

STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY,

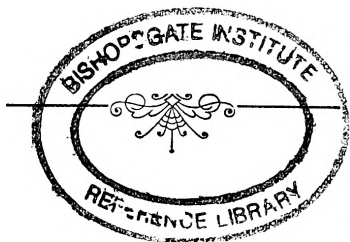
COMPRISING

The Agonies of Hanging.

By One who was Cut Down from the Gallows.

BASED UPON A MS. IN THE POSSESSION OF

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STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY,
COMPRISING
THE AGONIES OF HANGING.

IT has been my fortune to meet with some of the strangest characters that ever trod this planet. I myself, I admit, am not over-like Mr. John Smith, nonconformist and cheesemonger, and like draws to like. I have been more than once pronounced *daft*; and, be that as it may, I feel certain that during my lifetime more than one daft person has had my friendship. As I make a retrospect it occurs to me that, upon the whole, the daftest person that was ever enrolled on my list of friends was Major F——, who had been twelve years in the East India Company's service, and who belonged to an old county family. I was a big boy at school when Major F—— first took notice of me. It was the Annual Examination, and he and several other persons of influence were present, along with a contingent of the local clergy. I had distinguished myself by reading my theme, a wild, weird, Monk Lewis composition, full of dream and lightning and gloom and phantasy. It was certainly as unlike anything else that any other boy in the school could produce as it is possible to imagine. Some of the pupils could beat me at mere feats of commonplace drudgery; but they had all the leaden-footed mediocrity of the farmers and country parsons into which they

ultimately vegetated. My command of language and flight of imagination took Major F——'s breath away. He was heard muttering to himself: "This is a devil of a boy! I must do something for him. May I be jiggered if I don't!" And the masters and my class-fellows congratulated me; for the Major was known to be a man of his word, and to be both loyal and liberal to those to whom he felt attracted.

Only a few days after the school examination a report spread like wild-fire through the district that the Major had *hanged himself!* Throwing aside my Æschylus and Dunbar's Greek Lexicon, I hurried off to the residence of my prospective patron. He was reported to be dying, and for me to gain access to his chamber was exceedingly difficult. The principal obstacle was his daughter, Julia, who stood in the passage that led to his room and positively refused me entrance thereto. I attempted to crush past her, but she got hold of my ear and pulled it to the length of ear that is worn by an ass, but by no other of God's creatures. I was young, with a frame unknit, and with bones that were little more than cartilage; and this Julia was a perfect Amazon in physical strength. Howbeit, her mental prowess was as small as her personal vanity was inordinate.

"I know you," sneered she; "you are the school brat who wrote the ode to Aggie ——'s ankle!"

As she pronounced the word "ankle" she gave her skirts an opportune sweep, which revealed both her own ankles and a trifle more. I took the hint.

"Yes," quoth I, in a tone of well-simulated admiration. "But now that I have seen *your* ankle I repent me bitterly that I ever wrote a line upon Aggie ——'s."

"Will you write upon mine now?"

"Yes."

"Quite sure?"

"Yes."

"You will write prettily?"

"Yes."

"You are a dear!"

And with this tender exclamation she seized me in her arms and inflicted a loud, smacking kiss upon my forehead, and then gave me a push that nearly sent me abruptly and head foremost into the chamber where her father lay dying.

Thus, by a skilful blend of blandishment and impudence, I succeeded in being shown into the room where the Major lay. He was in bed. He raised himself up on his elbow and, staring at me, politely asked, "Who the deuce are you?" Then, steadying his gaze, a gleam of delight shone in his wild, mad eye, and he murmured, "Oh, it's Wully Ross." Next, putting his hand under his pillow, he drew out a few sheets of sermon-paper, all written over with his strong, determined handwriting, bold as a cavalry charge and straight as a sword.

"Thank you, Major F——," said I. "What am I to do with this?"

There was no answer. The Major was *dead*.

And now, after the lapse of many years, I put that MS. of his into the hands of the printer, with a trust that the *manes* of the writer may not disapprove.

MAJOR F——'S MS.

My studies have been so peculiar that I may be excused for digressing for a moment to show whence and how I inherited the bias for the dreamy, the mystical, and esoteric. The bias is not hereditary. My mother's milk was not full of inspirations and visions. It was thus she became the wife of my prospective father, who, unlike myself, was, by all competent authorities, believed to have had a slate off his upper storey.

The night was dark and stormy, and my future father,

who was then about twenty-two, was returning alone from a military review when he got benighted and lost. The rain splashed furiously, "the wind blew as 'twad blawn its last," and only glares and flashes of lightning lit up ever and anon the Cimmerian gloom.

"The gods have doomed and damned me," quoth my father; "I will lie down on the moor and perish!" But, at the moment, a faint gleam, as if from a distant glow-worm, shimmered through the blackness; and, clenching his teeth and his fists, he who was destined to be my male parent toiled on desperately in the direction of the light. At the light he arrived, after much scrambling through the bushes and not a few tumbles into the ditches. The light proceeded from a large oriel window in an old-fashioned country house with picturesque facades and romantic gables, which now, in a lull and hush of the storm, shone out with dim grandeur in the sheen of the waning moon. Through the gauzy curtains and the glass flowed the waves of instrumental music and the sound of the measured footfalls of the dance. It was evident that something was being enacted within in the way of mirth and revelry.

