

ТОМАС ДЕ КВИНСИ

NOTE BOOK OF AN
ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER

Томас Де Квинси

Note Book of an English Opium-Eater

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Thomas De Quincey

Note Book of an English Opium-Eater

THREE MEMORABLE MURDERS

A SEQUEL TO 'MURDER CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS.' ¹

[1854.]

It is impossible to conciliate readers of so saturnine and gloomy a class, that they cannot enter with genial sympathy into any gaiety whatever, but, least of all, when the gaiety trespasses a little into the province of the extravagant. In such a case, not to sympathize is not to understand; and the playfulness, which is not relished, becomes flat and insipid, or absolutely without meaning. Fortunately, after all such churls have withdrawn from my audience in high displeasure, there remains a large majority who are loud in acknowledging the amusement which they have derived from a former paper of mine, 'On Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts;' at the same time proving the sincerity of their praise by one hesitating expression of censure. Repeatedly they have suggested to me, that perhaps the extravagance, though clearly intentional, and forming one element in the general gaiety of the conception, went too far. I am not myself of that opinion; and I beg to remind these friendly censors, that it is amongst the direct purposes and efforts of this *bagatelle* to graze the brink of horror, and of all that would in actual realization be most repulsive. The very excess of the extravagance, in fact, by suggesting to the reader continually the mere aeriality of the entire speculation, furnishes the surest means of disenchanting him from the horror which might else gather upon his feelings. Let me remind such objectors, once for all, of Dean Swift's proposal for turning to account the supernumerary infants of the three kingdoms, which, in those days, both at Dublin and at London, were provided for in foundling hospitals, by cooking and eating them. This was an extravaganza, though really bolder and more coarsely practical than mine, which did not provoke any reproaches even to a dignitary of the supreme Irish church; its own monstrosity was its excuse; mere extravagance was felt to license and accredit the little *jeu d'esprit*, precisely as the blank impossibilities of Lilliput, of Laputa, of the Yahoos, &c., had licensed those. If, therefore, any man thinks it worth his while to tilt against so mere a foam-bubble of gaiety as this lecture on the aesthetics of murder, I shelter myself for the moment under the Telamonian shield of the Dean. But, in reality, my own little paper may plead a privileged excuse for its extravagance, such as is altogether wanting to the Dean's. Nobody can pretend, for a moment, on behalf of the Dean, that there is any ordinary and natural tendency in human thoughts, which could ever turn to infants as articles of diet; under any conceivable circumstances, this would be felt as the most aggravated form of cannibalism—cannibalism applying itself to the most defenceless part of the species. But, on the other hand, the tendency to a critical or aesthetic valuation of fires and murders is universal. If you are summoned to the spectacle of a great fire, undoubtedly the first impulse is—to assist in putting it out. But that field of exertion is very limited, and is soon filled by regular professional people, trained and equipped for the service. In the case of a fire which is operating upon *private* property, pity for a neighbor's calamity checks us at first in treating the affair as a scenic spectacle. But perhaps the fire may be confined to public buildings. And in any case, after we have paid our tribute of regret to the affair, considered as a calamity, inevitably, and without restraint, we go on to consider it as a stage spectacle. Exclamations of—How grand! How magnificent! arise in a sort of rapture from the crowd. For instance, when

¹ See 'Miscellaneous Essays,' p. 17.

Drury Lane was burned down in the first decennium of this century, the falling in of the roof was signalized by a mimic suicide of the protecting Apollo that surmounted and crested the centre of this roof. The god was stationary with his lyre, and seemed looking down upon the fiery ruins that were so rapidly approaching him. Suddenly the supporting timbers below him gave way; a convulsive heave of the billowing flames seemed for a moment to raise the statue; and then, as if on some impulse of despair, the presiding deity appeared not to fall, but to throw himself into the fiery deluge, for he went down head foremost; and in all respects, the descent had the air of a voluntary act. What followed? From every one of the bridges over the river, and from other open areas which commanded the spectacle, there arose a sustained uproar of admiration and sympathy. Some few years before this event, a prodigious fire occurred at Liverpool; the *Goree*, a vast pile of warehouses close to one of the docks, was burned to the ground. The huge edifice, eight or nine stories high, and laden with most combustible goods, many thousand bales of cotton, wheat and oats in thousands of quarters, tar, turpentine, rum, gunpowder, &c., continued through many hours of darkness to feed this tremendous fire. To aggravate the calamity, it blew a regular gale of wind; luckily for the shipping, it blew inland, that is, to the east; and all the way down to Warrington, eighteen miles distant to the eastward, the whole air was illuminated by flakes of cotton, often saturated with rum, and by what seemed absolute worlds of blazing sparks, that lighted up all the upper chambers of the air. All the cattle lying abroad in the fields through a breadth of eighteen miles, were thrown into terror and agitation. Men, of course, read in this hurrying overhead of scintillating and blazing vortices, the annunciation of some gigantic calamity going on in Liverpool; and the lamentation on that account was universal. But that mood of public sympathy did not at all interfere to suppress or even to check the momentary bursts of rapturous admiration, as this arrowy sleet of many-colored fire rode on the wings of hurricane, alternately through open depths of air, or through dark clouds overhead.

Precisely the same treatment is applied to murders. After the first tribute of sorrow to those who have perished, but, at all events, after the personal interests have been tranquillized by time, inevitably the scenical features (what aesthetically may be called the comparative *advantages*) of the several murders are reviewed and valued. One murder is compared with another; and the circumstances of superiority, as, for example, in the incidence and effects of surprise, of mystery, &c., are collated and appraised. I, therefore, for *my* extravagance, claim an inevitable and perpetual ground in the spontaneous tendencies of the human mind when left to itself. But no one will pretend that any corresponding plea can be advanced on behalf of Swift.

In this important distinction between myself and the Dean, lies one reason which prompted the present writing. A second purpose of this paper is, to make the reader acquainted circumstantially with three memorable cases of murder, which long ago the voice of amateurs has crowned with laurel, but especially with the two earliest of the three, viz., the immortal Williams' murders of 1812. The act and the actor are each separately in the highest degree interesting; and, as forty-two years have elapsed since 1812, it cannot be supposed that either is known circumstantially to the men of the current generation.

Never, throughout the annals of universal Christendom, has there indeed been any act of one solitary insulated individual, armed with power so appalling over the hearts of men, as that exterminating murder, by which, during the winter of 1812, John Williams in one hour, smote two houses with emptiness, exterminated all but two entire households, and asserted his own supremacy above all the children of Cain. It would be absolutely impossible adequately to describe the frenzy of feelings which, throughout the next fortnight, mastered the popular heart; the mere delirium of indignant horror in some, the mere delirium of panic in others. For twelve succeeding days, under some groundless notion that the unknown murderer had quitted London, the panic which had convulsed the mighty metropolis diffused itself all over the island. I was myself at that time nearly three hundred miles from London; but there, and everywhere, the panic was indescribable. One lady, my next neighbor, whom personally I knew, living at the moment, during the absence of her husband,

with a few servants in a very solitary house, never rested until she had placed eighteen doors (so she told me, and, indeed, satisfied me by ocular proof), each secured by ponderous bolts, and bars, and chains, between her own bedroom and any intruder of human build. To reach her, even in her drawing-room, was like going, as a flag of truce, into a beleaguered fortress; at every sixth step one was stopped by a sort of portcullis. The panic was not confined to the rich; women in the humblest ranks more than once died upon the spot, from the shock attending some suspicious attempts at intrusion upon the part of vagrants, meditating probably nothing worse than a robbery, but whom the poor women, misled by the London newspapers, had fancied to be the dreadful London murderer. Meantime, this solitary artist, that rested in the centre of London, self-supported by his own conscious grandeur, as a domestic Attila, or 'scourge of God;' this man, that walked in darkness, and relied upon murder (as afterwards transpired) for bread, for clothes, for promotion in life, was silently preparing an effectual answer to the public journals; and on the twelfth day after his inaugural murder, he advertised his presence in London, and published to all men the absurdity of ascribing to *him* any ruralizing propensities, by striking a second blow, and accomplishing a second family extermination. Somewhat lightened was the *provincial* panic by this proof that the murderer had not condescended to sneak into the country, or to abandon for a moment, under any motive of caution or fear, the great metropolitan *castra stativa* of gigantic crime, seated for ever on the Thames. In fact, the great artist disdained a provincial reputation; and he must have felt, as a case of ludicrous disproportion, the contrast between a country town or village, on the one hand, and, on the other, a work more lasting than brass—a [Greek: *chtaema es aei*!—a murder such in quality as any murder that *he* would condescend to own for a work turned out from his own *studio*.

Coleridge, whom I saw some months after these terrific murders, told me, that, for *his* part, though at the time resident in London, he had not shared in the prevailing panic; *him* they effected only as a philosopher, and threw him into a profound reverie upon the tremendous power which is laid open in a moment to any man who can reconcile himself to the abjuration of all conscientious restraints, if, at the same time, thoroughly without fear. Not sharing in the public panic, however, Coleridge did not consider that panic at all unreasonable; for, as he said most truly in that vast metropolis there are many thousands of households, composed exclusively of women and children; many other thousands there are who necessarily confide their safety, in the long evenings, to the discretion of a young servant girl; and if she suffers herself to be beguiled by the pretence of a message from her mother, sister, or sweetheart, into opening the door, there, in one second of time, goes to wreck the security of the house. However, at that time, and for many months afterwards, the practice of steadily putting the chain upon the door before it was opened prevailed generally, and for a long time served as a record of that deep impression left upon London by Mr. Williams. Southey, I may add, entered deeply into the public feeling on this occasion, and said to me, within a week or two of the first murder, that it was a private event of that order which rose to the dignity of a national event.² But now, having prepared the reader to appreciate on its true scale this dreadful tissue of murder (which as a record belonging to an era that is now left forty-two years behind us, not one person in four of this generation can be expected to know correctly), let me pass to the circumstantial details of the affair.

