

The Thunder-Struck¹

By Samuel Warren

In the summer of 18—, London was visited by one of the most tremendous thunder-storms that have been known in this climate. Its character and effects—some of which latter form the subject of this chapter—will make me remember it to the latest hour of my life.

There was something portentous—a still, surcharged air—about the whole of Tuesday, the 10th of July 18—, as though nature were trembling and cowering beneath a common shock. In the exquisite language of one of our old dramatists,² there seemed

—A calm

Before a tempest, when the gentle air
Lays her soft ear close to the earth, to listen
For that she fears steals on to ravish her.

From about eleven o'clock at noon, the sky wore a lurid threatening aspect, that shot awe into the beholder; suggesting to startled fancy the notion, that within the dim confines of the "labouring air," mischief was working to the world.

The heat was intolerable, keeping almost everybody within doors. The dogs, and other cattle in the streets, stood everywhere panting and loath to move. There was no small excitement, or rather agitation, diffused throughout the country, especially London; for, strange to say (and many must recollect the circumstance), it had been for some time confidently foretold by certain enthusiasts, religious as well as philosophic, that the earth was to be destroyed that very day; in short, that the tremendous JUDGMENT was at hand! Though not myself over-credulous, or given to superstitious fears, I own that on coupling these fearful predictions with the unusual, and almost preternatural aspect of the day, I more than once experienced sudden qualms of apprehension as I rode along on my daily rounds. I did not so much communicate alarm to the various circles I entered, as catch it from them. Then, again, I would occasionally pass a silent group of passengers clustering round a street-preacher, who, true to his vocation, "redeeming the time," seemed by his gestures, and the disturbed countenances around him, to be foretelling all that was frightful. The tone of excitement which pervaded my feelings, was further heightened by a conversation on the prevailing topic which I had in the course of the morning with the distinguished poet and scholar, Mr. —. With what fearful force did he suggest possibilities; what vivid, startling colouring did he throw over them! It was, indeed, a topic congenial to his gloomy imagination. He talked to me, in short, till my disturbed fancy began to realise the wildest chimeras.

"Great God, Dr. —!" said he, laying his hand suddenly on my arm, his great black eyes gleaming with mysterious awe, "Think, only think! What if, at the moment we are talking together, a comet, whose track the peering eye of science has never traced—whose very existence is known to none but God—is winging its fiery way towards our earth, swift as the

¹ This is a narrative—for obvious reasons somewhat varied in circumstances—of a lamentable occurrence in the author's family. About fourteen years ago, a very beautiful girl, eighteen years old, terrified at a violent thunder-storm, rushed into a cellar to escape, as she thought, from the danger, and was found there in the state described in the text. She died four days afterwards.

² Marlowe.

lightning, and with force inevitable! Is it at this instant dashing to fragments some mighty orb that obstructed its progress, and then passing on towards us, disturbing system after system in its way?—How—when will the frightful crash be felt? Is its heat now blighting our atmosphere?—Will combustion first commence, or shall we be at once split asunder into innumerable fragments, and sent drifting through infinite space?—W’hither—whither shall we fly? what must become of our species?—Is the Scriptural JUDGMENT then coming?—Oh, doctor, what if all these things *are really at hand?*”

Was this imaginative raving calculated to calm one’s feelings?—By the time I reached home, late in the afternoon, I felt in a fever of excitement. I found an air of apprehension throughout the whole house. My wife, children, and a young lady, a visitor, were all together in the parlour, looking out for me, through the window, anxiously—and with paler faces than they perhaps were aware of. The visitor just alluded to, by the way, was a Miss Agnes P , a girl of about twenty-one, the daughter of an old friend and patient of mine. Her mother, a widow (with no other child than this), resided in a village about fifty miles from town—from which she was expected, in a few days’ time, to take her daughter back again into the country. Miss P— was a very charming young woman. There was a softness of expression about her delicate features, that in my opinion constitutes the highest style of feminine loveliness. Her dark, pensive, searching eyes, spoke a soul full of feeling. The tones of her voice, mellow and various, and her whole carriage and demeanour, were in accordance with the expression of her features. In person she was about the average height, and perfectly well moulded and proportioned; and there was a Hebelike ease and grace about all her gestures. She excelled in most feminine accomplishments; but her favourite objects were music and romance. A more imaginative creature was surely never known. It required all the fond and anxious surveillance of her friends to prevent her carrying her tastes to excess, and becoming, in a manner, unfitted for the “dull commerce of a duller earth!”

