—"Shall this man die?" and in many notorious instances the result is simply a mockery of justice, of humanity, and above all, of our jury system.

On the caprice of an empirical politician depends the fate of a human being, and as successful politicians, especially these favoured with seats at the Home Office, are frequently lawyers,—*i.e.* men educated on the system of organised contradiction, the farce of illegal legality and extra-judical murder is often carried out to the end.

There had been a great debate, wherein the regnant Home Secretary had particularly distinguished himself, the subject being a

proposed vote of censure against the Government for inhumanity to political prisoners in Ireland; and the Home Secretary had shown in fine forensic manner that the policy of the party to which he had the honour to belong had been in strict keeping with the spirit of those ancient institutions which all Englishmen, &c., &c. Skilfully twisting the facts, and arguing, as if before a jury, he had done yeoman service for his party; and just as he was reading next morning the report of his speech in the *Times* newspaper, together with a leading article eulogistic of his eloquence, he received a startling communication from the governor of Portsmouth prison.

It was irritating, to say the least of it, to be disturbed at such a moment by so trifling and so disagreeable a matter as

the condition of an uninteresting criminal, guilty unquestionably of murder in the first degree. The right honourable gentleman glanced at the governor's report, then at his own peroration in the *Times*, with manifest uneasiness. At the very moment of his triumph, this revolting incident had occurred. A popular storm was impending. People were likely to think less of political small-talk and party debating than of those criminal laws which, in censuring the taking away of human life, instructed a salaried assassin with a rope to emulate the criminal. A cry of horror was ringing through the land. The glorious institutions so feelingly alluded to in his own speech were being threatened. The world was talking, not of the debate in the House of Commons, but of the sufferings, the shameful torture,

of an obscure and highly offensive human being.

The Home Secretary telegraphed for particulars, and turned again to the parliamentary debate.

How far he felt his responsibility in the matter of the recent miscarriage of justice, no one can say; doubtless, being a religious man, a member of a great Church, he felt that responsibility very much. But he was human, he had made an excellent speech, and he knew that he was being blest by the leaders of his party. But for his eloquence and forensic skill, that party might have been turned out, and he himself be no longer a salaried Special Providence. Small wonder that he felt righteously angry with the governor, the hangman, the prisoner, and all concerned.

Yet it was a happy and a glorious day. When he sallied forth he was greeted, at the clubs, at the government offices, and finally at the House, with constant congratulations. The Prime Minister almost embraced him. The Tory journals covered their placards with his name. Even here, however, was a source of irritation. Below the words ELOQUENT SPEECH OF THE HOME SECRETARY—VOTE OF CENSURE DEFEATED, there was printed, in the newspaper contents bills, HORRIBLE SCENE AT AN EXECUTION — A MAN TWICE HUNG, AND STILL LIVING.

Happily for his peace of mind, the gentleman in office lived in a world of his own, that of Politics, where far more interest is taken in stump-oratory and acute verbal debate than in any of the vulgar concerns

of Life and Death. He met very few people who exhibited the slightest interest in anything mundane beyond the triumph of the Party. He was aware, nevertheless, that much discomfort was coming,—that there were masses of ignorant people who felt less interested in his great speech than in the sufferings of an unfortunate murderer.

He had the reputation of being just and inflexible, not to say self-willed and stubborn; and if he acted indiscreetly, that reputation might be in danger. One thought, however, did not occur to him, in the hour of his political triumph: the thought of the absolute absurdity of the criminal's fate being referred to *him*, the *petit maître* of a political majority. He merely reflected that the exercise of his

prerogative, at such a moment, might be inconvenient; he never doubted his right to use it. To question the lawfulness of his own position in the matter, would be to question the very Institutions by which he lived, — to question the Law, which had brought him Fame, and a splendid income,—to question the supreme Christian faith in which he had been reared, and which, blent with and leavened by legal formulas, makes political office not only sacred but actually providential.

Yet the Angels of Heaven, who are supposed to weep over human folly, over "man, weak man, drest in a little brief authority," wept less for Maurizio Modena just then, than for his *ex officio* Providence Incarnate.

CHAPTER X.

The governor of the prison, having telegraphed information to the Home Secretary, duly received the following reply:—"Forward full details and await instructions." So, for the time being, the Italian's life was spared.

That afternoon, after leaving Modena's side, the chaplain himself wrote and forwarded to London a full and particular account of all that had taken place, putting the victim's case with all the pathos of which he was capable, and urging his claim to a commutation of the capital penalty. The facts of the case, when pub-

lished, as they were immediately, caused a thrill of horror to run through the length and breadth of the land. The barbarity of the man's crime was forgotten in the hideous torture to which he had been subjected.

It was fully twenty-four hours before Modena was able clearly to realise his condition. His first act on doing so was to send for the chaplain. The moment Mr. Shadwell entered the cell, Modena, who was lying with half-closed eyes, looked up eagerly, and stretched out his hands in welcome. His eyes were dim with tears, his face strangely sad and gentle.

"You have suffered much," said the young man, sitting by the bed. "Let me trust that my prayers have been answered, and that even out of your suffering, fright-

ful as it has been, has sprung a sincere repentance."

For some minutes the man was silent; at last he spoke.

"I am dead, signor, and I live," he said quietly.

"You mean that you have escaped death by a miracle," answered the chaplain.

"No, signor. So surely as I am lying here, I who am quick am really dead. When did they hang me? Was it a year ago? It seems to me an eternity —so long!"

"It was yesterday."

"Yesterday? When was yesterday? I do not know. It is all a blank—like a dream. I do not even know if it is I —Modena—who speak to you. Yesterday! yesterday! And Catherine? Is she

alive or dead? Answer me, I beseech you."

"Surely you must remember."

"I remember nothing," answered Modena, sadly. "I understand nothing. Only that I am a dead man that is alive."

"God help you! Shall I read to you?"

"Do, signor," said Modena, smiling.

And the chaplain, opening the Bible almost at random, read aloud, in a low broken voice, the strange story of Lazarus, how he died, was buried, and was raised by Christ from the dead. Folding his thin hands upon his breast, Modena listened, murmuring now and then to himself. When the story was done, he looked up and smiled.

"Why do you smile?" asked the chaplain.

"I smile, signor, because it is all so strange. When that man Lazarus came back from the grave, did he speak of what he had seen?"

"I do not know. There is no testimony that he did so."

"And yet, signor, he must have seen something strange—out *there!* He must have known that there is life in death, and that, when death comes, it is only the beginning."

"What do you mean?" eagerly demanded the chaplain, astonished at the other's subdued manner and calm dreamy tone. "Is it possible that, after—after what took place yesterday, you had any consciousness of another life?"

"I will tell you," answered Modena. "It was only for a minute that I lost

myself, that I sank into forgetfulness. The moment after." . . .

