‘The Next Heir’ by H. D. Everett

Fryer and Fryer, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn, the original firm and their successors, have for the past hundred years acted as guardians of the interests of the landed gentry, buying and selling portions of estates, proving wills, drawing up marriage settlements and the like. And a glance at the japanned deed-boxes in their somewhat shabby office would discover among the inscriptions sundry names of note.

The original Fryers have long been dead and gone, but there is still a Fryer at the head of the firm. And on a certain day of spring, this ruling Fryer was alone in his private office-room, when his clerk brought in a message.

"Mr. Richard Quinton to see you, sir. He has no card to send up, but he says you will know his name and his business, as he has called to answer an advertisement.”

Without doubt Mr. Fryer did know the name of Quinton, as it was legibly painted on a deed-box full in view, but something in his countenance expressed surprise. He signified his willingness to see Mr. Richard Quinton, and presently the visitor entered, a pleasant- faced youngish man, brown of attire, and indeed altogether a brown man, except for the whitish patch where his forehead had been screened from , the sun. Bronzed of skin, brown of short cut hair, and opening on the world a frank pair of hazel eyes, which looked as if they had been used to regard the wide spaces of waste lands, and were not fully used to the pressure and hurry and strenuousness of our over-civilised older world.

"I have called, sir, about an advertisement inserted by Fryer and Fryer in a Montreal paper. I have it here to show you. It was posted to me at the London hospital, where I have been since my wound, I see that the representative of Richard Morley Quinton, who emigrated to Canada in 1827, will hear on applying to you of something to his advantage.”

"May hear of something,” corrected the man of law. "Are you the representative in this generation? “

"I am, sir. Richard Morley Quinton was my grandfather.”

"Great-grandfather, surely? You are under thirty, and he was twenty-six years old when he left England."

"No: grandfather. He had a hard struggle in his first years on the other side. His English brother was not the sort to help him, and he never asked for help: he would not. He did not marry until late in life, and my old dad was the only son who survived infancy. There was a daughter who married and had children. But I don't suppose you want to know about her."

"We want the male heir. Or at least to know where he might be found."

"My dad married earlier, but he had no children by his first wife. He was well over fifty when he married my mother, and I am their only child. I can put you in the way of getting all the certificates you want, and vouchers from responsible people who have known the family. And now, tell me. Why am I advertised for? Is it an inheritance?"

"Not at the present moment, but it may be."

"Of Quinton and Quinton Verney — is that so? My dad would have been pleased. He thought much of Quinton, hearing about it from his father, who was born at the Court."

"If the present Mr. Quinton, your second cousin, makes no will, the Quinton property goes to the heir-male of your mutual great- grandfather. But he has the power of willing the whole where he pleases — to a hospital, or to a beggar in the street. You can count on no certain inheritance. You understand?"

"Then why?"

"We advertised because Mr. Quinton wished to ascertain who represented the Canadian branch of the family, and also to make your personal acquaintance. We can give you no certainty, but I gather from what he has written, that, if your cousin likes you, and if you agree to certain stipulations respecting the property, he intends to make you his heir. When the particulars you give me are verified, you will have to go down to Quinton, but he will reimburse any expense you may be put to, through loss of time and detention in England. You can hold yourself at our disposal?"

"If military orders do not interfere — yes, gladly, for the sake of a look at old Quinton Court, even with nothing to come after. But perhaps Mr. Quinton may prefer to meet me in London."

“You will have to go down there. Mr. Quinton is a complete invalid, and keeps a resident doctor: he is still under sixty, but most unlikely, I should say, to marry. His father was killed in the hunting-field; he had not been long married, but his wife, who was one of the Pengwyns, gave birth to twin sons, posthumous children. This Clement was the younger of the two, laut^his elder brother died at nineteen, also from an accident. There you have the family history in a nutshell. Give me an address, where a letter will certainly find you when I have looked into this.”

Richard had not long to wait for the expected letter. Mr. Clement Quinton seemed disposed to take his young kinsman on trust, without holding aloof till his story was verified. Mr Fryer was still in correspondence with Canada when the summons came for Richard to present himself at Quinton Verney. The young Canadian was prompt in obeying, and on the day following he took train for the nearest railway point. No day or time had been named for arrival, so, after changing at the junction and alighting at a small wayside station, no conveyance was there to meet him. Nor, on enquiry, was any trap to be hired. His portmanteau could be sent by a returning cart in the course of a couple of hours, but for himself there was no alternative. He would have to walk the four miles, or rather more, which separated the station from Mount Verney.

Mount Verney, these people styled Mr. Quinton 's dwelling, and not Quinton Court as he expected; the Quinton Court his old father used to talk of, told by the grandfather reminiscent of his youth. Why had the original name been changed — that should be a first question when the time for putting questions came. Meanwhile he was not ill- pleased to be approaching Quinton on foot and alone, and a walk of four miles and over was but a light matter.

Four miles of lovely country verdant with the early green of spring, hill and dale unfolding wooded glimpses here and there, and the ancient Roman road stretching its white line before him, enduring still after all these centuries. He could hardly mistake the way, but after a while he thought it better to ask direction. There were iron gates and an avenue leading to Mount Verney, so he was told, and when he came to the iron gates he must turn in.

Gates and an avenue! His father had spoken of no such appendage to Quinton Court, but no doubt they were additions of a later time. He had his father much in mind during that walk, and the interest he would have felt in this possible — nay, probable — inheritance for his son. His grandfather too; the grandfather who died before his birth: it was as if the two old men went beside him along the green-fenced way, made fair by the sunshine of late April. And he had another person in mind, one who up to now has not been named. Nan, his girl, who waited for him far off across the Atlantic, full of love and faith. If this succession truly came to pass, if it were even an assured future to him and to his heirs, marriage would be no longer an imprudence, it might be entered into at once on his return, released from war-service. That hope was enough to gild the sunshine, and spread the pastures with a brighter green. And then he came to the gates, and they stood open.

Mount Verney did not boast a lodge, though the drive was a long one. The avenue had been closely planted with ilex and pine, too closely for the good of the trees, and it was consequently dark in shadow: as he turned in he was conscious of a certain chill.

The open gates were hung on stone pillars, and the ornamentation of these uprights caught his eye. On either side, inwards and outwards, a face was carved in relief, but a face that was not human: the mask of a satyr, with pricked animal ears and sprouting horns, and an evil leering grin. Richard had seen nothing of this sort in his backwoods experience, though possibly other things that were starker and grimmer. The leering faces filled him with repugnance; they should not remain there, he thought, to watch over the comings and goings of the house, did ever that house become his own.

The dark avenue had a bend in it; he could not see to the end, but he thought he knew well what he would find there, the old Quinton homestead had been so often described to him. The grey stone house, with its gables and mullioned windows, diamond-paned; the steep roof, up and down which the pigeons strutted and plumed themselves; the paved courtyard with its breast-high wall and mounted urns. He had a clear picture of if in his mind, and this was what at the turn of the avenue he expected to see. But when the turn was reached, his joyful anticipations fell dead. This was quite another place. Had he been misdirected after all?

What lay before him was a white stuccoed villa, spreading over much ground, but so pierced with big window-spaces that it presented to the beholder scant solidity of wall. This was the entrance side; towards the valley the walls rounded themselves into two semi- circles with a flat central division, and here again were the big sash windows of plate- glass, overlooking the view. But there was no mistake. This was Mount Verney.

A grave-looking elderly manservant answered the bell, and it became evident the Canadian visitor had arrived too soon. Mr. Richard Quinton was expected, yes certainly, but the day had not been named, and Mr. Quinton was at present out in the car, and Dr. Lindsay with him. If Mr. Richard would step into the library, tea should be brought to him — unless he preferred sherry. His room had been so far prepared that it could be quickly made ready; he, Peters, would tell the housekeeper. And would Mr. Richard come this way?