No sooner had this young lady made her appearance in my house, and given token of something like a prolonged stay, than I became the most popular man in the circle of my acquaintance. Such assiduous calls to inquire after *my* health, and that of my family!—Such a multitude of men—young ones, to boot—and so embarrassed with a consciousness of the poorness of the pretence that drew them to my house! Such matronly inquiries from mothers and elderly female relatives, into the nature and extent of “sweet Miss P—’s expectations!” During a former stay at my house, about six months before the period of which I am writing, Miss P— surrendered her affections—to the delighted surprise of all her friends and relatives—to the quietest, and perhaps worthiest of her claimants—a young man, then preparing for orders at Oxford. Never, sure, was there a greater contrast between the tastes of a pledged couple; she all feeling, romance, enthusiasm; he serene, thoughtful, and matter-of-fact. It was most amusing to witness their occasional collisions on subjects which developed their respective tastes and qualities; and interesting to note that the effect was invariably to raise the one in the other’s estimation—as if each prized most the qualities of the other. Young N— had spent two days in London—the greater portion of them, I need hardly say, at my house—about a week before the period of which I am writing; and he and his fair mistress had disputed rather keenly on the topic of general discussion—the predicted event of the 10th of July. If she did not repose implicit faith in the prophecy, her belief had, somehow or another, acquired a most disturbing strength. He laboured hard to disabuse her of her awful apprehensions—and she as hard to overcome his obstinate incredulity. Each was a little too eager about the matter; and, for the first time since they had known each other, they parted with a *little* coldness— yes, although he was to set off the next morning for Oxford! In short, scarcely anything was talked about by Agnes but the coming 10th of July; and if she did not anticipate the actual destruction of the globe, and the final judgment of mankind, she at least looked forward to some event, mysterious and tremendous.

The eloquent enthusiastic creature almost brought over my placid, little, matter-of-fact wife to her way of thinking!

To return from this long digression—which, however, will be presently found to have been not unnecessary. After staying a few minutes in the parlour, I retired to my library, for the purpose, among other things, of making those entries in my Diary, from which these “Passages” are taken—but the pen lay useless in my hand. With my chin resting on the palm of my left hand, I sat at my desk lost in a reverie; my eyes fixed on the tree which grew in the yard and overshadowed my windows. How still—how motionless was every leaf! What sultry—oppressive—*unusual* repose! How it would have cheered me to hear the faintest “sough” of wind—to see the breeze sweep freshening through the leaves, rustling and stirring them into life! I opened my window, untied my neckerchief, and loosened my shirt-collar—for I felt suffocated with the heat. I heard at length a faint pattering sound among the leaves of the tree—and presently there fell on the window-frame three or four large ominous drops of rain. After gazing upwards for a moment or two on the gloomy aspect of the sky, I once more settled down to writing; and was dipping my pen into the ink-stand, when there blazed about me a flash of lightning, with such a ghastly, blinding splendour, as defies all description. It was like what one might conceive to be a glimpse of hell—and yet not a *glimpse* merely—for it continued, I think, six or seven seconds. It was followed, at scarce an instant’s interval, with a crash of thunder as if the world had been smitten out of its sphere, and was rending asunder!—I hope these expressions will not be considered hyperbolic. No one, I am sure, who recollects the occurrence I am describing, will require the appeal! —May I never see or hear the like again! I leaped from my chair with consternation; and could think of nothing at the moment, but closing my eyes, and shutting out from my ears the stunning sound of the thunder. For a moment I stood literally stupefied. On recovering myself, my first impulse was to spring to the door, and rush downstairs in search of my wife and children. I heard, on my way, the sound of shrieking proceed from the parlour in which I had left them. In a moment I had my wife folded in my arms, and my children clinging with screams round my knees. My wife had fainted. While I was endeavouring to restore her, there came a second flash of lightning, equally terrible with the first—and a second explosion of thunder, loud as one could imagine the discharge of a thousand parks of artillery, directly overhead. The windows—in fact, the whole house quivered with the shock. The noise helped to recover my wife from her swoon.