My prospective father knocked at the front door. The door was opened by a half-drunken footman carrying a lamp, who, observing that he who had knocked was a dejected-looking youth, drenched with rain and bedabbled with mire, politely advised him to "go to blazes," and at once slammed the door in his face. The door was, however, immediately re-opened, and an old white-haired gentleman, with a wild, wandering eye, asked decisively, but not unkindly:

"Well, what do you want?"

My prospective father told his tale, and impressively asked for the favour of a lodging till morning.

"This is my second daughter's wedding night," quoth the old gentleman, "and every bed in the house is occu-

pied, as the guests who have not already gone will stay over night."

"I am utterly tired out, and would gladly sleep on a sofa, a hearth-rug, or anyhow and anywhere," urged my prospective male parent.

"There is only *one* spare bed, and I do not care to send you to that," rejoined the old gentleman moodily, and with a strange light in his eye.

"Pray, sir, have no misgivings about its not being soft in feathers and luxuriant in drapery; I am too tired to be critical," urged my prospective parent.

"You know not what you ask," responded the old gentleman. Then, sinking his voice to a solemn whisper—" *The room is haunted!* "

His would-be guest laughed a derisive laugh, and replied: "Kind sir, show me into the room, and I will put up with the haunting."

To the room he was shown—a room handsome, tasteful, and even opulent.

"Haunted indeed," soliloquised he; and, divesting himself of his torn and sodden garments, he extinguished the candle, placed his loaded pistol under the bolster, and was soon fast asleep. Two hours later a hand was placed upon his brow, coldly and firmly, and under the mysterious pressure thereof he awoke. He sat up in bewilderment, not unalloyed with a vague terror. A white and ghostly figure loomed by the bedside, softly and hazily limned against the opposite wall, upon which, through the spars of the Venetian blind, fell the last rays of the waning moon or the first beams of the rising sun. My prospective father recollected that he had been apprised that the chamber was haunted.

"Some knavish trick," murmured he grimly. "By God, I will make a real ghost of this sham ghost, or may I —;" and he thrust his hand under the bolster to grasp his pistol. Then he recollected that the

report of fire-arms ringing through the house in that stilly hour would create intense alarm, and his rash act would be a poor return for the hospitality which had been accorded him. Still, determined that he would unmask the ghost, he leapt from his couch and seized the vague, white semblance vigorously in his arms. The figure fell supinely to the floor, and shriek after shriek rang hysterically through the chamber and echoed and re-echoed through the halls and corridors outside.

“What, in the name of all the saints, has happened now?” exclaimed my future father, as the shrieking form lay before him on the carpet, dimly, almost invisibly. Another minute, and the chamber-door burst open, and the grey-haired gentleman, in his night-gown and slippers, with a lighted candle in his left hand and a cocked pistol in his right, entered excitedly. He glanced at the figure prostrate on the floor, and then at his guest. “My daughter—scoundrel!” was his laconic exclamation, and he presented the muzzle of his weapon to my future father’s head. Then he dashed the pistol on the floor, and cried bitterly, “Devil, was it for this I sheltered you in my house! My daughter! my daughter!” Quite suddenly he left the room, leaving the candle burning on the floor beside the prostrate lady. In the light of this candle the youth beheld her. He beheld her and was vanquished. Her loveliness, as she lay there in the loose white drapery of the night, with the wealth of her rich brown hair falling over the lily whiteness of her bosom, sinking and rising in its convulsive breathing, was too much for the man for whom was reserved the distinction of being my father. The free sweeping symmetry of these arms had enthralled him. That bosom, that might have put that of Aphrodite to shame, made him love’s willing slave, and the tangles of that heavenly hair, which the flicker of the candle now flung into raven blackness, now touched into ruddy

gold, had forged the fetters of a bondage that made the young cadet forever and forever the thrall of the lady who lay at his feet. "Thine, thine," he murmured; "come life, come death, thine, only thine."

Suddenly the chamber door again burst open, and the old gentleman re-entered, still arrayed in his slippers and dressing gown. With him he brought a clergyman with his black coat on and his white choker, but with bare legs, and his unsocked feet stuck into a pair of unlaced boots. In his right hand he carried a Bible. He appeared more than half drunk, and, having been suddenly and abruptly summoned from his bed, he seemed dazed and only half awake. At his side walked a servant maid with bare neck and feet, and arrayed in a hurriedly-donned and solitary petticoat. The maid applied a small bottle of smelling salts to the nostrils of the prostrate lady, and baptised her brow and breast and hair with the contents of the water bottle.

The old gentleman was livid with rage. "Sir," said he sternly, "it pains me beyond expression that I have to give my girl in marriage to a *blackguard*; but, since things are as they are, I feel constrained to try to make the best of an infernally bad bargain. You have dishonoured the girl and her family. This parson will wed you to her, here—here on the very scene of your diabolical crime, or, by heavens, I will blow your brains out if I hang for it to-morrow from the highest tree on my estate."