Yet, first of all, one word as to the local scene of the murders. Ratcliffe Highway is a public thoroughfare in a most chaotic quarter of eastern or nautical London; and at this time (*viz.*, in 1812), when no adequate police existed except the *detective* police of Bow Street, admirable for its own peculiar purposes, but utterly incommensurate to the general service of the capital, it was a most dangerous quarter. Every third man at the least might be set down as a foreigner. Lascars, Chinese, Moors, Negroes, were met at every step. And apart from the manifold ruffianism, shrouded impenetrably under the mixed hats and turbans of men whose past was untraceable to any European

² I am not sure whether Southey held at this time his appointment to the editorship of the 'Edinburgh Annual Register.' If he did, no doubt in the domestic section of that chronicle will be found an excellent account of the whole.

eye, it is well known that the navy (especially, in time of war, the commercial navy) of Christendom is the sure receptacle of all the murderers and ruffians whose crimes have given them a motive for withdrawing themselves for a season from the public eye. It is true, that few of this class are qualified to act as 'able' seamen: but at all times, and especially during war, only a small proportion (or *nucleus*) of each ship's company consists of such men: the large majority being mere untutored landmen. John Williams, however, who had been occasionally rated as a seaman on board of various Indiamen, &c., was probably a very accomplished seaman. Pretty generally, in fact, he was a ready and adroit man, fertile in resources under all sudden difficulties, and most flexibly adapting himself to all varieties of social life. Williams was a man of middle stature (five feet seven and a-half, to five feet eight inches high), slenderly built, rather thin, but wiry, tolerably muscular, and clear of all superfluous flesh. A lady, who saw him under examination (I think at the Thames Police Office), assured me that his hair was of the most extraordinary and vivid color, viz., bright yellow, something between an orange and lemon color. Williams had been in India; chiefly in Bengal and Madras: but he had also been upon the Indus. Now, it is notorious that, in the Punjaub, horses of a high caste are often painted—crimson, blue, green, purple; and it struck me that Williams might, for some casual purpose of disguise, have taken a hint from this practice of Scinde and Lahore, so that the color might not have been natural. In other respects, his appearance was natural enough; and, judging by a plaster cast of him, which I purchased in London, I should say mean, as regarded his facial structure. One fact, however, was striking, and fell in with the impression of his natural tiger character, that his face wore at all times a bloodless ghastly pallor. 'You might imagine,' said my informant, 'that in his veins circulated not red life- blood, such as could kindle into the blush of shame, of wrath, of pity— but a green sap that welled from no human heart.' His eyes seemed frozen and glazed, as if their light were all converged upon some victim lurking in the far background. So far his appearance might have repelled; but, on the other hand, the concurrent testimony of many witnesses, and also the silent testimony of facts, showed that the oiliness and snaky insinuation of his demeanor counteracted the repulsiveness of his ghastly face, and amongst inexperienced young women won for him a very favorable reception. In particular, one gentle-mannered girl, whom Williams had undoubtedly designed to murder, gave in evidence—that once, when sitting alone with her, he had said, 'Now, Miss R., supposing that I should appear about midnight at your bedside, armed with a carving knife, what would you say?' To which the confiding girl had, replied, 'Oh, Mr. Williams, if it was anybody else, I should be frightened. But, as soon as I heard *your* voice, I should be tranquil.' Poor girl! had this outline sketch of Mr. Williams been filled in and realized, she would have seen something in the corpse-like face, and heard something in the sinister voice, that would have unsettled her tranquillity for ever. But nothing short of such dreadful experiences could avail to unmask Mr. John Williams.

Into this perilous region it was that, on a Saturday night in December, Mr. Williams, whom we suppose to have long since made his *coup d'essai*, forced his way through the crowded streets, bound on business. To say, was to do. And this night he had said to himself secretly, that he would execute a design which he had already sketched, and which, when finished, was destined on the following day to strike consternation into 'all that mighty heart' of London, from centre to circumference. It was afterwards remembered that he had quitted his lodgings on this dark errand about eleven o'clock P. M.; not that he meant to begin so soon: but he needed to reconnoitre. He carried his tools closely buttoned up under his loose roomy coat. It was in harmony with the general subtlety of his character, and his polished hatred of brutality, that by universal agreement his manners were distinguished for exquisite suavity: the tiger's heart was masked by the most insinuating and snaky refinement. All his acquaintances afterwards described his dissimulation as so ready and so perfect, that if, in making his way through the streets, always so crowded on a Saturday night in neighborhoods so poor, he had accidentally jostled any person, he would (as they were all satisfied) have stopped to offer the most gentlemanly apologies: with his devilish heart brooding over the most hellish of purposes, he would yet have paused to express a benign hope that the huge mallet, buttoned up under his elegant surtout,

with a view to the little business that awaited him about ninety minutes further on, had not inflicted any pain on the stranger with whom he had come into collision. Titian, I believe, but certainly Rubens, and perhaps Vandyke, made it a rule never to practise his art but in full dress—point ruffles, bag wig, and diamond-hilted sword; and Mr. Williams, there is reason to believe, when he went out for a grand compound massacre (in another sense, one might have applied to it the Oxford phrase of *going out as Grand Compounder*), always assumed black silk stockings and pumps; nor would he on any account have degraded his position as an artist by wearing a morning gown. In his second great performance, it was particularly noticed and recorded by the one sole trembling man, who under killing agonies of fear was compelled (as the reader will find) from a secret stand to become the solitary spectator of his atrocities, that Mr. Williams wore a long blue frock, of the very finest cloth, and richly lined with silk. Amongst the anecdotes which circulated about him, it was also said at the time, that Mr. Williams employed the first of dentists, and also the first of chiropodists. On no account would he patronize any second-rate skill. And beyond a doubt, in that perilous little branch of business which was practised by himself, he might be regarded as the most aristocratic and fastidious of artists.

But who meantime was the victim, to whose abode he was hurrying? For surely he never could be so indiscreet as to be sailing about on a roving cruise in search of some chance person to murder? Oh, no: he had suited himself with a victim some time before, viz., an old and very intimate friend. For he seems to have laid it down as a maxim—that the best person to murder was a friend; and, in default of a friend, which is an article one cannot always command, an acquaintance: because, in either case, on first approaching his subject, suspicion would be disarmed: whereas a stranger might take alarm, and find in the very countenance of his murderer elect a warning summons to place himself on guard. However, in the present ease, his destined victim was supposed to unite both characters: originally he had been a friend; but subsequently, on good cause arising, he had become an enemy. Or more probably, as others said, the feelings had long since languished which gave life to either relation of friendship or of enmity. Marr was the name of that unhappy man, who (whether in the character of friend or enemy) had been selected for the subject of this present Saturday night's performance. And the story current at that time about the connection between Williams and Marr, having (whether true or not true) never been contradicted upon authority, was, that they sailed in the same Indiaman to Calcutta; that they had quarrelled when at sea; but another version of the story said—no: they had quarrelled after returning from sea; and the subject of their quarrel was Mrs. Marr, a very pretty young woman, for whose favor they had been rival candidates, and at one time with most bitter enmity towards each other. Some circumstances give a color of probability to this story. Otherwise it has sometimes happened, on occasion of a murder not sufficiently accounted for, that, from pure goodness of heart intolerant of a mere sordid motive for a striking murder, some person has forged, and the public has accredited, a story representing the murderer as having moved under some loftier excitement: and in this case the public, too much shocked at the idea of Williams having on the single motive of gain consummated so complex a tragedy, welcomed the tale which represented him as governed by deadly malice, growing out of the more impassioned and noble rivalry for the favor of a woman. The case remains in some degree doubtful; but, certainly, the probability is, that Mrs. Marr had been the true cause, the *causa teterrima*, of the feud between the men. Meantime, the minutes are numbered, the sands of the hour-glass are running out, that measure the duration of this feud upon earth. This night it shall cease. To-morrow is the day which in England they call Sunday, which in Scotland they call by the Judaic name of 'Sabbath.' To both nations, under different names, the day has the same functions; to both it is a day of rest. For thee also, Marr, it shall be a day of rest; so is it written; thou, too, young Marr, shalt find rest—thou, and thy household, and the stranger that is within thy gates. But that rest must be in the world which lies beyond the grave. On this side the grave ye have all slept your final sleep.

The night was one of exceeding darkness; and in this humble quarter of London, whatever the night happened to be, light or dark, quiet or stormy, all shops were kept open on Saturday nights until

twelve o'clock, at the least, and many for half an hour longer. There was no rigorous and pedantic Jewish superstition about the exact limits of Sunday. At the very worst, the Sunday stretched over from one o'clock, A. M. of one day, up to eight o'clock A. M. of the next, making a clear circuit of thirty-one hours. This, surely, was long enough. Marr, on this particular Saturday night, would be content if it were even shorter, provided it would come more quickly, for he has been toiling through sixteen hours behind his counter. Marr's position in life was this: he kept a little hosier's shop, and had invested in his stock and the fittings of his shop about 180 pounds. Like all men engaged in trade, he suffered some anxieties. He was a new beginner; but, already, bad debts had alarmed him; and bills were coming to maturity that were not likely to be met by commensurate sales. Yet, constitutionally, he was a sanguine hopper. At this time he was a stout, fresh-colored young man of twenty-seven; in some slight degree uneasy from his commercial prospects, but still cheerful, and anticipating—(how vainly!)—that for this night, and the next night, at least, he will rest his wearied head and his cares upon the faithful bosom of his sweet lovely young wife. The household of Marr, consisting of five persons, is as follows: First, there is himself, who, if he should happen to be ruined, in a limited commercial sense, has energy enough to jump up again, like a pyramid of fire, and soar high above ruin many times repeated. Yes, poor Marr, so it might be, if thou wert left to thy native energies unmolested; but even now there stands on the other side of the street one born of hell, who puts his peremptory negative on all these flattering prospects. Second in the list of his household, stands his pretty and amiable wife, who is happy after the fashion of youthful wives, for she is only twenty-two, and anxious (if at all) only on account of her darling infant. For, thirdly, there is in a cradle, not quite nine feet below the street, viz., in a warm, cosy kitchen, and rocked at intervals by the young mother, a baby eight months old. Nineteen months have Marr and herself been married; and this is their first-born child. Grieve not for this child, that it must keep the deep rest of Sunday in some other world; for wherefore should an orphan, steeped to the lips in poverty, when once bereaved of father and mother, linger upon an alien and murderous earth? Fourthly, there is a stoutish boy, an apprentice, say thirteen years old; a Devonshire boy, with handsome features, such as most Devonshire youths have;³ satisfied with his place; not overworked; treated kindly, and aware that he was treated kindly, by his master and mistress. Fifthly, and lastly, bringing up the rear of this quiet household, is a servant girl, a grown-up young woman; and she, being particularly kind-hearted, occupied (as often happens in families of humble pretensions as to rank) a sort of sisterly place in her relation to her mistress. A great democratic change is at this very time (1854), and has been for twenty years, passing over British society. Multitudes of persons are becoming ashamed of saying, 'my master,' or 'my mistress:' the term now in the slow process of superseding it is, 'my employer.' Now, in the United States, such an expression of democratic hauteur, though disagreeable as a needless proclamation of independence which nobody is disputing, leaves, however, no lasting bad effect. For the domestic 'helps' are pretty generally in a state of transition so sure and so rapid to the headship of domestic establishments belonging to themselves, that in effect they are but ignoring, for the present moment, a relation which would at any rate dissolve itself in a year or two. But in England, where no such resources exist of everlasting surplus lands, the tendency of the change is painful. It carries with it a sullen and a coarse expression of immunity from a yoke which was in any case a light one, and often a benign one. In some other place I will illustrate my meaning. Here, apparently, in Mrs. Marr's service, the principle concerned illustrated itself practically. Mary, the female servant, felt a sincere and unaffected respect for a mistress whom she saw so steadily occupied with her domestic duties, and who, though so young, and invested with some slight authority, never exerted it capriciously, or even showed it at all conspicuously. According to the testimony of all the neighbors, she treated her mistress with a shade

³ An artist told me in this year, 1812, that having accidentally seen a native Devonshire regiment (either volunteers or militia), nine hundred strong, marching past a station at which he had posted himself, he did not observe a dozen men that would not have been described in common parlance as 'good looking.'

of unobtrusive respect on the one hand, and yet was eager to relieve her, whenever that was possible, from the weight of her maternal duties, with the cheerful voluntary service of a sister.

To this young woman it was, that, suddenly, within three or four minutes of midnight, Marr called aloud from the head of the stairs—directing her to go out and purchase some oysters for the family supper. Upon what slender accidents hang oftentimes solemn lifelong results! Marr occupied in the concerns of his shop, Mrs. Marr occupied with some little ailment and restlessness of her baby, had both forgotten the affair of supper; the time was now narrowing every moment, as regarded any variety of choice; and oysters were perhaps ordered as the likeliest article to be had at all, after twelve o'clock should have struck. And yet, upon this trivial circumstance depended Mary's life. Had she been sent abroad for supper at the ordinary time of ten or eleven o'clock, it is almost certain that she, the solitary member of the household who escaped from the exterminating tragedy, would *not* have escaped; too surely she would have shared the general fate. It had now become necessary to be quick. Hastily, therefore, receiving money from Marr with a basket in her hand, but unbonneted, Mary tripped out of the shop. It became afterwards, on recollection, a heart-chilling remembrance to herself—that, precisely as she emerged from the shop-door, she noticed, on the opposite side of the street, by the light of the lamps, a man's figure; stationary at the instant, but in the next instant slowly moving. This was Williams; as a little incident, either just before or just after (at present it is impossible to say which), sufficiently proved. Now, when one considers the inevitable hurry and trepidation of Mary under the circumstances stated, time barely sufficing for any chance of executing her errand, it becomes evident that she must have connected some deep feeling of mysterious uneasiness with the movements of this unknown man; else, assuredly, she would not have found her attention disposable for such a case. Thus far, she herself threw some little light upon what it might be that, semi-consciously, was then passing through her mind; she said, that, notwithstanding the darkness, which would not permit her to trace the man's features, or to ascertain the exact direction of his eyes, it yet struck her, that from his carriage when in motion, and from the apparent inclination of his person, he must be looking at No. 29.

