

The Spectre-Smitten

By Samuel Warren

Few topics of medical literature have occasioned more wide and contradictory speculation than that of insanity, with reference, as well to its predisposing and immediate causes, as to its best method of treatment. Since experience is the only substratum of real knowledge, the surest way of arriving at those principles which may regulate our researches, especially concerning the subtle disorder mania, is, when one does meet with some well-marked case, to watch it closely throughout, and be particularly anxious to seize on all those more transient indications, which are truer characteristics of the complaint than perhaps any other. With this object did I pay close attention to the very singular case detailed in the following narrative. The apparent eccentricity of the title will be found accounted for in the course of the narrative.

Mr M, as one of a very large party, had been enjoying the splendid hospitality of Lady —, and did not leave till a late, or rather early, hour in the morning. Pretty women, music, and champagne had almost turned his head, and it was rather fortunate for him that a hackney-coach stand was within a stone's-throw of the house he was leaving. Muffling his cloak closely around him, he contrived to move towards it in a tolerably direct line, and a few moments' time beheld him driving, at the usual snail's pace of those rickety vehicles, to Lincoln's Inn; for Mr M was a law student. In spite of the transient exhilaration produced by the scenes he had just quitted, and the excitement consequent on the prominent share he took in an animated though accidental discussion, in the presence of about thirty of the most elegant women that could well be brought together, he found himself becoming the subject of a most unaccountable depression of spirits. Even while at Lady —'s, he had latterly perceived himself talking often for mere talking's sake, the chain of his thoughts perpetually broken, and an impatience and irritability of manner towards those whom he addressed, which he readily resolved, however, into the reaction following high excitement.

M, I ought before, perhaps, to have mentioned, was a man of great talent—chiefly, however, imaginative—and had that evening been particularly brilliant on his favourite topic, *diablerie* and mysticism. He had been dilating, in particular, on the power possessed by Mr Maturin of exciting the most fearful and horrific ideas in the minds of his readers, instancing a particular passage of one of his romances, the title of which I have forgotten, where the fiend suddenly presents himself to his appalled victim, amidst the silence and gloom of his prison-cell. Long before he had reached home the fumes of the wine had evaporated, and the influence of excitement subsided; and with reference to intoxication, he was sober and calm as ever he was in his life. *Why* he knew not, but his heart seemed to grow heavier and heavier, and his thoughts gloomier, every step by which he neared Lincoln's Inn.

It struck three o'clock as he entered the sombrous portals of the ancient inn of court. The silence, the moonlight shining sadly on the dusky buildings, the cold, quivering stars—all these together combined to enhance his nervousness. He described it to me as though things seemed to wear a strange, spectral, supernatural aspect. Not a watchman of the inn was heard crying the hour, not a porter moving—no living being but himself visible in the large square he was crossing. As he neared his staircase, he perceived his heart fluttering; in short, he felt under some strange, unaccountable influence, which, had he reflected a little, he would have discovered to arise merely from an excitable nervous temperament operating on an imagination peculiarly

attuned to sympathies with terror. His chambers lay on the third floor of the staircase, and, on reaching it, he found his door-lamp glimmering with its last expiring ray. He opened his door, and after groping some time in the dark of his sitting-room, found his chamber-candlestick. In attempting to light his candle, he put out the lamp. He went downstairs, but found that the lamp of every landing had shared the fate of his own; so he returned rather irritated, thinking to amerce the porter of his customary Christmas-box for his niggard supply of oil. After some time spent in the search, he discovered his finder-box, and proceeded to strike a light. This was not the work of a moment; and where is the bachelor to whom it is! The potent spark, however, dropped at last into the very centre of the soft tinder; M blew—it caught—spread! the match quickly kindled, and he lighted his candle. He took it in his hand, and was making for bed, when his eyes caught a glimpse of an object which brought him senseless to the floor. The furniture of his room was disposed as when he had left it, for his laundress had neglected to come and put things in order: the table, with a few books on it, was drawn towards the fireplace, and by its side stood the ample-cushioned easy-chair.

The first object visible, with sudden distinctness, was a figure sitting in the arm-chair. It was that of a gentleman dressed in dark-coloured clothes, his hands, white as alabaster, closed together over his lap, and the face looking away; but it turned slowly towards M, revealing to him a countenance of a ghastly hue, the features glowing like steel heated to a white heat; and the two eyes turned full towards him, and blazing—absolutely blazing, he described it—with a most horrible lustre.

The appalling spectre, while M's eyes were riveted upon it, though glazing fast with fright, slowly rose from its seat, stretched out both its arms, and seemed approaching him, when he fell down senseless on the floor, as if smitten with apoplexy. He recollected nothing more till he found himself, about the middle of the next day, in bed—his laundress, myself and apothecary, and several others, standing round him.

His situation was not discovered till more than an hour after he had fallen, as nearly as could be subsequently ascertained—nor would it then but for a truly fortunate accident. He had neglected to close either of his outer doors (I believe it is usual for chambers in the inns of court to have double outer doors), and an old woman who happened to be leaving the adjoining set about five o'clock, on seeing Mr M's doors both open at such an untimely hour, was induced, by feelings of curiosity and alarm, to return to the rooms she had left for a light, with which she entered his chambers, after having repeatedly called his name without receiving any answer.

