HAWTHORNE NATHANIEL

DOCTOR GRIMSHAWE'S SECRET — A ROMANCE

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Содержание

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PREFACE

A preface generally begins with a truism; and I may set out with the admission that it is not always expedient to bring to light the posthumous work of great writers. A man generally contrives to publish, during his lifetime, quite as much as the public has time or inclination to read; and his surviving friends are apt to show more zeal than discretion in dragging forth from his closed desk such undeveloped offspring of his mind as he himself had left to silence. Literature has never been redundant with authors who sincerely undervalue their own productions; and the sagacious critics who maintain that what of his own an author condemns must be doubly damnable, are, to say the least of it, as often likely to be right as wrong.

Beyond these general remarks, however, it does not seem necessary to adopt an apologetic attitude. There is nothing in the present volume which any one possessed of brains and cultivation will not be thankful to read. The appreciation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings is more intelligent and wide-

spread than it used to be; and the later development of our national literature has not, perhaps, so entirely exhausted our resources of admiration as to leave no welcome for even the less elaborate work of a contemporary of Dickens and Thackeray. As regards "Doctor Grimshawe's Secret," — the title which, for lack of a better, has been given to this Romance, — it can scarcely be pronounced deficient in either elaboration or profundity. Had Mr. Hawthorne written out the story in every part to its full dimensions, it could not have failed to rank among the greatest of his productions. He had looked forward to it as to the crowning achievement of his literary career. In the Preface to "Our Old Home" he alludes to it as a work into which he proposed to convey more of various modes of truth than he could have grasped by a direct effort. But circumstances prevented him from perfecting the design which had been before his mind for seven years, and upon the shaping of which he bestowed more thought and labor than upon anything else he had undertaken. The successive and consecutive series of notes or studies [Footnote: These studies, extracts from which will be published in one of our magazines, are hereafter to be added, in their complete form, to the Appendix of this volume.] which he wrote for this Romance would of themselves make a small volume, and one of autobiographical as well as literary interest. There is no other instance, that I happen to have met with, in which a writer's thought reflects itself upon paper so immediately and sensitively as in these studies. To read them is to look into

the man's mind, and see its quality and action. The penetration, the subtlety, the tenacity; the stubborn gripe which he lays upon his subject, like that of Hercules upon the slippery Old Man of the Sea; the clear and cool common-sense, controlling the audacity of a rich and ardent imagination; the humorous gibes and strange expletives wherewith he ridicules, to himself, his own failure to reach his goal; the immense patience with which — again and again, and yet again — he "tries back," throwing the topic into fresh attitudes, and searching it to the marrow with a gaze so piercing as to be terrible; — all this gives an impression of power, of resource, of energy, of mastery, that exhilarates the reader. So many inspired prophets of Hawthorne have arisen of late, that the present writer, whose relation to the great Romancer is a filial one merely, may be excused for feeling some embarrassment in submitting his own uninstructed judgments to competition with theirs. It has occurred to him, however, that these undress rehearsals of the author of "The Scarlet Letter" might afford entertaining and even profitable reading to the later generation of writers whose pleasant fortune it is to charm one another and the public. It would appear that this author, in his preparatory work at least, has ventured in some manner to disregard the modern canons which debar writers from betraying towards their creations any warmer feeling than a cultured and critical indifference: nor was his interest in human nature such as to confine him to the dissection of the moral epidermis of shop-girls and hotel-boarders. On the contrary, we

are presented with the spectacle of a Titan, baring his arms and plunging heart and soul into the arena, there to struggle for death or victory with the superb phantoms summoned to the conflict by his own genius. The men of new times and new conditions will achieve their triumphs in new ways; but it may still be worth while to consider the methods and materials of one who also, in his own fashion, won and wore the laurel of those who know and can portray the human heart.

But let us return to the Romance, in whose clear though shadowy atmosphere the thunders and throes of the preparatory struggle are inaudible and invisible, save as they are implied in the fineness of substance and beauty of form of the artistic structure. The story is divided into two parts, the scene of the first being laid in America; that of the second, in England. Internal evidence of various kinds goes to show that the second part was the first written; or, in other words, that the present first part is a rewriting of an original first part, afterwards discarded, and of which the existing second part is the continuation. The two parts overlap, and it shall be left to the ingenuity of critics to detect the precise point of junction. In rewriting the first part, the author made sundry minor alterations in the plot and characters of the story, which alterations were not carried into the second part. It results from this that the manuscript presents various apparent inconsistencies. In transcribing the work for the press, these inconsistent sentences and passages have been withdrawn from the text and inserted in the Appendix; or, in a

few unimportant instances, omitted altogether. In other respects, the text is printed as the author left it, with the exception of the names of the characters. In the manuscript each personage figures in the course of the narrative under from three to six different names. This difficulty has been met by bestowing upon each of the *dramatis personæ* the name which last identified him to the author's mind, and keeping him to it throughout the volume.

The story, as a story, is complete as it stands; it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is no break in the narrative, and the legitimate conclusion is reached. To say that the story is complete as a work of art, would be quite another matter. It lacks balance and proportion. Some characters and incidents are portrayed with minute elaboration; others, perhaps not less important, are merely sketched in outline. Beyond a doubt it was the author's purpose to rewrite the entire work from the first page to the last, enlarging it, deepening it, adorning it with every kind of spiritual and physical beauty, and rounding out a moral worthy of the noble materials. But these last transfiguring touches to Aladdin's Tower were never to be given; and he has departed, taking with him his Wonderful Lamp. Nevertheless there is great splendor in the structure as we behold it. The character of old Doctor Grimshawe, and the picture of his surroundings, are hardly surpassed in vigor by anything their author has produced; and the dusky vision of the secret chamber, which sends a mysterious shiver through the tale, seems to be

unique even in Hawthorne.

There have been included in this volume photographic reproductions of certain pages of the original manuscript of Doctor Grimshawe, selected at random, upon which those ingenious persons whose convictions are in advance of their instruction are cordially invited to try their teeth; for it has been maintained that Mr. Hawthorne's handwriting was singularly legible. The present writer possesses specimens of Mr. Hawthorne's chirography at various ages, from boyhood until a day or two before his death. Like the handwriting of most men, it was at its best between the twenty-fifth and the fortieth years of life; and in some instances it is a remarkably beautiful type of penmanship. But as time went on it deteriorated, and, while of course retaining its elementary characteristics, it became less and less easy to read, especially in those writings which were intended solely for his own perusal. As with other men of sensitive organization, the mood of the hour, a good or a bad pen, a ready or an obstructed flow of thought, would all be reflected in the formation of the written letters and words. In the manuscript of the fragmentary sketch which has just been published in a magazine, which is written in an ordinary commonplace-book, with ruled pages, and in which the author had not yet become possessed with the spirit of the story and characters, the handwriting is deliberate and clear. In the manuscript of "Doctor Grimshawe's Secret," on the other hand, which was written almost immediately after the other, but on

unruled paper, and when the writer's imagination was warm and eager, the chirography is for the most part a compact mass of minute cramped hieroglyphics, hardly to be deciphered save by flashes of inspiration. The matter is not, in itself, of importance, and is alluded to here only as having been brought forward in connection with other insinuations, with the notice of which it seems unnecessary to soil these pages. Indeed, were I otherwise disposed, Doctor Grimshawe himself would take the words out of my mouth; his speech is far more poignant and eloquent than mine. In dismissing this episode, I will take the liberty to observe that it appears to indicate a spirit in our age less sceptical than is commonly supposed, — belief in miracles being still possible, provided only the miracle be a scandalous one.

It remains to tell how this Romance came to be published. It came into my possession (in the ordinary course of events) about eight years ago. I had at that time no intention of publishing it; and when, soon after, I left England to travel on the Continent, the manuscript, together with the bulk of my library, was packed and stored at a London repository, and was not again seen by me until last summer, when I unpacked it in this city. I then finished the perusal of it, and, finding it to be practically complete, I re-resolved to print it in connection with a biography of Mr. Hawthorne which I had in preparation. But upon further consideration it was decided to publish the Romance separately; and I herewith present it to the public, with my best wishes for their edification.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

NEW YORK, November 21, 1882.

DOCTOR GRIMSHAWE'S SECRET

CHAPTER I

A long time ago, [Endnote: 1] in a town with which I used to be familiarly acquainted, there dwelt an elderly person of grim aspect, known by the name and title of Doctor Grimshawe, [Endnote: 2] whose household consisted of a remarkably pretty and vivacious boy, and a perfect rosebud of a girl, two or three years younger than he, and an old maid-of-all-work, of strangely mixed breed, crusty in temper and wonderfully sluttish in attire. [Endnote: 3] It might be partly owing to this handmaiden's characteristic lack of neatness (though primarily, no doubt, to the grim Doctor's antipathy to broom, brush, and dusting-cloths) that the house — at least in such portions of it as any casual visitor caught a glimpse of — was so overlaid with dust, that, in lack of a visiting card, you might write your name with your forefinger upon the tables; and so hung with cobwebs that they assumed the appearance of dusky upholstery.

It grieves me to add an additional touch or two to the reader's disagreeable impression of Doctor Grimshawe's residence, by confessing that it stood in a shabby by-street, and cornered on a graveyard, with which the house communicated by a back door; so that with a hop, skip, and jump from the threshold,

across a flat tombstone, the two children [Endnote: 4] were in the daily habit of using the dismal cemetery as their playground. In their graver moods they spelled out the names and learned by heart doleful verses on the headstones; and in their merrier ones (which were much the more frequent) they chased butterflies and gathered dandelions, played hide-and-seek among the slate and marble, and tumbled laughing over the grassy mounds which were too eminent for the short legs to bestride. On the whole, they were the better for the graveyard, and its legitimate inmates slept none the worse for the two children's gambols and shrill merriment overhead. Here were old brick tombs with curious sculptures on them, and quaint gravestones, some of which bore puffy little cherubs, and one or two others the effigies of eminent Puritans, wrought out to a button, a fold of the ruff, and a wrinkle of the skull-cap; and these frowned upon the two children as if death had not made them a whit more genial than they were in life. But the children were of a temper to be more encouraged by the good-natured smiles of the puffy cherubs, than frightened or disturbed by the sour Puritans.

This graveyard (about which we shall say not a word more than may sooner or later be needful) was the most ancient in the town. The clay of the original settlers had been incorporated with the soil; those stalwart Englishmen of the Puritan epoch, whose immediate ancestors had been planted forth with succulent grass and daisies for the sustenance of the parson's cow, round the low-battlemented Norman church towers in the villages of the

fatherland, had here contributed their rich Saxon mould to tame and Christianize the wild forest earth of the new world. In this point of view — as holding the bones and dust of the primeval ancestor — the cemetery was more English than anything else in the neighborhood, and might probably have nourished English oaks and English elms, and whatever else is of English growth, without that tendency to spindle upwards and lose their sturdy breadth, which is said to be the ordinary characteristic both of human and vegetable productions when transplanted hither. Here, at all events, used to be some specimens of common English garden flowers, which could not be accounted for, — unless, perhaps, they had sprung from some English maiden's heart, where the intense love of those homely things, and regret of them in the foreign land, had conspired together to keep their vivifying principle, and cause its growth after the poor girl was buried. Be that as it might, in this grave had been hidden from sight many a broad, bluff visage of husbandman, who had been taught to plough among the hereditary furrows that had been ameliorated by the crumble of ages: much had these sturdy laborers grumbled at the great roots that obstructed their toil in these fresh acres. Here, too, the sods had covered the faces of men known to history, and reverenced when not a piece of distinguishable dust remained of them; personages whom tradition told about; and here, mixed up with successive crops of native-born Americans, had been ministers, captains, matrons, virgins good and evil, tough and tender, turned up and

battened down by the sexton's spade, over and over again; until every blade of grass had its relations with the human brotherhood of the old town. A hundred and fifty years was sufficient to do this; and so much time, at least, had elapsed since the first hole was dug among the difficult roots of the forest trees, and the first little hillock of all these green beds was piled up.