The young gentleman who was destined to be my father did not prefer even the ghost of an objection to being united for life to her who had already, even in her mute unconsciousness, quite vanquished him. The lady at length stood up, utterly dazed. The parson performed the nuptial ceremony, and the father and the maid-servant were witnesses. The bride's father lifted his pistol from the floor and soliloquised:

"My second daughter was married yesterday, and my eldest to-day. My second was married to an earl's son; my eldest and most beautiful is married to—oh, damn it all!" and he raised his pistol and fired point-blank at the wash-stand, shattering the basin and ewer to shivers. This was too much for the excited nerves of the bride. She shrieked, and fell into the bridegroom's arms in a swoon, from which she was recovered with difficulty.

The day after the marriage the mystery of the haunted chamber was solved, the riddle read. Matilda Clinton had been a confirmed somnambulist, without any one having suspected the fact; and the chamber which was reputed to be haunted had evidently been the goal of her nocturnal wanderings. To her dying day she remained "beautiful exceedingly;" but to her dying day the villagers set her down as "cracked," so disastrous had been the effects of awakening her in that room under the circumstances which I have just narrated. My father, too, was reputed to be "cracked," and the great wonder is—a wonder that occasionally overwhelms me—that, under the circumstances, I should be the possessor of mental gifts of an exceptional order, and of a genius to which neither of my parents could lay any valid claim. However, a man's history commences before he is born; and, having ventured to give so much of my own hereditary biography, I proceed to my narrative.

MAJOR F—— AT HIS STUDIES.

I have frequently been induced to contemplate in theory the physiology and psychology of "Hanging by the neck till dead," and also some of the more salient points in the more salient exigencies of human life and destiny. The results have occasionally been, to the uninitiated, impregnated with burlesque and eccentricity,

as the inductions of all experimental philosophers in the occult sciences must necessarily be. However, I have succeeded, to my own satisfaction, in establishing that the Rosicrucian theory is correct, and that heaven, earth, and hell are severally playing their rôle on the land, the water, and the welkin. We are roaring, "Cash—no abatement!" the angels are chanting "Hallelujah!" and the damned are yelling, "Oh, dear me!"—all mixed up together upon the same arena here. It is literally, and not figuratively, that we have each our good and evil spirits concerning themselves in the colouring of our destinies. They are not perceptible to the material, but they are to the psychal, man. Consequently, it is presumable that the determining of the number of good or evil spirits we may have is much in our own hands. If we can win the good graces of every one around us, supposing they amount to a few hundreds, the strong probability is that some of them will pass before us through that transformation scene vulgarly called "dying," and then we can depend upon their good offices. It is presumable that they cannot be friendly to those who offended them when they were as yet sealed up in the anatomical soul-envelope; nor perhaps with any who, subsequent to the transformation scene vulgarly called "dying," may grow potatoes, or make bricks out of the said soul-envelope lately warm and perambulating about invested in a hat, a pair of boots, or perhaps a pair of petticoats.

Nor is this state of matters strictly confined to that order of animals called human. I apprehend there is danger from the malevolent spirit of a murdered beetle. Life is life—the same mysterious afflatus, whether it animate Benjamin Disraeli or a cockroach; but in Disraeli it operates through a more high-strung development of nervous organism. What we so pompously designate "soul" is only "life" thrilling through finer

nervous fibres than are possessed by a beetle or a cockroach, or any of the intermediate links between them and the *homo sapiens* of Linnæus. How else can it be? Shall I who write deny the cockroach immortality, its chance for the felicity of heaven or the torment of hell, because its nervous organisation is defective compared with mine? It may have a very noble and elevated soul, without material to work with or through. Take my so-called soul from me and infuse it into the cockroach, and it would be an ordinary cockroach still; and, if I were to have its soul in return, I should simply be the living, breathing, scribbling, fighting creature that I am. How the idea originated that the life of man alone has a monopoly for immortality baffles the conception. It must be maintained, too, in the face of most awkward contingencies.

In pursuit of my studies in psychology, only a few months ago I procured a pauper just on the point of shuffling off this mortal coil. As I was defective in experimental apparatus bearing upon the peculiar *modus operandi* in which I was about to experiment, I ordered at the brass-founder's a brass cylinder, twelve feet long by twelve feet in diameter. The cylinder was hollow; but the walls were several feet thick, of solid brass. On one end of the cylinder was a square of glass of five feet in thickness, through which was visible the interior of the cylinder. This square of glass was a door, which, at pleasure, could be opened, and again secured with screws of immense strength. This was the only opening into the cylinder.