So tea was served to Richard in the library, and his first meal under the Mount Verney roof was taken in solitude, as the master of the house did not return. The library possessed one of the wide bows overlooking the valley, but in spite of the tall sash windows the room was a dark one. They were, it is true, heavily draped with crimson curtains, and the furniture was also heavy, and of an inartistic period. He tried to picture Nan in these surroundings, sitting in the opposite big chair (it would have swallowed her up entirely unless she perched on the arm) and pouring out for him from the huge old teapot, but the effort was in vain. The fancy portrait of his little love would not fit into this frame, but doubtless the frame could be altered: like the grinning masks on the gates, there was much it would be possible to change.

Meanwhile hurrying footsteps were heard on the floor overhead, housemaids, were busy there; and presently Peters came* again to ask if he should conduct the guest to his room.

Richard left the dull library with a sensation of relief. The chamber immediately above had been prepared for him, of equal size, and with windows commanding the view. Richard made some appreciative comment, which seemed to please the old servant.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “this is the best bed- room, it has the finest look-out. Mr. Quinton himself gave orders for it to be yours. It used to be Lady Anna Quinton's.”

"Lady Anna Quinton!" Richard repeated the name in surprise. "I did not know Mr. Quinton had ever been married."

"No, sir, and he never was. Her ladyship was his mother. She went away to France and died there; it is getting on for thirty years ago, but Mr. Quinton couldn't bear to take the room to be his, though it is the best in the house. I'll send up your portmanteau, sir, directly it arrives." And with that, Peters withdrew.

Here Richard was certainly well lodged. He stood at the middle window which had been set open, and looked out over a wide prospect. The sun was now beginning to decline, and the first flush of rosy cloud was reflected in the chain of pools which filled the valley to the right, widened out almost to the dimensions of a lake — no doubt artificially formed by damning up the natural stream, which rushed over a weir out of sight. In the middle distance, between the house and the water, was a grove of young oaks, not thickly set like the planting of the avenue, but high-trimmed and rising tall and bare-stemmed out of evergreen undergrowth. The shimmer of water was visible through them in the background, not wholly concealed though it might be when leafage was full.

The name of Quinton Verney was familiar, cherished among those legends of the importance of the family which the Canadian branch had preserved and handed down; but the lake was to Richard another innovation and surprise. Was it good fishing water, he wondered, and would rainbow trout flourish and breed there? As he stood looking, a boat shot out from the headland to the right, and, crossing the field of view, was lost behind the grove: it was only after it had disappeared that Richard began to wonder what had been the motive power. He could not recall any flash of oars or figures of rowers, or indeed any occupier of the boat.

This might have puzzled him still more, but his attention was diverted by the sound of an arrival below. A car had drawn up at the entrance, voices were now heard in the hall, footsteps on the stairs. After a brief interval, a sharp, rather authoritative knock came at his door and a man entered, a man still on the younger side of middle-age, reddish-haired and short of stature, with a close-trimmed bristly moustache.

"Mr. Quinton!" Richard exclaimed, coming forward. If this was his host, he was quite unlike the fancy picture he had formed. But then at Mount Verney everything was unlike and unexpected.

“No — my name's Lindsay — I'm the doctor. Mr. Quinton is sorry you were not met, but he had not understood you were arriving to-day.”

“I hope my coming has not been inconvenient?”

“Not at all — not at all, unless to yourself. But I do not suppose you minded the walk from the station; it is pretty country, and you came here especially to acquaint yourself with the place and its surroundings. One thing more. I have to ask you to excuse Mr. Quinton for this evening, and put up with my company only. Mr. Quinton is, as you know, an invalid, and I have been with him to-day to his dentist for some extractions under an anaesthetic. He is a wreck in consequence “— here the little reddish man shrugged his shoulders — “and will not leave his own rooms again to-night. You are comfortable here, I hope?” — this after Richard had expressed concern at his host's condition. Now it was necessary he should praise his .quarters, which he did without stint.

“Mr. Quinton would have it that Lady Anna's room should be made ready for the heir, and we were all surprised, as it has been long out of use. Well, adieu for the present: come down as soon as you are ready. Dinner is at seven: we keep early hours here in the country. What! your portmanteau not come? Then never mind about dressing; we will not stand on ceremony for to-night.”

With that, Lindsay the doctor took himself off. But, after he had closed the door, some of his last words kept repeating in Richard's mind. Made ready for the heir I That was taking intention for granted in a way for which he was not prepared; and, suddenly, he felt strangely doubtful of his own wish in the matter. Did he really desire to be the owner of the Quinton property, and, if not, from what hidden root did disinclination spring?

Presently a gong sounded from below, and he went down to find the dining-room lighted up, though it was scarcely more than dusk without, and the window-screens were still undrawn. The table was set out with some fine old silver and an abundance of flowers, the service of the meal was faultless, and Lindsay made an excellent deputy host. Good food has a cheering influence, and the causeless

depression which had threatened to engulf Richard's spirit was lifted, at least for the time.

“I hope you will like Quinton Verney,” Lindsay was saying with apparent heartiness. “Mr. Quinton is particularly anxious that you should like the place, and take an interest in his hobbies. He will explain better than I can what they are. But be prepared to hear a great deal about Roman remains in Britain, and to be cross-questioned about your knowledge.”

“Then I can only avow ignorance. It is a study that has not come in my way, but I am at least ready to be interested.”

“Ah, well, interest won't be difficult in what has been discovered on your own land, for that is his especial pride. A fine tessellated pavement down there by the pools, and an altar in what is now the grove. I am a duffer myself in these matters, but Mr. Quinton is a downright enthusiast about the old pagans and their times. It was he who replanted the grove where it is supposed that a sacred one existed, and set up in the midst of it a statue of Pan copied from the antique. I chaff him sometimes about it, and tell him I believe there is nothing he would like better than to revive the *Lupercalia*, and convert the entire neighbourhood. That's an exaggeration, of course, but the element of mystery a{>peals to him. As you will discover.”

Following this touch of personal revelation, Richard remarked:

“You know Mr. Quinton very well. I suppose you have been with him a long time?”

“Eighteen months — no less, no more. But you can get to know a man pretty well in that time, especially when you happen to be his doctor as well as his house-mate. He has been an invalid for many years — since boy- hood in fact: a sad case; you'll know more about it after a while. I was at the war before that: got knocked out, and when free of hospital could only take on a soft job, and fate or luck sent me here. Quinton and I have got on well together. Indeed I may tell you in confidence that he offered to leave me all he possessed, provided I would bind myself by his conditions.”

So the Quinton inheritance had been offered and refused elsewhere. Here was a matter that might well give Richard food for thought.

“And why did you not?” he began impulsively.

“Why didn't I grasp at such a chance? Well, I allow it was tempting enough, to a man who is a damaged article — a damage that will be lifelong. But I couldn't consent to bind myself as he would have me bound; and there was another reason. I would have been suspected of using my position here to exercise undue influence, and that I couldn't stomach. It was I who suggested to Mr. Quinton that he should seek out his next of kin — eh, what; what is the matter?”

The query was to Peters, who was whispering at his elbow.

“Pray excuse me. I am sorry, but my patient is not so well.” And the little doctor hurried away.

Peters brought in the next course.

“Dr. Lindsay hopes you will go on with the dinner, sir, and not wait for him. He may be detained some time.”

For the rest of the meal Richard was solitary. He declined after dinner wine and dessert, so Peters, who felt himself responsible towards the guest, suggested that he might like to smoke in the library, and coffee would be brought to him there. Richard rose from the table, and, as he did so, turned towards the unscreened window behind his chair, and experienced the shock of a surprise. There stood a strange-looking figure, gazing in at him and at the room, with face pressed against the glass. His exclamation recalled Peters, who was in the act of carrying out a tray; but by the time the old butler returned, the figure had disappeared. Who, or what was it? But Peters could not tell.

“I'll have it inquired into, sir. No one had any call to be there. These windows look into the enclosed garden, that is always kept private. A man, did you say, sir? Like a tramp?”