Thus rippled and surged, with its hundreds of little billows, the old graveyard about the house which cornered upon it; it made the street gloomy, so that people did not altogether like to pass along the high wooden fence that shut it in; and the old house itself, covering ground which else had been sown thickly with buried bodies, partook of its dreariness, because it seemed hardly possible that the dead people should not get up out of their graves and steal in to warm themselves at this convenient fireside. But I never heard that any of them did so; nor were the children ever startled by spectacles of dim horror in the night-time, but were as cheerful and fearless as if no grave had ever been dug. They were of that class of children whose material seems fresh, not taken at second hand, full of disease, conceits, whims, and weaknesses, that have already served many people's turns, and been moulded up, with some little change of combination, to serve the turn of some poor spirit that could not get a better case.

So far as ever came to the present writer's knowledge, there was no whisper of Doctor Grimshawe's house being haunted; a fact on which both writer and reader may congratulate themselves, the ghostly chord having been played upon in these

days until it has become wearisome and nauseous as the familiar tune of a barrel-organ. The house itself, moreover, except for the convenience of its position close to the seldom-disturbed cemetery, was hardly worthy to be haunted. As I remember it, (and for aught I know it still exists in the same guise,) it did not appear to be an ancient structure, nor one that would ever have been the abode of a very wealthy or prominent family; — a three-story wooden house, perhaps a century old, low-studded, with a square front, standing right upon the street, and a small enclosed porch, containing the main entrance, affording a glimpse up and down the street through an oval window on each side, its characteristic was decent respectability, not sinking below the boundary of the genteel. It has often perplexed my mind to conjecture what sort of man he could have been who, having the means to build a pretty, spacious, and comfortable residence, should have chosen to lay its foundation on the brink of so many graves; each tenant of these narrow houses crying out, as it were, against the absurdity of bestowing much time or pains in preparing any earthly tabernacle save such as theirs. But deceased people see matters from an erroneous — at least too exclusive — point of view; a comfortable grave is an excellent possession for those who need it, but a comfortable house has likewise its merits and temporary advantages. [Endnote: 5.]

The founder of the house in question seemed sensible of this truth, and had therefore been careful to lay out a sufficient number of rooms and chambers, low, ill-lighted, ugly, but

not unsusceptible of warmth and comfort; the sunniest and cheerfulest of which were on the side that looked into the graveyard. Of these, the one most spacious and convenient had been selected by Doctor Grimshawe as a study, and fitted up with bookshelves, and various machines and contrivances, electrical, chemical, and distillatory, wherewith he might pursue such researches as were wont to engage his attention. The great result of the grim Doctor's labors, so far as known to the public, was a certain preparation or extract of cobwebs, which, out of a great abundance of material, he was able to produce in any desirable quantity, and by the administration of which he professed to cure diseases of the inflammatory class, and to work very wonderful effects upon the human system. It is a great pity, for the good of mankind and the advantage of his own fortunes, that he did not put forth this medicine in pill-boxes or bottles, and then, as it were, by some captivating title, inveigle the public into his spider's web, and suck out its gold substance, and himself wax fat as he sat in the central intricacy.

But grim Doctor Grimshawe, though his aim in life might be no very exalted one, seemed singularly destitute of the impulse to better his fortunes by the exercise of his wits: it might even have been supposed, indeed, that he had a conscientious principle or religious scruple — only, he was by no means a religious man — against reaping profit from this particular nostrum which he was said to have invented. He never sold it; never prescribed it, unless in cases selected on some principle that nobody could detect or

explain. The grim Doctor, it must be observed, was not generally acknowledged by the profession, with whom, in truth, he had never claimed a fellowship; nor had he ever assumed, of his own accord the medical title by which the public chose to know him. His professional practice seemed, in a sort, forced upon him; it grew pretty extensive, partly because it was understood to be a matter of favor and difficulty, dependent on a capricious will, to obtain his services at all. There was unquestionably an odor of quackery about him; but by no means of an ordinary kind. A sort of mystery — yet which, perhaps, need not have been a mystery, had any one thought it worth while to make systematic inquiry in reference to his previous life, his education, even his native land — assisted the impression which his peculiarities were calculated to make. He was evidently not a New-Englander, nor a native of any part of these Western shores. His speech was apt to be oddly and uncouthly idiomatic, and even when classical in its form was emitted with a strange, rough depth of utterance, that came from recesses of the lungs which we Yankees seldom put to any use. In person, he did not look like one of us; a broad, rather short personage, with a projecting forehead, a red, irregular face, and a squab nose; eyes that looked dull enough in their ordinary state, but had a faculty, in conjunction with the other features, which those who had ever seen it described as especially ugly and awful. As regarded dress, Doctor Grimshawe had a rough and careless exterior, and altogether a shaggy kind of aspect, the effect of which was much increased by a reddish beard, which, contrary

to the usual custom of the day, he allowed to grow profusely; and the wiry perversity of which seemed to know as little of the comb as of the razor.

We began with calling the grim Doctor an elderly personage; but in so doing we looked at him through the eyes of the two children, who were his intimates, and who had not learnt to decipher the purport and value of his wrinkles and furrows and corrugations, whether as indicating age, or a different kind of wear and tear. Possibly — he seemed so aggressive and had such latent heat and force to throw out when occasion called — he might scarcely have seemed middle-aged; though here again we hesitate, finding him so stiffened in his own way, so little fluid, so encrusted with passions and humors, that he must have left his youth very far behind him; if indeed he ever had any.

The patients, or whatever other visitors were ever admitted into the Doctor's study, carried abroad strange accounts of the squalor of dust and cobwebs in which the learned and scientific person lived; and the dust, they averred, was all the more disagreeable, because it could not well be other than dead men's almost intangible atoms, resurrected from the adjoining graveyard. As for the cobwebs, they were no signs of housewifely neglect on the part of crusty Hannah, the handmaiden; but the Doctor's scientific material, carefully encouraged and preserved, each filmy thread more valuable to him than so much golden wire. Of all barbarous haunts in Christendom or elsewhere, this study was the one most overrun with spiders. They dangled

from the ceiling, crept upon the tables, lurked in the corners, and wove the intricacy of their webs wherever they could hitch the end from point to point across the window-panes, and even across the upper part of the doorway, and in the chimney-place. It seemed impossible to move without breaking some of these mystic threads. Spiders crept familiarly towards you and walked leisurely across your hands: these were their precincts, and you only an intruder. If you had none about your person, yet you had an odious sense of one crawling up your spine, or spinning cobwebs in your brain, — so pervaded was the atmosphere of the place with spider-life. What they fed upon (for all the flies for miles about would not have sufficed them) was a secret known only to the Doctor. Whence they came was another riddle; though, from certain inquiries and transactions of Doctor Grimshawe's with some of the shipmasters of the port, who followed the East and West Indian, the African and the South American trade, it was supposed that this odd philosopher was in the habit of importing choice monstrosities in the spider kind from all those tropic regions. [Endnote: 6.]

All the above description, exaggerated as it may seem, is merely preliminary to the introduction of one single enormous spider, the biggest and ugliest ever seen, the pride of the grim Doctor's heart, his treasure, his glory, the pearl of his soul, and, as many people said, the demon to whom he had sold his salvation, on condition of possessing the web of the foul creature for a certain number of years. The grim Doctor, according to

this theory, was but a great fly which this spider had subtly entangled in his web. But, in truth, naturalists are acquainted with this spider, though it is a rare one; the British Museum has a specimen, and, doubtless, so have many other scientific institutions. It is found in South America; its most hideous spread of legs covers a space nearly as large as a dinner-plate, and radiates from a body as big as a door-knob, which one conceives to be an agglomeration of sucked-up poison which the creature treasures through life; probably to expend it all, and life itself, on some worthy foe. Its colors, variegated in a sort of ugly and inauspicious splendor, were distributed over its vast bulb in great spots, some of which glistened like gems. It was a horror to think of this thing living; still more horrible to think of the foul catastrophe, the crushed-out and wasted poison, that would follow the casual setting foot upon it.

No doubt, the lapse of time since the Doctor and his spider lived has already been sufficient to cause a traditionary wonderment to gather over them both; and, especially, this image of the spider dangles down to us from the dusky ceiling of the Past, swollen into somewhat uglier and huger monstrosity than he actually possessed. Nevertheless, the creature had a real existence, and has left kindred like himself; but as for the Doctor, nothing could exceed the value which he seemed to put upon him, the sacrifices he made for the creature's convenience, or the readiness with which he adapted his whole mode of life, apparently, so that the spider might enjoy the conditions

best suited to his tastes, habits, and health. And yet there were sometimes tokens that made people imagine that he hated the infernal creature as much as everybody else who caught a glimpse of him. [Endnote: 7.]

CHAPTER II

Considering that Doctor Grimshawe, when we first look upon him, had dwelt only a few years in the house by the graveyard, it is wonderful what an appearance he, and his furniture, and his cobwebs, and their unweariable spinners, and crusty old Hannah, all had of having permanently attached themselves to the locality. For a century, at least, it might be fancied that the study in particular had existed just as it was now; with those dusky festoons of spider-silk hanging along the walls, those book-cases with volumes turning their parchment or black-leather backs upon you, those machines and engines, that table, and at it the Doctor, in a very faded and shabby dressing-gown, smoking a long clay pipe, the powerful fumes of which dwelt continually in his reddish and grisly beard, and made him fragrant wherever he went. This sense of fixedness — stony intractability — seems to belong to people who, instead of hope, which exalts everything into an airy, gaseous exhilaration, have a fixed and dogged purpose, around which everything congeals and crystallizes. [Endnote: 1] Even the sunshine, dim through the dustiness of the two casements that looked upon the graveyard, and the smoke, as it came warm out of Doctor Grimshawe's mouth, seemed already stale. But if the two children, or either of them, happened to be in the study, — if they ran to open the door at the knock, if they came scampering and peeped down

over the banisters, — the sordid and rusty gloom was apt to vanish quite away. The sunbeam itself looked like a golden rule, that had been flung down long ago, and had lain there till it was dusty and tarnished. They were cheery little imps, who sucked up fragrance and pleasantness out of their surroundings, dreary as these looked; even as a flower can find its proper perfume in any soil where its seed happens to fall. The great spider, hanging by his cordage over the Doctor's head, and waving slowly, like a pendulum, in a blast from the crack of the door, must have made millions and millions of precisely such vibrations as these; but the children were new, and made over every day, with yesterday's weariness left out.

The little girl, however, was the merrier of the two. It was quite unintelligible, in view of the little care that crusty Hannah took of her, and, moreover, since she was none of your prim, fastidious children, how daintily she kept herself amid all this dust; how the spider's webs never clung to her, and how, when — without being solicited — she clambered into the Doctor's arms and kissed him, she bore away no smoky reminiscences of the pipe that he kissed continually. She had a free, mellow, natural laughter, that seemed the ripened fruit of the smile that was generally on her little face, to be shaken off and scattered abroad by any breeze that came along. Little Elsie made playthings of everything, even of the grim Doctor, though against his will, and though, moreover, there were tokens now and then that the sight of this bright little creature was not a pleasure to him, but, on

the contrary, a positive pain; a pain, nevertheless, indicating a profound interest, hardly less deep than though Elsie had been his daughter.

Elsie did not play with the great spider, but she moved among the whole brood of spiders as if she saw them not, and, being endowed with other senses than those allied to these things, might coexist with them and not be sensible of their presence. Yet the child, I suppose, had her crying fits, and her pouting fits, and naughtiness enough to entitle her to live on earth; at least crusty Hannah often said so, and often made grievous complaint of disobedience, mischief, or breakage, attributable to little Elsie; to which the grim Doctor seldom responded by anything more intelligible than a puff of tobacco-smoke, and, sometimes, an imprecation; which, however, hit crusty Hannah instead of the child. Where the child got the tenderness that a child needs to live upon, is a mystery to me; perhaps from some aged or dead mother, or in her dreams; perhaps from some small modicum of it, such as boys have, from the little boy; or perhaps it was from a Persian kitten, which had grown to be a cat in her arms, and slept in her little bed, and now assumed grave and protective airs towards her former playmate. [Endnote: 2.]

The boy, [Endnote: 3] as we have said, was two or three years Elsie's elder, and might now be about six years old. He was a healthy and cheerful child, yet of a graver mood than the little girl, appearing to lay a more forcible grasp on the circumstances about him, and to tread with a heavier footstep on the solid

earth; yet perhaps not more so than was the necessary difference between a man-blossom, dimly conscious of coming things, and a mere baby, with whom there was neither past nor future. Ned, as he was named, was subject very early to fits of musing, the subject of which — if they had any definite subject, or were more than vague reveries — it was impossible to guess. They were of those states of mind, probably, which are beyond the sphere of human language, and would necessarily lose their essence in the attempt to communicate or record them. The little girl, perhaps, had some mode of sympathy with these unuttered thoughts or reveries, which grown people had ceased to have; at all events, she early learned to respect them, and, at other times as free and playful as her Persian kitten, she never in such circumstances ventured on any greater freedom than to sit down quietly beside him, and endeavor to look as thoughtful as the boy himself.