What will it be supposed had been her occupation at such an early hour in the adjoining chambers?—Laying out the corpse of their occupant, a Mr T, who had expired about eight o'clock the preceding evening! Mr M had known him, though not very intimately; and there were some painful circumstances attending his death which, even though on no other grounds than mere sympathy, M had laid much to heart. In addition to this, he had been observed by his friends as being latterly the subject of very high excitement, owing to the successful prosecution of an extensive literary undertaking. We all accounted for his present situation by referring it to some apoplectic seizure; for we were, of course, ignorant of the real occasion, fright, which I did not learn till long afterwards. The laundress told me that she found Mr M stretched along the floor in his cloak and full dress, and with a candlestick lying beside him. She at first supposed him intoxicated; but on finding all her efforts to rouse him unsuccessful, and seeing his fixed features and rigid frame, she hastily summoned to her assistance a fellow-laundress whom she had left in charge of the corpse next door, undressed him, and laid him on the bed.

A neighbouring medical man was then called in, who pronounced it to be a case of epilepsy; and he was sufficiently warranted by the appearance of a little froth about the lips, prolonged stupor, resembling sleep, and frequent convulsions of the most violent kind. The remedies resorted to produced no alleviation of the symptoms; and matters continued to wear such a threatening and alarming aspect, that I was summoned in by his brother, and was at his bedside by two o'clock. His countenance was dark, and highly intellectual; its lineaments were, naturally, full of power and energy, but *now* overclouded with an expression of trouble and horror. He was seized with a dreadful fit soon after I had entered the room.

M was a very powerful man; and, during the fits, it was next to impossible for all present, united, to control his movements. The foam at his mouth suggested to his terrified brother that the case was one of hydrophobia. None of my assurances to the contrary sufficed to quiet him, and his distress added to the confusion of the scene. After prescribing to the best of my ability, I left, considering the case to be one of simple epilepsy. During the rest of the day and night the fits abated both in violence and frequency; but he was left in a state of the utmost exhaustion, from which, however, he seemed to be rapidly recovering during the space of the four succeeding days, when I was suddenly summoned to his bedside, which I had left only two hours before, with the intelligence that he had disclosed symptoms of more alarming illness than ever.

I hurried to his chambers, and found that the danger had not been magnified. One of his friends met me on the staircase, and told me that, about half an hour before, while he and Mr C M, the patient's brother, were sitting beside him, he suddenly enquired, in a tone full of apprehension and terror, 'Is Mr T dead?' 'Oh, dear! yes; he died several days ago,' was the reply. 'Then it was he,' he gasped, 'it was *he* whom I saw, and he is surely *darned!* Yes, merciful Maker! he is, he is!' he continued, elevating his voice to a perfect roar; 'and the flames have reduced his face to ashes! Horror! horror! horror!' He then shut his eyes, and relapsed into silence for about ten minutes, when he exclaimed, 'Hark you, there—secure me! tie me! make me fast, or I shall burst upon you and destroy you all, for I am going mad—I feel it!' He ceased, and commenced breathing fast and heavily, his chest heaving as if under the pressure of enormous weight, and his swelling, quivering features evidencing the dreadful uproar within. Presently he began to grind his teeth, and his expanding eyes glared about him in all directions, as though following the motions of some frightful object, and he muttered fiercely through his closed teeth, 'Oh! save me from him—save me—save me!'

It was a fearful thing to see him lying in such a state, grinding his teeth as if he would crush them to powder—his livid lips crested with foam—his features swollen, writhing, blackening; and, which gave his face a peculiarly horrible and fiendish expression, his eyes distorted, or inverted upwards, so that nothing but the glaring whites of them could be seen—his whole frame rigid—and his hands clenched, as though they would never open again! Every one round the bedside of the unfortunate patient stood trembling with pale and momentarily averted faces. The return of these epileptic fits, in such violence, and after such an interval, alarmed me with apprehensions, lest, as is not unfrequently the case, apoplexy should supervene, or even ultimate insanity. It was rather singular that M was never known to have had an epileptic fit, previous to the present seizure, and he was then in his twenty-fifth year.

I was then conjecturing what sudden fright or blow, or accident of any kind, or congestions of the vessels of the brain, from frequent inebriation, could have brought on the present fit, when my patient, whose features had gradually sunk again into their natural disposition, gave a sigh of exhaustion—the perspiration burst forth, and he murmured—some time before we could distinctly catch the words, 'Oh! spectre-smitten! spectre-smitten!' (which expression I have

adopted as the title of this paper) 'I shall never recover again!' We endeavoured to divert his thoughts from the fantasy, if such there were, which seemed to possess them, by enquiring into the nature of his symptoms. He disregarded us, however; feebly grasped my hand in his clammy fingers, and, looking at me languidly, muttered, 'What—oh, what brought the fiend into *my* chambers?'—and I felt his whole frame pervaded by a cold shiver. 'Poor T! Horrid fate!'

On hearing him mention T's name, a suspicion crossed our minds that his highly-wrought feelings, acting on a strong imagination, always tainted with superstitious terrors, had conjured up some hideous object, which had scared him nearly to madness—probably some fancied apparition of his deceased neighbour. He began again to utter long deep-drawn groans, that gradually gave place to the heavy stertorous breathing, which, with other symptoms—his pulse for instance, beating about 115 a minute—confirmed me in the opinion that he was suffering from a very severe congestion of the vessels of the brain. I directed copious venesection—his head to be shaven, and covered perpetually with cloths soaked in evaporating lotions—blisters behind his ears and at the nape of the neck—and appropriate internal medicines.

I then left him, apprehending the worst consequences: for I had once before a similar case under my care—one in which a young lady was, which I strongly suspected to be the case with M, absolutely frightened to death, and went through nearly the same round of symptoms as those which were beginning to make their appearance in my present patient—a sudden epileptic seizure, terminating in outrageous madness, which destroyed both the physical and intellectual energies; and the young lady expired.