As soon as the physician informed me that the pauper could not survive over half-an-hour I had him placed inside the cylinder, and the hyaline door strongly secured with screws. I pressed my face to the glass, and, with breathless anxiety, watched what was going on inside. The pauper was a sickly yellow, and a cold, oily perspira-

tion glistened upon his deeply-corrugated forehead. One of his brown and toil-hardened hands held a convulsive grasp of the dirty blanket in which he was wrapped. A portion of his hirsute and muscular breast was visible where two of the buttons of his faded blue stripe shirt were open in front. That breast heaved a long, long heave. Oh, God, would it ever fall? Aye, it must. For there was a low mortal rattling audible through the five feet of solid glass—the death-rattle—and the old pauper could not live long now. I confess I felt somewhat terrified—not at the mere phenomenon called death, for I had witnessed it a thousand times on the field of battle, the hospital, and elsewhere; but, then, there was plenty of scope for the soul to fly heavenward, or wherever it might be labelled for; but, now, in the brass cylinder—close, air-tight—good Christ! A hundred-weight of gunpowder would hardly burst the “everlasting brass” of old Horace in which the pauper was expiring! What if the disembodied spirit should burst it with a fearful explosion, and blow me to atoms! But, from the time I was a cornet at sweet seventeen, I had sought the bubble reputation in the cannon’s mouth, and at the dear coral mouth of Miranda; and I resolved not to turn upon my heel now to save my head in anticipation of the explosive character of a pauper’s soul.

The cylinder was secured to prevent its flying up into the air by appending to it several cables with heavy anchors. The uncertainty of what the results would instantly be became absolutely harrowing. The dark-coloured and hairy breast, visible through the faded, striped shirt, fell at last. I looked with a rivetted gaze: would it ever rise again? The yellow, oily appearance of the complexion faded away into a ghastly white; not that lily whiteness which is lovely, not that snowy whiteness which is beautiful; but that horrible whiteness which is death-like. The baked lips were dry and shrivelled up, revealing the

pale gums and the grinning teeth, worn away in front by the common clay pipes which the man had smoked for forty years. His grey beard bristled grimly, and the forlorn lock of hair which time had left upon his temples. The eyes were wide open, and stared upward, as though they would stare through the worlds and the ages. Then the death-rattle ceased, the breast under the faded, striped shirt rose no more, the eyes glazed, the jaw fell, and the pauper was a clod of the earth he, grub-like, had toiled and moiled in so long.

I saw no spirit make its escape; but I knew that it was in the man in the cylinder no more. I knew I had him there soul and body, although the two had dissolved partnership. I could not tell whether the elements of felicity or *vice versâ* were in the brazen prison, but I knew that I had therein the two constituent parts of an animal, even a human one, and those two constituent parts no longer in functional conjunction. For the cylinder had not exploded, nor had I experienced the slightest concussion. If that soul were now reaping the rewards of the deeds done in the flesh, then the interior of that cylinder must be a portion of heaven, or, rather, there is no heaven or no hell, except what the soul contains in itself—a disembodied soul *qua* a disembodied soul. Re-united with the body in ultra-sepulchral life, the economy must of necessity be essentially different.

I had clearly got heaven or hell inside that cylinder; but the business was to find out which. The matter could, however, be determined by finding out what kind of life the pauper had led. From the conduct of his life I should be able to infer whether he had merited a harp in his hands in heaven or a gridiron under his hips in hell. So I went round the parish inquiring of all who had known this pauper as to what sort of a person he had been. I heard no good of him. There was a

chalk up against him at the public-house. He had fractured three of his wife's ribs and broken his mother-in-law's thumb. He had, furthermore, not partaken of the holy sacrament for three years; he had pulled the half of his mother's hair out, and had attempted to blow up his father with gunpowder; he gave up reading his Bible, and had refused to take tracts; and it was insinuated that he had actually poached and taken the name of the Lord his God in vain. So, of course, I had no doubt that he was in hell, and that consequently hell was inside the brass cylinder behind my coach-house.

There are several reasons (too obvious to warrant my occupying space with them here) for supposing that disembodied spirits are, with qualifications, subject to the restraints of matter. A sound anatomical organisation can contain a spirit; but it sooner or later escapes from a defective and impaired organisation. If we could have a guarantee against bodily malady, we would have a guarantee against death. Never yet did the soul escape from man but through some flaw in the physical organism. There was no flaw or mode of egress in the cylinder, consequently the soul must be there. If the cylinder had been organised, the internal spirit might have animated it. If a robin swallow a spider which expires in the gizzard, it is presumable that the vital principle of the spider goes to augment that already animating the animal organism of the robin—a strange, but somewhat feasible phase of metempsychosis. With a conviction of the truth of this principle, when I am oppressed with lassitude, lowness of spirits, and nervous prostration, I am in the habit of swallowing a live frog, which, expiring in my internal arrangements, its life goes to auxiliarate mine, and the experiment seldom fails to inspire me with healthful and exuberant spirits. At my instance, several of my friends have also tried the experiment, and pronounce it a most decided biocrene.

Further, in corroboration of the principle of spirit being imprisoned in matter, St. Peter writes of Christ : "Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit, by which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison." This is the preposterous "He descended into hell" of the creed explained by the indefinite, "that is remained in the state of the dead and under the power of death," which may mean anything or nothing. Who were the "spirits in prison" which Christ preached to after His "being put to death in the flesh"? It is not on record that, after His resurrection, he preached to any, if we except the expounding of the Scriptures to the two men journeying to the village of Emmaus, and the admonition to the eleven whom He found gathered together at Jerusalem. They cannot certainly be meant by the expression, "spirits in prison." The "preaching" must then refer to the interval in which the body of Jesus lay in the rock-hewn sepulchre. But it seems quite obvious who are meant by the "spirits in prison." St. Peter distinctly designates, at least, a portion of them. His words are : "He went and preached to the spirits in prison, which some time were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God awaited in the days of Noah, when the ark was preparing," etc. Since Scripture never once intimates, and the very Apostles' Creed itself vacillates on the subject of the descent into hell, and perhaps the ascent into heaven on that awful occasion has never been yet contended for, the spirit of Jesus must have remained in the material world to preach to the spirits of the antediluvians whom St. Peter expressly mentions. Neither am I aware that it has ever been contended for that there is more in the universe than matter and spirit ; and since spirits are in prison, a spirit imprisoned in a spirit seems more untenable and enigmatical than a spirit imprisoned in matter. Hence it appears that, during the three days of his interment, the disembodied spirit of