Once, slowly emerging from one of these waking reveries, little Ned gazed about him, and saw Elsie sitting with this pretty pretence of thoughtfulness and dreaminess in her little chair, close beside him; now and then peeping under her eyelashes to note what changes might come over his face. After looking at her a moment or two, he quietly took her willing and warm little hand in his own, and led her up to the Doctor.

The group, methinks, must have been a picturesque one, made up as it was of several apparently discordant elements, each of which happened to be so combined as to make a more effective whole. The beautiful grave boy, with a little sword by his side

and a feather in his hat, of a brown complexion, slender, with his white brow and dark, thoughtful eyes, so earnest upon some mysterious theme; the prettier little girl, a blonde, round, rosy, so truly sympathetic with her companion's mood, yet unconsciously turning all to sport by her attempt to assume one similar; — these two standing at the grim Doctor's footstool; he meanwhile, black, wild-bearded, heavy-browed, red-eyed, wrapped in his faded dressing-gown, puffing out volumes of vapor from his long pipe, and making, just at that instant, application to a tumbler, which, we regret to say, was generally at his elbow, with some dark-colored potation in it that required to be frequently replenished from a neighboring black bottle. Half, at least, of the fluids in the grim Doctor's system must have been derived from that same black bottle, so constant was his familiarity with its contents; and yet his eyes were never redder at one time than another, nor his utterance thicker, nor his mood perceptibly the brighter or the duller for all his conviviality. It is true, when, once, the bottle happened to be empty for a whole day together, Doctor Grimshawe was observed by crusty Hannah and by the children to be considerably fiercer than usual: so that probably, by some maladjustment of consequences, his intemperance was only to be found in refraining from brandy.

Nor must we forget — in attempting to conceive the effect of these two beautiful children in such a sombre room, looking on the graveyard, and contrasted with the grim Doctor's aspect of heavy and smouldering fierceness — that over his head, at this

very moment, dangled the portentous spider, who seemed to have come down from his web aloft for the purpose of hearing what the two young people could have to say to his patron, and what reference it might have to certain mysterious documents which the Doctor kept locked up in a secret cupboard behind the door.

"Grim Doctor," said Ned, after looking up into the Doctor's face, as a sensitive child inevitably does, to see whether the occasion was favorable, yet determined to proceed with his purpose whether so or not, — "Grim Doctor, I want you to answer me a question."

"Here's to your good health, Ned!" quoth the Doctor, eying the pair intently, as he often did, when they were unconscious. "So you want to ask me a question? As many as you please, my fine fellow; and I shall answer as many, and as much, and as truly, as may please myself!"

"Ah, grim Doctor!" said the little girl, now letting go of Ned's hand, and climbing upon the Doctor's knee, "'ou shall answer as many as Ned please to ask, because to please him and me!"

"Well, child," said Doctor Grimshawe, "little Ned will have his rights at least, at my hands, if not other people's rights likewise; and, if it be right, I shall answer his question. Only, let him ask it at once; for I want to be busy thinking about something else."

"Then, Doctor Grim," said little Ned, "tell me, in the first place, where I came from, and how you came to have me?"

The Doctor looked at the little man, so seriously and earnestly putting this demand, with a perplexed, and at first it might almost

seem a startled aspect.

"That is a question, indeed, my friend Ned!" ejaculated he, putting forth a whiff of smoke and imbibing a nip from his tumbler before he spoke; and perhaps framing his answer, as many thoughtful and secret people do, in such a way as to let out his secret mood to the child, because knowing he could not understand it: "Whence did you come? Whence did any of us come? Out of the darkness and mystery; out of nothingness; out of a kingdom of shadows; out of dust, clay, mud, I think, and to return to it again. Out of a former state of being, whence we have brought a good many shadowy revelations, purporting that it was no very pleasant one. Out of a former life, of which the present one is the hell! — And why are you come? Faith, Ned, he must be a wiser man than Doctor Grim who can tell why you or any other mortal came hither; only one thing I am well aware of, — it was not to be happy. To toil and moil and hope and fear; and to love in a shadowy, doubtful sort of way, and to hate in bitter earnest, — that is what you came for!"

"Ah, Doctor Grim! this is very naughty," said little Elsie. "You are making fun of little Ned, when he is in earnest."

"Fun!" quoth Doctor Grim, bursting into a laugh peculiar to him, very loud and obstreperous. "I am glad you find it so, my little woman. Well, and so you bid me tell absolutely where he came from?"

Elsie nodded her bright little head.

"And you, friend Ned, insist upon knowing?"

"That I do, Doctor Grim!" answered Ned. His white, childish brow had gathered into a frown, such was the earnestness of his determination; and he stamped his foot on the floor, as if ready to follow up his demand by an appeal to the little tin sword which hung by his side. The Doctor looked at him with a kind of smile, — not a very pleasant one; for it was an unamiable characteristic of his temper that a display of spirit, even in a child, was apt to arouse his immense combativeness, and make him aim a blow without much consideration how heavily it might fall, or on how unequal an antagonist.

"If you insist upon an answer, Master Ned, you shall have it," replied he. "You were taken by me, boy, a foundling from an almshouse; and if ever hereafter you desire to know your kindred, you must take your chance of the first man you meet. He is as likely to be your father as another!"

The child's eyes flashed, and his brow grew as red as fire. It was but a momentary fierceness; the next instant he clasped his hands over his face, and wept in a violent convulsion of grief and shame. Little Elsie clasped her arms about him, kissing his brow and chin, which were all that her lips could touch, under his clasped hands; but Ned turned away uncomforted, and was blindly making his way towards the door.

"Ned, my little fellow, come back!" said Doctor Grim, who had very attentively watched the cruel effect of his communication.

As the boy did not reply, and was still tending towards the

door, the grim Doctor vouchsafed to lay aside his pipe, get up from his arm-chair (a thing he seldom did between supper and bedtime), and shuffle after the two children in his slippers. He caught them on the threshold, brought little Ned back by main force, — for he was a rough man even in his tenderness, — and, sitting down again and taking him on his knee, pulled away his hands from before his face. Never was a more pitiful sight than that pale countenance, so infantile still, yet looking old and experienced already, with a sense of disgrace, with a feeling of loneliness; so beautiful, nevertheless, that it seemed to possess all the characteristics which fine hereditary traits and culture, or many forefathers, could do in refining a human stock. And this was a nameless weed, sprouting from some chance seed by the dusty wayside!

"Ned, my dear old boy," said Doctor Grim, — and he kissed that pale, tearful face, — the first and last time, to the best of my belief, that he was ever betrayed into that tenderness; "forget what I have said! Yes, remember, if you like, that you came from an almshouse; but remember, too, — what your friend Doctor Grim is ready to affirm and make oath of, — that he can trace your kindred and race through that sordid experience, and back, back, for a hundred and fifty years, into an old English line. Come, little Ned, and look at this picture."

He led the boy by the hand to a corner of the room, where hung upon the wall a portrait which Ned had often looked at. It seemed an old picture; but the Doctor had had it cleaned and

varnished, so that it looked dim and dark, and yet it seemed to be the representation of a man of no mark; not at least of such mark as would naturally leave his features to be transmitted for the interest of another generation. For he was clad in a mean dress of old fashion, — a leather jerkin it appeared to be, — and round his neck, moreover, was a noose of rope, as if he might have been on the point of being hanged. But the face of the portrait, nevertheless, was beautiful, noble, though sad; with a great development of sensibility, a look of suffering and endurance amounting to triumph, — a peace through all.

"Look at this," continued the Doctor, "if you must go on dreaming about your race. Dream that you are of the blood of this being; for, mean as his station looks, he comes of an ancient and noble race, and was the noblest of them all! Let me alone, Ned, and I shall spin out the web that shall link you to that man. The grim Doctor can do it!"

The grim Doctor's face looked fierce with the earnestness with which he said these words. You would have said that he was taking an oath to overthrow and annihilate a race, rather than to build one up by bringing forward the infant heir out of obscurity, and making plain the links — the filaments — which cemented this feeble childish life, in a far country, with the great tide of a noble life, which had come down like a chain from antiquity, in old England.

Having said the words, however, the grim Doctor appeared ashamed both of the heat and of the tenderness into which he had

been betrayed; for rude and rough as his nature was, there was a kind of decorum in it, too, that kept him within limits of his own. So he went back to his chair, his pipe, and his tumbler, and was gruffer and more taciturn than ever for the rest of the evening. And after the children went to bed, he leaned back in his chair and looked up at the vast tropic spider, who was particularly busy in adding to the intricacies of his web; until he fell asleep with his eyes fixed in that direction, and the extinguished pipe in one hand and the empty tumbler in the other.

CHAPTER III

Doctor Grimshawe, after the foregone scene, began a practice of conversing more with the children than formerly; directing his discourse chiefly to Ned, although Elsie's vivacity and more outspoken and demonstrative character made her take quite as large a share in the conversation as he.

The Doctor's communications referred chiefly to a village, or neighborhood, or locality in England, which he chose to call Newnham; although he told the children that this was not the real name, which, for reasons best known to himself, he wished to conceal. Whatever the name were, he seemed to know the place so intimately, that the children, as a matter of course, adopted the conclusion that it was his birthplace, and the spot where he had spent his schoolboy days, and had lived until some inscrutable reason had impelled him to quit its ivy-grown antiquity, and all the aged beauty and strength that he spoke of, and to cross the sea.

He used to tell of an old church, far unlike the brick and pine-built meeting-houses with which the children were familiar; a church, the stones of which were laid, every one of them, before the world knew of the country in which he was then speaking: and how it had a spire, the lower part of which was mantled with ivy, and up which, towards its very spire, the ivy was still creeping; and how there was a tradition, that, if the ivy ever reached the

top, the spire would fall upon the roof of the old gray church, and crush it all down among its surrounding tombstones. [Endnote: 1] And so, as this misfortune would be so heavy a one, there seemed to be a miracle wrought from year to year, by which the ivy, though always flourishing, could never grow beyond a certain point; so that the spire and church had stood unharmed for thirty years; though the wise old people were constantly foretelling that the passing year must be the very last one that it could stand.

He told, too, of a place that made little Ned blush and cast down his eyes to hide the tears of anger and shame at he knew not what, which would irresistibly spring into them; for it reminded him of the almshouse where, as the cruel Doctor said, Ned himself had had his earliest home. And yet, after all, it had scarcely a feature of resemblance; and there was this great point of difference, — that whereas, in Ned's wretched abode (a large, unsightly brick house), there were many wretched infants like himself, as well as helpless people of all ages, widows, decayed drunkards, people of feeble wits, and all kinds of imbecility; it being a haven for those who could not contend in the hard, eager, pitiless struggle of life; in the place the Doctor spoke of, a noble, Gothic, mossy structure, there were none but aged men, who had drifted into this quiet harbor to end their days in a sort of humble yet stately ease and decorous abundance. And this shelter, the grim Doctor said, was the gift of a man who had died ages ago; and having been a great sinner in his lifetime, and having drawn lands, manors, and a great mass of wealth into his clutches,

by violent and unfair means, had thought to get his pardon by founding this Hospital, as it was called, in which thirteen old men should always reside; and he hoped that they would spend their time in praying for the welfare of his soul. [Endnote: 2.]

Said little Elsie, "I am glad he did it, and I hope the poor old men never forgot to pray for him, and that it did good to the poor wicked man's soul."

"Well, child," said Doctor Grimshawe, with a scowl into vacancy, and a sort of wicked leer of merriment at the same time, as if he saw before him the face of the dead man of past centuries, "I happen to be no lover of this man's race, and I hate him for the sake of one of his descendants. I don't think he succeeded in bribing the Devil to let him go, or God to save him!"

"Doctor Grim, you are very naughty!" said Elsie, looking shocked.

"It is fair enough," said Ned, "to hate your enemies to the very brink of the grave, but then to leave him to get what mercy he can."