He paused trembling and shuddering.

"Do not speak of it," cried the chaplain pitifully. "Try to forget it, for the present."

"Signor, let me think! Yes, I remember. It was years and years ago—an eternity. I was dead all that time, and my death was a sleep, and though I knew that I was dead I had no dreams. At last, however, I awoke, and then there came years and years of waking. And you say that it was yesterday I died! How can that be? No, it must have been very long ago."

Though it was clear to the listener that he was raving, that his mind was wandering, his manner was so collected, his speech so

calm, that Shadwell was amazed. He took the man's hand gently, and said—

"Whatever has happened, one thing is clear, that you have time to make your peace with God. I have prayed and prayed and prayed that you may do so. For even so foul a sin as yours He has forgiveness, if you are truly and earnestly penitent and can believe."

Modena looked into his eyes and smiled again.

"God is all right, signor," he answered. "God is yonder."

"You believe in God at last," cried Shadwell eagerly.

"I do not know," was the reply. "I only know that some one told me before I died that there was a God, and that afterwards I found out it was no lie. That,

also, was years and years ago. Certainly since there is no Death there must be God."

"The Eternal, the All-Powerful, All-Merciful!" cried the chaplain fervently, raising his hands upwards with a thrill of religious exultation. The man's extraordinary manner mastered and agitated him. He himself seemed to be learning some new mystery from the lost creature whom he had been trying to teach. Spiritual and sentimental by temperament, and living constantly under the influence of the supernatural, Mr. Shadwell greeted this new experience with an eagerness akin to rapture. He no longer saw in Modena a miserable tormented wretch, but a living witness to those truths which so many contemporaries were treating with contempt

—a man who had passed the gates of the great Mystery, and had been permitted in some miraculous fashion to come back and testify.

Curiously in contrast with the clergyman's rapt and excited attitude was the sad, calm, matter-of-fact manner of Modena himself. He had shaken off his horror like a garment, and spoke with the quiet precision of one whose mind is perfectly at rest. Even when he seemed to be raving, when his words were strangest and most incoherent, they were gently and deliberately delivered.

But when the chaplain tried to question him further as to the nature of his mysterious experience, the man shook his head and seemed unwilling to speak. After a little while Shadwell left the cell.

Passing out of the prison gate, he met Dr. Redbrook. Between these two men there was, as may easily be supposed, little sympathy. Shadwell thought the doctor hard, unsympathetic, and materialistic. Redbrook looked upon the chaplain as a sentimentalist, feminine in his proclivities, and altogether ignorant of the world.

Nevertheless, they stopped and shook hands.

"You have been in the condemned cell?" asked Redbrook. "How is the man now?"

"Quite calm," was the reply. "He talks very singularly of his experiences during the time when we supposed him to be dead."

"Indeed! Ah, I was afraid that the shock would be too much for him."

"You do not quite understand," said the chaplain. "His mind is quite clear upon one point—that, during the period of his death, or pseudo-death, he was spiritually conscious, and as a result, he now affirms his belief in the supernatural."

"Can we quite trust him?" asked Redbrook, smiling. "The man is a hardened criminal, and by instinct, I should say, a liar."

"Why should he lie?" cried the chaplain, with some indignation. "It is not at such supreme moments that men stultify and perjure themselves. He has been face to face with God!"

"At any rate, the affair is interesting. It would be valuable, scientifically, to ascertain if there really was any kind of cerebration during that horrible episode. For

my own part, I should assume that any such psychic consciousness must be referred, not to the period of actual coma, but to the time when he was gradually being restored to respiration."

"I have often heard," said the chaplain with some impatience, "that men who have escaped from drowning undergo, during the few moments of unconsciousness, a strange experience, in which time is obliterated, and which brings before them, picture by picture, in sequence, all the events of their past life. In other cases of violent death the conditions are doubtless similar?"

"No doubt," replied the doctor, "I confess, however, that I have always been rather sceptical of the evidence in such cases."

"If we believe in a future life we must

assume that such life begins at the cessation of ordinary consciousness—in other words, at the moment when the Soul of man separates from his physical body. After death"——

"But Modena never died. He was merely in a state of coma."

"How do we know that? How do we know even what Death *is*? Of one thing I am certain—that God has dealt with this poor man in a completely miraculous manner; has enabled him, like Lazarus, to die and live again. Are you going to see him?"

"Yes. What you say interests me very much."

"I am glad of that," said the chaplain significantly, as he departed.

Redbrook found the unfortunate man

still lying in a state of dreamy quiescence. The great shock had passed away, and left him very feeble physically. His mind still wandered a little, and he seemed still unable to realise that a long period of time had not passed since the morning of his execution. All things seemed blurred in the mirror of his consciousness. What seemed most extraordinary was that he seemed to take little or no interest in his own future fate. When the doctor gently hinted that a commutation of the capital punishment was just possible, he said—

"What does it matter, signor? I am dead already. Whatever happens to me now, it is certain that I can never die twice."

"Your mind has certainly undergone a

great change. You used to assert strongly that death was annihilation. You went to the scaffold with that affirmation on your lips."

"Indeed, signor? I do not remember."

"But you believe now that there is a life after death?"

"I do not believe, signor—I *know*."

"And does not that make you afraid? If you are certain of one thing, are you not certain of another? Of punishment, for example?"

"Signor, I have been punished," replied the prisoner, smiling sadly. "My punishment has lasted an eternity of years. After I died, it began. Last night when I was asleep, I saw Catherine. She came to me with the mark of my knife upon her throat, and told me that my punish-

ment would be long, but not for ever. She cried very much, and asked me to forgive her. But I forgave her long ago, years and years ago. God told me to do so, and I obeyed."

"The man is certainly mad," said the doctor, as he left the cell.

Several days passed by, and during that time the public mind was greatly exercised on the subject of the execution. Sentimentalists and philanthropists clamoured for a reprieve. A representative from the Home Office came down and interviewed the prisoner, as well as the prison officials, including the chaplain and the doctor. Dr. Redbrook now reported officially that Modena was helplessly mad. At the end of a fortnight, the Home Secretary decided that the capital sentence should be sus-

pended, and that Modena, in view of his condition, should be remitted as soon as possible to a criminal hospital of the insane; in the event of his recovering the full possession of his faculties, his sentence was to be commuted into one of imprisonment for the term of his natural life.

In the meantime, Modena had continued to gain physical strength. He partook freely of the food that was brought to him, slept soundly at night, and woke at morning strengthened and refreshed. Nevertheless, he seemed at all times like a man under the influence of some narcotic; talked much to himself, and seemed conscious of phenomena imperceptible to the eyes of those surrounding him. His demeanour to his gaolers was gentleness itself. All his savage fits of passion, his

gloomy moods of ferocity had departed, leaving him quite tranquil.