The little incident which I have alluded to as confirming Mary's belief was, that, at some period not very far from midnight, the watchman had specially noticed this stranger; he had observed him continually peeping into the window of Marr's shop; and had thought this act, connected with the man's appearance, so suspicious, that he stepped into Marr's shop, and communicated what he had seen. This fact he afterwards stated before the magistrates; and he added, that subsequently, viz., a few minutes after twelve (eight or ten minutes, probably, after the departure of Mary), he (the watchman), when re-entering upon his ordinary half-hourly beat, was requested by Marr to assist him in closing the shutters. Here they had a final communication with each other; and the watchman mentioned to Marr that the mysterious stranger had now apparently taken himself off; for that he had not been visible since the first communication made to Marr by the watchman. There is little doubt that Williams had observed the watchman's visit to Marr, and had thus had his attention seasonably drawn to the indiscretion of his own demeanor; so that the warning, given unavailingly to Marr, had been turned to account by Williams. There can be still less doubt, that the bloodhound had commenced his work within one minute of the watchman's assisting Marr to put up his shutters. And on the following consideration:—that which prevented Williams from commencing even earlier, was the exposure of the shop's whole interior to the gaze of street passengers. It was indispensable that the shutters should be accurately closed before Williams could safely get to work. But, as soon as ever this preliminary precaution had been completed, once having secured that concealment from the public eye it then became of still greater importance not to lose a moment by delay, than previously it had been not to hazard any thing by precipitance. For all depended upon going in before Marr should have locked the door. On any other mode of effecting an entrance (as, for instance, by waiting for the return of Mary, and making his entrance simultaneously with her), it will be seen that Williams must have forfeited that particular advantage which mute facts, when read into their true construction, will

soon show the reader that he must have employed. Williams waited, of necessity, for the sound of the watchman's retreating steps; waited, perhaps, for thirty seconds; but when that danger was past, the next danger was, lest Marr should lock the door; one turn of the key, and the murderer would have been locked out. In, therefore, he bolted, and by a dexterous movement of his left hand, no doubt, turned the key, without letting Marr perceive this fatal stratagem. It is really wonderful and most interesting to pursue the successive steps of this monster, and to notice the absolute certainty with which the silent hieroglyphics of the case betray to us the whole process and movements of the bloody drama, not less surely and fully than if we had been ourselves hidden in Marr's shop, or had looked down from the heavens of mercy upon this hell-kite, that knew not what mercy meant. That he had concealed from Marr his trick, secret and rapid, upon the lock, is evident; because else, Marr would instantly have taken the alarm, especially after what the watchman had communicated. But it will soon be seen that Marr had *not* been alarmed. In reality, towards the full success of Williams, it was important, in the last degree, to intercept and forestall any yell or shout of agony from Marr. Such an outcry, and in a situation so slenderly fenced off from the street, viz., by walls the very thinnest, makes itself heard outside pretty nearly as well as if it were uttered in the street. Such an outcry it was indispensable to stifle. It *was* stifled; and the reader will soon understand *how*. Meantime, at this point, let us leave the murderer alone with his victims. For fifty minutes let him work his pleasure. The front-door, as we know, is now fastened against all help. Help there is none. Let us, therefore, in vision, attach ourselves to Mary; and, when all is over, let us come back with *her*, again raise the curtain, and read the dreadful record of all that has passed in her absence.

The poor girl, uneasy in her mind to an extent that she could but half understand, roamed up and down in search of an oyster shop; and finding none that was still open, within any circuit that her ordinary experience had made her acquainted with, she fancied it best to try the chances of some remoter district. Lights she saw gleaming or twinkling at a distance, that still tempted her onwards; and thus, amongst unknown streets poorly lighted,⁴ and on a night of peculiar darkness, and in a region of London where ferocious tumults were continually turning her out of what seemed to be the direct course, naturally she got bewildered. The purpose with which she started, had by this time become hopeless. Nothing remained for her now but to retrace her steps. But this was difficult; for she was afraid to ask directions from chance passengers, whose appearance the darkness prevented her from reconnoitring. At length by his lantern she recognized a watchman; through him she was guided into the right road; and in ten minutes more, she found herself back at the door of No. 29, in Ratcliffe Highway. But by this time she felt satisfied that she must have been absent for fifty or sixty minutes; indeed, she had heard, at a distance, the cry of *past one o'clock*, which, commencing a few seconds after one, lasted intermittingly for ten or thirteen minutes.

In the tumult of agonizing thoughts that very soon surprised her, naturally it became hard for her to recall distinctly the whole succession of doubts, and jealousies, and shadowy misgivings that soon opened upon her. But, so far as could be collected, she had not in the first moment of reaching home noticed anything decisively alarming. In very many cities bells are the main instruments for communicating between the street and the interior of houses: but in London knockers prevail. At Marr's there was both a knocker and a bell. Mary rang, and at the same time very gently knocked. She had no fear of disturbing her master or mistress; *them* she made sure of finding still up. Her anxiety was for the baby, who being disturbed, might again rob her mistress of a night's rest. And she well knew that, with three people all anxiously awaiting her return, and by this time, perhaps, seriously uneasy at her delay, the least audible whisper from herself would in a moment bring one of them to the door. Yet how is this? To her astonishment, but with the astonishment came creeping

⁴ I do not remember, chronologically, the history of gas-lights. But in London, long after Mr. Winsor had shown the value of gas-lighting, and its applicability to street purposes, various districts were prevented, for many years, from resorting to the new system, in consequence of old contracts with oil-dealers, subsisting through long terms of years.

over her an icy horror, no stir nor murmur was heard ascending from the kitchen. At this moment came back upon her, with shuddering anguish, the indistinct image of the stranger in the loose dark coat, whom she had seen stealing along under the shadowy lamp-light, and too certainly watching her master's motions: keenly she now reproached herself that, under whatever stress of hurry, she had not acquainted Mr. Marr with the suspicious appearances. Poor girl! she did not then know that, if this communication could have availed to put Marr upon his guard, it had reached him from another quarter; so that her own omission, which had in reality arisen under her hurry to execute her master's commission, could not be charged with any bad consequences. But all such reflections this way or that were swallowed up at this point in over-mastering panic. That her double summons *could* have been unnoticed—this solitary fact in one moment made a revelation of horror. One person might have fallen asleep, but two—but three—that was a mere impossibility. And even supposing all three together with the baby locked in sleep, still how unaccountable was this utter—utter silence! Most naturally at this moment something like hysterical horror overshadowed the poor girl, and now at last she rang the bell with the violence that belongs to sickening terror. This done, she paused: self-command enough she still retained, though fast and fast it was slipping away from her, to bethink herself—that, if any overwhelming accident *had* compelled both Marr and his apprentice-boy to leave the house in order to summon surgical aid from opposite quarters—a thing barely supposable—still, even in that case Mrs. Marr and her infant would be left; and some murmuring reply, under any extremity, would be elicited from the poor mother. To pause, therefore, to impose stern silence upon herself, so as to leave room for the possible answer to this final appeal, became a duty of spasmodic effort. Listen, therefore, poor trembling heart; listen, and for twenty seconds be still as death. Still as death she was: and during that dreadful stillness, when she hushed her breath that she might listen, occurred an incident of killing fear, that to her dying day would never cease to renew its echoes in her ear. She, Mary, the poor trembling girl, checking and overruling herself by a final effort, that she might leave full opening for her dear young mistress's answer to her own last frantic appeal, heard at last and most distinctly a sound within the house. Yes, now beyond a doubt there is coming an answer to her summons. What was it? On the stairs, not the stairs that led downwards to the kitchen, but the stairs that led upwards to the single story of bed-chambers above, was heard a creaking sound. Next was heard most distinctly a footfall: one, two, three, four, five stairs were slowly and distinctly descended. Then the dreadful footsteps were heard advancing along the little narrow passage to the door. The steps—oh heavens! *whose* steps?—have paused at the door. The very breathing can be heard of that dreadful being, who has silenced all breathing except his own in the house. There is but a door between him and Mary. What is he doing on the other side of the door? A cautious step, a stealthy step it was that came down the stairs, then paced along the little narrow passage—narrow as a coffin—till at last the step pauses at the door. How hard the fellow breathes! He, the solitary murderer, is on one side the door; Mary is on the other side. Now, suppose that he should suddenly open the door, and that incautiously in the dark Mary should rush in, and find herself in the arms of the murderer. Thus far the case is a possible one—that to a certainty, had this little trick been tried immediately upon Mary's return, it would have succeeded; had the door been opened suddenly upon her first tingle-tingle, headlong she would have tumbled in, and perished. But now Mary is upon her guard. The unknown murderer and she have both their lips upon the door, listening, breathing hard; but luckily they are on different sides of the door; and upon the least indication of unlocking or unlatching, she would have recoiled into the asylum of general darkness.

What was the murderer's meaning in coming along the passage to the front door? The meaning was this: separately, as an individual, Mary was worth nothing at all to him. But, considered as a member of a household, she had this value, viz., that she, if caught and murdered, perfected and rounded the desolation of the house. The case being reported, as reported it would be all over Christendom, led the imagination captive. The whole covey of victims was thus netted; the household ruin was thus full and orbicular; and in that proportion the tendency of men and women, flutter as

they might, would be helplessly and hopelessly to sink into the all-conquering hands of the mighty murderer. He had but to say—my testimonials are dated from No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway, and the poor vanquished imagination sank powerless before the fascinating rattlesnake eye of the murderer. There is not a doubt that the motive of the murderer for standing on the inner side of Marr's front-door, whilst Mary stood on the outside, was—a hope that, if he quietly opened the door, whisperingly counterfeiting Marr's voice, and saying, What made you stay so long? possibly she might have been inveigled. He was wrong; the time was past for that; Mary was now maniacally awake; she began now to ring the bell and to ply the knocker with unintermitting violence. And the natural consequence was, that the next door neighbor, who had recently gone to bed and instantly fallen asleep, was roused; and by the incessant violence of the ringing and the knocking, which now obeyed a delirious and uncontrollable impulse in Mary, he became sensible that some very dreadful event must be at the root of so clamorous an uproar. To rise, to throw up the sash, to demand angrily the cause of this unseasonable tumult, was the work of a moment. The poor girl remained sufficiently mistress of herself rapidly to explain the circumstance of her own absence for an hour; her belief that Mr. and Mrs. Marr's family had all been murdered in the interval; and that at this very moment the murderer was in the house.