“Kneel down! Love! Husband!” she gasped, endeavouring to drop upon her knees, “Kneel down! Pray—pray for us! *It is at hand!*” After shouting several times pretty loudly, and pulling the bell repeatedly and violently, one of the servants made her appearance—but evidently terrified and bewildered. She and her mistress, however, recovered themselves in a few minutes, roused by ‘the cries of the children. “Wait a moment, love,” said I, “and I will bring you a little sal-volatile!” I stepped into the back room, where I generally kept a few phials of drugs—and poured out what I wanted. The thought then for the first time struck me, that I had not seen Miss P— in the parlour I had just quitted. *Where* was she? What would *she* say to all this?—“God bless me, where is she?” I thought, with increasing trepidation.

“Edward—Edward,” I exclaimed, to a servant who happened to pass the door of the room where I was standing; “where’s Miss P—?”

“Miss P—, sir!—Why—I don’t—oh, yes!” he replied, suddenly recollecting himself, “about five minutes ago I saw her run very quickly upstairs, and haven’t seen her since, sir.”

“What!” I exclaimed with increasing trepidation, “was it about the time that the first flash of lightning came?” “Yes, it was, sir!”—“Take this in to your mistress, and say I’ll be with her immediately,” said I, giving him what I had mixed. I rushed upstairs, calling out as I went,

“Agnes! Agnes! where are you?” I received no answer. At length I reached the floor where her bedroom lay. The door was closed, but not shut.

“Agnes! Where are you?” I inquired, very agitatedly, at the same time knocking at her door. I received no answer.

“Agnes! Agnes! For God’s sake speak!—Speak, or I shall come into your room!” No reply was made; and I thrust open the door. Heavens! Can I describe what I saw?

Within less than a yard of me stood the most fearful figure my eyes have ever beheld. It was Agnes!—She was in the attitude of stepping to the door, with both arms extended. Her hair was partially dishevelled. Her face seemed whiter than the white dress she wore. Her lips were of a livid hue. Her eyes, full of awful expression, were fixed with a petrifying stare on me. Oh, language fails me—utterly!—Those eyes have seldom since been absent from me when alone! I strove to speak—but could not utter a sound. My lips seemed rigid as those I looked at. The horrors of nightmare seemed upon me. My eyes at length closed; my head seemed turning round—and for a moment or two I lost all consciousness. I revived. *There* was the frightful thing still before me—nay, close to me! Though I looked at her, I never once thought of Agnes P—. It was the tremendous appearance—the ineffable terror gleaming from her eyes, that thus overcame me. I protest I cannot conceive anything more dreadful! Miss P— continued standing perfectly motionless; and while I was gazing at her in the manner I have been describing, a peal of thunder roused me to my self-possession. I stepped towards her, took hold of her hand, exclaiming, “Agnes—Agnes!” and carried her to the bed, where I laid her down. It required some little force to press down her arms; and I drew the eyelids over her staring eyes mechanically. While in the act of doing so, a flash of lightning flickered luridly over her—but her eye neither quivered nor blinked. She seemed to have been suddenly deprived of all sense and motion: in fact, nothing but her pulse—if pulse it should be called—and faint breathing, showed that she lived. My eye wandered over her whole figure, dreading to meet some scorching trace of lightning—but there was nothing of the kind. What had happened to her? Was she frightened—to death? I spoke to her; I called her by her name, loudly; I shook her, rather violently: I might have acted it all to a statue! —I rang the chamber bell with almost frantic violence: and presently my wife and a female servant made their appearance in the room; but I was far more embarrassed than assisted by their presence. “Is she killed?” murmured the former, as she staggered towards the bed, and then clung convulsively to me—“Has the lightning struck her?”