"A clear case of madness," thought the doctor.

"Miraculous conversion," said the chaplain.

A few days before the final decision of the Home Secretary Modena arose from his bed, dressed himself without assistance, and walked for some time thoughtfully about his cell. When the warder brought his breakfast, he asked if he might have pen, ink, and paper. He wished, he said, to write down a "confession." The request was carried to the governor, who was at that moment closeted with the chaplain. After some hesitation, and at the chaplain's earnest entreaty, the governor granted the prisoner's request.

All that day Modena sat busily writing. When the doctor appeared, he found him so engaged, and looking thoroughly peaceful.

"What are you writing?" asked Redbrook.

"Signor, my confession," answered the prisoner.

"Surely that is superfluous. All the world is well aware of your crime, and why you committed it."

With a dazed puzzled look, Modena passed his hand across his eyes, as he returned—

"I do not remember. But there are things which I do remember, and which I have permission to write—things which happened long after I died."

"Are you writing in English or Italian?"

"In Italian, signor. I do not know the English very well."

When the warder came in to extinguish the lights, he found the prisoner still writing, but the moment he was commanded to do so he put his papers by, undressed, and lay down.

But early the next morning he was busy again, and by the next afternoon he had set down on paper, in the Italian language, one of the most curious records ever written by the hand of man.

CHAPTER XI.

HERE follows a translation into English of the narrative written by Modena in the condemned cell:—

As the scaffold crashed under my feet, as the knot crushed my throat, and a great sharp agony blotted out the bubbling life within me, I heard a roaring as of a tumultuous ocean covering and submerging me; the moment after, I awoke!

Was it the moment after, or had there been an interval of countless years? That I cannot tell; for it seemed that all count of Time had been obliterated within me, and that I lived only in some ever-present sense of loneliness and doom.

Then the sense of loneliness passed suddenly away, and a sudden lightness swept over me like a billow of the sea. I was bathed from head to foot in warm waves of light, which blinded all thought within me and left me only conscious of life itself. I was singing, I was crying, I was stretching out my arms and looking this way and that way like a child. Faces came and went around me—one a pale young face like my mother's, another the dark tender face of an old nurse. When I tried to speak, my voice was inarticulate. All I felt and knew was a wonderful thrill of joy, of lightness, of love. Clear laughter rang around me. Soft arms lifted me up and swung me to the sunlight—and with that came a glimpse of the orange-groves and mountains of my own land, of fruitage

and vintage, and of the still turquoise-coloured sea.

"Maurizio! Maurizio!" cried happy voices.

Then all changed like a kaleidoscope. Darkness and light alternated around me, and I changed with them. Now I was a little child running along the sea sands; then I was a youth lying in the summer woods; again I was a young man, standing and crying on my mother's grave. Throngs of people passed around me, and looked at me. I saw faces that I remembered, some beautiful, some loathsome —kind faces and unkind, smiling faces and tearful; and ever as I sought to speak, the vision darkened within me and every form and face was gone. I was like a drowning man, now fighting and choking for life,

now rising up to the surface of the sea. Twenty, thirty times, thus emerging, I saw Catherine, flying like a white bird above me.

"Catherine! Catherine!" I cried.

And she hovered above, with the wicked laugh I knew so well, and pointed to her throat, which was dripping blood.

Suddenly I seemed to live indeed—the sense of confusion cleared—I saw the blue sky, the clouds, and beneath them the world like a wrinkled map. I lifted my arms wildly up to heaven, and at that moment something struck me like a stone. I shrieked, and fell before the blow, but as I fell I felt fingers like iron clutching me round the throat, strangling me, choking away my breath.

I awoke, and I was standing alone on

a great plain, red and dry like the desert, and far away to the westward a black ball like the sun was sinking through crimson vapours; while eastward, over the sandy and illimitable track, a gigantic shadow of the gallows, with a corpse swinging pendant therefrom in sable silhouette, rose upon the horizon.

Then I knew that I was dead, and that the corpse I saw was mine, and that, having died, I was still quick, and lived.

A strange sense of lightness filled my living frame, which seemed indeed insubstantial and free as air, but my lower limbs were heavy as lead and held me darkly down. Silence and desolation surrounded me on every side, and the empty heavens stretched in a rayless arch above me. I drew my life with difficulty, as if the atmos-

phere were too fine and rare, so that I panted and struggled for breath. But I had died, and I lived, that was the one thing certain.

The priest had not lied. My life was not over, but beginning.

I sat down on the sand and covered my eyes, trying to think; and the thoughts coursed within me like rushing blood, and all my sense was muffled and confused. When I looked up again the sun had set, the heavens above me were sown thick with stars, and the sands below seemed transparent, mirroring the stars like water and shifting in shallow eddies like a tide—so that when I rose trembling I hesitated to move, lest the sands should engulf me, or I should sink through to some dark and desolate abyss.

I surveyed the waste around me, but there was no sign of any living thing, no tree, no landmark, nothing but the mysterious desert. The shadow of the gallows, and the silhouette of my corpse upon it, were swallowed up in obscurity. Only the heavens seemed alive, throbbing, pulsating, quivering, with innumerable lights, as strange and as far away as when I saw them from my home upon the earth.

I felt no wonder, nor surprise; only a curiously confused sense of awe and dread.

I remembered my past life, but with a dull feeling as if it were something that had never been real; now and then, however, it became present to me, and I saw it all, in a ghostly procession, sweeping past across my sense—darkly,

confusedly—till I could feel and understand no more.

Suddenly, as I stood thus alone, I became conscious of another figure that seemed human.

On the very edge of the luminous sands to the westward rose a shade like a palm-tree, and beneath it sat a form, with its face buried in its hands. Behind it, making it loom out distinct from the horizon, the sky was still bloodshot with the departed day.

I looked eastward, and westward, and heavenward again, and saw no other form, no other likeness of a living thing; but suddenly, as I gazed towards the form, I heard a cry from somewhere, calling my name.

I started and listened, and now, for

the first time, a great fear fell upon me, and my heart stood still.

"Maurizio Modena!"

I could not tell whence the cry came—from the heavens or from the sands, or what quarter of the windless air; indeed, I seemed rather to feel than to hear it, and at the same time a touch like that of a hand of ice came upon my brow.

"Who calls?" I cried, and as my voice rang out upon the night, the figure in the far distance arose suddenly, pointing towards me and beckoning. Tall and gaunt and dreadful it seemed, in that mystical red light.

With hands outstretched and groping, for I feared every moment to sink and vanish, I moved towards it, and the lights of heaven moved with me, drifting along

like sparks blown from a fire, and the red sand ran with me like water, like the flowing of the tide — whenever I paused, it rose around me and washed me swiftly on.