“A man,” Richard assented, but he did not add in what likeness. Surely it must have been some freak of fancy that suggested those lineaments, the white leering face which resembled the bestial masks at the gate of the avenue, with their pricked ears and budding horns; and suggested also the naked torso, of which a glimpse was afforded by the light.

Peters brought word with the coffee that no one was found in the garden, but he meant to be extra careful- in locking up, “lest it should be somebody after the plate.” And indeed, were ill characters about, the unscreened window was likely to

bring danger, as the display of silver on sideboard and table might well excite the cupidity of a looker-in.

Dr. Lindsay came down an hour later, but it was only to ask whether Richard had all he wanted for comfort and for the night.

“I shall be sitting up with Mr. Quinton,” he explained. “Unluckily, haemorrhage has followed these extractions, and he is morbidly affected by the sight and taste of blood. No, not a sufficient loss to be alarming: it will be subdued by to-morrow I don't doubt; it is serious only as it affects his special case. You'll give Peters your orders, will you not, and tell him when you wish to be called, and all that. I understand your portmanteau has arrived.”

So Richard found himself back again in the best bedroom at an early hour, with the night before him, and his luggage unpacked, and despatch-case set on the writing-table. Now was the time for the letter he had promised Nan, with his first impressions of Quinton Verney, about which she was naturally curious; the old homestead he had described to her, which might someday be his home and hers. But when he spread paper before him, he felt an overmastering reluctance to write that letter. What could he say if he told her the truth — and surely nothing less than the truth and the whole truth was due to Nan, however much it might disappoint and puzzle her. Could he tell her, with no reason to allege, of the distaste he felt for this place, for the house and all that it contained? — a distaste which began with the first sight of those leering masks at the avenue gate: how tell her of that other living face which resembled them, seen peering into the lighted dining-room, pressed against the glass of the shut window a couple of hours ago? Better delay, than that he should fill a letter with maunderings such as these, when another day's experience, or a personal inter- view with the invisible cousin, might bring about an altered mind. He was tired and out of spirits, and though he rejected with scorn the suggestion that a walk of less than five miles could have fatigued him, he was only lately out of hospital, and it was long since so much pedestrian exercise had come his way. And there had been throughout a certain excitement of highly strung expectation, from which no doubt reaction played its part. No, he would not attempt to write to Nan; the letter should be postponed until the morrow. And he would betake himself at once to bed.

II

It has been said that the chamber allotted to him was spacious and well-appointed, a private bathroom opened from it, and with one notable exception, it fulfilled every modern requirement. The rest of the house had been wired, and electric light installed, but here there were no means of illumination but candles, and, though these had been abundantly supplied on toilet and mantel- piece, and also at the bedside, the result was curiously dull. It was as if the walls and hangings of the apartment absorbed and did not reflect the light; a room of ordinary size would have been as well illuminated by a farthing dip. One of the windows was opened down a hand's breadth behind the curtains, and they stirred faintly in the air. Richard drew them apart to push up the lower sash, and then was struck by the beauty of the scene below. The valley had put on a veil of silvery mist, so delicate as hardly to obscure, and away to the left the moon was rising, a full yellow moon, magnified by its nearness to the horizon.

How still it all was. He had been used of late to the roar of a great city, audible even through hospital walls; before that to the thudding of great guns, and the scream of shell. How silent, and how peaceful: but presently not completely silent, for music broke into the stillness.

Somebody down below was playing on the flute, long-drawn notes and a simple air, but of enthralling sweetness. The music was difficult to locate; sometimes it seemed to come: from near the house, sometimes from the grove of trees, and now to be a mere echo from a greater distance still. Could some rustic lover be serenading a housemaid? but no, that seemed impossible. Richard was himself no musician, but he knew enough to appreciate the rare quality of the performer. And then the final notes died away, and silence reigned under the rising moon.

He dropped the curtain over the window, leaving it open, and now applied himself quickly to prepare for bed. Tired as he was, he expected to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow: such was his custom in high health, and the habit had served him in good stead when recruiting strength. But on this first night at Mount Verney sleep and he were to be strangers. No doubt there was some excitement of nerve or brain, the cause of which might be looked for entirely in him- self. This at

first; but by-and-bye there was something external, something more, though it was nameless and undefined.

A change had set in: this was no restlessness of his own that he was suffering, it was the misery and torture of another; a misery all the greater that it could not be expressed. It seemed to him that he was divided; he recognised that he was lying on the bed, but he was also walking the room from wall to wall, with tossed arms, with hands clenched and threatening, and then spread open; gestures foreign to his nature under any extreme of passion. He, or the entity which absorbed him, did not weep: no tears came to the relief of this distress, and his own voice was dumb in his throat; there could be no cry of appeal. Whether the passion which tore him was fury solely, or grief solely, he could not tell; or whether in its extreme anguish it combined the two.

For a while he was completely paralysed by this strange experience: he was walking the room with the sufferer; he was the sufferer: and then again he knew the personality and the agony were not his own; that his real self was stretched upon the bed, though he could neither lift a finger nor move a limb. How long did this endure in its alternations?

Keen as was his after memory, he could not tell: moments count as hours when under torture, and in an experience so abnormal time does not exist, even as we are told it will be effaced for us hereafter. One fragment of knowledge informed his brain; how he knew cannot be told, for no voice spoke. The entity was a woman. It was no man's agony into the vortex of which he had been drawn; this was a woman who knew both love and hate, a mother who had possessed and also lost.

Then, in a moment, the strain upon him snapped: he could move again, he had the government of his limbs, he was in his own body and not that other, if the other was a body indeed. Candles — the means of striking a light — were at his hand; in less time than it takes to write, both flames were kindled: the whole room was plain to see, and there was nothing, nothing but empty air. And yet he knew, he knew that the woman was still there — that she was pacing up and down from wall to wall — that she was still torn with fury, from the vortex of which his own spirit was scarcely yet set free, as consciousness of it remained.

This would have been a staggering experience, even to one versed in psychic marvels, but of such matters Richard Quinton was completely ignorant. To him the ordeal he had passed through was as unique as it was unaccountable — a horror to have so penetrated another's being, and also in a way a thing of shame, to }^e covered up shuddering from the light of day. He leapt out of bed; he must seek the window, the free air, if he would not choke and die. In his rush forward it seemed as if he encountered and passed through the frantic figure that yet was invisible and disembodied; but the collision, if it was collision, affected neither: roused as he was, the grip of individuality was too strong. He tore the curtains apart, and there at last was the cool night, the serene moon, the wafting of free air, in which, behind him in the room, the lighted candles flared. ' The moon was now high in heaven, the scene was bathed in white light, the shadows, where shadows fell, were black and sharply defined. The silvery mist of the earlier evening had disappeared, the light veil of it withdrawn, rolled up and swept away before that stirring of air. There was a path of reflected light across the quiet water of the pool, the headland stood out dark. And, strange to relate, from behind it again shot out the mysterious boat, the boat he had seen before, but now there were two men on board. He saw, or thought he saw, one man attack the other; for a dozen seconds they were locked together struggling. Then the rocking boat capsized and sank, and the men also disappeared.

Richard saw this, and yet in some dim way he realised that he had witnessed no actual disaster for which he need give the alarm: it was a scene projected into his mind from the mind of another. It did not even occur to him that there, within a bowshot of the house, were men drowning who might be saved. The moon-path on the water was smooth again now, undisturbed by even a ripple, the night utterly still. But a moment later the silence was broken by the same flute music which had discoursed so sweetly earlier in the night. It was, however, tuned to a livelier measure this second time, one that might accompany dancing feet. It sounded from the grove, and underneath the clear light Richard could distinguish moving figures, leaping among the trees.