The next morning, about eleven, saw me again at Mr M's chambers, where I found three or four members of his family—two of them his married sisters—seated round his sitting-room fire, in melancholy silence. Mr —, the apothecary, had just left, but was expected to return to meet me in consultation. My patient lay alone in his bedroom asleep, and apparently better than he had been since his first seizure. He had experienced only one slight fit during the night; and though he had been a little delirious in the earlier part of the evening, he had been, on the whole, so calm and quiet, that his friends' apprehensions of insanity were beginning to subside; so he was left, as I said, *alone*; for the nurse, just before my arrival, had left her seat by his bedside for a few moments, thinking him 'in a comfortable and easy nap,' and was engaged, in a low whisper, conversing with the members of M's family, who were in the sitting-room. Hearing such a report of my patient, I sat down quietly among his relatives, determining not to disturb him, at least till the arrival of the apothecary. Thus were we engaged, questioning the nurse in an undertone, when a loud laugh from the bedroom suddenly silenced our whisperings, and turned us all pale. We started to our feet with blank amazement in each countenance, scarcely crediting the evidence of our senses. Could it be M? It *must*, there was none else in the room. What, then, was he laughing about? While we were standing silently gazing on one another, with much agitation, the laugh was repeated, but longer and louder than before, accompanied with the sound of footsteps, now crossing the room—then, as if of one jumping! The ladies turned paler than before, and seemed scarcely able to stand. They sank again into their chairs, gasping with terror. 'Go in, nurse, and see what's the matter,' said I, standing by the side of the younger of the ladies, whom I expected every instant to fall into my arms in a swoon.

'Doctor!—go in?—I—I—I dare not!' stammered the nurse, pale as ashes, and trembling violently.

'Do you come here, then, and attend to Mrs —,' said I, 'and I will go'. The nurse staggered to my place, in a state not far removed from that of the lady whom she was called to attend; for a third laugh—long, loud, uproarious—had burst from the room while I was speaking. After

cautioning the ladies and the nurse to observe profound silence, and not to attempt following me till I sent for them, I stepped noiselessly to the bedroom door, and opened it slowly and softly, not to alarm him.

All was silent within; but the first object that presented itself, when I saw fairly into the room, can never be effaced from my mind to the day of my death. Mr M had got out of bed, pulled off his shirt, and stepped to the dressing-table, where he stood stark naked before the glass, with a razor in his right hand, with which he had just finished shaving off his eye-brows; and he was eyeing himself steadfastly in the glass, holding the razor elevated above his head. On seeing the door open, and my face peering at him, he turned full towards me (the grotesque aspect of his countenance, denuded of so prominent a feature as his eyebrows, and his head completely shaved, and the wildfire of madness flashing from his staring eyes, exciting the most frightful ideas), brandishing the razor over his head with an air of triumph, and shouting nearly at the top of his voice, 'Ah, ha, ha!—What do you think of this?'

Merciful Heaven! may I never be placed again in such perilous circumstances, nor have my mind overwhelmed with such a gush of horror as burst over it at that moment! What was I to do? Obeying a sudden impulse, I had entered the room, shutting the door after me; and, should anyone in the sitting-room suddenly attempt to open it again, or make a noise or disturbance of any kind, by giving vent to their emotions, what was to become of the madman or ourselves? He might, in an instant, almost sever his head from his shoulders, or burst upon me or his sisters, and do us some deadly mischief! I felt conscious that the lives of all of us depended on my conduct; and I devoutly thank God for the measure of tolerable self-possession which was vouchsafed to me at that dreadful moment. I continued standing like a statue, motionless and silent, endeavouring to fix my eye on him, that I might gain the command of his; that successful, I had some hopes of being able to deal with him. He, in turn, now stood speechless, and I thought he was quailing—that I had overmastered him—when I was suddenly fit to faint with despair, for at that awful instant I heard the door-handle tried—the door pushed gently open—and saw the nurse, I supposed, or one of the ladies, peeping through it. The maniac also heard it—the spell was broken—and, in a frenzy, he leaped several times successively in the air, brandishing the razor over his head as before.

While he was in the midst of these feats, I turned my head hurriedly to the person who had so cruelly disobeyed my orders, thereby endangering my life, and whispered in low, affrighted accents, 'At the peril of your lives— of mine—shut the door—away, away—hush! or we are all murdered!' I was obeyed—the intruder withdrew, and I heard a sound as if she had fallen to the floor, probably in a swoon. Fortunately the madman was so occupied with his antics, that he did not observe what had passed at the door. It was the nurse who made the attempt to discover what was going on, I afterwards learned—but unsuccessfully, for she had seen nothing. My injunctions were obeyed to the letter, for they maintained silence, unbroken but by a faint sighing sound, which I should not have heard, but that my ears were painfully sensitive to the slightest noise. To return, however, to myself and my fearful chamber companion.

'Mighty talisman!' he exclaimed, holding the razor before him, and gazing earnestly at it, 'how utterly unworthy—how infamous the common use men put thee to!' Still he continued standing with his eyes fixed intently upon the deadly weapon—I all the while uttering not a sound, nor moving a muscle, but waiting for our eyes to meet once more.

'Ha! Doctor —! how easily I keep you at bay, though little my weapon—*thus*,' he gaily exclaimed, at the same time assuming one of the postures of the broadsword exercise; but I observed that he *cautiously avoided meeting my eye again*. I crossed my arms submissively on

my breast, and continued in perfect silence, endeavouring, but in vain, to catch a glance of his eye. I did not wish to excite any emotion in him, except such as might have a tendency to calm, pacify, disarm him. Seeing me stand thus, and manifesting no disposition to meddle with him, he raised his left hand to his face, and rubbed his fingers rapidly over the site of his shaved eyebrows.