"After shoving him in!" quoth the Doctor; and made no further response to either of these criticisms, which seemed indeed to affect him very little — if he even listened to them. For he was a man of singularly imperfect moral culture; insomuch that nothing else was so remarkable about him as that — possessing a good deal of intellectual ability, made available by much reading and experience — he was so very dark on the moral side; as if he needed the natural perceptions that

should have enabled him to acquire that better wisdom. Such a phenomenon often meets us in life; oftener than we recognize, because a certain tact and exterior decency generally hide the moral deficiency. But often there is a mind well polished, married to a conscience and natural impulses left as they were in childhood, except that they have sprouted up into evil and poisonous weeds, richly blossoming with strong-smelling flowers, or seeds which the plant scatters by a sort of impulse; even as the Doctor was now half-consciously throwing seeds of his evil passions into the minds of these children. He was himself a grown-up child, without tact, simplicity, and innocence, and with ripened evil, all the ranker for a native heat that was in him and still active, which might have nourished good things as well as evil. Indeed, it did cherish by chance a root or two of good, the fragrance of which was sometimes perceptible among all this rank growth of poisonous weeds. A grown-up child he was, — that was all.

The Doctor now went on to describe an old country-seat, which stood near this village and the ancient Hospital that he had been telling about, and which was formerly the residence of the wicked man (a knight and a brave one, well known in the Lancastrian wars) who had founded the latter. It was a venerable old mansion, which a Saxon Thane had begun to build more than a thousand years ago, the old English oak that he built into the frame being still visible in the ancient skeleton of its roof, sturdy and strong as if put up yesterday. And the descendants of the

man who built it, through the French line (for a Norman baron wedded the daughter and heiress of the Saxon), dwelt there yet; and in each century they had done something for the old Hall, — building a tower, adding a suite of rooms, strengthening what was already built, putting in a painted window, making it more spacious and convenient, — till it seemed as if Time employed himself in thinking what could be done for the old house. As fast as any part decayed, it was renewed, with such simple art that the new completed, as it were, and fitted itself to the old. So that it seemed as if the house never had been finished, until just that thing was added. For many an age, the possessors had gone on adding strength to strength, digging out the moat to a greater depth, piercing the walls with holes for archers to shoot through, or building a turret to keep watch upon. But at last all necessity for these precautions passed away, and then they thought of convenience and comfort, adding something in every generation to these. And by and by they thought of beauty too; and in this time helped them with its weather-stains, and the ivy that grew over the walls, and the grassy depth of the dried-up moat, and the abundant shade that grew up everywhere, where naked strength would have been ugly.

"One curious thing in the house," said the Doctor, lowering his voice, but with a mysterious look of triumph, and that old scowl, too, at the children, "was that they built a secret chamber, — a very secret one!"

"A secret chamber!" cried little Ned; "who lived in it? A

ghost?"

"There was often use for it," said Doctor Grim; "hiding people who had fought on the wrong side, or Catholic priests, or criminals, or perhaps — who knows? — enemies that they wanted put out of the way, — troublesome folks. Ah! it was often of use, that secret chamber: and is so still!"

Here the Doctor paused a long while, and leaned back in his chair, slowly puffing long whiffs from his pipe, looking up at the great spider-demon that hung over his head, and, as it seemed to the children by the expression of his face, looking into the dim secret chamber which he had spoken of, and which, by something in his mode of alluding to it, assumed such a weird, spectral aspect to their imaginations that they never wished to hear of it again. Coming back at length out of his reverie, — returning, perhaps, out of some weird, ghostly, secret chamber of his memory, whereof the one in the old house was but the less horrible emblem, — he resumed his tale. He said that, a long time ago, a war broke out in the old country between King and Parliament. At that period there were several brothers of the old family (which had adhered to the Catholic religion), and these chose the side of the King instead of that of the Puritan Parliament: all but one, whom the family hated because he took the Parliament side; and he became a soldier, and fought against his own brothers; and it was said among them that, so inveterate was he, he went on the scaffold, masked, and was the very man who struck off the King's head, and that his foot trod in the

King's blood, and that always afterwards he made a bloody track wherever he went. And there was a legend that his brethren once caught the renegade and imprisoned him in his own birthplace —

"In the secret chamber?" interrupted Ned.

"No doubt!" said the Doctor, nodding, "though I never heard so."

They imprisoned him, but he made his escape and fled, and in the morning his prison-place, wherever it was, was empty. But on the threshold of the door of the old manor-house there was the print of a bloody footstep; and no trouble that the housemaids took, no rain of all the years that have since passed, no sunshine, has made it fade: nor have all the wear and tramp of feet passing over it since then availed to erase it.

"I have seen it myself," quoth the Doctor, "and know this to be true."

"Doctor Grim, now you are laughing at us," said Ned, trying to look grave. But Elsie hid her face on the Doctor's knee; there being something that affected the vivid little girl with peculiar horror in the idea of this red footstep always glistening on the doorstep, and wetting, as she fancied, every innocent foot of child or grown person that had since passed over it. [Endnote: 3.]

"It is true!" reiterated the grim Doctor; "for, man and boy, I have seen it a thousand times."

He continued the family history, or tradition, or fantastic legend, whichever it might be; telling his young auditors that the Puritan, the renegade son of the family, was afterwards, by

the contrivances of his brethren, sent to Virginia and sold as a bond slave; and how he had vanished from that quarter and come to New England, where he was supposed to have left children. And by and by two elder brothers died, and this missing brother became the heir to the old estate and to a title. Then the family tried to track his bloody footstep, and sought it far and near, through green country paths, and old streets of London; but in vain. Then they sent messengers to see whether any traces of one stepping in blood could be found on the forest leaves of America; but still in vain. The idea nevertheless prevailed that he would come back, and it was said they kept a bedchamber ready for him yet in the old house. But much as they pretended to regret the loss of him and his children, it would make them curse their stars were a descendant of his to return now. For the child of a younger son was in possession of the old estate, and was doing as much evil as his forefathers did; and if the true heir were to appear on the threshold, he would (if he might but do it secretly) stain the whole doorstep as red as the Bloody Footstep had stained one little portion of it.

"Do you think he will ever come back?" asked little Ned.

"Stranger things have happened, my little man!" said Doctor Grimshawe, "than that the posterity of this man should come back and turn these usurpers out of his rightful inheritance. And sometimes, as I sit here smoking my pipe and drinking my glass, and looking up at the cunning plot that the spider is weaving yonder above my head, and thinking of this fine old family and

some little matters that have been between them and me, I fancy that it may be so! We shall see! Stranger things have happened."

And Doctor Grimshawe drank off his tumbler, winking at little Ned in a strange way, that seemed to be a kind of playfulness, but which did not affect the children pleasantly; insomuch that little Elsie put both her hands on Doctor Grim's knees, and begged him not to do so any more. [Endnote: 4.]

CHAPTER IV

[Endnote: 1]

The children, after this conversation, often introduced the old English mansion into their dreams and little romances, which all imaginative children are continually mixing up with their lives, making the commonplace day of grown people a rich, misty, glancing orb of fairy-land to themselves. Ned, forgetting or not realizing the long lapse of time, used to fancy the true heir wandering all this while in America, and leaving a long track of bloody footsteps behind him; until the period when, his sins being expiated (whatever they might be), he should turn back upon his steps and return to his old native home. And sometimes the child used to look along the streets of the town where he dwelt, bending his thoughtful eyes on the ground, and think that perhaps some time he should see the bloody footsteps there, betraying that the wanderer had just gone that way.

As for little Elsie, it was her fancy that the hero of the legend still remained imprisoned in that dreadful secret chamber, which had made a most dread impression on her mind; and that there he was, forgotten all this time, waiting, like a naughty child shut up in a closet, until some one should come to unlock the door. In the pitifulness of her disposition, she once proposed to little Ned that, as soon as they grew big enough, they should set out in quest of the old house, and find their way into it, and find the

secret chamber, and let the poor prisoner out. So they lived a good deal of the time in a half-waking dream, partly conscious of the fantastic nature of their ideas, yet with these ideas almost as real to them as the facts of the natural world, which, to children, are at first transparent and unsubstantial.

The Doctor appeared to have a pleasure, or a purpose, in keeping his legend forcibly in their memories; he often recurred to the subject of the old English family, and was continually giving new details about its history, the scenery in its neighborhood, the aspect of the mansion-house; indicating a very intense interest in the subject on his own part, of which this much talk seemed the involuntary overflowing.

There was, however, an affection mingled with this sentiment. It appeared to be his unfortunate necessity to let his thoughts dwell very constantly upon a subject that was hateful to him, with which this old English estate and manor-house and family were somehow connected; and, moreover, had he spoken thus to older and more experienced auditors, they might have detected in the manner and matter of his talk, a certain hereditary reverence and awe, the growth of ages, mixed up with a newer hatred, impelling him to deface and destroy what, at the same time, it was his deepest impulse to bow before. The love belonged to his race; the hatred, to himself individually. It was the feeling of a man lowly born, when he contracts a hostility to his hereditary superior. In one way, being of a powerful, passionate nature, gifted with force and ability far superior to that of the aristocrat, he might scorn

him and feel able to trample on him; in another, he had the same awe that a country boy feels of the magistrate who flings him a sixpence and shakes his horsewhip at him.

Had the grim Doctor been an American, he might have had the vast antipathy to rank, without the trace of awe that made it so much more malignant: it required a low-born Englishman to feel the two together. What made the hatred so fiendish was a something that, in the natural course of things, would have been loyalty, inherited affection, devoted self-sacrifice to a superior. Whatever it might be, it seemed at times (when his potations took deeper effect than ordinary) almost to drive the grim Doctor mad; for he would burst forth in wild diatribes and anathemas, having a strange, rough force of expression and a depth of utterance, as if his words came from a bottomless pit within himself, where burned an everlasting fire, and where the furies had their home; and plans of dire revenge were welded into shape as in the heat of a furnace. After the two poor children had been affrighted by paroxysms of this kind, the strange being would break out into one of his roars of laughter, that seemed to shake the house, and, at all events, caused the cobwebs and spiders suspended from the ceiling, to swing and vibrate with the motion of the volumes of reverberating breath which he thus expelled from his capacious lungs. Then, catching up little Elsie upon one knee and Ned upon the other, he would become gentler than in his usual moods, and, by the powerful magnetism of his character, cause them to think him as tender and sweet an old

fellow as a child could desire for a playmate. Upon the whole, strange as it may appear, they loved the grim Doctor dearly; there was a loadstone within him that drew them close to him and kept them there, in spite of the horror of many things that he said and did. One thing that, slight as it seemed, wrought mightily towards their mutually petting each other, was that no amount of racket, hubbub, shouting, laughter, or noisy mischief which the two children could perpetrate, ever disturbed the Doctor's studies, meditations, or employments of whatever kind. He had a hardy set of nerves, not refined by careful treatment in himself or his ancestors, but probably accustomed from of old to be drummed on by harsh voices, rude sounds, and the clatter and clamor of household life among homely, uncultivated, strongly animal people.

As the two children grew apace, it behooved their strange guardian to take some thought for their instruction. So far as little Elsie was concerned, however, he seemed utterly indifferent to her having any cultivation: having imbibed no modern ideas respecting feminine capacities and privileges, but regarding woman, whether in the bud or in the blossom, as the plaything of man's idler moments, and the helpmeet — but in a humble capacity — of his daily life. He sometimes bade her go to the kitchen and take lessons of crusty Hannah in bread-making, sweeping, dusting, washing, the coarser needlework, and such other things as she would require to know when she came to be a woman; but carelessly allowed her to gather up the crumbs of

such instruction as he bestowed on her playmate Ned, and thus learn to read, write, and cipher; which, to say the truth, was about as far in the way of scholarship as little Elsie cared to go.

But towards little Ned the grim Doctor adopted a far different system. No sooner had he reached the age when the soft and tender intellect of the child became capable of retaining impressions, than he took him vigorously in hand, assigning him such tasks as were fit for him, and curiously investigating what were the force and character of the powers with which the child grasped them. Not that the Doctor pressed him forward unduly; indeed, there was no need of it; for the boy manifested a remarkable docility for instruction, and a singular quickness in mastering the preliminary steps which lead to science: a subtle instinct, indeed, which it seemed wonderful a child should possess for anything as artificial as systems of grammar and arithmetic. A remarkable boy, in truth, he was, to have been found by chance in an almshouse; except that, such being his origin, we are at liberty to suppose for him whatever long cultivation and gentility we may think necessary, in his parentage of either side, — such as was indicated also by his graceful and refined beauty of person. He showed, indeed, even before he began to read at all, an instinctive attraction towards books, and a love for and interest in even the material form of knowledge, — the plates, the print, the binding of the Doctor's volumes, and even in a bookworm which he once found in an old volume, where it had eaten a circular furrow. But the little boy had too

quick a spirit of life to be in danger of becoming a bookworm himself. He had this side of the intellect, but his impulse would be to mix with men, and catch something from their intercourse fresher than books could give him; though these would give him what they might.