There were five or six of them apparently, men or boys, and the figures looked as if naked above the waist. And the dance was not solely a dance, for they seemed to be chasing, or driving before them, some large animal which fled with leaps

through the under- growth, a goat possibly, or a sheep. The animal and the pursuing figures disappeared among the trees, and then appeared again as if they had made a circuit of the grove; the goat (if it was a goat) leaping in front, and the others pursuing. This was the end; a cloud drifted over the moon, and when it passed there was no more sign of movement in the grove, and the jocund fluting had ceased.

Richard turned back into the room, and now his perception of that fury and distress, if not wholly effaced, was dulled as if here, too, was the shadowing of a merciful cloud. But stretch himself on that bed he could not, nor address himself to sleep, lest it should be renewed with all the former horror. He would keep the lights burning, if only he had a book he would occupy himself with reading, but literature had formed no part of his light luggage.

He might seek one in the library below, treading softly in stocking-soles so as not to disturb the sleeping house.

But as he issued forth, candle in hand, he found a burner switched on on the landing, and the dressing-gowned small doctor crossing over from an opposite door. Lindsay at once accosted him.

“Can I do anything: what is the matter? — oh, can't sleep, and want a book: is that it? I can find you one close at hand, and mine are livelier than the fossils in the library. Come this way.”

Lindsay's room opened over the entrance, next to Mr. Quinton's bedchamber. A set of bookshelves filled a recess.

“Help yourself. The yellow-backs on the top shelf are French — I daresay you read French. But you'll find English ones below, and perhaps they are more likely to put you asleep.” He snapped on an extra light, and then turned for a fuller scrutiny of his companion. “You look pretty bad,” was his remark. “Does a sleepless night always knock you up like this? I'm doctor to the establishment you know, and I prescribe a peg. Whisky or brandy will you have? Both of them are here, and so is a syphon. Sit down while I get it ready. Three fingers — two — one? Good: you do well to be moderate. Get outside that, and you'll feel better. And then you can pick your book.”

Lindsay did not question further as to the cause of disturbance, though he looked inquisitive, as if suspicions were aroused. Richard for his part remained

tongue-tied, time was needed to digest and try to understand his experience: he might speak of it later on, but not now, while still his nerves were vibrating from the strain. The human companionship was, however, reassuring, and by the time the prescribed dose was swallowed, he felt altogether more normal. He inquired for Mr. Quinton, sat for a while conversing on indifferent subjects, and then departed with a book.

He did not venture again to lie down, but installed himself in a deep chair, the candles burning at his elbow. The effect of the novel may have been soporific, though he was an inattentive reader. After a long interval he fell asleep, and waked to find morning already brightening in the east.

The night was over, its perplexities and distresses had sunk into the past, and a new day had begun. It was refreshing to spirit as well as body to wash and re-clothe, to undo the bolts and chains which guarded the front door, and find himself in the free air. Though it was still the air which breathed over Mount Verney, he was delivered from the evil shadow of that roof. He retraced his steps of the day before, down the dark curving drive, out through the satyr-headed gates, to the highroad which was free to all, the road traversed by Roman legions in centuries that were past. He turned to the right, with the eastern sky behind him, and walked on, without object, but steeping himself in the freshness of the newly awakened world.

At first he appeared to be the only person astir and observant, but presently an old man of the labouring class pushed open a gate some way ahead and came towards him, a shepherd accompanied by his dog. Richard would have liked to exchange ideas with an English working man, but felt too suddenly shy to venture on more than a good-morning as they drew abreast. The man, however, stopped and accosted him.

“Beg pardon, master, but as you came along, did you mebbe happen on a straying sheep? A ewe she is, and has taken her lamb with her, one getting on in size, as it was dropped early. Me and the dog have been after her since first it was light.”

Richard had no information to give; he had not seen the ewe and her lamb. And then he bethought him.

“I stayed last night at Mount Verney, and, looking out in the moonlight, I saw a sheep leaping about in the grove, the coppice of oaks by the water. Would that be the one you have lost?”

The man shook his head.

“No, sir, that would be Mr. Quinton's sheep. I drove it down myself, a prime wether, only a day ago; and my heart was sore for the poor thing. It seemed as if the dog here was sorry too, for he didna like the job. Mr. Quinton he buys one at the spring full moon, and again at harvest, of my master or one of the other breeders, always to be driven into the coppice and left there, and I doubt if ever the creatures live as much as two days. What he wants them for 'tis beyond me to say. Seems a waste of good meat and good wool, for it is just a hole in the field and dig them under, so I am told, and not a soul the better. Some folks will eat braxy mutton, meat being dear as it is; but not one of them would touch a sheep that had died up there in the wood, poisoned as like as not. 'Tis just a mystery to all of us. But I've no call to be passing remarks, seeing you know Mr. Quinton, and are staying at Mount Verney.

Richard might have replied with truth that he did not know Mr. Quinton, their acquaintance was still to make. But he asked instead for direction, and was told to, cross a stile to the right into a certain field-path, which would bring him out opposite the house, by the bridge over the water.

The bridge was a rustic affair of planks and a hand-rail, and beyond it the way diverged to right and left, the path on the left entering the grove, barred only by a light iron turnstile. Was it curiosity, or another sort of attraction which drew Richard thither, to see by daylight the spot on which he had looked down under the moon the night before? Now it seemed ordinary enough; the paths cut through it were grassed over and green, but here and there, where the turf was soft, he noticed they were trampled by divided hoofs, larger than those of sheep. The trees, young and slender, shorn of their lower branches, were now faintly green with unexpanded leafage; the undergrowth, which was chiefly rhododendron, was here and there breaking into purple and pinkish flower.

While still some way from it, he could distinguish among the trees the statue of which Lindsay had spoken. It was mounted on a pedestal, and was, as he said, a modern copy of the antique. Pan with bis pipes in bronze, an abhorrent half -animal

figure; the brooding face less repulsive perhaps than those of the satyrs at the gate, but the regard it appeared to bend on the observer who approached, had a keener expression of intelligence and evil power. Richard as he drew near, his attention riveted on that face and crouching figure, almost stumbled over an object lying at the foot of the column.

It was the dead sheep. Had it been dragged thither with a purpose, or hunted till it fell exhausted where it lay? There was no mark upon it that he could see, of the knife of the executioner, but the swollen tongue protruded from the half open jaws, and thick blood had flowed from both nostrils, staining the ground.

Truly Mount Verney was a spot where there were strange happenings. The shudder of the night again passed over Richard, and he had now no least desire to linger in the grove, or to make further discoveries. Passing through another gate he gained a steep slope of lawn, leading up to the gravelled terrace on which the windows of the library opened. His approach had been observed, and here was Lindsay waving him a cheerful greeting, with the intelligence of waiting breakfast.

III

"Been for an early ramble? — that was well done. Mr. Quinton wants you to see as much as possible of the place before he speaks to you of the future. A lovely morning. And this house stands well, does it not, above the valley? Gives you a first rate view."

Richard assented. And then put the question he had been meditating.

"Was this house built on the site of another, do you know? The house my father used to speak about was called Quinton Court."

It was built long before his father's time, and was of stone; it had a walled courtyard and mullioned windows. I don't suppose it was ever a grand mansion. But that was what I expected to find in coming down here."

"Quinton Court is still in existence; the man lives there who has the farm. It is a fine-looking old place, but I expect it has gone a long way downhill since it was given up as the family residence. You will find it about a mile from here, on the other side of the hill."

"I should like to see it. I should greatly like to see it!"

“Make it the object of your next walk. Go the length of the lake to the head water, and through the field beyond, and you will come upon a cart-road. I would show you the way, but I. may have difficulty in leaving. And perhaps you would rather go alone.”

That he would prefer to make the visit alone was so true that Richard left the suggestion uncontested. Lindsay passed lightly to another subject; one on which he was not improbably curious.

“I hope the novel and the 'peg' helped on to sleep? I hate to lie awake myself, but sometimes a strange bed! There is fish, I think, under that cover. Or do you prefer bacon?”