And swiftly as I went, I came no nearer —or seemed to come no nearer—to the form, which still stood beckoning; but suddenly the fires of the sky shone out upon it, and I saw the face of Catherine, my wife, whom I had slain.

Thin and wasted and marble pale, as I had seen it on its bed of death, I saw the face, and full of a great fear, I shrank away, and my fear deepened as I saw it approaching to me swiftly as a wind flies, until the form came close to me with outstretched hands, and I saw the eyes fixed in death and the blood stream-

ing down from the gashed and naked breasts.

And I looked up into her face, and she shuddered away from me, staunching her bleeding wounds with her two hands, and crying as if in pain; while, as a skater who pauses on his heel and sees mountain and sky fly past him, so did I remain while all things swept past me—the sands and the heaven and the starry lights, and only the woman I had slain remained.

Then I remembered all her beauty and all her sin, and would have sprung upon her, but the weight of my own horror held me down; so we two gazed upon one another, as we had done in the world, she fearful yet terrible; I full of hate, yet afraid.

How long this lasted I know not, but all at once, with a shriek, she fled from me, and I pursued; and swiftly as the flying lights of heaven she ran across the glittering sands, I following; and when I sought to clutch her she ever eluded me, till at last she fell, face downwards, and lay like stone and silent, and I stood above her as I had stood in life, holding a knife in my hand.

I bent above her, and turned her face upward, and crossed her hands upon her breasts murmuring to myself, "It is well! She is dead! She will never sin or suffer more!" But even as I spoke she rose with a laugh that sounded as a shriek, and fled away from me again; and ere I knew it I was again following, striking at her with the blood-stained knife.

And ever again she fell and lay as dead, and ever again she rose and eluded me; and I knew not how often this thing happened, but it seemed for a space of weary years; yet the time and the place were still the same, and I had killed her countless times and still she lived, so that at last I said, "I cannot kill her!" and stood looking at her silently under the stars.

Then Catherine said, gazing at me in wonder, as if we had only just met—

"What brings you here, Maurizio?"

Her voice as she spoke seemed thin and far away, and she staunched her bleeding breasts with both hands. I could not answer, but at that moment I heard a sound like the distant clangour of bells, and looking over my shoulder saw again,

in the far distance, the shadow of the gallows, and my dead corpse swinging thereon.

And Catherine followed the look of mine eyes and said slowly—

"What is that hanging yonder?"

And this time I answered—

"It is I, who am dead! They hung me by the neck long years ago."

Then Catherine turned her large wild eyes on mine, and looked into me and through me, with bright tears streaming down her cold cheeks, and moaned in a low voice—

"Blood for blood, saith the Lord!"

I laughed aloud, thinking that we were not dead but living, but looking up I saw the stars still drifting past like sparks blown from a forge, and was afraid.

And Catherine said—

"I was waiting yonder inside the grave's gate, and at last I saw you come forth. I, too, am dead, Maurizio."

I heard her without wonder; nor did it seem strange to me at all that we should be standing there alone in that lonely place, but I feared the woman I had slain as I feared her when I saw her lying dead before me in the world, because she looked so still and sad. I remembered, too, that we had been man and wife together, in some strange half-forgotten life; that she had twined her arms about me and lain her head upon my breast; that I had hated her for her beauty and for her sin. All my life went over me like a wave, covering and stifling me. When I looked up again, Catherine

had withdrawn a little space and stood beckoning.

"Come!" she said, and moved swiftly across the sands, and I followed her from waste to waste of dimness, till we came to a shade like a solitary palm tree, and beneath it was the figure of a young man lying with his head on his arm asleep. And I knew him before I looked at him, and when I stooped by him and turned his face up to the stars, the face was bloody, and the eyes filmy in death.

But when I shrieked his name, he opened his eyes and arose, and seeing me shrank away shielding himself with his arm as from a blow; and ere I knew I was striking at him with my clenched hand, as if it held a knife. Then he fled from me and I pursued him as I had pursued

the woman, and ever he fell prone as the woman had fallen, and ever he arose again, flying like a thing that lived. I knew not how often this thing happened, but it seemed for weary years; yet the time and the place were still the same, and I had killed him countless times and still he lived; so that at last I cried, "I cannot kill him!" and stood looking at him silently under the stars.

We three stood together, looking at each other in wonder as if we had only just met; and again I gazed over my shoulder and saw the shadow in the distance, and these two, following my look, cried aloud—

"What is that hanging yonder?"

And again I answered—

"It is I, who am dead! They hung me by the neck long years ago!"

And those two fixed their eyes on mine, and said in a low voice together—

"Blood for blood, saith the Lord!"

I looked up and saw the stars still drifting past, and the shining heavens in motion like a torrent that shoots to the fall, and I said—

"I have died, and yet I live! What place is this? Where am I, Catherine?"

They answered together—

"We know not. We, too, are dead, Maurizio."

I looked at them again, and so wan and wistful did they seem that I pitied them, seeing in them some pale likeness of my own sorrow; and as mine eyes filled with tears, I saw that they were weeping too.

And Catherine said—

"I have been waiting for you, Maurizio."

And her companion said—

"I, too, have been waiting, Maurizio Modena."

Nor did it seem wonderful to me that they should have been waiting for me there, or that they wept while I was weeping; but I remembered my old hate for them as in a dream, and I felt my old life moving within me like a lump of lead.

Then both said together, looking up—

"We are afraid, Maurizio."

But I arose, feeling light and strong, and looked around me on the starry desert and on the drifting heavens, saying—

"We are dead, but there is no death. The priest did not lie. Surely God is somewhere. Let us go on together and look for him."

And, like a man rejoicing in his strength,

I strode on across the sands, dragging my limbs heavily after me, and Catherine and the other followed me wearily but less swiftly, and when I paused I saw them lagging a long way behind, and as I stood and beckoned, Catherine rolled over like a stone, and lay as dead.

Then I ran back and knelt beside her, and found her lying as she had lain on earth when I had slain her, her eyes closed, and her hands folded upon her bleeding breast. The other stood by me weeping, and cried—

"Too late, Modena. Leave her where she is lying, and let us wander on."

But methought a strange pity possessed me, such as I had felt when first I saw her lying slain, because she looked so still and white and beautiful on her

bed of death; and when I touched her softly and tried to waken her, she did not stir, and the other had run on and stood looking back and beckoning as I had beckoned. I turned to follow, but my feet were as lead, my old life rose within me heavy and dreadful, and I came back, kneeling down again by Catherine, and, bending over her, kissed her on the cold brow.