In the grim Doctor, rough and uncultivated as he seemed, this budding intelligence found no inadequate instructor. Doctor Grimshawe proved himself a far more thorough scholar, in the classics and mathematics, than could easily have been found in our country. He himself must have had rigid and faithful instruction at an early period of life, though probably not in his boyhood. For, though the culture had been bestowed, his mind had been left in so singularly rough a state that it seemed as if the refinement of classical study could not have been begun very early. Or possibly the mind and nature were incapable of polish; or he may have had a coarse and sordid domestic life around him in his infancy and youth. He was a gem of coarse texture, just hewn out. An American with a like education would more likely have gained a certain fineness and grace, and it would have been difficult to distinguish him from one who had been born to culture and refinement. This sturdy Englishman, after all that had been done for his mind, and though it had been well done, was still but another ploughman, of a long race of such, with a few scratchings of refinement on his hard exterior. His son, if he left one, might be a little less of the ploughman; his grandson, provided the female element were well chosen, might approach

to refinement; three generations — a century at least — would be required for the slow toil of hewing, chiselling, and polishing a gentleman out of this ponderous block, now rough from the quarry of human nature. But, in the mean time, he evidently possessed in an unusual degree the sort of learning that refines other minds, — the critical acquaintance with the great poets and historians of antiquity, and apparently an appreciation of their merits, and power to teach their beauty. So the boy had an able tutor, capable, it would seem, of showing him the way to the graces he did not himself possess; besides helping the growth of the strength without which refinement is but sickly and disgusting.

Another sort of culture, which it seemed odd that this rude man should undertake, was that of manners; but, in fact, rude as the grim Doctor's own manners were, he was one of the nicest and severest censors in that department that was ever known. It is difficult to account for this; although it is almost invariably found that persons in a low rank of life, such as servants and laborers, will detect the false pretender to the character of a gentleman, with at least as sure an instinct as the class into which they seek to thrust themselves. Perhaps they recognize something akin to their own vulgarity, rather than appreciate what is unlike themselves. The Doctor possessed a peculiar power of rich rough humor on this subject, and used to deliver lectures, as it were, to little Ned, illustrated with sketches of living individuals in the town where they dwelt; by an unscrupulous use of whom he

sought to teach the boy what to avoid in manners, if he sought to be a gentleman. But it must be confessed he spared himself as little as other people, and often wound up with this compendious injunction, — "Be everything in your behavior that Doctor Grim is not!"

His pupil, very probably, profited somewhat by these instructions; for there are specialties and arbitrary rules of behavior which do not come by nature. But these are few; and beautiful, noble, and genial manners may almost be called a natural gift; and these, however he inherited them, soon proved to be an inherent possession of little Ned. He had a kind of natural refinement, which nothing could ever soil or offend; it seemed, by some magic or other, absolutely to keep him from the knowledge of much of the grim Doctor's rude and sordid exterior, and to render what was around him beautiful by a sort of affiliation, or reflection from that quality in himself, glancing its white light upon it. The Doctor himself was puzzled, and apparently both startled and delighted at the perception of these characteristics. Sometimes he would make a low, uncouth bow, after his fashion, to the little fellow, saying, "Allow me to kiss your hand, my lord!" and little Ned, not quite knowing what the grim Doctor meant, yet allowed the favor he asked, with a grave and gracious condescension that seemed much to delight the suitor. This refusal to recognize or to suspect that the Doctor might be laughing at him was a sure token, at any rate, of the lack of one vulgar characteristic in little Ned.

In order to afford little Ned every advantage to these natural gifts, Doctor Grim nevertheless failed not to provide the best attainable instructor for such positive points of a polite education as his own fierce criticism, being destructive rather than generative, would not suffice for. There was a Frenchman in the town — a M. Le Grand, secretly calling himself a Count — who taught the little people, and, indeed, some of their elders, the Parisian pronunciation of his own language; and likewise dancing (in which he was more of an adept and more successful than in the former branch) and fencing: in which, after looking at a lesson or two, the grim Doctor was satisfied of his skill. Under his instruction, with the stimulus of the Doctor's praise and criticism, Ned soon grew to be the pride of the Frenchman's school, in both the active departments; and the Doctor himself added a further gymnastic acquirement (not absolutely necessary, he said, to a gentleman's education, but very desirable to a man perfect at all points) by teaching him cudgel-playing and pugilism. In short, in everything that related to accomplishments, whether of mind or body, no pains were spared with little Ned; but of the utilitarian line of education, then almost exclusively adopted, and especially desirable for a fortuneless boy like Ned, dependent on a man not wealthy, there was little given.

At first, too, the Doctor paid little attention to the moral and religious culture of his pupil; nor did he ever make a system of it. But by and by, though with a singular reluctance and kind of bashfulness, he began to extend his care to these matters;

being drawn into them unawares, and possibly perceiving and learning what he taught as he went along. One evening, I know not how, he was betrayed into speaking on this point, and a sort of inspiration seized him. A vista opened before him: handling an immortal spirit, he began to know its requisitions, in a degree far beyond what he had conceived them to be when his great task was undertaken. His voice grew deep, and had a strange, impressive pathos in it; his talk became eloquent with depth of meaning and feeling, as he told the boy of the moral dangers of the world, for which he was seeking to educate him; and which, he said, presented what looked like great triumphs, and yet were the greatest and saddest of defeats. He told him that many things that seemed nearest and dearest to the heart of man were destructive, eating and gnawing away and corroding what was best in him; and what a high, noble, re-creating triumph it was when these dark impulses were resisted and overthrown; and how, from that epoch, the soul took a new start. He denounced the selfish greed of gold, lawless passion, revenge, — and here the grim Doctor broke out into a strange passion and zeal of anathema against this deadly sin, making a dreadful picture of the ruin that it creates in the heart where it establishes itself, and how it makes a corrosive acid of those genial juices. Then he told the boy that the condition of all good was, in the first place, truth; then, courage; then, justice; then, mercy; out of which principles operating upon one another would come all brave, noble, high, unselfish actions, and the scorn of all mean ones;

and how that from such a nature all hatred would fall away, and all good affections would be ennobled.

I know not at what point it was, precisely, in these ethical instructions that an insight seemed to strike the grim Doctor that something more — vastly more — was needed than all he had said; and he began, doubtfully, to speak of man's spiritual nature and its demands, and the emptiness of everything which a sense of these demands did not pervade, and condense, and weighten into realities. And going on in this strain, he soared out of himself and astonished the two children, who stood gazing at him, wondering whether it were the Doctor who was speaking thus; until some interrupting circumstance seemed to bring him back to himself, and he burst into one of his great roars of laughter. The inspiration, the strange light whereby he had been transfigured, passed out of his face; and there was the uncouth, wild-bearded, rough, earthy, passionate man, whom they called Doctor Grim, looking ashamed of himself, and trying to turn the whole matter into a jest. [Endnote: 2.]

It was a sad pity that he should have been interrupted, and brought into this mocking mood, just when he seemed to have broken away from the sinfulness of his hot, evil nature, and to have soared into a region where, with all his native characteristics transfigured, he seemed to have become an angel in his own likeness. Crusty Hannah, who had been drawn to the door of the study by the unusual tones of his voice, — a kind of piercing sweetness in it, — always averred that she saw the gigantic spider

swooping round his head in great crafty circles, and clutching, as it were, at his brain with its great claws. But it was the old woman's absurd idea that this hideous insect was the Devil, in that ugly guise, — a superstition which deserves absolutely no countenance. Nevertheless, though this paroxysm of devotional feeling and insight returned no more to the grim Doctor, it was ever after a memorable occasion to the two children. It touched that religious chord, in both their hearts, which there was no mother to touch; but now it vibrated long, and never ceased to vibrate so long as they remained together, — nor, perhaps, after they were parted from each other and from the grim Doctor. And even then, in those after years, the strange music that had been awakened was continued, as it were the echo from harps on high. Now, at all events, they made little prayers for themselves, and said them at bedtime, generally in secret, sometimes in unison; and they read in an old dusty Bible which lay among the grim Doctor's books; and from little heathens, they became Christian children. Doctor Grimshawe was perhaps conscious of this result of his involuntary preachment, but he never directly noticed it, and did nothing either to efface or deepen the impression.

It was singular, however, that, in both the children's minds, this one gush of irresistible religious sentiment, breaking out of the grim Doctor's inner depths, like a sort of holy lava from a volcano that usually emitted quite other matter, (such as hot, melted wrath and hate,) quite threw out of sight, then and always afterwards, his darker characteristics. They remembered him,

with faith and love, as a religious man, and forgot — what perhaps had made no impression on their innocent hearts — all the traits that other people might have called devilish. To them the grim Doctor was a saint, even during his lifetime and constant intercourse with them, and canonized forever afterwards. There is almost always, to be sure, this profound faith, with regard to those they love, in childhood; but perhaps, in this instance, the children really had a depth of insight that grown people lacked; a profound recognition of the bottom of this strange man's nature, which was of such stuff as martyrs and heroic saints might have been made of, though here it had been wrought miserably amiss. At any rate, his face with the holy awe upon it was what they saw and remembered, when they thought of their friend Doctor Grim.

One effect of his zealous and analytic instruction of the boy was very perceptible. Heretofore, though enduring him, and occasionally making a plaything of him, it may be doubted whether the grim Doctor had really any strong affection for the child: it rather seemed as if his strong will were forcing him to undertake, and carry sedulously forward, a self-imposed task. All that he had done — his redeeming the bright child from poverty and nameless degradation, ignorance, and a sordid life hopeless of better fortune, and opening to him the whole realm of mighty possibilities in an American life — did not imply any love for the little individual whom he thus benefited. It had some other motive.

But now, approaching the child in this close, intimate, and helpful way, it was very evident that his interest took a tenderer character. There was everything in the boy, that a boy could possess, to attract affection; he would have been a father's pride and joy. Doctor Grimshawe, indeed, was not his father; but to a person of his character this was perhaps no cause of lesser love than if there had been the whole of that holy claim of kindred between them. We speak of the natural force of blood; we speak of the paternal relation as if it were productive of more earnest affection than can exist between two persons, one of whom is protective, but unrelated. But there are wild, forcible, unrestricted characters, on whom the necessity and even duty of loving their own child is a sort of barrier to love. They perhaps do not love their own traits, which they recognize in their children; they shrink from their own features in the reflection presented by these little mirrors. A certain strangeness and unlikeness (such as gives poignancy to the love between the sexes) would excite a livelier affection. Be this as it may, it is not probable that Doctor Grimshawe would have loved a child of his own blood, with the coarse characteristics that he knew both in his race and himself, with nearly such fervor as this beautiful, slender, yet strenuous, intelligent, refined boy, — with such a high-bred air, handling common things with so refined a touch, yet grasping them so firmly; throwing a natural grace on all he did. Was he not his father, — he that took this fair blossom out of the sordid mud in which he must soon have withered and perished? Was not this

beautiful strangeness, which he so wondered at, the result of his care?

And little Elsie? did the grim Doctor love her as well? Perhaps not, for, in the first place, there was a natural tie, though not the nearest, between her and Doctor Grimshawe, which made him feel that she was cast upon his love: a burden which he acknowledged himself bound to undertake. Then, too, there were unutterably painful reminiscences and thoughts, that made him gasp for breath, that turned his blood sour, that tormented his dreams with nightmares and hellish phantoms; all of which were connected with this innocent and happy child; so that, cheerful and pleasant as she was, there was to the grim Doctor a little fiend playing about his floor and throwing a lurid light on the wall, as the shadow of this sun-flickering child. It is certain that there was always a pain and horror mixed with his feelings towards Elsie; he had to forget himself, as it were, and all that was connected with the causes why she came to be, before he could love her. Amid his fondness, when he was caressing her upon his knee, pressing her to his rough bosom, as he never took the freedom to press Ned, came these hateful reminiscences, compelling him to set her down, and corrugating his heavy brows as with a pang of fiercely resented, strongly borne pain. Still, the child had no doubt contrived to make her way into the great gloomy cavern of the grim Doctor's heart, and stole constantly further and further in, carrying a ray of sunshine in her hand as a taper to light her way, and illuminate the rude dark pit into which she so fearlessly

went.