"I am a good sleeper usually, in any sort of bed, strange or familiar. Dr. Lindsay, I am sorry to be a troublesome guest, but can I change my room? And, if you will allow me, I will do so before to-night.”

“You can, without doubt. There are other guest-rooms, though with fewer advantages than the bow-room, as we call it. I will see about the exchange. But — may I be so indiscreet as to ask why? Because Mr. Quinton will put the question to me, and I had better be prepared to answer him.”

“Then perhaps I may put a question on my side. I understand that bedroom has been long out of use. I know nothing about ghosts, and have never believed in them, but — it is not like other rooms. Is it supposed to be haunted? And, if so, why was it chosen for me?”

“I can't tell you much about it; remember I only came here eighteen months ago. As for why it was chosen, you must ask Mr. Quinton: it was his doing, not mine. I never heard of any ghost being seen there. The only queer thing said about the room sounds like illusion, and could not disturb a sleeper. Nor would it, I suppose, be visible at night. But perhaps you, as a Quinton, would be more sensitive than a stranger.”

“What is the queer thing?”

“Why it seems absurd, but they say whoever looks through that window sees a boat on the lake. I saw something like it myself on one occasion, but I expect it is a flaw in the glass. Was there a ghost last night?”

“No ghost in the sense you mean, but such an impression of misery — and not misery only, anger — that I found sleep impossible. That is all I have to tell. If Mr. Quinton is affronted by my wish to change, I must find quarters elsewhere till he is ready to speak tome.”

"Nonsense: he won't be affronted, it would be absurd. I doubt if you will see him today, but he is decidedly better, and I shall not need to sit up another night. You'll like him, I think. He has his eccentricities, that must be allowed. But you would be sorry for him from your heart if you knew all.”

“He is eccentric? I heard a strange story about him this morning, from an old shepherd I met in the road. Is it true that he purchases a sheep twice a year, and that it is driven into the grove to die? There is one lying dead there now, at the foot of the statue of Pan.”

Lindsay shrugged his shoulders.

“I told you he was half a pagan, and I don't defend the sheep business. That sacrifice is one of the things he wants continued, and makes a condition; but I told him straight out that no successor would pledge himself to a thing so out of reason, and you had better be firm about it when he speaks. Of course it is natural he should wish Mount Verney kept up as the residence of the owner; there one can be in sympathy. His grandfather built it, and his father planned the grounds, and the ornamental water and all that. Odd about the lake, seeing what happened after. Why, don't you know? The elder son was drowned there. Mr. Quinton's twin brother. Archibald, his name was. He was the Quinton heir.”

Richard saw again, in a flash of memory, the two figures struggling in the boat and disappearing under water; but where was the good of taking Lindsay into confidence? He had said enough, and made it plain he would occupy the room no more, nor look from it over the lake: he did not care to what sort of apartment he was transferred; it would serve him for the time, however mean.

The doctor hurried away as soon as they had breakfasted, apologising for his enforced absence, but Richard was well content to be alone. He wanted to think out the warning again given about conditions. That which concerned the sheep was unthinkable, and could hardly be pressed; but evidently there were others, by reason of which Lindsay had refused the offered heirship. If he was required to live at Mount

Verney in the future, and make it his home and his wife's home — what then? In one way the prospect of the inheritance was tempting enough to him, and would be to any man — an inheritance that would at once convert him into a person of importance, with a stake in the country as the saying is; a good position to offer his wife, ample means, provision for the children that might be born to them. But if what he began dimly to suspect was fact; if the place had somehow fallen under a curse, in pagan times or now — such a curse as affected inanimate building, and tainted the very ground — it would be no fit home for her. And Nan was not covetous of riches — she would not mind struggling on with him and being poor; she would approve, so he justly thought, of a refusal made for the sake of right.

There was nothing to detain him indoors, so with these cogitations in mind, he set out in the direction Lindsay had indicated, following the north shore of the artificial lake, and crossing the headland which, viewed from above, had been the departure point of the mysterious boat. On the western side of the headland, furthest from the house and half hidden by the bank, were the remains of what certainly had been a boathouse; but in these days no boat sheltered there, and the timbers of the roof had rotted and fallen in decay. He passed through the gate by the head- water, a clear and fast running stream; found and followed the cart-road, which after a while was merged in a superior approach, now well-nigh as worn and deeply rutted as the other.

He came upon the old Court suddenly, round a fold of the hill, and there he stood for a while, his heart moved by a mysterious feeling of kinship — if not utterly fantastic to suppose flesh and blood can feel itself akin to walls of stone. The old homestead had fallen from its first estate, but there was a dignity about it still, the dignity of fine proportion and high quality, differing widely from the jerry building of to-day. The grey gables were there as of old, the roof of slabbed stone, the panes of diamond lattice; there the flagged courtyard with its breast-high boundary wall, and five of the six urns mounted in place; the sixth had fallen, and lay broken at the foot.

The front door was fast shut, an oak door studded with iron, but Richard drew near and knocked, treading the very stones the footsteps of the dead had worn. Why, why had the later degenerates forsaken this dear place, and fixed their abode at Mount Verney?

A neatly-dressed young woman opened to him, and looked inquiringly at the stranger.

"I'm sorry, sir, my father is not in, if so be as you come seeking him."

No, Richard said, that was not his errand; but might he be allowed to see inside the house, if only a couple of the rooms?

"Why certainly, if you are thinking of taking the place. I didn't know as it had got about that we are leaving, but news do fly apace. But we shall not be out until September."

"My name is Quinton, and I am from Canada. My great-grandfather lived here, and it was here that my grandfather was born. I am anxious to see the Court now I am in England. If you would be so good as to allow."

"Come in, sir, and look where you like; you are kindly welcome. My father would make you so I know, for he is the oldest tenant on the estate. We have no fault to find with the place, but the farm is too big for father now he has no son with him, and the house too large for us too. I am the only one at home, and mother is laid by with the rheumatics. These long stone passages take a lot of cleaning, to say nothing of the many rooms, though more than half of them we shut away."

So upon this invitation Richard had his wish, and saw over the house upstairs and down. In some of the rooms put out of use there were still pieces of old furniture, Quinton property, his guide told him: an oak chest or two, corner cupboards with carven doors, a worm-eaten dresser, chairs in the last stage of decrepitude. They were let with the house, having been thought unworthy of removal to Mount Verney. In the best parlour sacks of grain were stored, and on the threshold of two of the empty bedrooms he was warned to step warily, as the floors were thought to be unsafe.

Quinton Court had fallen from its first estate, but it was still lovely in the eyes of this late descended son. It had been cleanly kept, however roughly, and there was an air of purity about its homeliness, of open casements and scents of lavender and apples. He could picture his Nan here, a happy house-mistress under the ancient roof of his forefathers; but not as the chatelaine of Mount Verney with all its wealth: never at Mount Verney. Ah, if only Mr. Quinton would make this place his bequest to the next heir, the old Court and the surrounding farm which he might work for a

living; and leave Quinton Verney and his accumulated thousands, where else and to whom else he pleased !

IV

Such were Richard's thoughts as he walked back along the green shores of the lake, and under the mid-day sun. He and the doctor were again tête-à-tête at luncheon; but he was told Mr. Quinton desired to see him that afternoon in his private room above stairs; also that he intended to dine with them, being greatly better than the day before. So the first interview with his host came about earlier than he had been led to expect.

The appearance of his elderly cousin took him by surprise. Mr. Clement Quinton was strikingly handsome, though older-looking than his two and fifty years. He might have been taken for a man advanced in the seventies, though his tall thin figure was still upright. He owned a thick thatch of grey hair, a close-cut white beard, and bushy grey eyebrows above eyes of steely blue, rather unnaturally wide open. He welcomed Richard cordially, shaking him by the hand: a cold hand, his was, and yet the younger man felt uncomfortably, the instant they were palm to palm, that he touched something sticky and moist. Mr. Quinton's left hand was gloved, and Richard remembered after that he held a dark silk handkerchief in the other while they talked together.