And with that kiss a strange yearning came upon me to uplift her and bear her with me I knew not whither; for I thought, "I cannot leave her on these waste sands alone, since presently she will awaken and see the empty heavens and be afraid." So I stooped and raised her in my arms, trembling beneath her weight, and holding her gently; and as

I stepped forward the load grew lighter, and my feet seemed light as air, and I ran along swiftly and passed the other, and left him a long way behind.

And flying thus, I felt full of a new peace and lightness, and felt as if I could wander on for ever and never weary; till suddenly I felt her move in mine arms, and breathe feebly, and I knew that she lived. Then I set her down gently, and stood looking at her, and she smiled and put out her hand and touched me softly on the hair; and at the touch my peace fell from me, and I fell on my knees weeping and moaning and naming her name.

Then Catherine said—

"He tarries a long way behind. Go back to him, Maurizio."

I looked back and saw no sign or trace of him whom we had left; so I turned to Catherine and said—

"Let us wander on together."

But when I moved to depart my feet were as lead, and my whole life felt like death within me, and I could not stir; and Catherine said again—

"He tarries a long way behind. Go back to him, Maurizio."

And ere I knew it I was running back across the sands, and how long I ran I knew not, but it seemed for years and years, and I knew that I could not pause until I had found him; but at last I saw him lying under the palm tree where I had found him first, and bent over him, and saw that he was dead. I touched him, but he was cold and did not stir,

and far away I saw Catherine standing and looking back and beckoning; so I bent above him and raised him in mine arms as I had raised Catherine, and carried him gently, and at every step I took the load felt lighter, till I ran with him swiftly as the wind runs over waving wheat, and ever I grew more light and strong, till I brought him to the place where Catherine waited, and he wakened smiling as I set him down.

So we three stood together looking on one another, and the heavens sparkled like frost above us, and far away there grew a light like the dim first flush of day.

And Catherine said—

"We are dead, but there is no death. Let us go on together, Maurizio."

We went on together, I leading and those two following, for weary years and years; and ever the edge of the sands grew brighter, but slowly, slowly; and ever I grew stronger and lighter, till at last I paused and saw the two far away behind me, too weary to follow further.

Then suddenly there flashed up a light like morning red before me, and I heard voices saying, "Come! hasten!" and far away, where the sunset is seen from the world, there was a Gate of Gold. But I looked back, and Catherine and the other had vanished in a darkness, and I gazed above me on the heavens drifting swiftly and brightly towards the Gate, and I was afraid.

And therewith my old life came back upon me like a wave; and I remembered

Catherine as I had first seen her, pretty and young, and I heard a sound like our marriage bells; and I thought, "There is no death, and she is not dead. I will go back and find her, and if she is too weary to follow me, I will uplift her in my arms and bear her onward."

Ere I knew it, I was running back from the light towards the darkness, crying, "Catherine! Catherine!" And though it seemed an endless quest, I knew I could not rest until I had found her; and I found her, indeed, at last, lying white and dead, and the other by her side, white and dead also, both with blood-marks upon them, cold and asleep.

Then suddenly I remembered that I had slain them, and I stood looking down upon them full of the sickness of my old life, and

my tears fell fast, for I pitied them, seeing they looked so peaceful and so sad. I gazed around me, and saw only the still sands and the moving heavens, but nothing that lived; and far away, small as a pin's point, glimmered the Gate of Gold.

And I said—

"God is somewhere. The priest did not lie. But I am alone in all the world, and no one hears me, though I repent. There is no death, but I would that I could die!"

And even as I spake thus, looking down upon them, the two awakened and looked up at me, saying, softly—

"Is it thou, Maurizio?"

And, in a broken voice, I answered—

"It is I!"

Then they looked at one another and murmured—

"Blood for blood, saith the Lord!"

But I fell upon my knees beside them, praying and begging them to arise and follow; and Catherine reached out her hand and took mine, and laid it upon her wounded breast, so that I felt the blood flowing warm, and the other smiled, crying—

"Why have you come hither, Maurizio Modena?"

And I answered—

"I know not. I have died, and I live. God have mercy upon me!"

They rose together and stood by me, crying—

"God have mercy upon us!"

And we three fell upon our knees together, knowing we were alone in all the world.

CHAPTER XII.

STRANGE as it may seem to those who have never passed through the gates of death, and strange as it seems to me now as I look back on that far-off time, I had never until that instant of utter desolation felt so certain of the presence of something which the priests have called God. Kneeling there with those others, I looked around me, weeping, and saw the dreary waste, and the stars blown across the empty heaven, and underneath my feet, through the sands transparent with water, an abyss filled with a shining silver radiance as of moonrise in the world.

But it was rather within me than without me that the presence of something from beyond me seemed stirring, like the faint first glimmer of dawn on the sea waves. And now, though my tears fell fast, they grew peaceful, and my being grew calm and light as air; when, looking westward, I saw again the Gate of Gold glimmering far away, and, as I turned my eyes thither, Catherine and the other gazed thither also, and we cried together—

"Yonder! yonder!"

And lo! even as we spake, we three were raised like straws on water, and upheld as if by hands, and drifted thither—the same way that the tides of earth and heaven seemed moving; so that the gate each moment grew brighter and nearer, till we came close unto it, and were cast

down before it like weeds on the shore; and where they were cast down Catherine and the other fell and lay as dead, while I stood erect and saw, standing at the Gate, clothed in white, the Man who was crucified on the Cross; and He cried my name three times, saying, "Hasten, Maurizio! They are waiting within to judge thee, and thou hast tarried too long."

I looked at Him, and knew the face I had seen in the pictures, a young man's face sad and gentle, with great eyes that seemed to suffer from the light they shed upon me.

And He said again, though He had named me—

"What is thy name?"

And I answered—

"Maurizio Modena!"

"And He said—

"What is that in thy hand, Maurizio?"

I looked and was afraid, for my right hand was bloody, and I held within it the knife with which I had slain Catherine and the other, who lay at my feet as dead.

Then He beckoned to me, crying, "Come!" and I ran to Him and fell just without the Gate upon my knees, with all my old life heavy within me and around me, and bands of lead upon me holding me as in a vice; and He came out of the gate and stood looking down upon me.

"They did not lie," I cried. "Lord, I am quick, who was dead. What is Thy will?"

He answered—

"Where is Catherine, thy wife?"

And I was silent; and He said—

"Where is the other whom thou didst slay?"

I was silent again, but looking back over my shoulder I saw the two had arisen as if from sleep, and were gazing this way and that, as if in a dream, and I cried aloud—

"Catherine! Catherine!"

And she came unto us slowly, followed by the other, and when they saw Him who stood above me, they paused and were afraid.

Then I cried—

"Lord, where are we?"

And He answered—

"This is Death, Maurizio!"

But I laughed and cried—

"Lord, there is no Death. Eternities have passed away, and I live." And it

seemed that the two who stood by me echoed the thought within me, saying, "Lord, there is no Death! Eternities have passed away, and we live!"