CHAPTER V

Doctor Grim [Endnote: 1] had the English faith in open air and daily acquaintance with the weather, whatever it might be; and it was his habit, not only to send the two children to play, for lack of a better place, in the graveyard, but to take them himself on long rambles, of which the vicinity of the town afforded a rich variety. It may be that the Doctor's excursions had the wider scope, because both he and the children were objects of curiosity in the town, and very much the subject of its gossip: so that always, in its streets and lanes, the people turned to gaze, and came to their windows and to the doors of shops to see this grim, bearded figure, leading along the beautiful children each by a hand, with a surly aspect like a bulldog. Their remarks were possibly not intended to reach the ears of the party, but certainly were not so cautiously whispered but they occasionally did do so. The male remarks, indeed, generally died away in the throats that uttered them; a circumstance that doubtless saved the utterer from some very rough rejoinder at the hands of the Doctor, who had grown up in the habit of a very ready and free recourse to his fists, which had a way of doubling themselves up seemingly of their own accord. But the shrill feminine voices sometimes sent their observations from window to window without dread of any such repartee on the part of the subject of them.

"There he goes, the old Spider-witch!" quoth one shrill

woman, “with those two poor babes that he has caught in his cobweb, and is going to feed upon, poor little tender things! The bloody Englishman makes free with the dead bodies of our friends and the living ones of our children!”

“How red his nose is!” quoth another; “he has pulled at the brandy-bottle pretty stoutly to-day, early as it is! Pretty habits those children will learn, between the Devil in the shape of a great spider, and this devilish fellow in his own shape! It were well that our townsmen tarred and feathered the old British wizard!”

And, as he got further off, two or three little blackguard barefoot boys shouted shrilly after him, —

> “Doctor Grim, Doctor Grim,
> The Devil wove a web for him!”

being a nonsensical couplet that had been made for the grim Doctor’s benefit, and was hooted in the streets, and under his own windows. Hearing such remarks and insults, the Doctor would glare round at them with red eyes, especially if the brandy-bottle had happened to be much in request that day.

Indeed, poor Doctor Grim had met with a fortune which befalls many a man with less cause than drew the public attention on this odd humorist; for, dwelling in a town which was as yet but a larger village, where everybody knew everybody, and claimed the privilege to know and discuss their characters, and where

there were few topics of public interest to take off their attention, a very considerable portion of town talk and criticism fell upon him. The old town had a certain provincialism, which is less the characteristic of towns in these days, when society circulates so freely, than then: besides, it was a very rude epoch, just when the country had come through the war of the Revolution, and while the surges of that commotion were still seething and swelling, and while the habits and morals of every individual in the community still felt its influence; and especially the contest was too recent for an Englishman to be in very good odor, unless he should cease to be English, and become more American than the Americans themselves in repudiating British prejudices or principles, habits, mode of thought, and everything that distinguishes Britons at home or abroad. As Doctor Grim did not see fit to do this, and as, moreover, he was a very doubtful, questionable, morose, unamiable old fellow, not seeking to make himself liked nor deserving to be so, he was a very unpopular person in the town where he had chosen to reside. Nobody thought very well of him; the respectable people had heard of his pipe and brandy-bottle; the religious community knew that he never showed himself at church or meeting; so that he had not that very desirable strength (in a society split up into many sects) of being able to rely upon the party sympathies of any one of them. The mob hated him with the blind sentiment that makes one surly cur hostile to another surly cur. He was the most isolated individual to be found anywhere; and, being so unsupported, everybody was his enemy.

The town, as it happened, had been pleased to interest itself much in this matter of Doctor Grim and the two children, insomuch as he never sent them to school, nor came with them to meeting of any kind, but was bringing them up ignorant heathen to all appearances, and, as many believed, was devoting them in some way to the great spider, to which he had bartered his own soul. It had been mooted among the selectmen, the fathers of the town, whether their duty did not require them to put the children under more suitable guardianship; a measure which, it may be, was chiefly hindered by the consideration that, in that case, the cost of supporting them would probably be transferred from the grim Doctor's shoulders to those of the community. Nevertheless, they did what they could. Maidenly ladies, prim and starched, in one or two instances called upon the Doctor — the two children meanwhile being in the graveyard at play — to give him Christian advice as to the management of his charge. But, to confess the truth, the Doctor's reception of these fair missionaries was not extremely courteous. They were, perhaps, partly instigated by a natural feminine desire to see the interior of a place about which they had heard much, with its spiders' webs, its strange machines and confusing tools; so, much contrary to crusty Hannah's advice, they persisted in entering. Crusty Hannah listened at the door; and it was curious to see the delighted smile which came over her dry old visage as the Doctor's growling, rough voice, after an abrupt question or two, and a reply in a thin voice on the part of the maiden

ladies, grew louder and louder, till the door opened, and forth came the benevolent pair in great discomposure. Crusty Hannah averred that their caps were much rumpled; but this view of the thing was questioned; though it were certain that the Doctor called after them downstairs, that, had they been younger and prettier, they would have fared worse. A male emissary, who was admitted on the supposition of his being a patient, did fare worse; for (the grim Doctor having been particularly intimate with the black bottle that afternoon) there was, about ten minutes after the visitor's entrance, a sudden fierce upraising of the Doctor's growl; then a struggle that shook the house; and, finally, a terrible rumbling down the stairs, which proved to be caused by the precipitate descent of the hapless visitor; who, if he needed no assistance of the grim Doctor on his entrance, certainly would have been the better for a plaster or two after his departure.

Such were the terms on which Doctor Grimshawe now stood with his adopted townspeople; and if we consider the dull little town to be full of exaggerated stories about the Doctor's oddities, many of them forged, all retailed in an unfriendly spirit; misconceptions of a character which, in its best and most candidly interpreted aspects, was sufficiently amenable to censure; surmises taken for certainties; superstitions — the genuine hereditary offspring of the frame of public mind which produced the witchcraft delusion — all fermenting together; and all this evil and uncharitableness taking the delusive hue of benevolent interest in two helpless children; — we may partly

judge what was the odium in which the grim Doctor dwelt, and amid which he walked. The horrid suspicion, too, countenanced by his abode in the corner of the graveyard, affording the terrible Doctor such facilities for making free, like a ghoul as he was, with the relics of mortality from the earliest progenitor to the man killed yesterday by the Doctor's own drugs, was not likely to improve his reputation.

He had heretofore contented himself with, at most, occasionally shaking his stick at his assailants; but this day the black bottle had imparted, it may be, a little more fire than ordinary to his blood; and besides, an unlucky urchin happened to take particularly good aim with a mud ball, which took effect right in the midst of the Doctor's bushy beard, and, being of a soft consistency, forthwith became incorporated with it. At this intolerable provocation the grim Doctor pursued the little villain, amid a shower of similar missiles from the boy's playmates, caught him as he was escaping into a back yard, dragged him into the middle of the street, and, with his stick, proceeded to give him his merited chastisement.

But, hereupon, it was astonishing how sudden commotion flashed up like gunpowder along the street, which, except for the petty shrieks and laughter of a few children, was just before so quiet. Forth out of every window in those dusky, mean wooden houses were thrust heads of women old and young; forth out of every door and other avenue, and as if they started up from the middle of the street, or out of the unpaved sidewalks, rushed

fierce avenging forms, threatening at full yell to take vengeance on the grim Doctor; who still, with that fierce dark face of his, — his muddy beard all flying abroad, dirty and foul, his hat fallen off, his red eyes flashing fire, — was belaboring the poor hinder end of the unhappy urchin, paying off upon that one part of the boy's frame the whole score which he had to settle with the rude boys of the town; giving him at once the whole whipping which he had deserved every day of his life, and not a stroke of which he had yet received. Need enough there was, no doubt, that somebody should interfere with such grim and immitigable justice; and certainly the interference was prompt, and promised to be effectual.

"Down with the old tyrant! Thrash him! Hang him! Tar and feather the viper's fry! the wizard! the body-snatcher!" bellowed the mob, one member of which was raving with delirium tremens, and another was a madman just escaped from bedlam.

It is unaccountable where all this mischievous, bloodthirsty multitude came from, — how they were born into that quietness in such a moment of time! What had they been about heretofore? Were they waiting in readiness for this crisis, and keeping themselves free from other employment till it should come to pass? Had they been created for the moment, or were they fiends sent by Satan in the likeness of a blackguard population? There you might see the offscourings of the recently finished war, — old soldiers, rusty, wooden-legged: there, sailors, ripe for any kind of mischief; there, the drunken population of a neighboring

grogshop, staggering helter-skelter to the scene, and tumbling over one another at the Doctor's feet. There came the father of the punished urchin, who had never shown heretofore any care for his street-bred progeny, but who now came pale with rage, armed with a pair of tongs; and with him the mother, flying like a fury, with her cap awry, and clutching a broomstick, as if she were a witch just alighted. Up they rushed from cellar doors, and dropped down from chamber windows; all rushing upon the Doctor, but overturning and thwarting themselves by their very multitude. For, as good Doctor Grim levelled the first that came within reach of his fist, two or three of the others tumbled over him and lay grovelling at his feet; the Doctor meanwhile having retreated into the angle between two houses. Little Ned, with a valor which did him the more credit inasmuch as it was exercised in spite of a good deal of childish trepidation, as his pale face indicated, brandished his fists by the Doctor's side; and little Elsie did what any woman may, — that is, screeched in Doctor Grim's behalf with full stretch of lungs. Meanwhile the street boys kept up a shower of mud balls, many of which hit the Doctor, while the rest were distributed upon his assailants, heightening their ferocity.

"Seize the old scoundrel! the villain! the Tory! the dastardly Englishman! Hang him in the web of his own devilish spider, — 't is long enough! Tar and feather him! tar and feather him!"

It was certainly one of those crises that show a man how few real friends he has, and the tendency of mankind to stand aside, at

least, and let a poor devil fight his own troubles, if not assist them in their attack. Here you might have seen a brother physician of the grim Doctor's greatly tickled at his plight: or a decorous, powdered, ruffle-shirted dignitary, one of the weighty men of the town, standing at a neighbor's corner to see what would come of it.

"He is not a respectable man, I understand, this Grimshawe, — a quack, intemperate, always in these scuffles: let him get out as he may!"

And then comes a deacon of one of the churches, and several church-members, who, hearing a noise, set out gravely and decorously to see what was going forward in a Christian community.

"Ah! it is that irreligious and profane Grimshawe, who never goes to meeting. We wash our hands of him!"

And one of the selectmen said, —

"Surely this common brawler ought not to have the care of these nice, sweet children; something must be done about it; and when the man is sober, he must be talked to!"

Alas! it is a hard case with a man who lives upon his own bottom and responsibility, making himself no allies, sewing himself on to nobody's skirts, insulating himself, — hard, when his trouble comes; and so poor Doctor Grimshawe was like to find it.

He had succeeded by dint of good skill, and some previous practice at quarter-staff, in keeping his assailants at bay, though

not without some danger on his own part; but their number, their fierceness, and the more skilled assault of some among them must almost immediately have been successful, when the Doctor's part was strengthened by an unexpected ally. This was a person [Endnote: 2] of tall, slight figure, who, without lifting his hands to take part in the conflict, thrust himself before the Doctor, and turned towards the assailants, crying, —

"Christian men, what would you do? Peace, — peace!"

His so well intended exhortation took effect, indeed, in a certain way, but not precisely as might have been wished: for a blow, aimed at Doctor Grim, took effect on the head of this man, who seemed to have no sort of skill or alacrity at defending himself, any more than at making an assault; for he never lifted his hands, but took the blow as unresistingly as if it had been kindly meant, and it levelled him senseless on the ground.