The person to whom she addressed this statement was a pawnbroker; and a thoroughly brave man he must have been; for it was a perilous undertaking, merely as a trial of physical strength, singly to face a mysterious assassin, who had apparently signalized his prowess by a triumph so comprehensive. But, again, for the imagination it required an effort of self-conquest to rush headlong into the presence of one invested with a cloud of mystery, whose nation, age, motives, were all alike unknown. Rarely on any field of battle has a soldier been called upon to face so complex a danger. For if the entire family of his neighbor Marr had been exterminated, were this indeed true, such a scale of bloodshed would seem to argue that there must have been two persons as the perpetrators; or if one singly had accomplished such a ruin, in that case how colossal must have been his audacity! probably, also, his skill and animal power! Moreover, the unknown enemy (whether single or double) would, doubtless, be elaborately armed. Yet, under all these disadvantages, did this fearless man rush at once to the field of butchery in his neighbor's house. Waiting only to draw on his trousers, and to arm himself with the kitchen poker, he went down into his own little back-yard. On this mode of approach, he would have a chance of intercepting the murderer; whereas from the front there would be no such chance; and there would also be considerable delay in the process of breaking open the door. A brick wall, nine or ten feet high, divided his own back premises from those of Marr. Over this he vaulted; and at the moment when he was recalling himself to the necessity of going back for a candle, he suddenly perceived a feeble ray of light already glimmering on some part of Marr's premises. Marr's back-door stood wide open. Probably the murderer had passed through it one half minute before. Rapidly the brave man passed onwards to the shop, and there beheld the carnage of the night stretched out on the floor, and the narrow premises so floated with gore, that it was hardly possible to escape the pollution of blood in picking out a path to the front-door. In the lock of the door still remained the key which had given to the unknown murderer so fatal an advantage over his victims. By this time, the heart-shaking news involved in the outcries of Mary (to whom it occurred that by possibility some one out of so many victims might still be within the reach of medical aid, but that all would depend upon speed) had availed, even at that late hour, to gather a small mob about the house. The pawnbroker threw open the door. One or two watchmen headed the crowd; but the soul-harrowing spectacle checked them, and impressed sudden silence upon their voices, previously so loud. The tragic drama read aloud its own history, and the succession of its several steps—few and summary. The murderer was as yet altogether unknown; not even suspected. But there were reasons for thinking that he must have been a person familiarly known to Marr. He had entered the shop by opening the door after it had been closed by Marr. But it was justly argued—that, after the caution conveyed to Marr by the watchman, the appearance of any stranger in the shop at that hour, and in so

dangerous a neighborhood, and entering by so irregular and suspicious a course, (*i.e.*, walking in after the door had been closed, and after the closing of the shutters had cut off all open communication with the street), would naturally have roused Marr to an attitude of vigilance and self-defence. Any indication, therefore, that Marr had *not* been so roused, would argue to a certainty that *something* had occurred to neutralize this alarm, and fatally to disarm the prudent jealousies of Marr. But this 'something' could only have lain in one simple fact, *viz.*, that the person of the murderer was familiarly known to Marr as that of an ordinary and unsuspected acquaintance. This being presupposed as the key to all the rest, the whole course and evolution of the subsequent drama becomes clear as daylight. The murderer, it is evident, had opened gently, and again closed behind him with equal gentleness, the street-door. He had then advanced to the little counter, all the while exchanging the ordinary salutation of an old acquaintance with the unsuspecting Marr. Having reached the counter, he would then ask Marr for a pair of unbleached cotton socks. In a shop so small as Marr's, there could be no great latitude of choice for disposing of the different commodities. The arrangement of these had no doubt become familiar to the murderer; and he had already ascertained that, in order to reach down the particular parcel wanted at present, Marr would find it requisite to face round to the rear, and, at the same moment, to raise his eyes and his hands to a level eighteen inches above his own head. This movement placed him in the most disadvantageous possible position with regard to the murderer, who now, at the instant when Marr's hands and eyes were embarrassed, and the back of his head fully exposed, suddenly from below his large surtout, had unslung a heavy ship-carpenter's mallet, and, with one solitary blow, had so thoroughly stunned his victim, as to leave him incapable of resistance. The whole position of Marr told its own tale. He had collapsed naturally behind the counter, with his hands so occupied as to confirm the whole outline of the affair as I have here suggested it. Probable enough it is that the very first blow, the first indication of treachery that reached Marr, would also be the last blow as regarded the abolition of consciousness. The murderer's plan and *rationale* of murder started systematically from this infliction of apoplexy, or at least of a stunning sufficient to insure a long loss of consciousness. This opening step placed the murderer at his ease. But still, as returning sense might constantly have led to the fullest exposures, it was his settled practice, by way of consummation, to cut the throat. To one invariable type all the murders on this occasion conformed: the skull was first shattered; this step secured the murderer from instant retaliation; and then, by way of locking up all into eternal silence, uniformly the throat was cut. The rest of the circumstances, as self-revealed, were these. The fall of Marr might, probably enough, cause a dull, confused sound of a scuffle, and the more so, as it could not now be confounded with any street uproar—the shop-door being shut. It is more probable, however, that the signal for the alarm passing down to the kitchen, would arise when the murderer proceeded to cut Marr's throat. The very confined situation behind the counter would render it impossible, under the critical hurry of the case, to expose the throat broadly; the horrid scene would proceed by partial and interrupted cuts; deep groans would arise; and then would come the rush up-stairs. Against this, as the only dangerous stage in the transaction, the murderer would have specially prepared. Mrs. Marr and the apprentice-boy, both young and active, would make, of course, for the street door; had Mary been at home, and three persons at once had combined to distract the purposes of the murderer, it is barely possible that one of them would have succeeded in reaching the street. But the dreadful swing of the heavy mallet intercepted both the boy and his mistress before they could reach the door. Each of them lay stretched out on the centre of the shop floor; and the very moment that this disabling was accomplished, the accursed hound was down upon their throats with his razor. The fact is, that, in the mere blindness of pity for poor Marr, on hearing his groans, Mrs. Marr had lost sight of her obvious policy; she and the boy ought to have made for the back door; the alarm would thus have been given in the open air; which, of itself, was a great point; and several means of distracting the murderer's attention offered upon that course, which the extreme limitation of the shop denied to them upon the other.

Vain would be all attempts to convey the horror which thrilled the gathering spectators of this piteous tragedy. It was known to the crowd that one person had, by some accident, escaped the general massacre: but she was now speechless, and probably delirious; so that, in compassion for her pitiable situation, one female neighbor had carried her away, and put her to bed. Hence it had happened, for a longer space of time than could else have been possible, that no person present was sufficiently acquainted with the Marrs to be aware of the little infant; for the bold pawnbroker had gone off to make a communication to the coroner; and another neighbor to lodge some evidence which he thought urgent at a neighboring police-office. Suddenly some person appeared amongst the crowd who was aware that the murdered parents had a young infant; this would be found either below-stairs, or in one of the bedrooms above. Immediately a stream of people poured down into the kitchen, where at once they saw the cradle—but with the bedclothes in a state of indescribable confusion. On disentangling these, pools of blood became visible; and the next ominous sign was, that the hood of the cradle had been smashed to pieces. It became evident that the wretch had found himself doubly embarrassed—first, by the arched hood at the head of the cradle, which, accordingly, he had beat into a ruin with his mallet, and secondly, by the gathering of the blankets and pillows about the baby's head. The free play of his blows had thus been baffled. And he had therefore finished the scene by applying his razor to the throat of the little innocent; after which, with no apparent purpose, as though he had become confused by the spectacle of his own atrocities, he had busied himself in piling the clothes elaborately over the child's corpse. This incident undeniably gave the character of a vindictive proceeding to the whole affair, and so far confirmed the current rumor that the quarrel between Williams and Marr had originated in rivalry. One writer, indeed, alleged that the murderer might have found it necessary for his own safety to extinguish the crying of the child; but it was justly replied, that a child only eight months old could not have cried under any sense of the tragedy proceeding, but simply in its ordinary way for the absence of its mother; and such a cry, even if audible at all out of the house, must have been precisely what the neighbors were hearing constantly, so that it could have drawn no special attention, nor suggested any reasonable alarm to the murderer. No one incident, indeed, throughout the whole tissue of atrocities, so much envenomed the popular fury against the unknown ruffian, as this useless butchery of the infant.

Naturally, on the Sunday morning that dawned four or five hours later, the case was too full of horror not to diffuse itself in all directions; but I have no reason to think that it crept into any one of the numerous Sunday papers. In the regular course, any ordinary occurrence, not occurring, or not transpiring until fifteen minutes after 1 A. M. on a Sunday morning, would first reach the public ear through the Monday editions of the Sunday papers, and the regular morning papers of the Monday. But, if such were the course pursued on this occasion, never can there have been a more signal oversight. For it is certain, that to have met the public demand for details on the Sunday, which might so easily have been done by cancelling a couple of dull columns, and substituting a circumstantial narrative, for which the pawnbroker and the watchman could have furnished the materials, would have made a small fortune. By proper handbills dispersed through all quarters of the infinite metropolis, two hundred and fifty thousand extra copies might have been sold; that is, by any journal that should have collected *exclusive* materials, meeting the public excitement, everywhere stirred to the centre by flying rumors, and everywhere burning for ampler information. On the Sunday se'ennight (Sunday the *octave* from the event), took place the funeral of the Marrs; in the first coffin was placed Marr; in the second Mrs. Marr, and the baby in her arms; in the third the apprentice boy. They were buried side by side; and thirty thousand laboring people followed the funeral procession, with horror and grief written in their countenances.

As yet no whisper was astir that indicated, even conjecturally, the hideous author of these ruins—this patron of grave-diggers. Had as much been known on this Sunday of the funeral concerning that person as became known universally six days later, the people would have gone right from the churchyard to the murderer's lodgings, and (brooking no delay) would have torn him limb from limb.

As yet, however, in mere default of any object on whom reasonable suspicion could settle, the public wrath was compelled to suspend itself. Else, far indeed from showing any tendency to subside, the public emotion strengthened every day conspicuously, as the reverberation of the shock began to travel back from the provinces to the capital. On every great road in the kingdom, continual arrests were made of vagrants and 'trampers,' who could give no satisfactory account of themselves, or whose appearance in any respect answered to the imperfect description of Williams furnished by the watchman.

With this mighty tide of pity and indignation pointing backwards to the dreadful past, there mingled also in the thoughts of reflecting persons an under-current of fearful expectation for the immediate future. 'The earthquake,' to quote a fragment from a striking passage in Wordsworth—

'The earthquake is not satisfied at once.'

All perils, specially malignant, are recurrent. A murderer, who is such by passion and by a wolfish craving for bloodshed as a mode of unnatural luxury, cannot relapse into *inertia*. Such a man, even more than the Alpine chamois hunter, comes to crave the dangers and the hairbreadth escapes of his trade, as a condiment for seasoning the insipid monotonies of daily life. But, apart from the hellish instincts that might too surely be relied on for renewed atrocities, it was clear that the murderer of the Marrs, wheresoever lurking, must be a needy man; and a needy man of that class least likely to seek or to find resources in honorable modes of industry; for which, equally by haughty disgust and by disuse of the appropriate habits, men of violence are specially disqualified. Were it, therefore, merely for a livelihood, the murderer whom all hearts were yearning to decipher, might be expected to make his resurrection on some stage of horror, after a reasonable interval. Even in the Marr murder, granting that it had been governed chiefly by cruel and vindictive impulses, it was still clear that the desire of booty had co-operated with such feelings. Equally clear it was that this desire must have been disappointed: excepting the trivial sum reserved by Marr for the week's expenditure, the murderer found, doubtless, little or nothing that he could turn to account. Two guineas, perhaps, would be the outside of what he had obtained in the way of booty. A week or so would see the end of that. The conviction, therefore, of all people was, that in a month or two, when the fever of excitement might a little have cooled down, or have been superseded by other topics of fresher interest, so that the newborn vigilance of household life would have had time to relax, some new murder, equally appalling, might be counted upon.