Christ, "ekeruxen," assembled together the spirits of the dead, "phulake," under watch or guard—that is, as we have seen, in this material world—till the resurrection day again unites the body with the spirit, and man, psychological and physiological, becomes subject to an essentially different economy.

Reasoning in this manner, I set about experimenting further upon the pauper in the cylinder. Ocular proof of the presence of a spirit can be arrived at only under peculiar circumstances. Man is seldom conscious of the maximum of his own physical force till some imminent emergency calls it forth; and it is even so with the capabilities of his spirit. One on the point of drowning will lay a grasp upon an object, the strength and tenacity of which, in ordinary circumstances, he might regard as absolutely superhuman. So is it in abnormal conditions of the soul. It puts forth energies for the exertion of which the ordinary senses do not afford a competent medium. It grasps at more than the material eyes and ears have been constructed to convey to it—views into the realm of shades, sounds from the shores of the Eternal. By a week's morbid contemplation upon the most revolting developments of human depravity and crime, and the most deep and awful mysteries of existence, I fitted myself to become aware of the presence of the soul in the cylinder by another process than that of ratiocination. Having schooled myself at the solemn hour of midnight, through the darkness and the thunder of the storm, arrayed in a long white sheet, I glided along in the direction of the cylinder. I carried in my right hand a half-rotten splinter of fir, which had formed part of the bottom of a murderer's coffin. It was deeply saturated with the putrid grease of his viscera, and, being ignited, burned fiercely in the tremendous might of the storm. I brandished the red fire wildly around my head, and it threw a weird, wild radiance upon the

dim outline of the tombstones, the black and terrible rocks, and the rank hemlocks as they were crushed beneath my hurrying feet.

Where on fields of fire hiss rains of blood,

I go ! I go ! I go !

A gore-bubble on the infernal flood,

Io ! Io ! Io !

Ten thousand grave-worms wriggle here,

And on their backs I ride,

In a long black coffin, grim and drear,

And my skull on its dexter side—

Nail'd with a nail through the bare white skull

To the coffin's dexter side !

Io ! Io ! Io !

And I shout Io ! on the slimy shore,

'Neath the palls of the ages unfurl'd ;

And the worms go with me round evermore,

In the weird rolling round of the world !

Oh, the damned stench of my rotted brains !

Oh, the crawling that ceases, oh never !

Of worms, horrid worms, o'er my thighs, in my veins,

Of worms, horrid worms, in my eyes, in my reins,

And the burnings forever and ever !

Ride helter-skelter down to hell,

'Neath the Banner of Darkness unfurl'd !

Ring—ring my death-toll on Destiny's bell,

In the weird rolling round of the world !

Io ! Io ! Io !

To the waist in eternal burnings I go !

I kept waving the horrible torch round my head, and, in a voice high, husky, terrible, and unearthly, chanted the dithyramb which I have just transcribed. I reached the cylinder. I crushed a skull which I carried down into the soft earth opposite the glass door, and stuck a lighted candle into each eyeless socket. By this light, which I managed to shelter from the wind, I ventured to look into the interior, where the mortal remains of the pauper lay. He was there, cold and rigid, just as I had left him—ghastly, ghastly !—with his hand still grasping

a handful of the miserable blanket, in which lay his poor remains.....The voice of God shouted in the black heaven. The foundations of the earth reeled under the tremendous roll of the thunder. The rain splashed down in the darkness, and extinguished the two candles that burned in the sockets of the skull.....A black cloud lay on the eastern, a blacker cloud on the western horizon, and the devil himself—I knew him at a glance—leapt from the one cloud to the other with a yell to which the thunder was a mere whisper. In his leap across the world, by a blow of his club foot he knocked the planet Mars out of the solar system, and gave the moon a switch with his tail which nearly blotted that satellite from the face of the heavens forever. I staggered forward, half suffocated with the fumes of brimstone. Something struck me on the head which sent stars flying out of my eyes three times in succession, and by the light of those stars I beheld my hands and found that they had become as large as frying-pans and were dripping with blood.....Yes, the spirit was there, inside the cylinder. But it was a fearful ordeal : I would not pass through it again to be lord of a thousand worlds. The spirit was there ; but I had better say no more, aided only by a human vocabulary and the limited capacities of a human brain. When there is no blood in my arm, and my skull is filled with cold clay, I shall write it.

My next study in psychology was my endeavouring to obtain a glimpse of what was going on behind the eternal curtain through the medium of strangulation—" hanging by the neck till dead."