There was nothing embarrassing or noteworthy about the earlier conversation. Mr. Quinton appeared kindly interested in Richard's past history, asking about his father and home, how he had been educated and where, and also the details of his military service. They had been talking together for half an hour, before any reference was made to the future.

I want you to be interested in this place," he said with emphasis. "I want you to be particularly interested. For there are various things I am bound to leave to the doing of others, and much will depend on their punctual carrying on. It will smooth my pillow — as the saying is — if I may be assured of the co-operation of my successor."

This was not very easy to answer, as Richard could not assume successorship on a hint so vague. So he struck out into an account of his visit to

Quinton Court, and pleasure over the discovery that the old house of which his grandfather had spoken with affection, was still solidly existent.

“I was afraid it had been pulled down, and Mount Verney built on its site.”

“No, we destroyed nothing. My respect for antiquity is too great. As I will show you later, it has been my great desire to — call back into life, I may say — associations from the dead past of an earlier period still. Traces of what had been, were thick on the ground hereabouts: you shall have the complete history of how, and why, and what. You will find it remarkable indeed. I will tell you frankly, my young cousin, it is here and on Mount Verney I want your interest focussed. This place dates back to the Roman occupation of Britain, and in comparison with the relics here, Quinton Court is but a thing of yesterday.”

"Dr. Lindsay told me Roman remains had been unearthed. I think he said some portions of a pavement.”

“There was a villa here, on this very spot; baths in the valley, with the water running through them; and an altar where you see the grove, which was once a dense thicket of wood. I have other means of knowing, besides conclusions drawn from the fragments that remain, and these communications the excavations have strikingly confirmed. I was directed where to dig. There was a special cult connected with this place. The worship of Pan.”

“I observed the statue in the grove.”

"It marks the site of the old altar. Pan is a deity about whom little has been known and much mistaken. From the sources of information at my command, I have compiled a treatise. And that is one thing I require of my successor. If unpublished at the time of my decease, I wish it given to the world.”

The posthumous publication of a treatise! It would be well if other conditions were no more formidable than this.

“Some writers have made the mistake of confounding Pan with Faunus; surely an extraordinary error. My theory is entirely different. Cain was his prototype. Cain.”

Here the recluse seemed to be stirred by some inward excitement, and he got up to pace the room.

“Cain! “he repeated. “Of course you know the scriptural narrative, and probably little else about that founder of an early race. There are mistakes in that

account — it is libellous, the fabrication of an enemy. Eve put about unworthy slanders. If Cain did truly kill his brother, it was in self-defence, or in a fury of panic anger: I say if, for I do not allow it to be- the truth. Abel, the favourite, was a sneak and a coward, and he knew whatever lie he set up, so long as it was against the other, would stand as unassail- able truth. He was better blotted out, than left to be the father of a degenerate race. Cain was at least a man. And it is said the Lord put a mark on him. What did that mean, think you?"

"I have not the least idea. Does anybody know? "

"I know this much, that it was the curse of the partly animal form. Cain was crippled into that likeness, and some of his sons took after him. Not the daughters, for they were in the likeness of Eve. And it is on record that they were beautiful. The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair. But that does not come into the argument, nor concern us now. It was because of the mark set on him that Pan loved solitary places, the cool depths of caves and the shadow of woods. It was he in the beginning, and not Abel, who was the keeper of flocks. Abel did nothing but laze in the sun and watch the fruits ripen, and then gather them for an offering. I told you that the record lied. Do you wonder how I know all this? "

Richard could do nothing but assent.

"I will tell you — show you. I wish to instruct you in my methods, that they may be yours hereafter. It is not all who have the gift of sight. Lindsay is psychically blind. But something tells me you have it, or will have it. Come here with me."

He opened a door and showed an inner, smaller room, probably intended as a dressing-closet in the original design of the house. There was a writing-table and chair in the sole window, but the only other furniture was a high stand, on which was some object covered over with black velvet drapery. Mr. Quinton turned back part of the covering, and directed, Richard to seat himself before it. The lifted flap revealed the smooth and shining surface of a large crystal, or ball of glass, set into a frame. "You know what this is, and what its use? I want to test whether I can make a scryer of you. The black cloth is used only to prevent confusing lights. Now look steadily into the crystal, and tell me what you see."

Richard looked, in some amusement and complete incredulity.

“I see the reflection of my own face,” he said presently. “Nothing more. Except — yes — something which looks like smoke.”

“Go on looking, and be patient. There will be more.”

As Richard gazed, his own reflection disappeared, the smoke cleared away, and there were the gates of the avenue with the leering faces, exactly as he saw them the day before. Then the cloud of smoke returned, blotting them out; cleared again, and showed the spy of the evening, peering in at the window of the dining-room. Succeeding this, came the scene of the grove by moonlight, with the figures leaping among the trees, and driving the doomed sheep.

“I am seeing a procession of scenes,” he replied to a further question. “But only what are in my mind and memory. Nothing new.”

“Go on looking,” was again the command. “What is new will come.”

The next scene was, as Richard half expected, the grove as he entered it that morning, with the statue of Pan on its pedestal, and the sheep before it lying dead. This persisted, not small as dwarfed within the limits of the ball, but now as if a window opened before him on the actual scene. But a change was taking place in the figure of the god. The bronze seemed to soften and warm into flesh, the terrible, wise face was no longer serene and meditative, the eyes looked into his, and now there was mockery in them, revelling in his surprise. The thing was alive, moving, surely about to descend.

But no. The figure, without leaving its pedestal, stretched out one hairy ape-like arm, and clutched the body of the sheep, drawing it up to rest on his crossed hocks, while the mocking face bent closer, as if to snuff or lick the blood. Was the monstrous creature about to tear the victim open, ready to devour? The action of the hands looked like it.

Richard could look no longer. A sweat of horror broke out over him, and stood in beads on his forehead; he started up gasping for air.

“Let me go,” he cried out wildly: "let me go!”

Mr. Quinton replaced the velvet covering.

“That is enough for to-day,” he said. “I am sufficiently answered. You can see.”

Richard hardly knew how he got out of the room, whether it was by Mr. Quinton's dismissal or his own will. Or how long a time elapsed before, finding himself alone, he happened to look at the palm of his right hand, which had felt curiously sticky after contact with Mr. Quinton's. The smear on it was dry and easily effaced by washing, but without doubt what he had touched was blood.

Mr. Quinton seemed to have been in no way affronted by Richard's abrupt withdrawal. He was in a genial mood when he joined the two younger men at dinner, now with his loose wrapping gown put off, and faultlessly attired in evening dress. A handsome man; and Richard noticed that his hands were beautifully shaped and white. But, to the guest's vision, there was one striking peculiarity about his appearance, a peculiarity which seemed to increase as the meal went forward. Perhaps the opening of Richard's clairvoyance, artificially induced some hours before, had not wholly closed. For doubtless what he now perceived, would not have been visible to ordinary sight.

Most of us in these later days have heard of the existence of auras, a species of halo which is supposed to emanate from every mortal, indicative of spiritual values and degrees of power; but it is doubtful whether our backwoodsman was aware. What he saw, however, was an aura, though formed of shadow and not light. It encompassed the seated figure of his host with a surrounding of grey haze, spreading to a yard or more from either shoulder, and equally above the head; not obstructing the view of the room behind him, but dimming it, as might a stretched veil of grey crape. It was curious to see Peters waiting on him and passing through this, evidently unaware; his hand and the bottle advancing into the full light as he filled Mr. Quinton's glass, and then withdrawing to leave the veil as perfect as before. Mr. Quinton made an excellent dinner, and chaffed Richard on his want of appetite; he also drank freely of the wines Peters was handing round, and pressed them on his guests. The glasses were particularly elegant, of Venetian pattern, slender stemmed and fragile. Peters had just replenished his master's glass, when Mr. Quinton in the course of argument, lifted and brought it down sharply on the table with the result of breakage. The accident attracted little notice; Peters cleared away the fragments and mopped up the spilt wine, and another glass was set in its place and filled. But as

Mr. Quinton raised the fresh glass to his lips, Richard noticed that blood was dripping from his right hand in heavy spots, staining his shirt-cuff and the cloth.