I was compelled to disengage myself from her grasp, and hurry her into the adjoining room—whither I called a servant to attend her; and then returned to my hapless patient. But what was I to do? Medical man as I was, I never had seen a patient in such circumstances, and felt as ignorant on the subject as agitated. It was not epilepsy—it was not apoplexy—a swoon—nor any known species of hysteria. The most remarkable feature of her case, and what enabled me to ascertain the nature of her disease, was this; that if I happened accidentally to alter the position of her limbs, they retained, for a short time, their new position. If, for instance, I moved her arm—it remained for a while in the situation in which I had last placed it, and gradually resumed its former one. If I raised her into an upright posture, she continued sitting so without the support of pillows, or other assistance, as exactly as if she had heard me express a wish to that effect, and assented to it; but—the horrid vacancy of her aspect! If I elevated one eyelid for a moment, to examine the state of the eye, it was some time in closing, unless I drew it over myself. All these circumstances—which terrified the servant who stood shaking at my elbow, and muttering, “She’s possessed! she’s possessed!—Satan has her!” convinced me at length that the unfortunate girl was seized with CATALEPSY; that rare mysterious affection, so fearfully blending the conditions of life and death—presenting—so to speak—life in the aspect of death, and death in that of life! I felt no doubt that extreme terror, operating suddenly on a nervous system most

highly excited, and a vivid, active fancy, had produced the effects I saw. Doubtless the first terrible outbreak of the thunder-storm—especially the fierce splendour of that first flash of lightning which so alarmed myself—apparently corroborating and realising all her awful apprehensions of the predicted event, overpowered her at once, and flung her into the fearful situation in which I found her—that of one ARRESTED in her terror-struck flight towards the door of her chamber. But again—the thought struck me— had she received any direct injury from the lightning? Had it blinded her? It might be so—for I could make no impression on the pupils of the eyes. Nothing could startle them into action. They seemed a little more dilated than usual, and fixed.

I confess that, besides the other agitating circumstances of the moment, this extraordinary, this unprecedented case, too much distracted my self-possession to enable me promptly to deal with it. I had heard and read of, but never before seen such a case, No time, however, was to be lost. I determined to resort at once to strong anti-spasmodic treatment. I bled her from the arm freely, applied blisters behind the ears, immersed her feet, which, together with her hands, were cold as those of a statue, in hot water, and endeavoured to force into her mouth a little opium and ether. Whilst the servants were busied about her, undressing her, and carrying my directions into effect, I stepped for a moment into the adjoining room, where I found my wife just recovering from a violent fit of hysterics. Her loud laughter, though so near me, I had not once heard, so absorbed was I with the mournful case of Miss P—. After continuing with her till she recovered sufficiently to accompany me downstairs, I returned to Miss P—'s bedroom. She continued exactly in the condition in which I had left her. Though the water was hot enough almost to parboil her tender feet, it produced no sensible effect on the circulation, or the state of the skin; and finding a strong determination of blood towards the regions of the head and neck, I determined to have her cupped between the shoulders. I went downstairs to drop a line to the apothecary, requesting him to come immediately with his cupping instruments. As I was delivering the note into the hands of a servant, a man rushed up to the open door where I was standing, and, breathless with haste, begged my instant attendance on a patient close by, who had just met with a severe accident. Relying on the immediate arrival of Mr. —, the apothecary, I put on my hat and great-coat, took my umbrella, and followed the man who had summoned me out. It rained in torrents; for the storm, after about twenty minutes' intermission, burst forth again with unabated violence. The thunder and lightning—peal upon peal—blaze upon blaze, were really terrific!