Then though I gazed downward, I felt the light of His eyes upon me, as He cried—

"There is Death and there is judgment! What is that blood upon thee, Maurizio?"

I answered—

"It is the blood of those whom I have slain."

Then I felt the light touch of His hand upon my hair, and I heard His voice, saying—

"Dost thou repent, Maurizio?"

And when I hid my face and wept, He stooped and breathed upon me, and my old life fell from me like a garment, and

I arose naked before Him, and I saw His face bright and beautiful as an angel's; and beside me, naked too, stood Catherine and the other, trembling full of wonder; and suddenly out of the gate there came a great music as of innumerable voices crying, "Come, come!"

But even then, as I moved thither, the sands rose up around me like waves of the sea, and we three were struggling and sinking therein, and He whom we had seen at the gate was walking away over the waves leaving us there to perish; and I struggled fighting for breath, but my feet were like lead sinking me down; and I sunk deeper and deeper, with the brine in my throat and darkness on my eyes, till my sense was blotted away and I knew no more; and when I awakened

I was lying here in my cell, dead, but living — I, Maurizio Modena, who for my crime had been condemned by man to die.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE record ended here. When it had been completed, the unfortunate man had given it to the chaplain, who, being unacquainted with Italian, had handed it to Dr. Redbrook. Redbrook took it home, and on the evening when our story opened, deciphered it with some difficulty. After he had finished its perusal he was summoned again, in the manner already described, to the condemned cell.

He found Modena pacing to and fro like a wild beast, and uttering hysterical cries. He already looked years older, and his cheeks and eyes were sunken as if by

famine. The moment Redbrook entered he turned wildly, and uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

"It is not you I want," he cried. "It is the other."

"Do you mean the chaplain?" asked Redbrook quietly. "I thought that he was here."

A warder explained that Mr. Shadwell had only quitted the cell about half-an-hour previously, leaving the prisoner to all appearance quite calm; but that shortly after his departure Modena had been seized with a sort of hysterical paroxysm, which had seemed every moment to be growing more violent.

"Calm yourself, Modena!" said Redbrook. "Everything possible is being done on your behalf. In all possibility you will be respited."

Modena laughed strangely, almost savagely.

"Can you not understand?" he cried. "I have asked for no mercy. I will accept none. I have died once, and I wish to die again. Why do you keep me here? Why do you torture me here in Hell? I demand justice—justice!"

"You will have it!"

"Ah, signor, you are laughing at me! Is it justice to keep me here, to punish me still so cruelly, when God has forgiven me? I tell you that I am lying here in my grave, and that I wish to arise, and that you will not suffer me. Last night a voice came to me in my cell, saying, 'There is no death! Kill thyself, Modena!' but I knew that it was the devil tempting me, and that I dared not obey."

"What do you wish to be done?"

"I wish for justice, signor. I have been condemned to die. You heard my judge? I am to be taken from this place to the place of execution, and the rope is to be placed around my neck, and I am to be hung by the neck till I am dead!"

"You know very well what has occurred. By a horrible accident"——

But Modena interrupted him with a wild cry, waving his arms in the air and gesticulating like a madman.

"I tell you, signor, that you are torturing me, you are killing me, but it is too long, too long. Where is the hangman? I call for him—I demand him! Toll the bell! Pray for me! It is time, and I am ready! I cannot linger here!"

It is quite impossible to convey the prisoner's tones of wild protest and passionate entreaty. More than ever was Redbrook convinced that the man was raving mad. With furious hands he had torn open his shirt collar, showing the throat still livid with the hangman's mark, and there, with flashing eyes, he stood gaunt and pale, like what he was indeed—a creature risen from the grave.

"Very well," said the doctor, quietly, "It shall be as you wish, Modena."

"When? when?"

"Perhaps to-morrow."

"To-morrow! It is an eternity. Why cannot it be *now?* I have died, and I am to die again. That is God's punishment upon me, and I accept it—it is just. But let it be quick—quick!"

"Very well. Promise me to rest quietly, and I will do my best."

Modena bowed his head.

"I will try to be patient," he replied. "But, signor, if you knew how I suffer, you would not keep me in pain."

And with a sob he sank sitting upon his bed, hiding his face in his hands. After a few words whispered to the warders, whom he instructed to keep close watch upon the prisoner and see that he did not lay violent hands upon himself, Redbrook left the prisoner. As he crossed the street to his own house he met Mr. Shadwell, to whom he rapidly related what had taken place.

"It is strange," said the clergyman. "I left him quite calm. It must be some

few words I dropped about the hope of a reprieve."

"No doubt," returned Redbrook. "By the way, I have read that paper you gave to me. It is a very curious document. If you will come in, I will read it to you."

The two passed into the doctor's house together, and entered the study or surgery, when Redbrook, producing the manuscript, read it off rapidly in English, only pausing now and then to decipher a difficult word or to find some suitable English equivalent. When he had finished, the chaplain drew a long breath and covered his eyes with his hands, as if thinking.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Redbrook. "Will you not admit now that the man is raving mad, and utterly irresponsible for his own actions?"

"So far from thinking him mad, I believe him to be at last completely sane."

The doctor smiled.

"Do you actually believe this wild nonsense to be the record of an actual experience? It seems to be the clear result of diseased cerebration, caused by a horrible shock to the nervous system. Its very imagery, its terminology, is that of the ordinary religious sentiment. The man dies, or imagines he dies, having some faint knowledge of religious ideas, but utterly disbelieving in the supernatural. Semi-strangulation follows, not sufficient to cause death. Meantime, the unoxygenised blood mounts to the brain and produces a series of horrible impressions, all conditioned by his former dread of death, his fear of punishment, and his knowledge

of popular superstition. The imagery, my dear Shadwell, is that of the Religious Tract Society—a starry space, a golden gate, a human figure in the likeness of the pictures of Jesus—and combined with all that, innumerable horrors, blood, the knife, shrouds, and phantoms. Surely you can't accept such stuff as a veritable revelation of the Unseen."

"I cannot tell," returned the chaplain. "I am lost in wonder. What impresses me most singularly is not the actual record, but the change in Modena himself. You know how absolutely he was convinced of annihilation? Yet in a moment, as it were, he is changed, and if he now craves to die it is not because he thinks to escape punishment, but to meet it and to triumph finally over it."

"The whims of such a man are unaccountable. He is simply insane."

"Pardon me, there we differ altogether. I am certain that God, in some miraculous manner, has revealed to him a glimpse of a great mystery."

"What, then, would you do with him?" asked Redbrook, grimly. "Hang him again?"

"I do not think it would be so cruel as to keep him alive."

"What? Surely you are not serious! Think of the physical torment the poor wretch has suffered already."