He seemed, I thought, inclined to go over them a second time, when a knock was heard at the outer chamber door, which I instantly recognized as that of Mr —, the apothecary. The madman also heard it, and turned suddenly pale, and moved away from the glass opposite which he had been stooping. ‘Oh—oh!’ he groaned, while his features assumed an air of the blankest affright, every muscle quivering, and every limb trembling from head to foot—‘Is that—is—is that T come for me?’ He let fall the razor on the floor, and clasping his hands in an agony of apprehension, he retreated, crouching and cowering down, towards the more distant part of the room, where he continued peering round the bed-post, his eyes straining, as though they would start from their sockets, and fixed steadfastly upon the door. I heard him rustling the bed-curtain and shaking it; but very gently, as if wishing to cover and conceal himself within its folds. My attention was wholly occupied with one object, the razor on the floor. How I thanked God for the gleam of hope that all might yet be right—that I might succeed in obtaining possession of the deadly weapon, and putting it beyond his reach! I stole gradually towards the spot where the razor lay, without removing once my eye from his, nor he his from the dreaded door, intending, as soon as I should have come pretty near it, to make a sudden snatch at the horrid implement of destruction. I did—I succeeded—I got it into my possession. I had hardly grasped my prize when the door opened, and Mr —, the apothecary, entered, sufficiently startled and bewildered, as it may be supposed, with the strange aspect of things.

‘Ha—ha—ha! It’s *you*, is it—it’s you—you anatomy!—you plaster! How dare you mock me in this horrid way, eh?’ shouted the maniac; and, springing like a lion from his lair, he made for the spot where the confounded apothecary stood, stupified with terror. I verily believe he would have been destroyed, torn to pieces, or cruelly maltreated in some way or other, had I not started and thrown myself between the maniac and the unwitting object of his vengeance, exclaiming at the same time, as a *dernier ressort*, a sudden and strong appeal to his fears—‘Remember!—T! T! T!’

‘I do—I do!’ stammered the maniac, stepping back perfectly aghast. He seemed utterly petrified, and sank shivering down again into his former position at the corner of the bed, moaning—‘Oh me! wretched me! Away—away—away!’ I then stepped to Mr —, who had not moved an inch, directed him to retire instantly, conduct all the females out of the chambers, and return as soon as possible with two or three of the inn-porters, or any other able-bodied men he could procure on the spur of the moment; and I concluded by slipping the razor, unobservedly as I thought, into his hands, and bidding him remove it to a place of safety. He obeyed, and I found myself once more alone with the madman.

‘M! dear Mr M! I’ve got something to say to you—I have indeed; it’s very, very particular.’ I commenced, approaching him slowly, and speaking in the softest tones conceivable.

‘But you’ve forgotten *this*, you fool, you!—you have!’ he replied fiercely, approaching the dressing-table, and suddenly seizing another razor—the fellow of the one I had got hold of with such pains and peril—and which, alas, alas! had never once caught my eye! I gave myself up for lost, fully expecting that I should be murdered, when I saw the bloodthirsty spirit with which he clutched it, brandished it over his head, and with a smile of fiendish derision, shook it full before me! I trembled, however, the next moment, for himself; for he drew it rapidly to and fro before

his throat, as though he would give the fatal gash, but did not touch the skin. He gnashed his teeth with a kind of savage satisfaction, at the dreadful power with which he was consciously armed.

‘Oh, Mr M! think of your poor mother and sisters!’ I exclaimed in a sorrowful tone, my voice faltering with uncontrollable agitation. He shook the razor again before me with an air of defiance, and really ‘grinned horribly a ghastly smile.’

‘Now, suppose I choose to punish your perfidy, you wretch! and do what you dread, eh?’ said he, holding the razor as if he were going to cut his throat.

‘Why, wouldn’t it be nobler to forgive and forget, Mr M?’ I replied with tolerable firmness, and folding my arms on my breast, anxious to appear quite at ease.

‘Too—too—too doctor!—Too—too—too—too! Ha! by the way—what do you say to a *razor hornpipe*—eh?—Ha, ha, ha! a novelty at least!’ He began forthwith to dance a few steps, leaping frantically high, and uttering at intervals a sudden, shrill dissonant cry, resembling that used by those who dance the Highland ‘fling’, or some other species of Scottish dance I affected to admire his dancing, even to ecstasy, clapping my hands and shouting, ‘Bravo, bravo! Encore!’ He seemed inclined to go over it again, but was too much exhausted, and sat down panting on the window seat, which was close behind him.

‘You’ll catch cold, Mr M, sitting in that draught of air, naked and perspiring as you are. Will you put on your clothes?’ said I, approaching him.

‘No!’ he replied sternly, and extended the razor threateningly. I fell back, of course, not knowing what to do, nor choosing to risk either his destruction or my own by attempting any active interference; for what was to be done with a madman who had an open razor in his hand? Mr —, the apothecary, seemed to have been gone an age; and I found even my *temper* beginning to fail me, for I was tired with his tricks, deadly dangerous as they were.

My attention, however, was soon riveted again on the motions of the maniac. ‘Yes—yes, decidedly so—I’m too hot to do it now—I am!’ said he, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and eyeing the razor intently. ‘I must get calm and cool—and then—*then* for the sacrifice! Aha, the sacrifice! An offering—expiation—even as Abraham—ha, ha, ha! But, by the way, how did Abraham do it—that is, how did he intend to have done it? Ah, I must ask my familiar?’