The patient who thus abruptly, and, under circumstances, inopportunately, required my services, proved to be one Bill —, a notorious boxer, who, in returning that evening from a great prize-fight, had been thrown out of his gig, the horse having been frightened by the lightning, and the rider, who was much the worse for liquor, had his ankle dreadfully dislocated. He had been taken up by some passengers, and conveyed with great difficulty to his own residence, a public-house, not three minutes' walk from where I lived. The moment I entered the tap-room, which I had to pass on my way to the staircase, I heard his groans, or rather howls, overhead. The excitement of intoxication, added to the agonies occasioned by his accident, had driven him, I was told, nearly mad. He was uttering the most revolting execrations as I entered his room. He damned himself, his ill luck (for it seemed he had lost considerable sums on the fight), the combatants, the horse that threw him, the thunder and lightning—everything, in short, and everybody about him. The sound of the thunder was sublime melody to me, and the more welcome, because it drowned the blasphemous bellowing of the monster I was visiting. Yes; there lay the burly boxer, stretched upon the bed, with none of his dress removed except the boot, which had been cut from the limb that was injured—his new blue coat, with glaring yellow buttons, and drab knee-breeches, soiled

with the Street mud into which he had been precipitated—his huge limbs, writhing in restless agony over the bed—his fists clenched, and his flat, iron-featured face swollen and distorted with pain and fury.

“But, my good woman,” said I, pausing at the door, addressing myself to the boxer’s wife, who, wringing her hands, had conducted me upstairs, “I assure you I am not the person you should have sent to. It’s a surgeon’s, not a physician’s case; I fear I can’t do much for him—quite out of my way

“Oh, for God’s sake—for the love of God, don’t say so!” gasped the poor creature with affrighted emphasis—“Oh, do *something* for him, or he’ll drive us all out of our senses—he’ll be killing us!”

“Do something!” roared my patient, who had overheard the last words of his wife, turning his bloated face towards *me*—“*do* something, indeed? aye, and be — to you! Here, here look ye, doctor—look ye *here!*” he continued, pointing to the wounded foot, which, all crushed and displaced, and the stocking soaked with blood, presented a shocking appearance—“look here, indeed!—ah! that horse! That horse!” his teeth gnashed, and his right hand was lifted up, clenched, with fury—“If I don’t break every bone in his — body, as soon as ever I can stir this cursed leg again!”

I felt for a moment as though I had entered the very pit and presence of Satan, for the lightning was gleaming over his ruffianly figure incessantly, and the thunder rolling close overhead while he was speaking.

“Hush! hush! you’ll drive the doctor away! For pity’s sake hold your tongue, or Dr. won’t come into the room to you!” gasped his wife, dropping on her knees beside him.

“Ha, ha! Let him go! Only let him stir a step, and lame as I am, — me if I don’t jump out of bed, and teach him civility! *Here*, you doctor, as you call yourself! What’s to be done?” Really I was too much shocked, at the moment, to know. I was half inclined to leave the room immediately, and had a fair plea for doing so in the *surgical* nature of the case; but the agony of the fellow’s wife induced me to check my outraged feelings, and stay. After directing a person to be sent off, in my name, for the nearest surgeon, I addressed myself to my task, and proceeded to remove the stocking. His whole body quivered with the anguish it occasioned; and I saw such fury gathering in his features, that I began to dread lest he might rise up in a sudden frenzy, and strike me.

“Oh! oh! oh! Curse your clumsy hands! You don’t know no more nor a child!” he groaned, “what you’re about. Leave it—leave it alone! Give over with ye! Doctor, — , I say, be off!”

“Mercy, mercy, doctor!” sobbed his wife in a whisper, fearing from my momentary pause that I was going to take her husband at his word—“Don’t go away!—Oh, go on—go on! It *must* be done, you know! Never mind what he says! He’s only a little the worse for liquor now—and—and then the *pain!* Go on, doctor! He’ll thank you the more for it to-morrow!”

“Wife! here!” shouted her husband. The woman instantly stepped up to him. He stretched out his Herculean arm, and grasped her by the shoulder.

“So, you! I’m drunk, am I? I’m *drunk* eh—you lying —!” he exclaimed, and jerked her violently away, right across the room, to the door, where the poor creature fell down, but presently rose, crying bitterly.