Had the mob really been enraged for any strenuous cause, this incident would have operated merely as a preliminary whet to stimulate them to further bloodshed. But, as they were mostly actuated only by a natural desire for mischief, they were about as well satisfied with what had been done as if the Doctor himself were the victim. And besides, the fathers and respectabilities of the town, who had seen this mishap from afar, now began to put forward, crying out, "Keep the peace! keep the peace! A riot! a riot!" and other such cries as suited the emergency; and the crowd vanished more speedily than it had congregated, leaving the Doctor and the two children alone beside the fallen victim

of a quarrel not his own. Not to dwell too long on this incident, the Doctor, laying hold of the last of his enemies, after the rest had taken to their heels, ordered him sternly to stay and help him bear the man, whom he had helped to murder, to his house.

"It concerns you, friend; for, if he dies, you hang to a dead certainty!"

And this was done accordingly.

CHAPTER VI

About an hour thereafter there lay on a couch that had been hastily prepared in the study a person of singularly impressive presence: a thin, mild-looking man, with a peculiar look of delicacy and natural refinement about him, although he scarcely appeared to be technically and as to worldly position what we call a gentleman; plain in dress and simple in manner, not giving the idea of remarkable intellectual gifts, but with a kind of spiritual aspect, fair, clear complexion, gentle eyes, still somewhat clouded and obscured by the syncope into which a blow on the head had thrown him. He looked middle-aged, and yet there was a kind of childlike, simple expression, which, unless you looked at him with the very purpose of seeing the traces of time in his face, would make you suppose him much younger.

"And how do you find yourself now, my good fellow?" asked Doctor Grimshawe, putting forth his hand to grasp that of the stranger, and giving it a good, warm shake. "None the worse, I should hope?" [Endnote: 1.]

"Not much the worse," answered the stranger: "not at all, it may be. There is a pleasant dimness and uncertainty in my mode of being. I am taken off my feet, as it were, and float in air, with a faint delight in my sensations. The grossness, the roughness, the too great angularity of the actual, is removed from me. It is a state that I like well. It may be, this is the way that the dead feel when

they awake in another state of being, with a dim pleasure, after passing through the brief darkness of death. It is very pleasant."

He answered dreamily, and sluggishly, reluctantly, as if there were a sense of repose in him which he disliked to break by putting any of his sensations into words. His voice had a remarkable sweetness and gentleness, though lacking in depth of melody.

"Here, take this," said the Doctor, who had been preparing some kind of potion in a teaspoon: it may have been a dose of his famous preparation of spider's web, for aught I know, the operation of which was said to be of a soothing influence, causing a delightful silkiness of sensation; but I know not whether it was considered good for concussions of the brain, such as it is to be supposed the present patient had undergone. "Take this: it will do you good; and here I drink your very good health in something that will do me good."

So saying, the grim Doctor quaffed off a tumbler of brandy and water.

"How sweet a contrast," murmured the stranger, "between that scene of violence and this great peace that has come over me! It is as when one can say, I have fought the good fight."

"You are right," said the Doctor, with what would have been one of his deep laughs, but which he modified in consideration of his patient's tenderness of brain. "We both of us fought a good fight; for though you struck no actual stroke, you took them as unflinchingly as ever I saw a man, and so turned the fortune of the

battle better than if you smote with a sledge-hammer. Two things puzzle me in the affair. First, whence came my assailants, all in that moment of time, unless Satan let loose out of the infernal regions a synod of fiends, hoping thus to get a triumph over me. And secondly, whence came you, my preserver, unless you are an angel, and dropped down from the sky."

"No," answered the stranger, with quiet simplicity. "I was passing through the street to my little school, when I saw your peril, and felt it my duty to expostulate with the people."

"Well," said the grim Doctor, "come whence you will, you did an angel's office for me, and I shall do what an earthly man may to requite it. There, we will talk no more for the present."

He hushed up the children, who were already, of their own accord, walking on tiptoe and whispering, and he himself even went so far as to refrain from the usual incense of his pipe, having observed that the stranger, who seemed to be of a very delicate organization, had seemed sensible of the disagreeable effect on the atmosphere of the room. The restraint lasted, however, only till (in the course of the day) crusty Hannah had fitted up a little bedroom on the opposite side of the entry, to which she and the grim Doctor moved the stranger, who, though tall, they observed was of no great weight and substance, — the lightest man, the Doctor averred, for his size, that ever he had handled.

Every possible care was taken of him, and in a day or two he was able to walk into the study again, where he sat gazing at the sordidness and unneatness of the apartment, the strange festoons

and drapery of spiders' webs, the gigantic spider himself, and at the grim Doctor, so shaggy, grizzly, and uncouth, in the midst of these surroundings, with a perceptible sense of something very strange in it all. His mild, gentle regard dwelt too on the two beautiful children, evidently with a sense of quiet wonder how they should be here, and altogether a sense of their unfitness; they, meanwhile, stood a little apart, looking at him, somewhat disturbed and awed, as children usually are, by a sense that the stranger was not perfectly well, that he had been injured, and so set apart from the rest of the world.

"Will you come to me, little one?" said he, holding out a delicate hand to Elsie.

Elsie came to his side without any hesitation, though without any of the rush that accompanied her advent to those whom she affected. "And you, my little man," added the stranger, quietly, and looking to Ned, who likewise willingly approached, and, shaking him by the offered hand, let it go again, but continued standing by his side.

"Do you know, my little friends," said the stranger, "that it is my business in life to instruct such little people as you?"

"Do they obey you well, sir?" asked Ned, perhaps conscious of a want of force in the person whom he addressed.

The stranger smiled faintly. "Not too well," said he. "That has been my difficulty; for I have moral and religious objections, and also a great horror, to the use of the rod, and I have not been gifted with a harsh voice and a stern brow; so that, after a while,

my little people sometimes get the better of me. The present generation of men is too gross for gentle treatment."

"You are quite right," quoth Doctor Grimshawe, who had been observing this little scene, and trying to make out, from the mutual deportment of the stranger and the two children, what sort of man this fair, quiet stranger was, with his gentleness and weakness, — characteristics that were not attractive to himself, yet in which he acknowledged, as he saw them here, a certain charm; nor did he know, scarcely, whether to despise the one in whom he saw them, or to yield to a strange sense of reverence. So he watched the children, with an indistinct idea of being guided by them. "You are quite right: the world now — and always before, as far as I ever heard — requires a great deal of brute force, a great deal of animal food and brandy in the man that is to make an impression on it."

The convalescence of the stranger — he gave his name as Colcord — proceeded favorably; for the Doctor remarked that, delicate as his system was, it had a certain purity, — a simple healthfulness that did not run into disease as stronger constitutions might. It did not apparently require much to crush down such a being as this, — not much unkindly breath to blow out the taper of his life, — and yet, if not absolutely killed, there was a certain aptness to keep alive in him not readily to be overcome.

No sooner was he in a condition so to do, than he went forth to look after the little school that he had spoken of, but soon

came back, announcing in a very quiet and undisturbed way that, during his withdrawal from duty, the scholars had been distributed to other instructors, and consequently he was without place or occupation [Endnotes: 2, 3, 4.]

"A hard case," said the Doctor, flinging a gruff curse at those who had so readily deserted the poor schoolmaster.

"Not so hard," replied Colcord. "These little fellows are an unruly set, born of parents who have led rough lives, — here in battle time, too, with the spirit of battle in them, — therefore rude and contentious beyond my power to cope with them. I have been taught, long ago," he added, with a peaceful smile, "that my business in life does not lie with grown-up and consolidated men and women; and so, not to be useless in my day, and to gain the little that my sustenance requires, I have thought to deal with children. But even for this I lack force."

"I dare say," said the Doctor, with a modified laugh. "Little devils they are, harder to deal with than men. Well, I am glad of your failure for one reason, and of your being thrown out of business; because we shall have the benefit of you the longer. Here is this boy to be instructed. I have made some attempts myself; but having no art of instructing, no skill, no temper I suppose, I make but an indifferent hand at it: and besides I have other business that occupies my thoughts. Take him in hand, if you like, and the girl for company. No matter whether you teach her anything, unless you happen to be acquainted with needlework."

"I will talk with the children," said Colcord, "and see if I am likely to do good with them. The lad, I see, has a singular spirit of aspiration and pride, — no ungentle pride, — but still hard to cope with. I will see. The little girl is a most comfortable child."

"You have read the boy as if you had his heart in your hand," said the Doctor, rather surprised. "I could not have done it better myself, though I have known him all but from the egg."

Accordingly, the stranger, who had been thrust so providentially into this odd and insulated little community, abode with them, without more words being spoken on the subject: for it seemed to all concerned a natural arrangement, although, on both parts, they were mutually sensible of something strange in the companionship thus brought about. To say the truth, it was not easy to imagine two persons apparently less adapted to each other's society than the rough, uncouth, animal Doctor, whose faith was in his own right arm, so full of the old Adam as he was, so sturdily a hater, so hotly impulsive, so deep, subtle, and crooked, so obstructed by his animal nature, so given to his pipe and black bottle, so wrathful and pugnacious and wicked, — and this mild spiritual creature, so milky, with so unforceful a grasp; and it was singular to see how they stood apart and eyed each other, each tacitly acknowledging a certain merit and kind of power, though not well able to appreciate its value. The grim Doctor's kindness, however, and gratitude, had been so thoroughly awakened, that he did not feel the disgust that he probably otherwise might at what seemed the mawkishness of

Colcord's character; his want, morally speaking, of bone and muscle; his fastidiousness of character, the essence of which it seemed to be to bear no stain upon it; otherwise it must die.

On Colcord's part there was a good deal of evidence to be detected, by a nice observer, that he found it difficult to put up with the Doctor's coarse peculiarities, whether physical or moral. His animal indulgences of appetite struck him with wonder and horror; his coarse expressions, his free indulgence of wrath, his sordid and unclean habits; the dust, the cobwebs, the monster that dangled from the ceiling; his pipe, diffusing its fragrance through the house, and showing, by the plainest and simplest proof, how we all breathe one another's breath, nice and proud as we may be, kings and daintiest ladies breathing the air that has already served to inflate a beggar's lungs. He shrank, too, from the rude manhood of the Doctor's character, with its human warmth, — an element which he seemed not to possess in his own character. He was capable only of gentle and mild regard, — that was his warmest affection; and the warmest, too, that he was capable of exciting in others. So that he was doomed as much apparently as the Doctor himself to be a lonely creature, without any very deep companionship in the world, though not incapable, when he, by some rare chance, met a soul distantly akin, of holding a certain high spiritual communion. With the children, however, he succeeded in establishing some good and available relations; his simple and passionless character coincided with their simplicity, and their as yet unawakened

passions: they appeared to understand him better than the Doctor ever succeeded in doing. He touched springs and elements in the nature of both that had never been touched till now, and that sometimes made a sweet, high music. But this was rarely; and as far as the general duties of an instructor went, they did not seem to be very successfully performed. Something was cultivated; the spiritual germ grew, it might be; but the children, and especially Ned, were intuitively conscious of a certain want of substance in the instructor, — a something of earthly bulk; a too etherealness. But his connection with our story does not lie in any excellence, or lack of excellence, that he showed as an instructor, and we merely mention these things as illustrating more or less his characteristics.

The grim Doctor's curiosity was somewhat piqued by what he could see of the schoolmaster's character, and he was desirous of finding out what sort of a life such a man could have led in a world which he himself had found so rough a one; through what difficulties he had reached middle age without absolutely vanishing away in his contact with more positive substances than himself; how the world had given him a subsistence, if indeed he recognized anything more dense than fragrance, like a certain people whom Pliny mentioned in Africa, — a point, in fact, which the grim Doctor denied, his performance at table being inappreciable, and confined, at least almost entirely, to a dish of boiled rice, which crusty Hannah set before him, preparing it, it might be, with a sympathy of her East Indian part towards him.

Well, Doctor Grimshawe easily got at what seemed to be all of the facts of Colcord's life; how that he was a New-Englander, the descendant of an ancient race of settlers, the last of them; for, once pretty numerous in their quarter of the country, they seemed to have been dying out, — exhaling from the earth, and passing to some other region.

"No wonder," said the Doctor bluffly. "You have been letting slip the vital principle, if you are a fair specimen of the race. You do not clothe yourself in substance. Your souls are not coated sufficiently. Beef and brandy would have saved you. You have exhaled for lack of them."

The schoolmaster shook his head, and probably thought his earthly salvation and sustenance not worth buying at such a cost. The remainder of his history was not tangible enough to afford a narrative. There seemed, from what he said, to have always been a certain kind of refinement in his race, a nicety of conscience, a nicety of habit, which either was in itself a want of force, or was necessarily connected with it, and which, the Doctor silently thought, had culminated in the person before him.