‘A *sacrifice*, Mr M? Why, what do you mean?’ I enquired, attempting a laugh—I say, *attempting*—for my blood trickled chillily through my veins, and my heart seemed frozen.

‘What do I mean, eh? Wretch! Dolt! What do I mean? Why, a peace-offering to my Maker, for a badly spent life, to be sure! One would think that you had never *heard* of such a thing as religion, you savage!’

‘I deny that the sacrifice would be accepted; and for two reasons,’ I replied, suddenly recollecting that he plumed himself on his casuistry, and hoping to engage him on some new crotchet, which might keep him in play till Mr — returned with assistance; but I was mistaken!

‘Well, well, Doctor —, let *that* be for the present—I can’t resolve doubts now—no, no,’ he replied solemnly—‘tis a time for action—for action—for action,’ he continued, gradually elevating his voice, using vehement gesticulations, and rising from his seat.

‘Yes, yes,’ said I warmly; ‘but though you’ve followed closely enough the advice of the Talmudist, in shaving off your eyebrows, as a preparatory—’

‘Aha! aha! What!—have *you* seen the Talmud!—have you really? Well,’ he added, after a doubtful pause, ‘in what do you think I’ve failed, eh?’

I need hardly say that I myself scarcely knew what led me to utter the nonsense in question; but I have several times found, in cases of insanity, that suddenly and readily supplying a motive for the patient's conduct—referring it to a *cause*, of some sort or other, with steadfast intrepidity—even be the said cause never so preposterously absurd—has been attended with the happiest effects, in arresting the patient's attention. I have several times recommended this little device to those who have been entrusted with the care of the insane, and have been assured of its success.

'You are very near the mark, I own; but it strikes me that you have shaved them off too equally, too uniformly. You ought to have left some little ridges—furrows—hem, hem!—to—to—to terminate, or resemble the—the *striped stick* which Jacob held up before the ewes!'

'Oh—ay—ay! Exactly—true! Strange oversight!' he replied, as if struck with the truth of the remark, and yet puzzled by vain attempts to corroborate it by his own recollections; 'I—I recollect it now—but it isn't too late yet— is it?'

'I think not,' I replied, with apparent hesitation, hardly crediting the success of my strange stratagem. 'To be sure, it will require very great delicacy; but as you have not shaved them off *very* closely, I think I can manage it,' I continued doubtfully.

'Oh, oh, oh!' growled the maniac, while his eyes flashed fire at me. 'There's one sitting by me that tells me you are dealing falsely with me—oh, lying villain! oh, perfidious wretch!' At that moment the door opened gently behind me, and the voice of Mr —, the apothecary, whispered in a low hurried tone, 'Doctor, I have got three of the inn-porters here, in the sitting-room.' Though the whisper was almost inaudible even to me, when uttered close to my ear, to my utter amazement M had heard every syllable of it, and understood it too, as if some officious minion of Satan himself had quickened his ears, or conveyed the intelligence to him.

'Ah, ha, ha!—Ha, ha, ha!—Fools! knaves, harpies!—and what are you and your hired desperadoes to me? Thus—thus do I outwit you—thus!' and, springing from his seat, he suddenly drew up the lower part of the window frame, and looked through it—then at the razor—and again at me, with one of the most awful glances—full of dark diabolical meaning, the momentary suggestion, surely, of the great Tempter—that I ever encountered in my life.

'Which!—which!—which!' he muttered fiercely through his closed teeth, while his right foot rested on the window-seat, ready for him to spring out, and his eye travelled, as before, rapidly from the razor to the window. Can anything be conceived more palsying to the beholders? 'Why did not you and your strong reinforcement spring at once upon him and overpower him?' possibly someone is asking. What! and he armed with a *naked razor*? His head might have been severed from his shoulders, before we could have over-mastered him—or we might ourselves—at least one of us—have been murdered, or cruelly maimed in the attempt. We knew not *what* to do!

M suddenly withdrew his head from the window through which he had been gazing, with a shuddering, horror-stricken emotion, and groaned, 'No! no! no! I won't—can't—for there's T standing just beneath, his face all blazing, and waiting with outspread arms to catch me,' standing, at the same time shading his eyes with his left hand—when I whispered, 'Now, now, go up to him, secure him—all three spring on him at once, and disarm him!'

They obeyed me, and were in the act of rushing into the room, when M suddenly planted himself into a posture of defiance, elevated the razor to his throat, and almost howled, 'One step—one step nearer—and I—I—I—so!' motioning as though he would draw it from one ear to the other. We all fell back, horror struck, and in silence. What could we do? If we moved towards him, or made use of any threatening gestures, we should see the floor in an instant

deluged with his blood. I once more crossed my arms on my breast, with an air of mute submission.

‘Ha, ha!’ he exclaimed after a pause, evidently pleased with such a demonstration of his power, ‘obedient, however!—well—that’s one merit! But still, what a set of cowards—bullies you must all be! What! all four of you afraid of one man?’ In the course of his frantic gesticulations, he had drawn the razor so close to his neck, that its edge had slightly grazed the skin under his left ear, and a little blood trickled from it over his shoulders and breast.

‘Blood!—*blood?* What a strange feeling! How coldly it fell on my breast! How did I do it? Shall—I—go—on, as I have made a beginning?’ he exclaimed, drawling the words at great length. He shuddered, and—to my unutterable joy and astonishment—deliberately closed the razor, replaced it in its case, put both in the drawer; and having done all this, before we ventured to approach him, he fell at his full length on the floor, and began to yell in a manner that was perfectly frightful; but, in a few moments, he burst into tears, and cried and sobbed like a child.