I, perhaps somewhat unwarrantably, took it for granted that the portal of the Future opens gradually in proportion as the soul succeeds in disengaging itself from the body in the hour of death ; and, consequently, in the agonies of dissolution I might have some degree of

insight into the arcana of the Future. Accordingly, I gave instructions that a gallows should be erected on the lawn in front of my residence.

To keep touch with the other world, I had the scaffold constructed from the more or less rotten boards of exhumed coffins; and I had a canopy erected over the noose mounted with the blackest and heaviest of hearse-plumes. When the south wind swept up the lawn it waved these sombre plumes with most sepulchral effect: I was seized with a befitting sensation of shudder and nausea; and, in spite of the fragrance of the birch, the narcissus, and the rhododendron, the air was heavy with stench, which seemed to proceed from the marrow growing putrid in my own bones. Considering the nature of the study in which I was engaged, this was as it should be. One adjunct, however, was still wanting—the rope. In order to have all things as far as possible appropriate, I determined to have this rope made of a murderer's entrails. At the town of D—— they had just hanged a miscreant who had done to death his own mother. You have no idea what difficulty I had with the authorities in obtaining this scoundrel's, to me, exceedingly valuable viscera. However, by the dint of persistency, diplomacy, and hard cash, I managed to have him exhumed from amid the earth and quicklime where he lay under the flag-stones of the gaol floor. Then, at midnight, I had him carried by three ticket-of-leave men to the haunted thorn in L—— moss. By my command, to this thorn they secured the lower extremity of his intestinal canal, and carried him round and round the tree till the whole length of his intestines was coiled round the thorn, as you have seen an anchor-chain coiled round the capstan. While they carried the wretch round and round the tree I whistled the "Dead March in Saul;" but I had to whistle till I was utterly out of breath. It seemed to me that the scoun-

drel's intestinal canal must have been at least ten miles long.

The next trouble was to get some one to tan and prepare the ten miles of viscera, preparatory to spinning them into the rope with which I was to hang myself. With the whole concern on my back in a fisher's creel, I called upon the local chemist at two o'clock in the morning, and, ringing him up, I threw down the basket before him, and explained to him what I wanted him to do. That chemist was an utter ass, without a scintilla of the heroic self-sacrifice that is indispensable in him who would dare to travel on the path of scientific investigation. First he threatened to have me locked up as a lunatic; next, looking into the basket of viscera, he swore he would have me arrested on the suspicion of murder. I took out my cheque book and wrote three figures; and, in the chemist's eyes, I became at once sane and innocent, and, taking the basket and its contents on his back, he descended into the cellar, assuring me that what I wanted done was not only æsthetic, but highly rational.

The murderer's intestines made as much tough, cat-gut-looking cord as would have rigged a sloop of war. I cut off twelve feet, sufficient to hang me. But, after I had run on a beautiful noose, and had got the cord properly fixed to the gallows' beam, the next business was to test its strength. I was over eleven stone: what if, under my weight, the cord should give way? I remembered that my wife was rather over twelve stone. I determined to see if it would bear *her*. If it would bear her, it would bear me.

I found my wife even more intractable than the chemist. Not all my blandishments could induce her to allow the noose to be placed over her head. "Miranda," said I at length, "I conjure you by the moon that looked down through the quivering leaves of

the aspen under which we sat as boy and girl forty-five years ago, when first I ventured to whisper to you of love—by that moon I conjure you to humour your Harold now." She let her head sink upon my bosom as she sobbed forth: "Harold, Harold darling, tie me up *by the feet*."

Good! The noose round the ankles would do as well as the noose round the neck, as far as the mere testing of the strength of the cord was concerned. I took off my braces and knotted them round her skirts, that there might be no unseemly garmental disarrangement as my darling danced from the gut with her heels to the sky. I put the noose over her ankles and launched her into the air. Round she gyrated in three glorious whirls, and the cord brake not. Hurrah! I took her down. She was black in the face and speechless. "A swoon," muttered I; and I took her up in my arms and ran off with her to the fish-pond, into which I plunged her. It occurred to me that that would put her all right; but, in my absorption in my transcendental studies, it did not occur to me to wait and fish her out of the water. However, the butler, assisted, as I understand, by a policeman, did so; and she was clean dead for the space of three hours, though she is now more or less alive again. But I am digressing into a subsidiary and trifling matter.

Some whisperings of my design got abroad into the surrounding districts with marvellous rapidity, and for days bands of roughs, such as go to witness public executions, might be observed hanging about the avenue gate and the preserves. I was painfully apprehensive, however, that the proposed experiment would not partake of the character of amusement to myself individually, and I resolved that it should not become so to the public. My wife implored me, as I valued her love and the love of God, to desist from what she in her sim-