Such was the public expectation. Let the reader then figure to himself the pure frenzy of horror when in this hush of expectation, looking, indeed, and waiting for the unknown arm to strike once more, but not believing that any audacity could be equal to such an attempt as yet, whilst all eyes were watching, suddenly, on the twelfth night from the Marr murder, a second case of the same mysterious nature, a murder on the same exterminating plan was perpetrated in the very same neighborhood. It was on the Thursday next but one succeeding to the Marr murder that this second atrocity took place; and many people thought at the time, that in its dramatic features of thrilling interest, this second case even went beyond the first. The family which suffered in this instance was that of a Mr. Williamson; and the house was situated, if not absolutely *in* Ratcliffe Highway, at any rate immediately round the corner of some secondary street, running at right angles to this public thoroughfare, Mr. Williamson was a well-known and respectable man, long settled in that district; he was supposed to be rich; and more with a view to the employment furnished by such a calling, than with much anxiety for further accumulations, he kept a sort of tavern; which, in this respect, might be considered on an old patriarchal footing—that, although people of considerable property resorted to the house in the evenings, no kind of anxious separation was maintained between them and the other visitors from the class of artisans or common laborers. Anybody who conducted himself with propriety was free to take a seat, and call for any liquor that he might prefer. And thus the society was pretty miscellaneous; in part stationary, but in some proportion fluctuating. The household consisted of the following five persons:—1. Mr. Williamson, its head, who was an old man above seventy, and was well fitted for

his situation, being civil, and not at all morose, but, at the same time, firm in maintaining order; 2. Mrs. Williamson, his wife, about ten years younger than himself; 3. a little grand-daughter, about nine years old; 4. a housemaid, who was nearly forty years old; 5. a young journeyman, aged about twenty-six, belonging to some manufacturing establishment (of what class I have forgotten); neither do I remember of what nation he was. It was the established rule at Mr. Williamson's, that, exactly as the clock struck eleven, all the company, without favor or exception, moved off. That was one of the customs by which, in so stormy a district, Mr. Williamson had found it possible to keep his house free from brawls. On the present Thursday night everything had gone on as usual, except for one slight shadow of suspicion, which had caught the attention of more persons than one. Perhaps at a less agitating time it would hardly have been noticed; but now, when the first question and the last in all social meetings turned upon the Marrs, and their unknown murderer, it was a circumstance naturally fitted to cause some uneasiness, that a stranger, of sinister appearance, in a wide surtout, had flitted in and out of the room at intervals during the evening; had sometimes retired from the light into obscure corners; and, by more than one person, had been observed stealing into the private passages of the house. It was presumed in general, that the man must be known to Williamson. And in some slight degree, as an occasional customer of the house, it is not impossible that he *was*. But afterwards, this repulsive stranger, with his cadaverous ghastliness, extraordinary hair, and glazed eyes, showing himself intermittingly through the hours from 8 to 11 P.M., revolved upon the memory of all who had steadily observed him with something of the same freezing effect as belongs to the two assassins in 'Macbeth,' who present themselves reeking from the murder of Banquo, and gleaming dimly, with dreadful faces, from the misty background, athwart the pomps of the regal banquet.

Meantime the clock struck eleven; the company broke up; the door of entrance was nearly closed; and at this moment of general dispersion the situation of the five inmates left upon the premises was precisely this: the three elders, viz., Williamson, his wife, and his female servant, were all occupied on the ground floor—Williamson himself was drawing ale, porter, &c., for those neighbors, in whose favor the house-door had been left ajar, until the hour of twelve should strike; Mrs. Williamson and her servant were moving to and fro between the back-kitchen and a little parlor; the little grand-daughter, whose sleeping-room was on the *first* floor (which term in London means always the floor raised by one flight of stairs above the level of the street), had been fast asleep since nine o'clock; lastly, the journeyman artisan had retired to rest for some time. He was a regular lodger in the house; and his bedroom was on the second floor. For some time he had been undressed, and had lain down in bed. Being, as a working man, bound to habits of early rising, he was naturally anxious to fall asleep as soon as possible. But, on this particular night, his uneasiness, arising from the recent murders at No. 29, rose to a paroxysm of nervous excitement which kept him awake. It is possible, that from somebody he had heard of the suspicious-looking stranger, or might even personally observed him slinking about. But, were it otherwise, he was aware of several circumstances dangerously affecting this house; for instance, the ruffianism of this whole neighborhood, and the disagreeable fact that the Marrs had lived within a few doors of this very house, which again argued that the murderer also lived at no great distance. These were matters of *general* alarm. But there were others peculiar to this house; in particular, the notoriety of Williamson's opulence; the belief, whether well or ill founded, that he accumulated, in desks and drawers, the money continually flowing into his hands; and lastly, the danger so ostentatiously courted by that habit of leaving the house-door ajar through one entire hour—and that hour loaded with extra danger, by the well-advertised assurance that no collision need be feared with chance convivial visitors, since all such people were banished at eleven. A regulation, which had hitherto operated beneficially for the character and comfort of the house, now, on the contrary, under altered circumstances, became a positive proclamation of exposure and defencelessness, through one entire period of an hour. Williamson himself, it was said generally, being a large unwieldy man, past seventy, and signally inactive, ought, in prudence, to make the locking of his door coincident with the dismissal of his evening party.

Upon these and other grounds of alarm (particularly this, that Mrs. Williamson was reported to possess a considerable quantity of plate), the journeyman was musing painfully, and the time might be within twenty-eight or twenty-five minutes of twelve, when all at once, with a crash, proclaiming some hand of hideous violence, the house-door was suddenly shut and locked. Here, then, beyond all doubt, was the diabolic man, clothed in mystery, from No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway. Yes, that dreadful being, who for twelve days had employed all thoughts and all tongues, was now, too certainly, in this defenceless house, and would, in a few minutes, be face to face with every one of its inmates. A question still lingered in the public mind—whether at Marr's there might not have been *two* men at work. If so, there would be two at present; and one of the two would be immediately disposable for the up-stairs work; since no danger could obviously be more immediately fatal to such an attack than any alarm given from an upper window to the passengers in the street. Through one half-minute the poor panic-stricken man sat up motionless in bed. But then he rose, his first movement being towards the door of his room. Not for any purpose of securing it against intrusion—too well he knew that there was no fastening of any sort—neither lock, nor bolt; nor was there any such moveable furniture in the room as might have availed to barricade the door, even if time could be counted on for such an attempt. It was no effect of prudence, merely the fascination of killing fear it was, that drove him to open the door. One step brought him to the head of the stairs: he lowered his head over the balustrade in order to listen; and at that moment ascended, from the little parlor, this agonizing cry from the woman-servant, 'Lord Jesus Christ! we shall all be murdered!' What a Medusa's head must have lurked in those dreadful bloodless features, and those glazed rigid eyes, that seemed rightfully belonging to a corpse, when one glance at them sufficed to proclaim a death-warrant.

Three separate death-struggles were by this time over; and the poor petrified journeyman, quite unconscious of what he was doing, in blind, passive, self-surrender to panic, absolutely descended both flights of stairs. Infinite terror inspired him with the same impulse as might have been inspired by headlong courage. In his shirt, and upon old decaying stairs, that at times creaked under his feet, he continued to descend, until he had reached the lowest step but four. The situation was tremendous beyond any that is on record. A sneeze, a cough, almost a breathing, and the young man would be a corpse, without a chance or a struggle for his life. The murderer was at that time in the little parlor—the door of which parlor faced you in descending the stairs; and this door stood ajar; indeed, much more considerably open than what is understood by the term 'ajar.' Of that quadrant, or 90 degrees, which the door would describe in swinging so far open as to stand at right angles to the lobby, or to itself, in a closed position, 55 degrees at the least were exposed. Consequently, two out of three corpses were exposed to the young man's gaze. Where was the third? And the murderer—where was he? As to the murderer, he was walking rapidly backwards and forwards in the parlor, audible but not visible at first, being engaged with something or other in that part of the room which the door still concealed. What the something might be, the sound soon explained; he was applying keys tentatively to a cupboard, a closet, and a scrutoire, in the hidden part of the room. Very soon, however, he came into view; but, fortunately for the young man, at this critical moment, the murderer's purpose too entirely absorbed him to allow of his throwing a glance to the staircase, on which else the white figure of the journeyman, standing in motionless horror, would have been detected in one instant, and seasoned for the grave in the second. As to the third corpse, the missing corpse, viz., Mr. Williamson's, *that* is in the cellar; and how its local position can be accounted for, remains a separate question much discussed at the time, but never satisfactorily cleared up. Meantime, that Williamson was dead, became evident to the young man; since else he would have been heard stirring or groaning. Three friends, therefore, out of four, whom the young man had parted with forty minutes ago, were now extinguished; remained, therefore, 40 per cent. (a large per centage for Williams to leave); remained, in fact, himself and his pretty young friend, the little grand-daughter, whose childish innocence was still slumbering without fear for herself, or grief for her aged grand-parents. If *they* are gone for ever, happily one friend (for such he will prove himself, indeed, if from such a danger

he can save this child) is pretty near to her. But alas! he is still nearer to a murderer. At this moment he is unnerved for any exertion whatever; he has changed into a pillar of ice; for the objects before him, separated by just thirteen feet, are these:—The housemaid had been caught by the murderer on her knees; she was kneeling before the fire-grate, which she had been polishing with black lead. That part of her task was finished; and she had passed on to another task, viz., the filling of the grate with wood and coals, not for kindling at this moment, but so as to have it ready for kindling on the next day. The appearances all showed that she must have been engaged in this labor at the very moment when the murderer entered; and perhaps the succession of the incidents arranged itself as follows:—From the awful ejaculation and loud outcry to Christ, as overheard by the journeyman, it was clear that then first she had been alarmed; yet this was at least one and a-half or even two minutes after the door-slamming. Consequently the alarm which had so fearfully and seasonably alarmed the young man, must, in some unaccountable way, have been misinterpreted by the two women. It was said, at the time, that Mrs. Williamson labored under some dulness of hearing; and it was conjectured that the servant, having her ears filled with the noise of her own scrubbing, and her head half under the grate, might have confounded it with the street noises, or else might have imputed this violent closure to some mischievous boys. But, howsoever explained, the fact was evident, that, until the words of appeal to Christ, the servant had noticed nothing suspicious, nothing which interrupted her labors. If so, it followed that neither had Mrs. Williamson noticed anything; for, in that case, she would have communicated her own alarm to the servant, since both were in the same small room. Apparently the course of things after the murderer had entered the room was this:—Mrs. Williamson had probably not seen him, from the accident of standing with her back to the door. Her, therefore, before he was himself observed at all, he had stunned and prostrated by a shattering blow on the back of her head; this blow, inflicted by a crow-bar, had smashed in the hinder part of the skull. She fell; and by the noise of her fall (for all was the work of a moment) had first roused the attention of the servant; who then uttered the cry which had reached the young man; but before she could repeat it, the murderer had descended with his uplifted instrument upon *her* head, crushing the skull inwards upon the brain. Both the women were irrecoverably destroyed, so that further outrages were needless; and, moreover, the murderer was conscious of the imminent danger from delay; and yet, in spite of his hurry, so fully did he appreciate the fatal consequences to himself, if any of his victims should so far revive into consciousness as to make circumstantial depositions, that, by way of making this impossible, he had proceeded instantly to cut the throats of each. All this tallied with the appearances as now presenting themselves. Mrs. Williamson had fallen backwards with her head to the door; the servant, from her kneeling posture, had been incapable of rising, and had presented her head passively to blows; after which, the miscreant had but to bend her head backwards so as to expose her throat, and the murder was finished.