We took him up in our arms, he groaning, ‘Oh! shorn of my strength!—shorn! shorn like Samson! Why part with my weapon? The Philistines be upon me!’—and laid him down on the bed, where, after a few moments, he fell asleep.

When he awoke again, a strait-waistcoat put all his tremendous strugglings at defiance, though his strength seemed increased in a tenfold degree, and prevented his attempting either his own life or that of any one near him. When he found all his writhings and heavings utterly useless, he gnashed his teeth, the foam issued from his mouth, and he shouted, ‘I’ll be even with you, you incarnate devils! I will!—I’ll suffocate myself!’ and he held his breath till he grew black in the face, when he gave over the attempt. It was found necessary to have him strapped down to the bed; and his howlings were so shocking and loud, that we began to think of removing him, even in that dreadful condition, to a madhouse. I ordered his head to be shaved again, and kept perpetually covered with cloths soaked in evaporating lotions; blisters to be applied behind each ear, and at the nape of the neck; leeches to the temples; and the appropriate internal medicines in such cases; and left him, begging I might be sent for instantly in the event of his getting worse.

Oh! I shall never forget this harrowing scene! My feelings were wound up almost to bursting; nor did they recover their proper tone for many a week. I cannot conceive that the people whom the New Testament speaks of as being ‘possessed of devils’ could have been more dreadful in appearance, or more outrageous in their actions, than was M; nor can I help suggesting the thought, that, possibly, they were in reality nothing more than the maniacs of the worst kind. And is not a man transformed into a devil, when his reason is utterly overturned?

On seeing M the next morning, I found he had passed a terrible night—that the constraint of the strait-waistcoat filled him incessantly with a fury that was absolutely diabolical. His tongue was dreadfully lacerated; and the whites of his eyes, with perpetual straining, were discoloured with a reddish hue, like ferrets’ eyes. He was truly a piteous spectacle!

He lay in a most precarious state for a fortnight; and though the fits of outrageous madness had ceased or become much mitigated, and interrupted not unfrequently with ‘lucid intervals’, as the phrase is, I began to be apprehensive of his sinking eventually into that deplorable condition, idiocy.

During one of his intervals of sanity—when the savage field relaxed for a moment the hold he had taken of the victim’s faculties—M said something according with a fact which it was impossible for him to have any knowledge of by the senses, which was to me inexplicable. It was about nine o’clock in the morning of the third day after that on which the scene above described took place that M, who was lying in a state of lassitude and exhaustion, scarcely able to open his

eyes, turned his head slowly towards Mr —, the apothecary, who was sitting by his bedside, and whispered to him, ‘They are preparing to bury that wretched fellow next door—hush! hush!—one of the coffin trestles has fallen—hush!’ Mr — and the nurse, who had heard him, both strained their ears to listen, but could hear not even a mouse stirring. ‘There’s somebody come in—a lady, kissing his lips before he’s screwed down. Oh! I hope she won’t be scorched—that’s all!’ He then turned away his head, with no appearance of emotion, and presently fell asleep.

Through curiosity Mr looked at his watch, and from subsequent enquiry ascertained that, sure enough, about the time when his patient had spoken, they were about burying his neighbour; that one of the trestles *did* slip a little aside, and the coffin, in consequence, was near falling; and finally, marvellous to tell, that a lady, one of the deceased’s relatives, I believe, did come and kiss the corpse, and cry bitterly over it! Neither Mr — nor the nurse heard any noise whatever during the time of the burial preparations next door, for the people had been earnestly requested to be as quiet about them as possible, and really made no disturbance whatever.

By what strange means he had acquired his information—whether or not he was indebted for some portion of it to the exquisite delicacy, the morbid sensitiveness of the organs of hearing, I cannot conjecture; but how are we to account for the latter part of what he uttered, about the lady’s kissing the corpse, etc?

On another occasion, during one of his most placid moods, but not in any lucid interval, he insisted on my taking pen, ink, and paper, and turning amanuensis. To quiet him, I acquiesced, and wrote what he dictated; and the manuscript now lies before me, and is, *verbatim et literatim*, as follows:

‘I, T M, saw—what saw I? A solemn silver grove—there were *innumerable spirits* sleeping among the branches—(and it is this, though unobserved of naturalists, that makes the aspen tree’s leaves to quiver so much—it is this, I say, namely, the rustling movements of the spirits)—and in the midst of this grove was a beautiful site for a statue, and one there assuredly was—but *what* a statue! Transparent, of a stupendous size, through which—the sky was cloudy and troubled—a ship was seen sinking at sea, and the crew at cards; but the *good spirit* of the storm saved them, for he showed them the key of the universe: and a shoal of sharks, with murderous eyes, were disappointed of a meal. Lo, man, behold!—another part of this statue—what a one!—has a *fissure* in it: it opens—widens into a parlour, in darkness; and now shall be disclosed the *horror of horrors*; for lo! some one sitting—easy chair—fiery face—fiend—fiend—O God! O God! save me!’ cried he.

He ceased speaking, with a shudder; nor did he resume the dictation, for he seemed in a moment to have forgotten that he had dictated at all. I preserved the paper; and, gibberish though it is, I consider it both curious and highly characteristic throughout. Judging from the latter part of it, where he speaks of a ‘dark parlour, with some fiery-faced fiend sitting in an easy-chair’, and coupling this with various similar expressions and allusions which he made during his ravings, I felt convinced that his fancy was occupied with some one individual image of horror, which had scared him into madness, and now clung to his disordered faculties like a fiend. He often talked about ‘spectres’, ‘spectral’; and uttered incessantly the words ‘spectre-smitten’. The nurse once asked him what he meant by these words. He started—grew disturbed—his eye glanced with affright—and he shook his head, exclaiming ‘Horror!’