plicity was pleased to call "a mad and ludicrous project." But her entreaties and remonstrances were of no avail in moving me from undertaking at all hazards an enterprise for the promotion of science and in the sacred cause of truth. My only marriageable daughter threatened to make off with the ostler, or do some other horrible thing, if I would persist in disgracing and making the family ridiculous by what she called exhibitions of "crazy eccentricity." I dismissed the ostler, and locked her up in the spirit-cellar. In short, I gave the whole household to understand that I was not a man to be trifled with, and that, although I was thoroughly domesticated and a little uxorious, yet my connubial and paternal obligations were secondary to those I owed to the pursuit of science and the elucidation of truth. I took to the gallows with me the key of the cellar in which my daughter was confined. I had a settee with the softest of cushions drawn up into the recess of the drawing-room window, that, reclining there, my wife might, if she chose, witness the scene to be enacted. I arose rather before my accustomed hour—ten o'clock—and partook heartily, with her, of our matutinal meal, and ordered a cup of coffee and a slice of buttered toast to be taken down to Julia in the cellar. Then I returned to the seclusion of my study, and, to while away the hour till the clock struck twelve, I set myself to sketching with a crayon several monsters I found scattered through the Revelation of St. John. I intend shortly to put the Revelation cartoons into the hands of the engraver. I was specially struck by the "great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads."* I drew this dragon with all the skill I possessed as an imaginative limner; but, as he did not look *red*, according to St. John, he did not

* Rev. xxii. 3.

appear formidable. So I resolved he should be *red*, according to the Scriptures ; and I accordingly threw off my coat, rolled up my left shirt sleeve, cut my arm with my pen-knife, and, dipping a tooth-brush in the blood, I therewith *reddened* the dragon. The "four beasts" were next honoured by my attentions as an artist. "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within."* I managed pretty well with the six wings a-piece, which was twenty-four wings in all ; but to draw or paint the "eyes within," and yet make them visible, called for a supreme effort of ingenuity. I thought first of printing under the picture :

*The Eyes are "within," and of course cannot
be seen.*

But it occurred to me that some might doubt my word and question whether indeed the eyes were there at all. Utterly non-plussed as to how to get the eyes painted "within" these four apocalyptic beasts and yet visible, I, in a prayerful spirit, read the fifth chapter of Daniel, and how to represent the internal eyes flashed upon me like a revelation. In each beast I, with a bodkin, punctured seven holes through the paper—that is, twenty-eight holes in all. As the paper lies flat on the table these twenty-eight eyes are not over-distinct. They show to the greatest advantage when you take the paper into a dark room, hold it up vertically, and get some one to stand behind it and to strike a match all of a sudden. Each of the twenty-eight eyes then becomes distinctly visible, and a small gleam of light is emitted from each. Of course, under the circumstances, you see nothing but the eyes—you cannot see the beasts ;

* Rev. iv. 8.

but you *know* the beasts are there ; and it is too much, in the mystery of divine things, to presume to try to be able to see both the four beasts and their twenty-eight eyes "within" at one and the same time. I am, no doubt, an amazingly able man. When I quite recover from the hanging I shall saw away one side of my skull, in order that I may see my mental machinery at work.

Having completed my apocalyptic drawings, I fell down on my knees and preferred the following prayer to Heaven :—

Omniscient Power, whose dominion extends alike over the worlds of Mind and Matter, sustain me in the pursuit of Knowledge, even to a comparative disregard of the life which Thou gavest me. I thank Thee, O Lord, for the rooted impression that true intelligence is a synonym for Religion and Virtue, and Ignorance only another name for Depravity and Sin. And I would humbly desire to thank Thee for that boldness by which I can disregard the derision and sneers of vulgar and narrow prejudices, and for that originality of conception which ranges afar into undiscovered lands, spurning the hackneyed and beaten pathways of experiment and thought. I thank Thee that Thou hast given me no reverence for social landmarks, however time-honoured, unless they have been placed there true to the theodolyte of Reason and the geometry of Truth—not that I love what is time-honoured less, but that I love Truth more. Give me none of the arrogance but all of the humility of Philosophy, and enable me to feel that, to whatever degree I may be able to dispel the mists which brood around the presence of the Eternal, I am still immeasurably far from grasping the immensity of knowledge which, perhaps to the exclusion of the archangel, it may be Thine own special prerogative to know. Enable the world to feel, O Lord, that ALL

knowledge is generically divine, and that strenuous toiling towards its attainment is the only pursuit worthy of the lofty and sacred destinies of man as a defaced specimen of Thy noblest handiwork. Pardon all my frailties and shortcomings, and——

Here I heard the old clock in the dining-room beginning to strike twelve ; so, muttering "Amen," I drew on my gloves, lifted my hat and cane, and with a fearless heart and a steady step I strode downstairs to the gallows.

Tony, the footman, acted as executioner, and not another individual of the household was allowed to be present, under pain of my most severe displeasure. Tony, with evidences of the most terrible reluctance, put the noose over my head, and I was swung into the empty air. A white silk handkerchief which I carried in the outside pocket of my coat was to be drawn out by me as a signal that the hanging process had become absolutely unendurable, and then Tony was at once to cut the rope by which I was suspended. The instant I felt the trap-door give way under my feet the sensation became utterly indescribable, and I thrust my hand into my pocket to pull out the handkerchief, when I discovered—oh, heaven and earth!—that I had left it where I had thrown off my dressing-gown.