“I am afraid, sir, you have cut yourself,” he exclaimed impulsively; and almost at the same instant Peters appeared at his master's elbow offering a dark silk handkerchief.

Mr. Quinton did not answer, but uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and abruptly rose from table and left the room. Lindsay followed him, but presently returned, looking unusually grave. Richard inquired if the cut was serious.

“Mr. Quinton did not cut his hand,” Lindsay answered. “I am charged to tell you what is the matter. Though it is as far as possible kept secret, he thinks it better you should know.”

The gravity of Lindsay's countenance did not relax . He poured out half a glass of wine and drank it, as if to nerve himself for the telling of the tale.

“When I came here as resident doctor eighteen months ago, I heard the story: it was, of course, necessary I should be informed as I had to treat his case. I shall have to go a long way back to make you understand. Lady Anna, Quinton's mother, had twin sons, born shortly after her husband's death. She must have been a strange woman. They were her only children, but almost from infancy she made a difference between them, setting all her affection on Archibald, the elder, and treating the other, Clement, with coldness and every evidence of dislike. Quinton says he can never remember his mother caressing him, or even speaking kindly. He was always the one held to blame for any childish fault or mischief, and pushed into the background, while everything was for Archibald the heir. We cannot wonder that this folly of hers led to bad feeling between the lads. It was active in their school days, though they were educated at different schools, and met only in the holidays. Whenever they met they fought. What the last quarrel was about I cannot say, but Archibald was entering an expensive regiment, and the army could not be afforded for Clement, though it was his great desire: he owns to having' been very sore. They were in a boat on the lake, and they fought there, and the boat capsized.

“It was said that Archibald hadn't a chance; he had been stunned by a blow on the head, or else had struck his head in falling. They both could swim a little, but he went down like a stone, and Clement reached the shore: the distance could not

have been great, nor could one have expected such an accident to result in anything worse than a ducking. The horrible part of it was that Lady Anna saw what happened from her window in the bow room."

"Ah ! "

"Yes, the room you had, and where you were disturbed last night. She saw the fight and the struggle, and was convinced of Clement's guilt: that he had plotted the occasion and killed Archibald, so that he might take his place. She wanted to have the boy tried for murder; ay, and would have had her way, had it not been for her brother, Lord Pengwyn, who was guardian to both the lads. He got the thing passed over as an accident, as no doubt it was. But the point I am coming to, though I've been long about it, is this. When Clement was drawn from the water, and brought in, sick and dazed. Lady Anna met him in a fury of passion. He was Cain over again, the first murderer who slew his brother: I wonder, did Eve do the like! 'Your brother's blood,' she said, 'will be upon your hands for ever.' Quinton says he would not have cared, after that, if they had hung him then and there. He had an illness, and the palms of his hands began to bleed — from the pores as it were, without a wound — and they have continued to bleed at intervals from that day to this. You saw what happened to-night."

"It sounds like a miracle. Is there no cure?"

"Everything has been tried — styptics, hypnotism even. Sometimes the symptom remits for two or three weeks, and the bleeding is generally early in the day; he thought himself safe this evening. Miracle? no, unless the power of the mind over the body is held to be miraculous. You have read of the stigmatists — women, ay and men too — on whom the wounds of Christ have broken out, to bleed always on Fridays?"

"I have heard of them — certainly. But I set it down as a fraud — a monkish trick."

"It is as well vouched for as any other physical phenomenon. And this case of Quinton's is nearly allied, though horror created it in his case, and not saintly adoration. It has spoiled his life; for over thirty years he has been an invalid, and will so continue to the end. His aberration of mind has all arisen from this root: his queer

fancies about Cain and Pan, blood-sacrifices to Pagan gods — satyrs and fauns and hobgoblins, and I know not what!”

“You speak of aberration, and yet assert that he is sane?”

"He is sane enough for all practical purposes — a good man of business even, with a sharp eye to the main chance. Take him apart from these cranks of his, I like him — I can't help liking him. You'll like him too, when you know him better. You have seen the least attractive side of him, coming down like this, with the misgiving he is driving you into a corner. I'd have you stand up to him and speak your mind about what you will and will not do. And I believe he will hear reason in the end.”

Next morning's post brought Richard a letter, forwarded on from London: a notice requiring his appearance before a certain Medical Board, and obliging his return to town. He sent a message to Mr. Quinton by Lindsay, explaining his abrupt departure, but saying he was willing to return if desired. The reply message requested an interview, in the same upstairs room as before.

It proved to be a long one. Lindsay, waiting in the hall for the car to come round, wondered what was the delay, and what was passing between the two. At last a door in the upper regions opened and shut, and Richard came down the stairs. He was white as chalk, staggering like a man dizzy or blind, and a cold sweat stood in beads on his forehead, as happened after the scrying of the day before. Lindsay sprang forward to meet him, and propped him with a hand under his arm. He leaned against the wall, and gasped out:

"It's all over — I've refused — you were right to refuse too. The thing he asks is impossible. This house is full of devils — of devils, I tell you — and they come out of Quinton 's crystal. He made me look again — against my will, and I saw — what I can't speak of — what I never can forget !”

“Come into the dining room with me, and I'll give you a dram. You have been upset; you may think differently when you are calm.”

“No — no. Never this place for me. He is beyond reason: he is given over to the fiend. I told him I would thank him for ever for just Quinton Court and a farm, but he would not part the property. It had to be all or nothing. And not even to gain Quinton Court would I be owner here. No, I'll have no dram. I want to get away.”

The car was now heard coming round, and drawing up at the door.

“Goodbye, Lindsay, and thank you for your kindness. We may never meet again, but I shall not forget.”

These were last words, and the next moment he was shut in and speeding away, the open gates with their watchful faces left behind.

V

Richard reached London only to fall ill. The doctor diagnosed influenza, but seemed to think his system had received a shock: as to this he was not communicative. He had a week in bed, and another of tardy convalescence, a prey to depression and all the ills resulting from exhaustion. A fortnight had gone by since he left Mount Verney, when he received a communication from Fryer and Fryer asking for an interview. Mr. Fryer wished to see Mr. Richard Quinton on a matter of business, and would be obliged if he could make it convenient to call.

“I ought to have written to the old bird, to tell him I am out of the running,” was Richard's comment, spoken to himself. “But, as I have been remiss, I had better go and hear what he has to say. I shall have to take a taxi.”

He had no strength left for the walking distance, and even the office stairs were something of a trial. He was shown in at once to Mr, Fryer, and began with an apology.

“I have only just ascertained your address,” said the man of law. “Are you aware, Mr. Quinton, that your cousin and late host is dead?”

“Indeed no, sir, I was not aware.” And that Richard was shocked by the intelligence was plain to see.

“He died suddenly of heart-failure the night after you left. And, so far as Dr. Lindsay and I can ascertain after a careful search through all his papers, he has left no will.”

This communicatory did not seem to inform Richard; he was still too dazed by what he had just heard.

Mr. Fryer tapped the blotting-pad before him, which was a way he had when irritated.

“You don't realise what that means? The whole property goes to you, both real estate and personal. Mount Verney, and all that it contains.”

Richard gave a cry, which sounded more like horror than elation.

“You are telling me — that I am the owner of Mount Verney?”

“If no will is discovered later, certainly you are the owner.”

“And does this bind me to live there? Because I cannot — I will not. I told Mr. Quinton so before leaving, and, as he made it a condition, I refused the inheritance.”

“So I understand from Dr. Lindsay. No, you are bound to nothing. You can live where you please. And, as soon as the legal processes of succession are gone through, you can sell the property, should you prefer investment abroad.”