A few days afterwards he hired an amanuensis, who, of course, was duly apprized of the sort of person he had to deal with; and, after a painfully ludicrous scene, M attempting to beat down the man’s terms from a guinea and a half a week, to half-a-crown, he engaged him for three guineas, he said, and insisted on his taking up his station at the side of the bed, in order that he might

minute down every word that was uttered. M told him he was going to dictate a romance! It would have required, in truth, the 'pen of a ready writer' to keep pace with poor M's utterance; for he raved on at a prodigious rate, in a strain, it need hardly be said, of unconnected absurdities. Really, it was inconceivable nonsense; rhapsodical rantings in the Maturin style, full of vaults, sepulchres, spectres, devils, magic; with here and there a thought of real poetry. It was piteous to peruse it! His amanuensis found it impossible to keep up with him, and therefore profited by a hint from one of us, and instead of writing, merely moved his pen rapidly over the paper, scrawling all sorts of ragged lines and figures to resemble writing!

M never asked him to read it over, nor requested to see it for himself; but, after about fifty pages were done, dictated a title-page—pitched on publishers—settled the price and number of volumes—*four!*—and then exclaimed, 'Well!—thank God—*that's* off my mind at last!' He never mentioned it afterwards; and his brother committed the whole to the flames about a week after. M had not, however, yet done with his amanuensis, but put his services in requisition in quite another capacity—that of reader. Milton was the book he selected; and, actually, they went through very nearly nine books, M perpetually interrupting him with comments, sometimes saying surpassingly absurd, and occasionally very fine, forcible things.

As there was no prospect of his speedily recovering the use of his reasoning faculties, he was removed to a private asylum, where I attended him regularly for more than six months. He was reduced to a state of drivelling idiocy—complete fatuity! Lamentable! heart-rending! Oh! how deplorable to see a man of superior intellect—one whose services are really wanted in society—the prey of madness! Dr Johnson was well known to express a peculiar horror of insanity. 'O God!' said he, 'afflict my body with what tortures Thou willest, but *spare my reason.*' Where is he that does not join him in uttering such a prayer?

The reader may possibly recollect seeing something like the following expression occurring in 'The Broken Heart'. 'A candle flickering and expiring in its socket, which suddenly shoots up into an instantaneous brilliance, and then is utterly extinguished.' I have referred to it merely because it affords a very apt illustration—apter than any that now suggests itself to me—of what sometimes takes place in madness. The roaring flame of insanity sinks into the sullen, smouldering embers of complete fatuity, and remains so for months, when, like that of the candle just alluded to, it will instantaneously gather up and concentrate its expiring energies into one terrific blaze, one final paroxysm of outrageous mania, and lo! it has consumed itself utterly, burnt itself out, and the patient is unexpectedly restored to reason.

The experience of my medical readers, if it has lain in the track of insanity, must have presented such cases to their notice not unfrequently. However metaphysical ingenuity may set us speculating about 'the why and wherefore of it', the *fact* is undeniable. It was thus with Mr M. He had sunk into the orable condition of a simple, harmless, melancholy idiot, and was released from formal constraint; but suddenly, one morning while at breakfast, he sprang upon the person who always attended him, and had not the man been very muscular, and practised in such matters, he must have been soon overpowered, and perhaps murdered. A long and deadly wrestle took place between them. Thrice they threw each other; and the keeper saw that the madman several times cast a longing eye towards a knife which lay on the breakfast-table, and endeavoured to sway his antagonist so as to get himself within its reach. Both were getting exhausted with the prolonged struggle; and the keeper, really afraid of his life, determined to settle matters as soon as possible. The instant, therefore, that he could get his right arm disengaged, he hit poor M a dreadful blow on the side of the head, which felled him, and he lay senseless on the floor, the blood pouring fast from his ears, nose, and mouth. He was again

confined in a strait-waistcoat, and conveyed to bed, when, what with exhaustion, and the effect of the medicines which had been administered, he fell into profound sleep, which continued all day and, with little intermission, through the night. When he awoke in the morning, lo! he was 'in his right mind'. His calm, tranquillized features, and the sobered expression of his eyes, showed that the sun of reason had really once more dawned upon his long-benighted faculties.

I heard of the good news before I saw him, and, on hastening to his room, found it was indeed so; his altered appearance, at first sight, amply corroborated it! How different the mild, sad smile now beaming on his pallid features, from the vacant stare, the unmeaning laugh of idiocy, or the fiendish glare of madness! He spoke in a very feeble, almost inarticulate voice, complained of dreadful exhaustion, whispered something indistinctly about 'waking from a long and dreary dream,' and said that he felt, as it were, only half awake or alive—all was new, strange, startling! Fearful of taxing too much his newborn powers, I feigned an excuse and took my leave, recommended him cooling and quieting medicines, and perfect seclusion from visitors. How exhilarated I felt my own spirits all that day!

He gradually, very gradually, but surely recovered. One of the earliest indications of his reviving interest in life, 'and all its busy, thronging scenes,' was an abrupt enquiry whether Trinity Term had commenced, and whether or not he was now eligible to be called to the bar. He was utterly unconscious that three terms had flitted over him while he lay in the gloomy wilderness of insanity; and when I satisfied him of this fact, he alluded with a sigh to the beautiful thought of one of our old dramatists, who, illustrating the unconscious lapse of years over 'Endymion', makes one tell him—'And behold, the twig to which thou laidest thy head, is now become a tree!'