It is remarkable that the young artisan, paralyzed as he had been by fear, and evidently fascinated for a time so as to walk right towards the lion's mouth, yet found himself able to notice everything important. The reader must suppose him at this point watching the murderer whilst hanging over the body of Mrs. Williamson, and whilst renewing his search for certain important keys. Doubtless it was an anxious situation for the murderer; for, unless he speedily found the keys wanted, all this hideous tragedy would end in nothing but a prodigious increase of the public horror, in tenfold precautions therefore, and redoubled obstacles interposed between himself and his future game. Nay, there was even a nearer interest at stake; his own immediate safety might, by a probable accident, be compromised. Most of those who came to the house for liquor were giddy girls or children, who, on finding this house closed, would go off carelessly to some other; but, let any thoughtful woman or man come to the door now, a full quarter of an hour before the established time of closing, in that case suspicion would arise too powerful to be checked. There would be a sudden alarm given; after which, mere luck would decide the event. For it is a remarkable fact, and one that illustrates the singular inconsistency of this villain, who, being often so superfluously subtle, was in other directions

so reckless and improvident, that at this very moment, standing amongst corpses that had deluged the little parlor with blood, Williams must have been in considerable doubt whether he had any sure means of egress. There were windows, he knew, to the back; but upon what ground they opened, he seems to have had no certain information; and in a neighborhood so dangerous, the windows of the lower story would not improbably be nailed down; those in the upper might be free, but then came the necessity of a leap too formidable. From all this, however, the sole practical inference was to hurry forward with the trial of further keys, and to detect the hidden treasure. This it was, this intense absorption in one overmastering pursuit, that dulled the murderer's perceptions as to all around him; otherwise, he must have heard the breathing of the young man, which to himself at times became fearfully audible. As the murderer stood once more over the body of Mrs. Williamson, and searched her pockets more narrowly, he pulled out various clusters of keys, one of which dropping, gave a harsh gingling sound upon the floor. At this time it was that the secret witness, from his secret stand, noticed the fact of Williams's surtout being lined with silk of the finest quality. One other fact he noticed, which eventually became more immediately important than many stronger circumstances of incrimination; this was, that the shoes of the murderer, apparently new, and bought, probably, with poor Marr's money, creaked as he walked, harshly and frequently. With the new clusters of keys, the murderer walked off to the hidden section of the parlor. And here, at last, was suggested to the journeyman the sudden opening for an escape. Some minutes would be lost to a certainty trying all these keys; and subsequently in searching the drawers, supposing that the keys answered—or in violently forcing them, supposing that they did *not*. He might thus count upon a brief interval of leisure, whilst the rattling of the keys might obscure to the murderer the creaking of the stairs under the re-ascending journeyman. His plan was now formed: on regaining his bedroom, he placed the bed against the door by way of a transient retardation to the enemy, that might give him a short warning, and in the worst extremity, might give him a chance for life by means of a desperate leap. This change made as quietly as possible, he tore the sheets, pillow-cases, and blankets into broad ribbons; and after plaiting them into ropes, spliced the different lengths together. But at the very first he descries this ugly addition to his labors. Where shall he look for any staple, hook, bar, or other fixture, from which his rope, when twisted, may safely depend? Measured from the window-sill—*i.e.*, the lowest part of the window architrave—there count but twenty-two or twenty-three feet to the ground. Of this length ten or twelve feet may be looked upon as cancelled, because to that extent he might drop without danger. So much being deducted, there would remain, say, a dozen feet of rope to prepare. But, unhappily, there is no stout iron fixture anywhere about his window. The nearest, indeed the sole fixture of that sort, is not near to the window at all; it is a spike fixed (for no reason at all that is apparent) in the bed-tester; now, the bed being shifted, the spike is shifted; and its distance from the window, having been always four feet, is now seven. Seven entire feet, therefore, must be added to that which would have sufficed if measured from the window. But courage! God, by the proverb of all nations in Christendom, helps those that help themselves. This our young man thankfully acknowledges; he reads already, in the very fact of any spike at all being found where hitherto it has been useless, an earnest of providential aid. Were it only for himself that he worked, he could not feel himself meritoriously employed; but this is not so; in deep sincerity, he is now agitated for the poor child, whom he knows and loves; every minute, he feels, brings ruin nearer to *her*; and, as he passed her door, his first thought had been to take her out of bed in his arms, and to carry her where she might share his chances. But, on consideration, he felt that this sudden awaking of her, and the impossibility of even whispering any explanation, would cause her to cry audibly; and the inevitable indiscretion of one would be fatal to the two. As the Alpine avalanches, when suspended above the traveller's head, oftentimes (we are told) come down through the stirring of the air by a simple whisper, precisely on such a tenure of a whisper was now suspended the murderous malice of the man below. No; there is but one way to save the child; towards *her* deliverance, the first step is through his own. And he has made an excellent beginning; for the spike, which too fearfully he

had expected to see torn away by any strain upon the half-carious wood, stands firmly when tried against the pressure of his own weight. He has rapidly fastened on to it three lengths of his new rope, measuring eleven feet. He plaits it roughly; so that only three feet have been lost in the intertwisting; he has spliced on a second length equal to the first; so that, already, sixteen feet are ready to throw out of the window; and thus, let the worst come to the worst, it will not be absolute ruin to swarm down the rope so far as it will reach, and then to drop boldly. All this has been accomplished in about six minutes; and the hot contest between above and below is steadily but fervently proceeding. Murderer is working hard in the parlor; journeyman is working hard in the bedroom. Miscreant is getting on famously down-stairs; one batch of bank-notes he has already bagged; and is hard upon the scent of a second. He has also sprung a covey of golden coins. Sovereigns as yet were not; but guineas at this period fetched thirty shillings a-piece; and he has worked his way into a little quarry of these. Murderer is almost joyous; and if any creature is still living in this house, as shrewdly he suspects, and very soon means to know, with that creature he would be happy, before cutting the creature's throat, to drink a glass of something. Instead of the glass, might he not make a present to the poor creature of its throat? Oh no! impossible! Throats are a sort of thing that he never makes presents of; business—business must be attended to. Really the two men, considered simply as men of business, are both meritorious. Like chorus and semi-chorus, strophe and antistrophe, they work each against the other. Pull journeyman, pull murderer! Pull baker, pull devil! As regards the journeyman, he is now safe. To his sixteen feet, of which seven are neutralized by the distance of the bed, he has at last added six feet more, which will be short of reaching the ground by perhaps ten feet—a trifle which man or boy may drop without injury. All is safe, therefore, for him: which is more than one can be sure of for miscreant in the parlor. Miscreant, however, takes it coolly enough: the reason being, that, with all his cleverness, for once in his life miscreant has been over-reached. The reader and I know, but miscreant does not in the least suspect, a little fact of some importance, viz., that just now through a space of full three minutes he has been overlooked and studied by one, who (though reading in a dreadful book, and suffering under mortal panic) took accurate notes of so much as his limited opportunities allowed him to see, and will assuredly report the creaking shoes and the silk-mounted surtout in quarters where such little facts will tell very little to his advantage. But, although it is true that Mr. Williams, unaware of the journeyman's having 'assisted' at the examination of Mrs. Williamson's pockets, could not connect any anxiety with that person's subsequent proceedings', nor specially, therefore, with his having embarked in the rope-weaving line, assuredly he knew of reasons enough for not loitering. And yet he *did* loiter. Reading his acts by the light of such mute traces as he left behind him, the police became aware that latterly he must have loitered. And the reason which governed him is striking; because at once it records—that murder was not pursued by him simply as a means to an end, but also as an end for itself. Mr. Williams had now been upon the premises for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes; and in that space of time he had dispatched, in a style satisfactory to himself, a considerable amount of business. He had done, in commercial language, 'a good stroke of business.' Upon two floors, viz., the cellar-floor and the ground-floor, he has 'accounted for' all the population. But there remained at least two floors more; and it now occurred to Mr. Williams that, although the landlord's somewhat chilling manner had shut him out from any familiar knowledge of the household arrangements, too probably on one or other of those floors there must be some throats. As to plunder, he has already bagged the whole. And it was next to impossible that any arrear the most trivial should still remain for a gleaner. But the throats—the throats—there it was that arrears and gleanings might perhaps be counted on. And thus it appeared that, in his wolfish thirst for blood, Mr. Williams put to hazard the whole fruits of his night's work, and his life into the bargain. At this moment, if the murderer knew all, could he see the open window above stairs ready for the descent of the journeyman, could he witness the life- and-death rapidity with which that journeyman is working, could he guess at the almighty uproar which within ninety seconds will be maddening the population of this populous district—no picture of a maniac in flight of panic or in pursuit of vengeance would

adequately represent the agony of haste with which he would himself be hurrying to the street-door for final evasion. That mode of escape was still free. Even at this moment, there yet remained time sufficient for a successful flight, and, therefore, for the following revolution in the romance of his own abominable life. He had in his pockets above a hundred pounds of booty; means, therefore, for a full disguise. This very night, if he will shave off his yellow hair, and blacken his eyebrows, buying, when morning light returns, a dark-colored wig, and clothes such as may co-operate in personating the character of a grave professional man, he may elude all suspicions of impertinent policemen; may sail by any one of a hundred vessels bound for any port along the huge line of sea-board (stretching through twenty-four hundred miles) of the American United States; may enjoy fifty years for leisurely repentance; and may even die in the odor of sanctity. On the other hand, if he prefer active life, it is not impossible that, with *his* subtlety, hardihood, and unscrupulousness, in a land where the simple process of naturalization converts the alien at once into a child of the family, he might rise to the president's chair; might have a statue at his death; and afterwards a life in three volumes quarto, with no hint glancing towards No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway. But all depends on the next ninety seconds. Within that time there is a sharp turn to be taken; there is a wrong turn, and a right turn. Should his better angel guide him to the right one, all may yet go well as regards this world's prosperity. But behold! in two minutes from this point we shall see him take the wrong one: and then Nemesis will be at his heels with ruin perfect and sudden.