I could not speak a word, if on it had hung the event of my soul's salvation. Every sin of mine—of thought, word, and deed—blazed before me in characters of fire, and from amid the lurid blazonry the meek, calm face of my mother, who had been thirty years in the grave, looked upon me with unutterable tenderness and love. Then the earth gave way, and I was hurled down headlong into the unfathomable darkness. In my descent I was dashed against revolving and tremendous worlds, with rivers of blood rolling into oceans of fire. Portions

of my agonised frame stuck to every fearful world against which I was driven, whereupon they seemed to become part of myself, and their oceans of blood lashed the shores in darkness and thunder in sympathy with my torture, which, increasing with an inconceivable rapidity, already amounted to ten thousand times beyond what mortals can conceive to be the agonies of ten thousand hells. I became unconscious of my material identity, and had only a mysterious existence as a spirit of suffering infused through the worlds—boundless, limitless, and horrible embodiments of darkness and death—the condensed breathings from the yells of the damned. The myriad world-shadows rolled into one mass with a diameter of millions and millions of miles, and my suffering soul writhed through the minutest part of the mass in the fires of unutterable agony. The amalgamated planets became identified with my brain. Then innumerable gigantic forms of shadow shot through it arrows of red fire, and it reeled millions of miles away through the darkness and horrors of immensity in the wild madness of ever-increasing torture. Anon it seemed that, after the lapse of many thousand years, all the thunder-peals since the creation of the world combined in one tremendous roar, the skull of the tortured brain was split, and the boundless world-shadow of agony rolled down—down into vacuity and nothingness!

I understand that Tony had discovered that I had not the handkerchief, and instantly cut the rope of the gallows. I am yet in bed, severely indisposed; but I hope soon to be able to subject the agonies I suffered to the ordeal of scientific and philosophical analysis. Meanwhile I am nearly perishing for a draught of water; but all the servants have, without their wages, gone off in terror. My wife is with me in bed. She never

speaks, but only stares at me wildly, and falls into one fit of hysterics after another. I am told Julia has effected her escape from the cellar, and has gone off, heaven knows where!

APPENDIX.

LETTER FROM MAJOR F——'S DAUGHTER, JULIA.

SIR,—A friend of mine has sent me copies of your horribly wicked and abominable journal, in which I see that you have dared to publish, disfigured by the grossest exaggerations and most fearful absurdities, the manuscript which, to my eternal regret, my poor dead father so mistakenly entrusted to your care. You know perfectly well that I never, *never*, NEVER showed you my ankles, and *never* asked you to write your foolish verses about them, which were just suited to the fast and silly young hoydens who were taken in by your ranting and raving about “knights and fair ladies,” which is a habit I see you have by no means lost as you have grown older, but not apparently wiser, except that you have added wickedness to foolishness by blaspheming Jehovah and ridiculing His holy Book, for which you will certainly suffer hereafter in the fire that is not quenched and the worm that dieth not.

As for your abominable calumny that I threatened to run away with the ostler, I can only put it down to the fact that I once refused to run away with you, and that you are now trying to punish my maidenly modesty by mean spite and wicked lying. Let me remind you, Sir, if you have conveniently forgotten it, that at the time of my poor father's untimely decease I was engaged to a deacon of the Established Church, who has since become a humble but ardent minister of that Word which you are so continually reviling to your eternal damnation, and whose name I have now the happiness of bearing as his loved and loving wife. You are a wicked, unprincipled man to divulge in your lying paper family secrets and matters which should always remain sacred to the privacy of the hearth; and God will judge you for it, seeing that my husband cannot so forget his character as a man of God (what you irreverently call a “beetle”) as to horse-whip you as you deserve in this world. But wait till the next.

† I admit that my dear papa was considered to be a little eccentric; but that he ever suffocated a poor pauper in a brass thing, or hung my sainted mother up by the heels with such a hideous rope, is

as wickedly untrue as that he tried to commit suicide, as you have so unscrupulously said he did. The manuscript, which I sometimes suspect you *stole* from under his dying pillow, was simply an account of some dreadful *dreams* he had one night after going to have supper with the man of God and my husband, who distinctly remembers the occasion, because he helped to bring poor papa home after being taken seriously ill as he was about half-past eleven. I remember myself how frightened I was by his cries after he got to sleep, poor dear.

If you are not ashamed of what you have done, a Day will come when you will be—I mean the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, when, if you do not repent and be saved, you and all who write and read your horrible paper will be burned up with chaff and fire unquenchable.—Yours indignantly,

JULIA HEYWOOD (*née* FRASER).

[I publish the foregoing that the public may have an idea of the refined and delicate character of the daughter of Major F—. I would have corrected her prosody and set her shambling sentences on their feet ; but I do not care to run the risk of placing a document before the world which she can assert is “disfigured by the grossest exaggerations.” In reply to her charge, I can only say with Pilate, “What I have written, I have written,” and, moreover, every word I have written is true. I have several more MSS. from the pen of the lady’s late father, one particularly on a “School Thrashing Machine,” which he claimed to have invented, which I had thought to suppress out of deference for the Julia I knew of old, but which I now feel inclined to publish out of *lack* of deference for the sweet-tempered and soft-spoken parson’s wife into which this Julia seems to have developed. Moreover, a certain delicacy restrains me from being more explicit when I say that I have a large bundle of love-letters tied together with a silk ribbon of now faded green, and that the perusal of these letters would astonish the Rev. Mr. Heywood.—SALADIN.]