Richard still sat half-stunned, slowly taking it in. He could rid himself of Mount Verney and all that it contained, and Quinton Court, the home of his desire, would be his own.

“You would have wished, of course, to attend your cousin's funeral, but you had quitted the address left with me, and we were unable to let you know in time. He was cremated, according to his own often-expressed desire. There is one thing, Mr. Quinton, I would like to say to you — to suggest, though you may think I am exceeding my province. Your cousin's intestacy benefits you, but there are others who suffer by it. Old Peters, a servant who had been with him from boyhood: he would have been provided for without doubt. Probably there would have been gratuities to the other domestics, according to their length of service; and his resident doctor, Lindsay, would have come in for a legacy. Of course it is quite at your option what.”

“I will thank you, sir, to put down what you would have advised Mr. Quinton in all these cases, had you prepared his will, and I will make it good.”

It was not always easy to divine Mr. Fryer's sentiments, but he seemed to receive the instruction with pleasure. Lawyer and client shook hands, and then Richard was on the street again, hurrying away. O, what a letter — what a letter he would have to write to Nan!

Legal processes take time, and summer was waning into autumn before Richard was fully established as owner of the Quinton property. Up to now he had sedulously

avoided Mount Verney, though he had been in the near neighbourhood, and had several times visited Quinton Court. He knew only by the agent's report that his orders were carried out, the heads removed from the gate-pillars and the statue from the grove, which was a grove no longer, as the young oaks had been felled and carted away. The Roman relics had been presented to a local museum, and the house was now shut up, and emptied of most of its furniture. Lindsay, at Richard's desire, had chosen such of the plenishings as he cared for and could make useful, receiving these in addition to the money gift advised by Mr. Fryer.

All this was accomplished, the last load removed, and now the big white villa was shut up and vacant, and Clement Quinton's heir was about to enter for the first time as its possessor. But, strange to say, he had elected to make the visit late at night and in secret, so planning his approach across country that his coming and going might be unnoticed and unknown. A thief's visit, one would have said, rather than that of the lawful owner, who could have commanded all.

The latter part of the journey was made on foot, and throughout he carried with him, under his own eye and hand, a large and heavy gladstone-bag. He had studied incendiary methods when serving in France, and materials for swift destruction were contained within.

It was a wild evening; a gale, forestalling the equinox, hurtled overhead, tearing the clouds into shreds as they flew before it, and making clear spaces for some shining of stars. Rain was not yet, though doubtless it would fall presently. The wind would help Richard's purpose, rain would not, though he thought it could hardly defeat it. That intermittent shining of the stars gave little light. The night was very nearly “as dark as hell's mouth”, and Richard had much the feeling that he was venturing into the mouth of hell.

It had needed the mustering of a desperate courage, this expedition on which he was bent, but he could entrust his purpose to no other hand. Purification by fire: there could be, it seemed to him, no other cleansing. He intended no oblation to the infernal gods, that was far from his thought: what he dimly designed was a final breaking of their power.

With this purpose in mind he turned into the dark avenue, the shut gates yielding to his hand, between the pillars from which the satyrs' heads were gone. Did

faces pry on him from between the close-ranked trees? He would not think of it: and for this night at least he would shut the eyes of his soul, the eyes with which he had perceived before, or he might happen upon something which would make him altogether a coward. In the dark- ness he left the road more than once, and blundered into the plantation, needing to have recourse to the electric torch in his pocket before he could find the way. But at last he came upon the open sweep of drive, and there was the villa before him, stark and white, eyeless and shuttered, the corpse of a house from which the soul had gone out.

This new owner had been careful to carry with him the keys which, admitted. He unlocked a side door and entered, and now the torch was a necessity in the pitch darkness which prevailed within. His first act was to go through the lower rooms, unshuttering and opening everywhere, so as to let in a free draught of air. Here a certain amount of the heavier furniture still remained: Lindsay had been moderate in his selection, though he might, with Richard's approval, have grasped at all. Then he mounted to the attics, opening as he went, and here the incendiary work started. The flames were beginning to creep over the floors and about the back staircase, when he turned his attention to the better apartments on the first floor, entering and igniting one after another. He left Mr. Quinton's private rooms until the last; the rooms where those momentous interviews had taken place, and where the devils had issued from the glass.

The private den had been wholly stripped, both of furniture and books; no doubt Lindsay, who was free to take what he pleased, had valued these mementoes of a patient who was also a friend. Richard was glad to find the apartment empty; there was less to recall the past. But as he moved the illuminating torch from left to right in his survey, it seemed to him for an instant that a tall figure stood before him — long enough to realise its presence, though gone in the space of a couple of agitated heartbeats. He never doubted that it was Quinton, present to reproach him, to arrest the course of destruction if that were possible. But in spite of what he had seen — if indeed he did see — he gritted his teeth and went on.

The inner cabinet was next to enter. Here nothing had been removed or changed; the writing-table in the window still had its equipment of inkpot and blotting-pad, and on the latter, Richard noticed, a sheet of. blank paper was spread out. The velvet

cover thrown over the high stand, no doubt concealed the uncanny crystal into which he had been forced to look. No one would look into it again after the destruction of this night ! And then somehow, he knew not how, his attention was drawn to the white paper on the table.

Most of us have seen the development of a photographic plate, and how magically the image starts into view on a surface which before was blank. That was what appeared to happen under his eyes upon the paper, and the image was the imprint of a large hand, a man's hand, red as if dipped in blood.

The same awful sensation of sick faintness experienced before with the crystal, overcame him once again. It was a marvel to him afterwards that he did not fall unconscious, to perish in the burning house. He saved himself by a desperate effort of will, flinging what was left of his incendiary material behind him on the floor. As he gained the staircase, a rush of air met him from below, and this was perhaps his salvation. But the house was now filling with smoke, and from the upper regions came already the crackle of spreading flame.

The crackle of flame, and something more. Something which sounded like the clatter of hoofs over bare floors, and a cackle of hellish laughter; unless his senses were by this time wholly dazed and confused, hearing bewitched as well as~ sight. He found the door by which he entered, locked it behind him and fled into the night, now no longer bewilderingly dark, but faintly illuminated by the rising moon.

He did not take the direction of the avenue and the road, but climbed fences and made his way up the hill behind; and when on the wind-swept summit he turned to look back. He had done his work effectually; the white villa was alight in all its windows, fiercely ablaze within, and, as he still lingered and watched, a portion of the roof fell in, and flame and smoke shot up into the sky.

From the local paper of the following Saturday:

We regret to state that the mansion of Mount Verney, recently the residence of the late Clement Quinton, Esquire, and now the property of Mr. Richard Quinton, was destroyed by fire on Tuesday night. The origin of the fire is wrapped in mystery, as the house was unoccupied and shut up, and the electric light disconnected, so there could have been no fusion of wires. Much valuable property is destroyed, and part of

the building is completely gutted. The blaze was first noticed between twelve and one o'clock, by a man driving home late from market. He gave notice to the police, but by the time the fire-engines arrived, the conflagration had taken such hold that it could not be checked, though abundant water was at hand in the Mount Verney lake. The loss to Mr. Richard Quinton will be very considerable, as we understand no part of it is covered by insurance.

From the same paper in the following December:
We understand that a gift has been made to our hospital fund, of the shell of the Mount Verney house with the grounds that surround it, to be converted into a sanatorium for the treatment of tuberculosis, and Mr. Richard Quinton also adds to the subscription list the. sum of £1,000. This munificent donation of money and a site, will enable the work to be put in hand at once; and it is believed that what is left of the original mansion can be incorporated in the scheme.

The Mount Verney house, which, as will be remembered, was destroyed by a disastrous fire about three months ago, was not insured, and Mr. Richard Quinton had no wish to rebuild for his own occupation. He will, we understand, make his-future residence at Quinton Court, the ancestral home of his family, so soon as he returns from Canada with his bride.