Meantime, if the murderer allows himself to loiter, the ropemaker overhead does *not*. Well he knows that the poor child's fate is on the edge of a razor: for all turns upon the alarm being raised before the murderer reaches her bedside. And at this very moment, whilst desperate agitation is nearly paralyzing his fingers, he hears the sullen stealthy step of the murderer creeping up through the darkness. It had been the expectation of the journeyman (founded on the clamorous uproar with which the street-door was slammed) that Williams, when disposable for his up-stairs work, would come racing at a long jubilant gallop, and with a tiger roar; and perhaps, on his natural instincts, he would have done so. But this mode of approach, which was of dreadful effect when applied to a case of surprise, became dangerous in the case of people who might by this time have been placed fully upon their guard. The step which he had heard was on the staircase—but upon which stair? He fancied upon the lowest: and in a movement so slow and cautious, even this might make all the difference; yet might it not have been the tenth, twelfth, or fourteenth stair? Never, perhaps, in this world did any man feel his own responsibility so cruelly loaded and strained, as at this moment did the poor journeyman on behalf of the slumbering child. Lose but two seconds, through awkwardness or through the self-counteractions of panic, and for *her* the total difference arose between life and death. Still there is a hope: and nothing can so frightfully expound the hellish nature of him whose baleful shadow, to speak astrologically, at this moment darkens the house of life, than the simple expression of the ground on which this hope rested. The journeyman felt sure that the murderer would not be satisfied to kill the poor child whilst unconscious. This would be to defeat his whole purpose in murdering her at all. To an epicure in murder such as Williams, it would be taking away the very sting of the enjoyment, if the poor child should be suffered to drink off the bitter cup of death without fully apprehending the misery of the situation. But this luckily would require time: the double confusion of mind, first, from being roused up at so unusual an hour, and, secondly, from the horror of the occasion when explained to her, would at first produce fainting, or some mode of insensibility or distraction, such as must occupy a considerable time. The logic of the case, in short, all rested upon the *ultra* fiendishness of Williams. Were he likely to be content with the mere fact of the child's death, apart from the process and leisurely expansion of its mental agony—in that case there would be no hope. But, because our present murderer is fastidiously finical in his exactions—a sort of martinet in the scenical grouping and draping of the circumstances in his murders—therefore it is that hope becomes reasonable, since all such refinements of preparation demand time. Murders of mere necessity Williams was obliged to hurry; but, in a murder of pure voluptuousness, entirely

disinterested, where no hostile witness was to be removed, no extra booty to be gained, and no revenge to be gratified, it is clear that to hurry would be altogether to ruin. If this child, therefore, is to be saved, it will be on pure aesthetical considerations.⁵

But all considerations whatever are at this moment suddenly cut short. A second step is heard on the stairs, but still stealthy and cautious; a third—and then the child's doom seems fixed. But just at that moment all is ready. The window is wide open; the rope is swinging free; the journeyman has launched himself; and already he is in the first stage of his descent. Simply by the weight of his person he descended, and by the resistance of his hands he retarded the descent. The danger was, that the rope should run too smoothly through his hands, and that by too rapid an acceleration of pace he should come violently to the ground. Happily he was able to resist the descending impetus: the knots of the splicings furnished a succession of retardations. But the rope proved shorter by four or five feet than he had calculated: ten or eleven feet from the ground he hung suspended in the air; speechless for the present, through long-continued agitation; and not daring to drop boldly on the rough carriage pavement, lest he should fracture his legs. But the night was not dark, as it had been on occasion of the Marr murders. And yet, for purposes of criminal police, it was by accident worse than the darkest night that ever hid a murder or baffled a pursuit. London, from east to west, was covered with a deep pall (rising from the river) of universal fog. Hence it happened, that for twenty or thirty seconds the young man hanging in the air was not observed. His white shirt at length attracted notice. Three or four people ran up, and received him in their arms, all anticipating some dreadful annunciation. To what house did he belong? Even *that* was not instantly apparent; but he pointed with his finger to Williamson's door, and said in a half-choking whisper—'*Marr's murderer, now at work!*'

All explained itself in a moment: the silent language of the fact made its own eloquent revelation. The mysterious exterminator of No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway had visited another house; and, behold! one man only had escaped through the air, and in his night-dress, to tell the tale. Superstitiously, there was something to check the pursuit of this unintelligible criminal. Morally, and in the interests of vindictive justice, there was everything to rouse, quicken, and sustain it.

Yes, Marr's murderer—the man of mystery—was again at work; at this moment perhaps extinguishing some lamp of life, and not at any remote place, but here—in the very house which the listeners to this dreadful announcement were actually touching. The chaos and blind uproar of the scene which followed, measured by the crowded reports in the journals of many subsequent days, and in one feature of that case, has never to my knowledge had its parallel; or, if a parallel, only in one case—what followed, I mean, on the acquittal of the seven bishops at Westminster in 1688. At present there was more than passionate enthusiasm. The frenzied movement of mixed horror and exultation—the ululation of vengeance which ascended instantaneously from the individual street, and then by a sublime sort of magnetic contagion from all the adjacent streets, can be adequately expressed only by a rapturous passage in Shelley:—

'The transport of a fierce and monstrous gladness
Spread through the multitudinous streets, fast flying
Upon the wings of fear:—From his dull madness
The starveling waked, and died in joy: the dying,
Among the corpses in stark agony lying,
Just heard the happy tidings, and in hope
Closed their faint eyes: from house to house replying

⁵ Let the reader, who is disposed to regard as exaggerated or romantic the pure fiendishness imputed to Williams, recollect that, except for the luxurious purpose of basking and revelling in the anguish of dying despair, he had no motive at all, small or great, for attempting the murder of this young girl. She had seen nothing, heard nothing—was fast asleep, and her door was closed; so that, as a witness against him, he knew that she was as useless as any one of the three corpses. And yet he *was* making preparations for her murder, when the alarm in the street interrupted him.

With loud acclaim the living shook heaven's cope,
And fill'd the startled earth with echoes.' ⁶

There was something, indeed, half inexplicable in the instantaneous interpretation of the gathering shout according to its true meaning. In fact, the deadly roar of vengeance, and its sublime unity, *could* point in this district only to the one demon whose idea had brooded and tyrannized, for twelve days, over the general heart: every door, every window in the neighborhood, flew open as if at a word of command; multitudes, without waiting for the regular means of egress, leaped down at once from the windows on the lower story; sick men rose from their beds; in one instance, as if expressly to verify the image of Shelley (in v. 4, 5, 6, 7), a man whose death had been looked for through some days, and who actually *did* die on the following day, rose, armed himself with a sword, and descended in his shirt into the street. The chance was a good one, and the mob were made aware of it, for catching the wolfish dog in the high noon and carnival of his bloody revels—in the very centre of his own shambles. For a moment the mob was self-baffled by its own numbers and its own fury. But even that fury felt the call for self-control. It was evident that the massy street-door must be driven in, since there was no longer any living person to co-operate with their efforts from within, excepting only a female child. Crowbars dexterously applied in one minute threw the door out of hangings, and the people entered like a torrent. It may be guessed with what fret and irritation to their consuming fury, a signal of pause and absolute silence was made by a person of local importance. In the hope of receiving some useful communication, the mob became silent. 'Now listen,' said the man of authority, 'and we shall learn whether he is above-stairs or below.' Immediately a noise was heard as if of some one forcing windows, and clearly the sound came from a bedroom above. Yes, the fact was apparent that the murderer was even yet in the house: he had been caught in a trap. Not having made himself familiar with the details of Williamson's house, to all appearance he had suddenly become a prisoner in one of the upper rooms. Towards this the crowd now rushed impetuously. The door, however, was found to be slightly fastened; and, at the moment when this was forced, a loud crash of the window, both glass and frame, announced that the wretch had made his escape. He had leaped down; and several persons in the crowd, who burned with the general fury, leaped after him. These persons had not troubled themselves about the nature of the ground; but now, on making an examination of it with torches, they reported it to be an inclined plane, or embankment of clay, very wet and adhesive. The prints of the man's footsteps were deeply impressed upon the clay, and therefore easily traced up to the summit of the embankment; but it was perceived at once that pursuit would be useless, from the density of the mist. Two feet ahead of you, a man was entirely withdrawn from your power of identification; and, on overtaking him, you could not venture to challenge him as the same whom you had lost sight of. Never, through the course of a whole century, could there be a night expected more propitious to an escaping criminal: means of disguise Williams now had in excess; and the dens were innumerable in the neighborhood of the river that could have sheltered him for years from troublesome inquiries. But favors are thrown away upon the reckless and the thankless. That night, when the turning-point offered itself for his whole future career, Williams took the wrong turn; for, out of mere indolence, he took the turn to his old lodgings—that place which, in all England, he had just now the most reason to shun.

Meantime the crowd had thoroughly searched the premises of Williamson. The first inquiry was for the young grand-daughter. Williams, it was evident, had gone into her room: but in this room apparently it was that the sudden uproar in the streets had surprised him; after which his undivided attention had been directed to the windows, since through these only any retreat had been left open to him. Even this retreat he owed only to the fog and to the hurry of the moment, and to the difficulty of approaching the premises by the rear. The little girl was naturally agitated by the influx of strangers

⁶ 'Revolt of Islam,' canto xii.

at that hour; but otherwise, through the humane precautions of the neighbors, she was preserved from all knowledge of the dreadful events that had occurred whilst she herself was sleeping. Her poor old grandfather was still missing, until the crowd descended into the cellar; he was then found lying prostrate on the cellar floor: apparently he had been thrown down from the top of the cellar stairs, and with so much violence, that one leg was broken. After he had been thus disabled, Williams had gone down to him, and cut his throat. There was much discussion at the time, in some of the public journals, upon the possibility of reconciling these incidents with other circumstantialities of the case, supposing that only one man had been concerned in the affair. That there *was* only one man concerned, seems to be certain. One only was seen or heard at Marr's: one only, and beyond all doubt the same man, was seen by the young journeyman in Mrs. Williamson's parlor; and one only was traced by his footmarks on the clay embankment. Apparently the course which he had pursued was this: he had introduced himself to Williamson by ordering some beer. This order would oblige the old man to go down into the cellar; Williams would wait until he had reached it, and would then 'slam' and lock the street-door in the violent way described. Williamson would come up in agitation upon hearing this violence. The murderer, aware that he would do so, met him, no doubt, at the head of the cellar stairs, and threw him down; after which he would go down to consummate the murder in his ordinary way. All this would occupy a minute, or a minute and a half; and in that way the interval would be accounted for that elapsed between the alarming sound of the street-door as heard by the journeyman, and the lamentable outcry of the female servant. It is evident also, that the reason why no cry whatsoever had been heard from the lips of Mrs. Williamson, is due to the positions of the parties as I have sketched them. Coming behind Mrs. Williamson, unseen therefore, and from her deafness unheard, the murderer would inflict entire abolition of consciousness while she was yet unaware of his presence. But with the servant, who had unavoidably witnessed the attack upon her mistress, the murderer could not obtain the same fulness of advantage; and *she* therefore had time for making an agonizing ejaculation.

It has been mentioned, that the murderer of the Marrs was not for nearly a fortnight so much as suspected; meaning that, previously to the Williamson murder, no vestige of any ground for suspicion in any direction whatever had occurred either to the general public or to the police. But there were two very limited exceptions to this state of absolute ignorance. Some of the magistrates had in their possession something which, when closely examined, offered a very probable means for tracing the criminal. But as yet they had *not* traced him. Until the Friday morning next after the destruction of the Williamsons, they had not published the important fact, that upon the ship-carpenter's mallet (with which, as regarded the stunning or disabling process, the murders had been achieved) were inscribed the letters 'J. P.' This mallet had, by a strange oversight on the part of the murderer, been left behind in Marr's shop; and it is an interesting fact, therefore, that, had the villain been intercepted by the brave pawnbroker, he would have been met virtually disarmed. This public notification was made officially on the Friday, viz., on the thirteenth day after the first murder. And it was instantly followed (as will be seen) by a most important result. Meantime, within the secrecy of one single bedroom in all London, it is a fact that Williams had been whisperingly the object of very deep suspicion from the very first—that is, within that same hour which witnessed the Marr tragedy. And singular it is, that the suspicion was due entirely to his own folly. Williams lodged, in company with other men of various nations, at a public-house. In a large dormitory there were arranged five or six beds; these were occupied by artisans, generally of respectable character. One or two Englishmen there were, one or two Scotchmen, three or four Germans, and Williams, whose birth-place was not certainly known. On the fatal Saturday night, about half-past one o'clock, when Williams returned from his dreadful labors, he found the English and Scotch party asleep, but the Germans awake: one of them was sitting up with a lighted candle in his hands, and reading aloud to the other two. Upon this, Williams said, in an angry and very peremptory tone, 'Oh, put that candle out; put it out directly; we shall all be burned in our beds.' Had the British party in the room been awake, Mr. Williams would have roused a mutinous