“Get away! Get off—get downstairs—if you don’t want me to serve you the same again! Say I’m drunk, you beast?” With frantic gestures she obeyed, rushed downstairs, and I was left alone with her husband. I was disposed to follow her abruptly; but the positive dread of my life (for he might leap out of the bed and kill me with a blow) kept me to my task. My flesh crept with disgust at touching his! I examined the wound, which undoubtedly must have given him torture enough to drive him, mad, and bathed it in warm water; resolved to pay no attention to his abuse,

and quit the instant that the surgeon, who had been sent for, made his appearance. At length he came. I breathed more freely, resigned the case into his hands, and was going to take up my hat, when he begged me to continue in the room, with such an earnest apprehensive look, that I reluctantly remained. I saw, he dreaded as much being left alone with his patient as I! It need hardly be said that every step that was taken in dressing the wound, was attended with the vilest execrations of the patient. Such a foul-mouthed ruffian I never encountered anywhere. It seemed as though he was possessed of a devil. What a contrast to the sweet speechless sufferer whom I had left at home, and to whom my heart yearned to return!

The storm still continued raging. The rain had comparatively ceased, but the thunder and lightning made their appearance with fearful frequency and fierceness. I drew down the blind of the window, observing to the surgeon that the lightning seemed to startle our patient.

“Put it up again! Put up that blind again, I say!” he cried impatiently. “D’ye think *I’m* afraid of the lightning, like my — horse to-day? Put it up again—or I’ll get out and do it myself!” I did as he wished. Reproof or expostulation was useless. “Ha!” he exclaimed, in a low tone of fury, rubbing his hands together—in a manner bathing them in the fiery stream, as a flash of lightning gleamed ruddily over him. “*There* it is! Curse it—just the sort of flash that frightened my horse—d— it!”—and the impious wretch shook his fist, and “grinned horribly a ghastly smile.”

“Be silent, sir! Be silent! or we will both leave you instantly. Your behaviour is impious! it is frightful to witness! Forbear—lest the vengeance of God descend upon you!”

“Come, come—none o’ your Methodism *here!* Go on with your business! Stick to your trade,” interrupted the Boxer.

“Does not that rebuke your blasphemies?” I inquired, suddenly shading my eyes from the vivid stream of lightning that burst into the room, while the thunder rattled overhead—evidently in most dreadful proximity. When I removed my hands from my eyes, and opened them, the first object that they fell upon was the figure of the Boxer, sitting upright in bed, with both hands stretched out, just as those of Elymas the sorcerer in the picture of Raphael—his face the colour of a corpse—and his eyes, almost starting out of their sockets, directed with a horrid stare towards the window. His lips moved not—nor did he utter a sound. It was clear what had occurred. The wrathful fire of heaven, that had glanced harmlessly around us, had blinded the blasphemer. Yes—the sight of his eyes had perished. While we were gazing at him in silent awe, he fell back in bed speechless, and clasped his hands over his breast, seemingly in an attitude of despair. But for that motion, we should have thought him dead. Shocked beyond expression, Mr. — paused in his operations. I examined the eyes of the patient. The pupils were both dilated to their utmost extent, and immovable. I asked him many questions, but he answered not a word. Occasionally, however, a groan of horror, remorse, agony (or all combined) would burst from his pent bosom; and this was the only evidence he gave of consciousness. He moved over on his right side—his “pale face turned to the wall”—and, unclasping his hands, pressed the forefinger of each with convulsive force upon the eyes. Mr. — proceeded with his task. What a contrast between the present and past behaviour of our patient! Do what we would—put him to never such great pain—he neither uttered a syllable, nor expressed any symptoms of passion, as before. There was, however, no necessity for my continuing any longer; so I left the case in the hands of Mr. —, who undertook to acquaint Mrs. — with the frightful accident that had happened to her husband. What two scenes had I witnessed that evening!