"The physical torment is nothing," returned Shadwell, rising to his feet. "It is by our souls we suffer, after all. See how eagerly the man would now face the ordeal from which he shrank, knowing

that death is only the dark bridge to another life!"

"At any rate, I hope the reprieve will come. I should be sorry to be again an actor in that horrible farce of hanging."

"I share your hope for the sake of our common humanity. For Modena's sake, I should like to grant his wish, and kill him as speedily and as painlessly as possible."

The two separated, Shadwell repairing at once to the prison cell. Redbrook watched him depart, and shrugging his shoulders, muttered—

"*Arcades ambo!* One is as mad as the other."

Nevertheless, he took out the Italian manuscript and read it again, with more eagerness and interest, and a great deal

more emotion, than he would have liked to confess.

Meantime, the chaplain had joined Modena, who welcomed him eagerly. Over his ministrations to the miserable man I draw a veil, but his impassioned earnestness and tenderness, his entire sympathy with the strange moods of the prisoner, did not fail of their effect. Their positions seemed now reversed. Modena was the man whose certainty and faith were absolute, who had, as it were, been face to face with God, and knew the terror and the wonder of His ways. Shadwell was the man who knew nothing, had seen nothing, who only guessed and believed. But the clergyman's sweet humanity went far to complete the miracle in the murderer's soul.

"Do *you*, too, think I am mad, signor?"

asked the Italian suddenly, as they were parting.

"Indeed, no," was the reply.

"You believe that I have been dead, and that there is no death, as I have said."

"Certainly. That, as you know, is our living faith."

"You are a good man," said Modena, bending and kissing his hand. "You are the only creature who has never lied to me. You will be with me when I die again to-morrow."

"I will be with you whenever it is possible. But suppose, after all, that it is God's will that you should not die?"

"That cannot be God's will."

"But suppose it were. God might, in His infinite mercy, wish you to remain

upon the earth completing your probation and your punishment *here*."

A look of strange dread and agony passed over the Italian's face. Tears filled his eyes, his mouth twitched convulsively, as he replied—

"I am sure, signor, God is not so cruel. He knows how many years I have suffered, how infinitely I have endured, since I offended against His law. Last night, too, I had a dream, and Catherine herself came to me and said, 'Why did you go back? We are waiting for you at the gate,' and then she wept. I have to go in there and be judged. We shall go in hand-in-hand—Catherine and I; but until I go she must wait yonder, bleeding and in pain, and that will not be well."

That very evening the reprieve came.

Late at night the governor sent for both Dr. Redbrook and the chaplain, and communicated its arrival to them.

"I think the poor fellow should know as soon as possible," he said.

A warder, on being sent to the cell, reported that the prisoner was sleeping quite peacefully, and so it was decided not to communicate the fact to him until the next morning.

But at break of day, when the warders were changed, and a new one took up his position in the cell, the attention of the new comer was attracted by the position of the prisoner, who lay back upon his pillow, his face towards the light, which streamed in through the window, his eyes staring wide open, and his arms outstretched upon the coverlet.

The warder bent over him and saw that he was quite dead.

"The shock was too great," said Redbrook, as he bent over the corpse some hours afterwards, and addressing the chaplain, who also stood looking sadly down upon it, "he never recovered, and if he had lived, he would have been a madman till the end."

As he spoke thus, he glanced at Shadwell, who, without seeming to hear, stepped nearer to the bed, and, putting out his thin hand, drew it lightly, as if in benediction, over the marble brow of the dead man.

"God be with him!" he murmured. "Mad or sane, I believe he is now at peace!"

And peaceful, indeed, he seemed, in the pale majesty and solemnity of death. His eyes had been closed, his arms drawn down gently by his side, his wild hair smoothed over his high but narrow brow. But around his throat, which was partly bare, there still lay the livid bruise of the hangman's rope.

"After all," said Redbrook, "the man was a murderer, and one of the most dangerous kind—the more dangerous, indeed, because he had plenty of brains and had received a good education."

"Yes, yes," murmured the chaplain, a little impatiently, his eyes still fixed upon the corpse. Then he added, as if to himself, "The moment after! The moment after!"

"That is just the point," said the doctor

in the same low tone. "As if a whole life's conduct, the entire upbuilding of a nature, could be changed in a moment. Why, it would take ages of evolution to make a criminal like this worthy of perpetuation."

The clergyman turned and looked at him, his gentle face full of deep emotion, his eyes tenderly indignant.

"Has your philosophy taught you so little that you do not understand that Time is a mere abstract term, applied by finite man to interpret states of human consciousness? A moment! In the divine scheme, a moment may be an eternity! In the brief space between his first death and his resurrection, Modena lived longer than you and I have done in a lifetime. He passed through an indefinite period of change and preparation

and punishment—of evolution, if you like to call it by that name; and what seems to us a miracle, was in reality the slow working of the natural and irrevocable law. But leave me, I beseech you! I wish to pray here alone, by his bedside!"

"Very well, I will go," returned Redbrook, moving from the cell. "I am very glad, in any case, that the poor fellow is dead."

The clergyman placed his hand on Modena's breast, but turned his eyes again on Redbrook, saying—

"Dead? You believe then that he has died indeed, and that all is over with him for ever, and that all remaining of him lies here, a heap of dust?"

"Certainly."

"Then I tell you that he is not dead but

living, and that there is no such thing as Death."

And he fell upon his knees by the corpse and prayed.

EPILOGUE.

EPILOGUE.

LAST night I knew that I was dead.

The chamber was quite dark, save for one bright beam of moonlight that crept through the curtained window-pane and fell slant upon the white face lying in the coffin. I had arisen, and was looking at myself as in a mirror; and the face I saw was like marble, the eyes closed over with waxen lids, and a curious sickly scent as of dead flowers and chill flesh came from beneath the shroud.

Yes, the face was mine—I knew it well, even to the little mole among the thin hairs of the beard, and the faint mark of a cicatrix upon the brow.

I said to myself, "Why have they left me here alone?" for all the house was still, without a sound, and I felt afraid.

I knew the room well. I had slept in it many a year. On the mantelpiece was a book I had been reading, long, long ago, when I was ill, and on the wall there was a picture I had loved very much—that of Peter sinking in the waves, and of the young man Jesus walking on the sea. All was so familiar, and yet so strange.

I was dead, and yet I lived. I was lying there alone, with my jaw bound up and my hands folded upon my heart, and yet I was standing by the coffin looking down upon myself.

I opened the door, and looked out into the lobby of the house, then slipping forth I closed the door behind me. I found

another door standing open, and entered the room where I had worked and thought. All the books and pictures I loved were there, and in the desk were pages of unfinished writing. The place was quite dark, and yet I could see everything.