protest against this arrogant mandate. But Germans are generally mild and facile in their tempers; so the light was complaisantly extinguished. Yet, as there were no curtains, it struck the Germans that the danger was really none at all; for bed-clothes, massed upon each other, will no more burn than the leaves of a closed book. Privately, therefore, the Germans drew an inference, that Mr. Williams must have had some urgent motive for withdrawing his own person and dress from observation. What this motive might be, the next day's news diffused all over London, and of course at this house, not two furlongs from Marr's shop, made awfully evident; and, as may well be supposed, the suspicion was communicated to the other members of the dormitory. All of them, however, were aware of the legal danger attaching, under English law, to insinuations against a man, even if true, which might not admit of proof. In reality, had Williams used the most obvious precautions, had he simply walked down to the Thames (not a stone's-throw distant), and flung two of his implements into the river, no conclusive proof could have been adduced against him. And he might have realized the scheme of Courvoisier (the murderer of Lord William Russell) —viz., have sought each separate month's support in a separate well- concerted murder. The party in the dormitory, meantime, were satisfied themselves, but waited for evidences that might satisfy others. No sooner, therefore, had the official notice been published as to the initials J. P. on the mallet, than every man in the house recognized at once the well- known initials of an honest Norwegian ship-carpenter, John Petersen, who had worked in the English dockyards until the present year; but, having occasion to revisit his native land, had left his box of tools in the garrets of this inn. These garrets were now searched. Petersen's tool- chest was found, but wanting the mallet; and, on further examination, another overwhelming discovery was made. The surgeon, who examined the corpses at Williamson's, had given it as his opinion that the throats were not cut by means of a razor, but of some implement differently shaped. It was now remembered that Williams had recently borrowed a large French knife of peculiar construction; and accordingly, from a heap of old lumber and rags, there was soon extricated a waistcoat, which the whole house could swear to as recently worn by Williams. In this waistcoat, and glued by gore to the lining of its pockets, was found the French knife. Next, it was matter of notoriety to everybody in the inn, that Williams ordinarily wore at present a pair of creaking shoes, and a brown surtout lined with silk. Many other presumptions seemed scarcely called for. Williams was immediately apprehended, and briefly examined. This was on the Friday. On the Saturday morning (viz., fourteen days from the Marr murders) he was again brought up. The circumstantial evidence was overwhelming; Williams watched its course, but said very little. At the close, he was fully committed for trial at the next sessions; and it is needless to say, that, on his road to prison, he was pursued by mobs so fierce, that, under ordinary circumstances, there would have been small hope of escaping summary vengeance. But upon this occasion a powerful escort had been provided; so that he was safely lodged in jail. In this particular jail at this time, the regulation was, that at five o'clock, P. M. all the prisoners on the criminal side should be finally locked up for the night, and without candles. For fourteen hours (that is, until seven o'clock on the next morning) they were left unvisited, and in total darkness. Time, therefore, Williams had for committing suicide. The means in other respects were small. One iron bar there was, meant (if I remember) for the suspension of a lamp; upon this he had hanged himself by his braces. At what hour was uncertain: some people fancied at midnight. And in that case, precisely at the hour when, fourteen days before, he had been spreading horror and desolation through the quiet family of poor Marr, now was he forced into drinking of the same cup, presented to his lips by the same accursed hands.

* * * * *

The case of the M'Keans, which has been specially alluded to, merits also a slight rehearsal for the dreadful picturesqueness of some two or three amongst its circumstances. The scene of this murder was at a rustic inn, some few miles (I think) from Manchester; and the advantageous situation

of this inn it was, out of which arose the two fold temptations of the case. Generally speaking, an inn argues, of course, a close cincture of neighbors—as the original motive for opening such an establishment. But, in this case, the house individually was solitary, so that no interruption was to be looked for from any persons living within reach of screams; and yet, on the other hand, the circumjacent vicinity was eminently populous; as one consequence of which, a benefit club had established its weekly rendezvous in this inn, and left the peculiar accumulations in their club-room, under the custody of the landlord. This fund arose often to a considerable amount, fifty or seventy pounds, before it was transferred to the hands of a banker. Here, therefore, was a treasure worth some little risk, and a situation that promised next to none. These attractive circumstances had, by accident, become accurately known to one or both of the two M'Keans; and, unfortunately, at a moment of overwhelming misfortune to themselves. They were hawkers; and, until lately, had borne most respectable characters: but some mercantile crash had overtaken them with utter ruin, in which their joint capital had been swallowed up to the last shilling. This sudden prostration had made them desperate: their own little property had been swallowed up in a large *social* catastrophe, and society at large they looked upon as accountable to them for a robbery. In preying, therefore, upon society, they considered themselves as pursuing a wild natural justice of retaliation. The money aimed at did certainly assume the character of public money, being the product of many separate subscriptions. They forgot, however, that in the murderous acts, which too certainly they meditated as preliminaries to the robbery, they could plead no such imaginary social precedent. In dealing with a family that seemed almost helpless, if all went smoothly, they relied entirely upon their own bodily strength. They were stout young men, twenty-eight to thirty-two years old; somewhat undersized as to height; but squarely built, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, and so beautifully formed, as regarded the symmetry of their limbs and their articulations, that, after their execution, the bodies were privately exhibited by the surgeons of the Manchester Infirmary, as objects of statuesque interest. On the other hand, the household which they proposed to attack consisted of the following four persons:—1. the landlord, a stoutish farmer—but *him* they intended to disable by a trick then newly introduced amongst robbers, and termed *hocussing*, *i.e.*, clandestinely drugging the liquor of the victim with laudanum; 2. the landlord's wife; 3. a young servant woman; 4. a boy, twelve or fourteen years old. The danger was, that out of four persons, scattered by possibility over a house which had two separate exits, one at least might escape, and by better acquaintance with the adjacent paths, might succeed in giving an alarm to some of the houses a furlong distant. Their final resolution was, to be guided by circumstances as to the mode of conducting the affair; and yet, as it seemed essential to success that they should assume the air of strangers to each other, it was necessary that they should preconceive some general outline of their plan; since it would on this scheme be impossible, without awaking violent suspicions, to make any communications under the eyes of the family. This outline included, at the least, one murder: so much was settled; but, otherwise, their subsequent proceedings make it evident that they wished to have as little bloodshed as was consistent with their final object. On the appointed day, they presented themselves separately at the rustic inn, and at different hours. One came as early as four o'clock in the afternoon; the other not until half-past seven. They saluted each other distantly and shyly; and, though occasionally exchanging a few words in the character of strangers, did not seem disposed to any familiar intercourse. With the landlord, however, on his return about eight o'clock from Manchester, one of the brothers entered into a lively conversation; invited him to take a tumbler of punch; and, at a moment when the landlord's absence from the room allowed it, poured into the punch a spoonful of laudanum. Some time after this, the clock struck ten; upon which the elder M'Kean, professing to be weary, asked to be shown up to his bedroom: for each brother, immediately on arriving, had engaged a bed. On this, the poor servant girl had presented herself with a bed-candle to light him upstairs. At this critical moment the family were distributed thus:—the landlord, stupefied with the horrid narcotic which he had drunk, had retired to a private room adjoining the public room, for the purpose of reclining upon a sofa: and he, luckily for his own safety, was looked upon as entirely

incapacitated for action. The landlady was occupied with her husband. And thus the younger M'Kean was left alone in the public room. He rose, therefore, softly, and placed himself at the foot of the stairs which his brother had just ascended, so as to be sure of intercepting any fugitive from the bedroom above. Into that room the elder M'Kean was ushered by the servant, who pointed to two beds—one of which was already half occupied by the boy, and the other empty: in these, she intimated that the two strangers must dispose of themselves for the night, according to any arrangement that they might agree upon. Saying this, she presented him with the candle, which he in a moment placed upon the table; and, intercepting her retreat from the room threw his arm round her neck with a gesture as though he meant to kiss her. This was evidently what she herself anticipated, and endeavored to prevent. Her horror may be imagined, when she felt the perfidious hand that clasped her neck armed with a razor, and violently cutting her throat. She was hardly able to utter one scream, before she sank powerless upon the floor. This dreadful spectacle was witnessed by the boy, who was not asleep, but had presence of mind enough instantly to close his eyes. The murderer advanced hastily to the bed, and anxiously examined the expression of the boy's features: satisfied he was not, and he then placed his hand upon the boy's heart, in order to judge by its beatings whether he were agitated or not. This was a dreadful trial: and no doubt the counterfeit sleep would immediately have been detected, when suddenly a dreadful spectacle drew off the attention of the murderer. Solemnly, and in ghostly silence, uprose in her dying delirium the murdered girl; she stood upright, she walked steadily for a moment or two, she bent her steps towards the door. The murderer turned away to pursue her; and at that moment the boy, feeling that his one solitary chance was to fly while this scene was in progress, bounded out of bed. On the landing at the head of the stairs was one murderer, at the foot of the stairs was the other: who could believe that the boy had the shadow of a chance for escaping? And yet, in the most natural way, he surmounted all hindrances. In the boy's horror, he laid his left hand on the balustrade, and took a flying leap over it, which landed him at the bottom of the stairs, without having touched a single stair. He had thus effectually passed one of the murderers: the other, it is true, was still to be passed; and this would have been impossible but for a sudden accident. The landlady had been alarmed by the faint scream of the young woman; had hurried from her private room to the girl's assistance; but at the foot of the stairs had been intercepted by the younger brother, and was at this moment struggling with *him*. The confusion of this life-and- death conflict had allowed the boy to whirl past them. Luckily he took a turn into a kitchen, out of which was a back-door, fastened by a single bolt, that ran freely at a touch; and through this door he rushed into the open fields. But at this moment the elder brother was set free for pursuit by the death of the poor girl. There is no doubt, that in her delirium the image moving through her thoughts was that of the club, which met once a- week. She fancied it no doubt sitting; and to this room, for help and for safety she staggered along; she entered it, and within the doorway once more she dropped down, and instantly expired. Her murderer, who had followed her closely, now saw himself set at liberty for the pursuit of the boy. At this critical moment, all was at stake; unless the boy were caught, the enterprise was ruined. He passed his brother, therefore, and the landlady without pausing, and rushed through the open door into the fields. By a single second, perhaps, he was too late. The boy was keenly aware, that if he continued in sight, he would have no chance of escaping from a powerful young man. He made, therefore, at once for a ditch, into which he tumbled headlong. Had the murderer ventured to make a leisurely examination of the nearest ditch, he would easily have found the boy—made so conspicuous by his white shirt. But he lost all heart, upon failing at once to arrest the boy's flight. And every succeeding second made his despair the greater. If the boy had really effected his escape to the neighboring farm-house, a party of men might be gathered within five minutes; and already it might have become difficult for himself and his brother, unacquainted with the field paths, to evade being intercepted. Nothing remained, therefore, but to summon his brother away. Thus it happened that the landlady, though mangled, escaped with life, and eventually recovered. The landlord owed his safety to the stupefying potion. And the baffled murderers had the misery of knowing that their

dreadful crime had been altogether profitless. The road, indeed, was now open to the club-room; and, probably, forty seconds would have sufficed to carry off the box of treasure, which afterwards might have been burst open and pillaged at leisure. But the fear of intercepting enemies was too strongly upon them; and they fled rapidly by a road which carried them actually within six feet of the lurking boy. That night they passed through Manchester. When daylight returned, they slept in a thicket twenty miles distant from the scene of their guilty attempt. On the second and third nights, they pursued their march on foot, resting again during the day. About sunrise on the fourth morning, they were entering some village near Kirby Lonsdale, in Westmoreland. They must have designedly quitted the direct line of route; for their object was Ayrshire, of which county they were natives; and the regular road would have led them through Shap, Penrith, Carlisle. Probably they were seeking to elude the persecution of the stage-coaches, which, for the last thirty hours, had been scattering at all the inns and road-side *cabarets*

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