"It was always in us," continued Colcord, with a certain pride which people generally feel in their ancestral characteristics, be they good or evil. "We had a tradition among us of our first emigrant, and the causes that brought him to the New World; and it was said that he had suffered so much, before quitting his native shores, so painful had been his track, that always afterwards on the forest leaves of this land his foot left a print of blood wherever

he trod." [Endnote: 5.]

CHAPTER VII

"A print of blood!" said the grim Doctor, breaking his pipe-stem by some sudden spasm in his gripe of it. "Pooh! the devil take the pipe! A very strange story that! Pray how was it?" [Endnote: 1.]

"Nay, it is but a very dim legend," answered the schoolmaster: "although there are old yellow papers and parchments, I remember, in my father's possession, that had some reference to this man, too, though there was nothing in them about the bloody footprints. But our family legend is, that this man was of a good race, in the time of Charles the First, originally Papists, but one of them — the second you, our legend says — was of a milder, sweeter cast than the rest, who were fierce and bloody men, of a hard, strong nature; but he partook most of his mother's character. This son had been one of the earliest Quakers, converted by George Fox; and moreover there had been love between him and a young lady of great beauty and an heiress, whom likewise the eldest son of the house had designed to make his wife. And these brothers, cruel men, caught their innocent brother and kept him in confinement long in his own native home — "

"How?" asked the Doctor. "Why did not he appeal to the laws?"

"Our legend says," replied the schoolmaster, "only that he was

kept in a chamber that was forgotten." [Endnote: 2.]

"Very strange that!" quoth the Doctor. "He was sold by his brethren."

The schoolmaster went on to tell, with much shuddering, how a Jesuit priest had been mixed up with this wretched business, and there had been a scheme at once religious and political to wrest the estate and the lovely lady from the fortunate heir; and how this grim Italian priest had instigated them to use a certain kind of torture with the poor heir, and how he had suffered from this; but one night, when they left him senseless, he contrived to make his escape from that cruel home, bleeding as he went; and how, by some action of his imagination, — his sense of the cruelty and hideousness of such treatment at his brethren's hands, and in the holy name of his religion, — his foot, which had been crushed by their cruelty, bled as he went, and that blood had never been stanched. And thus he had come to America, and after many wanderings, and much track of blood along rough ways, to New England. [Endnote: 3.]

"And what became of his beloved?" asked the grim Doctor, who was puffing away at a fresh pipe with a very queer aspect.

"She died in England," replied the schoolmaster. "And before her death, by some means or other, they say that she found means to send him a child, the offspring of their marriage, and from that child our race descended. And they say, too, that she sent him a key to a coffin, in which was locked up a great treasure. But we have not the key. But he never went back to his own

country; and being heart-broken, and sick and weary of the world and its pomps and vanities, he died here, after suffering much persecution likewise from the Puritans. For his peaceful religion was accepted nowhere."

"Of all legends, — all foolish legends," quoth the Doctor, wrathfully, with a face of a dark blood-red color, so much was his anger and contempt excited, "and of all absurd heroes of a legend, I never heard the like of this! Have you the key?"

"No; nor have I ever heard of it," answered the schoolmaster.

"But you have some papers?"

"They existed once: perhaps are still recoverable by search," said the schoolmaster. "My father knew of them."

"A foolish legend," reiterated the Doctor. "It is strange how human folly strings itself on to human folly, as a story originally false and foolish grows older."

He got up and walked about the room, with hasty and irregular strides and a prodigious swinging of his ragged dressing-gown, which swept away as many cobwebs as it would take a week to reproduce. After a few turns, as if to change the subject, the Doctor asked the schoolmaster if he had any taste for pictures, and drew his attention to the portrait which has been already mentioned, — the figure in antique sordid garb, with a halter round his neck, and the expression in his face which the Doctor and the two children had interpreted so differently. Colcord, who probably knew nothing about pictures, looked at it at first merely from the gentle and cool complaisance of his character;

but becoming absorbed in the contemplation, stood long without speaking; until the Doctor, looking in his face, perceived his eyes were streaming with tears.

"What are you crying about?" said he, gruffly.

"I don't know," said the schoolmaster quietly. "But there is something in this picture that affects me inexpressibly; so that, not being a man passionate by nature, I have hardly ever been so moved as now!"

"Very foolish," muttered the Doctor, resuming his strides about the room. "I am ashamed of a grown man that can cry at a picture, and can't tell the reason why."

After a few more turns he resumed his easy-chair and his tumbler, and, looking upward, beckoned to his pet spider, which came dangling downward, great parti-colored monster that he was, and swung about his master's head in hideous conference as it seemed; a sight that so distressed the schoolmaster, or shocked his delicate taste, that he went out, and called the two children to take a walk with him, with the purpose of breathing air that was neither infected with spiders nor graves.

After his departure, Doctor Grimshawe seemed even more disturbed than during his presence: again he strode about the study; then sat down with his hands on his knees, looking straight into the fire, as if it imaged the seething element of his inner man, where burned hot projects, smoke, heat, blackness, ashes, a smouldering of old thoughts, a blazing up of new; casting in the gold of his mind, as Aaron did that of the Israelites, and waiting

to see what sort of a thing would come out of the furnace. The children coming in from their play, he spoke harshly to them, and eyed little Ned with a sort of savageness, as if he meant to eat him up, or do some other dreadful deed: and when little Elsie came with her usual frankness to his knee, he repelled her in such a way that she shook her little hand at him, saying, "Naughty Doctor Grim, what has come to you?"

Through all that day, by some subtle means or other, the whole household knew that something was amiss; and nobody in it was comfortable. It was like a spell of weather; like the east wind; like an epidemic in the air, that would not let anything be comfortable or contented, — this pervading temper of the Doctor. Crusty Hannah knew it in the kitchen: even those who passed the house must have known it somehow or other, and have felt a chill, an irritation, an influence on the nerves, as they passed. The spiders knew it, and acted as they were wont to do in stormy weather. The schoolmaster, when he returned from his walk, seemed likewise to know it, and made himself secure and secret, keeping in his own room, except at dinner, when he ate his rice in silence, without looking towards the Doctor, and appeared before him no more till evening, when the grim Doctor summoned him into the study, after sending the two children to bed.

"Sir," began the Doctor, "you have spoken of some old documents in your possession relating to the English descent of your ancestors. I have a curiosity to see these documents. Where are they?" [Endnote: 4.]

"I have them about my person," said the schoolmaster; and he produced from his pocket a bundle of old yellow papers done up in a parchment cover, tied with a piece of white cord, and presented them to Doctor Grimshawe, who looked over them with interest. They seemed to consist of letters, genealogical lists, certified copies of entries in registers, things which must have been made out by somebody who knew more of business than this ethereal person in whose possession they now were. The Doctor looked at them with considerable attention, and at last did them hastily up in the bundle again, and returned them to the owner.

"Have you any idea what is now the condition of the family to whom these papers refer?" asked he.

"None whatever, — none for almost a hundred years," said the schoolmaster. "About that time ago, I have heard a vague story that one of my ancestors went to the old country and saw the place. But, you see, the change of name has effectually covered us from view; and I feel that our true name is that which my ancestor assumed when he was driven forth from the home of his fathers, and that I have nothing to do with any other. I have no views on the estate, — none whatever. I am not so foolish and dreamy."

"Very right," said the Doctor. "Nothing is more foolish than to follow up such a pursuit as this, against all the vested interests of two hundred years, which of themselves have built up an impenetrably strong allegation against you. They harden

into stone, in England, these years, and become indestructible, instead of melting away as they do in this happy country."

"It is not a matter of interest with me," replied the schoolmaster.

"Very right, — very right!" repeated the grim Doctor.

But something was evidently amiss with him this evening. It was impossible to feel easy and comfortable in contact with him: if you looked in his face, there was the red, lurid glare of his eyes; meeting you fiercely and craftily as ever: sometimes he bit his lip and frowned in an awful manner. Once, he burst out into an awful fit of swearing, for no good reason, or any reason whatever that he explained, or that anybody could tell. Again, for no more suitable reason, he uplifted his stalwart arm, and smote a heavy blow with his fist upon the oak table, making the tumbler and black bottle leap up, and damaging, one would think, his own knuckles. Then he rose up, and resumed his strides about the room. He paused before the portrait before mentioned; then resumed his heavy, quick, irregular tread, swearing under his breath; and you would imagine, from what you heard, that all his thoughts and the movement of his mind were a blasphemy. Then again — but this was only once — he heaved a deep, ponderous sigh, that seemed to come up in spite of him, out of his depths, an exhalation of deep suffering, as if some convulsion had given it a passage to upper air, instead of its being hidden, as it generally was, by accumulated rubbish of later time heaped above it.

This latter sound appealed to something within the simple

schoolmaster, who had been witnessing the demeanor of the Doctor, like a being looking from another sphere into the trouble of the mortal one; a being incapable of passion, observing the mute, hard struggle of one in its grasp.

"Friend," said he at length, "thou hast something on thy mind."

"Aye," said the grim Doctor, coming to a stand before his chair. "You see that? Can you see as well what it is?"

"Some stir and writhe of something in the past that troubles you, as if you had kept a snake for many years in your bosom, and stupefied it with brandy, and now it awakes again, and troubles you with bites and stings."

"What sort of a man do you think me?" asked the Doctor.

"I cannot tell," said the schoolmaster. "The sympathies of my nature are not those that should give me knowledge of such men."

"Am I, think you," continued the grim Doctor, "a man capable of great crime?"

"A great one, if any," said Colcord; "a great good, likewise, it might be."

"What would I be likely to do," asked Doctor Grim, "supposing I had a darling purpose, to the accomplishment of which I had given my soul, — yes, my soul, — my success in life, my days and nights of thought, my years of time, dwelling upon it, pledging myself to it, until at last I had grown to love the burden of it, and not to regret my own degradation? I, a man of strongest will. What would I do, if this were to be resisted?"

"I do not conceive of the force of will shaping out my ways,"

said the schoolmaster. “I walk gently along and take the path that opens before me.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” shouted the grim Doctor, with one of his portentous laughs. “So do we all, in spite of ourselves; and sometimes the path comes to a sudden ending!” And he resumed his drinking.

The schoolmaster looked at him with wonder, and a kind of shuddering, at something so unlike himself; but probably he very imperfectly estimated the forces that were at work within this strange being, and how dangerous they made him. He imputed it, a great deal, to the brandy, which he had kept drinking in such inordinate quantities; whereas it is probable that this had a soothing, emollient effect, as far as it went, on the Doctor’s emotions; a sort of like to like, that he instinctively felt to be a remedy, But in truth it was difficult to see these two human creatures together, without feeling their incompatibility; without having a sense that one must be hostile to the other. The schoolmaster, through his fine instincts, doubtless had a sense of this, and sat gazing at the lurid, wrathful figure of the Doctor, in a sort of trance and fascination: not able to stir; bewildered by the sight of the great spider and other surroundings; and this strange, uncouth fiend, who had always been abhorrent to him, — he had a kind of curiosity in it, waited to see what would come of it, but felt it to be an unnatural state to him. And again the grim Doctor came and stood before him, prepared to make another of those strange utterances with which he had already so perplexed him.

That night — that midnight — it was rumored through the town that one of the inhabitants, going home late along the street that led by the graveyard, saw the grim Doctor standing by the open window of the study behind the elm tree, in his old dressing-gown, chill as was the night, and flinging his arms abroad wildly into the darkness, and muttering like the growling of a tempest, with occasional vociferations that grew even shrill with passion. The listener, though affrighted, could not resist an impulse to pause, and attempt overhearing something that might let him into the secret counsels of this strange wild man, whom the town held in such awe and antipathy; to learn, perhaps, what was the great spider, and whether he were summoning the dead out of their graves. However, he could make nothing out of what he overheard, except it were fragmentary curses, of a dreadful character, which the Doctor brought up with might and main out of the depths of his soul, and flung them forth, burning hot, aimed at what, and why, and to what practical end, it was impossible to say; but as necessarily as a volcano, in a state of eruption, sends forth boiling lava, sparkling and scintillating stones, and a sulphurous atmosphere, indicative of its inward state. [Endnote: 5.]

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.