It was not till several days after his restoration to reason that I ventured to enter into anything like detailed conversation with him, or to make particular allusions to his late illness; and on this occasion it was that he related to me his *rencontre* with the fearful object which had overturned his reason; adding, with intense emotion, that not ten thousand a year should induce him to live in the same chambers any more. During the course of his progress towards complete recovery, memory shot its strengthening rays further and further back into the inspissated gloom in which the long interval of insanity had shrouded his mind; but it was too dense, too 'palpable and obscure', to be ever completely and thoroughly illuminated.

The rays of recollection, however, settled distinctly on some of the more prominent points, and I was several times astonished by his sudden reference to things which he had said and done during the 'very depth and quagmire of his disorder.' He asked me once, for instance, whether he had not made an attempt on his life, and with a razor, and how it was that he did not succeed. He had no recollection, however, of the long and deadly struggle with his keeper—at least, he never made the slightest allusion to it; nor, of course, did anyone else.

'I don't much mind talking these horrid things over with you, doctor, for you know all the ins and outs of the whole affair; but if any of my friends or relatives presume to torture me with any allusions or enquiries of this sort, I'll fight them—they'll drive me mad again!' The reader may suppose the hint was not disregarded.

'Did the horrible spectre which occasioned your illness in the first instance ever present itself to you afterwards?' I once enquired. He paused and turned pale. Presently he replied, with considerable agitation: 'Yes, yes; it scarcely ever left me. It has not always preserved its spectral consistency, but has entered into the most astounding, the most preposterous combinations conceivable with other objects and scenes—all of them, however, more or less of a distressing or

fearful character, many of them terrific!’ I begged him, if it were not unpleasant to him, to give me a specimen of them.

‘It is certainly far from gratifying to trace scenes of such shame and horror, but I will comply as far as I am able,’ said he, rather gloomily. ‘Once I saw him’ (meaning the spectre) ‘leading on an army of huge speckled and crested serpents against me; and when they came upon me—for I had no power to run away—I suddenly found myself in the midst of a pool of stagnant water, absolutely alive with slimy, shapeless reptiles; and while endeavouring to make my way out, *he* rose to the surface, his face hissing in the water and blazing bright as ever! Again, I thought I saw him in single combat, by the gates of Eden, with Satan, and the air thronged and heated with swart faces looking on!’ This was unquestionably some dim, confused recollection of the Milton readings, in the earlier part of his illness.

‘Again, I thought I was in the act of opening my snuff box, when *he* issued from it, diminutive at first in size, but swelling soon into gigantic proportions, and his fiery features diffusing a light and heat around that absolutely scorched and blasted! At another time, I thought I was gazing upwards on a sultry summer sky, and in the midst of a luminous fissure in it, made by the lightning, I distinguished *his* accursed figure, with his glowing features wearing an expression of horror, and his limbs outstretched, as if he had been hurled down from some height or other, and was falling through the sky towards me. He came—he came—flung himself into my recoiling arms, and clung to me, burning, scorching, withering my soul within me! I thought, further, that I was all the while the subject of strange, paradoxical, contradictory feelings towards him—that I, at one and the same time, loved and loathed, feared and despised him!’ He mentioned several other instances of the confusions in his ‘chamber of imagery’.

I told him of his sudden exclamation concerning Mr T—’s burial, and its singular corroboration; but he either did not, or affected not to recollect anything about it. He told me he had a full and distinct recollection of being for a long time possessed with the notion of making himself a ‘sacrifice’ of some sort or other, and that he was seduced or goaded on to do so by the spectre, by the most dazzling temptations, and under the most appalling threats—one of which latter was, that God would plunge him into hell for ever if he did not offer up himself; that if he did so, he should be a sublime spectacle to the universe, etc, etc, etc.

‘Do you recollect anything about dictating a novel or a romance?’ He started, as if struck with some sudden recollection. ‘No; but I’ll tell you what I recollect well—that the spectre and I were set to copy all the tales and romances that ever had been written, in a large, bold, round hand, and then translate them into Greek or Latin verse!’ He smiled, nay, even laughed at the thought, almost the first time of his giving way to such emotions since his recovery. He added that, as to the latter, the idea of the utter hopelessness of ever getting through such a stupendous undertaking never once presented itself to him, and that he should have gone on with it, but that he lost his inkstand!

‘Had you ever a clear and distinct idea that you had lost the right use of reason?’

‘Why, about that, to tell the truth, I’ve been puzzling myself a good deal, and yet I cannot say anything decisive. I *do* fancy that at times I had short, transient glimpses into the real state of things, but they were so evanescent. I am conscious of feeling, at these times, incessant fury, arising from a sense of personal constraint, and I longed once to strangle some one who was giving me medicine.’

But one of the most singular of all is yet to come. He still persisted—yes, then, after his complete recovery, as we supposed—in avowing his belief that we had hired a huge boa-serpent from Exeter ‘Change to come and keep constant watch over him, to constrain his movements

when he threatened to become violent, and that it lay constantly coiled up under his bed for that purpose; that he could now and then feel the motions—the writhing, undulating motions—of its coils; hear it utter a sort of sigh, and see it often elevate its head over the bed, and play with its slippery, delicate, forked tongue over his face, to soothe him to sleep.

When poor M, with a serious, earnest air, assured me *he* still believed all this, my hopes of his complete and final restoration to sanity were dashed at once! How such an absurd idea could possibly be persisted in, I was bewildered in attempting to conceive. I frequently strove to reason him out of it, but in vain. To no purpose did I burlesque and caricature the notion almost beyond all bounds; it was useless to remind him of the blank impossibility of it; he regarded me with such a face as I should exhibit to a fluent personage quite in earnest in demonstrating to me that the moon was made of green cheese.