I walked to the window and looked out. The moon was shining on the street, and on the housetops, and the sky was full of stars. I heard a measured tread, and the figure of a man passed by below me, and its face gleamed in the moon as it looked up at the windows.

How real and clear it was, and yet I felt so desolate! I tried to utter a cry, but no voice came from within me. I turned back into the room and approached the mirror over the mantelpiece, and I saw there my own face looking at me, as it had looked

at me out of the coffin—the eyes sealed down.

Not a stir in the house, not a sound.

I passed out into the lobby, and entered another chamber which opened silently at my coming, and lo! the Mother was lying there in bed, awake, her eyes wide open, her soul hungering for her son. Her grey hair was scattered on the pillow, and her thin hands moved nervously over the coverlet. I bent over her and kissed her, and her face brightened, but she saw me not. I tried to say "Mother! mother!" and to comfort her, but again no voice came from within me.

But I saw her lips moving, and heard her voice saying:

"He was my first-born and only son. None in the world was like him—I did

not think that he could die. He is gone where I shall follow. The earth is empty without him, for he loved me, and his smile was the light of life."

I could not bear it. I could not bear to see her sorrow, and to seek in vain to find form and words that might comfort her—to know that she saw me not and knew not of my presence there; but as I yearned over her, she rose from her bed and took a light, and passed with feeble feet into the neighbouring chamber, where I was lying dead. And I stood behind her, while she bent over my body and sobbed, kissing my cold lips and smoothing my hair in the coffin, and wailing, "My son! my son!" Her cry troubled the silence, and passing outward seemed to shake the world, and I sought to answer it, but could not, while

she fell upon her knees and wept and prayed.

I left her weeping, and passed upstairs and stood in the rooms of the serving-women tired out and sound asleep.

Then I entered another chamber, and lo! the Beloved was lying there worn and haggard, but her eyes were closed in troubled rest upon her tear-stained pillow, and I saw that she had cried herself to sleep. Pale and beautiful she lay, murmuring wildly as she slept, and I wound my arms around her and kissed her upon the mouth, praying that she might wake. And even then her eyes opened, and slowly the great wave of the world's despair rolled upon her, and she sobbed in darkness.

I longed to speak to her. I longed to say, "Dearest, why did you leave me there

alone? Yet be comforted, for I am here!" But she saw me not and knew not of my presence, though she moaned my name. And all our days and nights of love, our gladness and fulness of life, swept over me, plunging me into despair, and I knew that I had lost her, that I was dead. . . .

I was lying still and quiet in my coffin, when the dawn crept in and touched me with a cold finger and dried the clammy dew from my brow and lips. Presently I heard voices whispering, and the Mother and the Beloved came in together and looked at me, crying, and clinging to each other.

I could hear their words.

"How peaceful he looks! God bless him!"

But their sorrow pained me, and I tried in vain to stir and to open my eyes, and

to tell them I was conscious of their presence. Nor could I weep, though my sense was salt with cruel tears. . . .

It was later in the day, when I saw strange men enter the room, and my dear ones followed wailing, and ere the lid was closed upon the coffin, they kissed me and blest me again and again. I felt the lid close upon me, leaving me in darkness; but even then I was standing by the bedside, looking down upon the coffin, which was covered with wreaths of flowers.

Though it was daylight, the house was dark and still. I crept downstairs, and came into a room where the mourners were waiting—old friends that I knew well, sitting round a table where there were cakes and wine. They talked in whispers together, but when I passed among them no one saw

me or heeded me, and my loneliness was very strange.

But I was lying in darkness and being borne on men's shoulders to the door, where the hearse was waiting. Yet I followed, looking on, while the cry of the Mother and the Beloved came from the house within. A thin rain was falling, and the air felt very cold, and I thought with a shiver of the grave of clay where I was to lie. . . .

By the graveside they gathered, I among them, while they lowered me in the coffin, and the priest read aloud the holy ritual for the dead; and I saw the wreaths of flowers falling upon the grave, and the first handful of earth struck my heart like a blow. The Mother and the Beloved stood near me clothed in black, straining their poor eyes to catch a last glimpse of him

they had lost for ever. And I tried to call to them, but no voice came from within me. Utter loneliness of doom covered me, and the rain fell upon me, like tears from the eyes of God.

It was very lonely in the house when I returned. It was summer time and the windows were wide open, and the scent of the blossoming world came in, but the place was sad and dark. The dear ones I loved moved like ghosts about the house, and knew not the dead man who followed them from room to room; and when I saw the Beloved sitting in the room where I had toiled and worked, and turning over the papers and books I had loved, I would have died again to take her in my arms and dry her tears. For the scent of her breath was like myrrh upon my mouth,

and the blessing of her love was like the light of life. But when I saw the Mother sitting lonely in her room, grey-haired and weary, her eyes fixed on vacancy, I knew that she saw me somewhere afar off, and was coming to me soon: which comforted me in my loneliness, and took away the sting of Death.

But I murmured daily to myself, "How soon will those I love forget me? How soon shall I fade away indeed?" And the thought thus awakened seemed deathlier than Death, and brought the sense of nothingness and oblivion, as of my grave wide open and waiting to take me for ever.

How lonely it was in the house! I was there, yet lying in my grave. I was twain, who was one—a shadow on the fringes of

life, a darkness on the hearth, a presence unseen and without a name. I haunted the old rooms, and I looked at the pictures on the walls, and I heard always a sea-sound, the ever-breaking waves of the world. Dumb and voiceless, unknown, unseen, I awaited; and as the sunny days brightened in the house, I grew fainter and feebler, fading into forgetfulness.

And I thought "Why do they not speak to me? why cannot they see me? why do I linger here unknown?"

But one night a cry arose in the house, and I heard a coming and going of feet, and I followed and found the Beloved lying upon her face, and when some one raised her, I saw that she too was dead. Even then, as I looked upon her dead form and rayless eyes, I saw her standing beside me

with her eyes fixed on mine and smiling sweetly, and lo! she knew me, and we knew each other, and in that moment, all thought, all sense, all life, became glorified and glad. I named her name and she heard me, and crept into my arms. . . .

Then suddenly I awoke, and behold she was bending over me, bright and beautiful in life, and the grey-haired Mother stood near, smiling and loving too.

"How late you have slept," said the Beloved. "We heard you cry aloud. Have you been dreaming?"

"Yes," I said, faintly discerning her through a mist of tears.

"Some terrible dream? But there, it is over now."

I looked up into her face.

"I dreamed that I was dead," I answered. "Nay, rather I dreamed that I was quick, who was lying dead."

She smiled and laughed, threw her arms around me, and kissed me on the lips, and I knew then that Divine Death was the one thing certain, and that Death is only the heavenly name for that Love which is Eternal Life.

THE END.

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