I hurried home full of agitation at the spectacle I had just quitted, and melancholy apprehensions concerning the one to which I was returning. On reaching my lovely patient’s room, I found, alas! no sensible effects produced by the very active means which had been adopted. She lay in bed, the aspect of her features apparently the same as when I last saw her. Her eyes were closed—her cheeks very pale, and mouth rather open, as if she were on the point

of speaking. The hair hung in a little disorder on each side of her face, having escaped, from beneath her cap. My wife sat beside her, grasping her right hand—weeping and almost stupefied; and the servant that was in the room when I entered, seemed so bewildered as to be worse than useless. As it was now getting dark, I ordered candles. I took one of them in my hand, opened her eyelids, and passed and repassed the candle several times before her eyes, but it produced no apparent effect. Neither the eyelids blinked, nor the pupils contracted. I then took out my penknife, and made a thrust with the open blade, as though I intended to plunge it into her right eye; it seemed as if I might have buried the blade in the socket, for the shock or resistance called forth by the attempt. I took her hand in mine—having for a moment displaced my wife—and found it damp and cold; but when I suddenly left it suspended, it continued so for a few moments, and only gradually resumed its former situation. I pressed the back of the blade of my penknife upon the flesh at the root of the nail (as everyone knows, a very tender part), but she evinced not the slightest sensation of pain. I shouted suddenly and loudly in her ears, but with similar ill success. I felt at an extremity. Completely baffled at all points—discouraged and agitated beyond expression—I left Miss P— in the care of a nurse, whom I had sent for to attend upon her, at the instance of my wife, and hastened to my study to see if my books could throw any light upon the nature of this, to me, new and inscrutable disorder. After hunting about for some time, and finding but little to the purpose, I prepared for bed, determining in the morning to send off for Miss P—’s mother, and Mr. N— from Oxford, and also to call upon my eminent friend Dr. D—, and hear what his superior skill and experience might be able to suggest. In passing Miss P—’s room, I stepped in to take my farewell for the evening. “Beautiful, unfortunate creature!” thought I, as I stood gazing mournfully on her, with my candle in my hand, leaning against the bed-post. “What mystery is upon thee? What awful change has come over thee?—the gloom of the grave and the light of life—both lying upon thee at once! Is thy mind palsied as thy body? How long is this strange state to last? How long art thou doomed to linger thus on the confines of both worlds, so that those in either, who love thee, may not claim thee? Heaven guide our thoughts to discover a remedy for thy fearful disorder!” I could not bear to look upon her any longer; and after kissing her lips, hurried up to bed, charging the nurse to summon me the moment that any change whatever was perceptible in Miss P—. I dare say, I shall be easily believed when I apprise the reader of the troubled night that followed such a troubled day. The thunder-storm itself, coupled with the predictions of the day, and apart from its attendant incidents that have been mentioned, was calculated to leave an awful and permanent impression on one’s mind. “If I were to live a century, I could not forget it,” said a distinguished writer, in a letter to me. “The thunder and lightning were more appalling than I ever recollect witnessing, even in the West Indies—that region of storms and hurricanes. The air had been long surcharged with electricity; and I predicted several days beforehand that we should have a storm of very unusual violence. But when with this we couple the strange prophecy that gained credit with a prodigious number of those one would have expected to be above such things—neither more nor less than that the world was to come to an end on that very day, and the judgment of mankind to follow; I say, the coincidence of the events was not a little singular, and calculated to inspire common folk with wonder and fear. I dare say, if one could but find them out, that there were instances of people frightened out of their wits on the occasion. I own to you candidly that I, for one, felt a little squeamish, and had not a little difficulty in bolstering up my courage with Virgil’s *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*,” etc.

I did not so much sleep as doze interruptedly for the first three or four hours after getting into bed. I, as well as my alarmed Emily, would start up occasionally, and sit listening, under the apprehension that we heard a shriek, or some other such sound, proceed from Miss P—’s room. The image of the blinded Boxer flitted in fearful forms about me, and my ears seemed to ring

with his curses.—It must have been, I should think, between two and three o'clock, when I dreamed that I leaped out of bed, under an impulse sudden as irresistible—slipped on my dressing-gown, and hurried downstairs to the back drawing-room. On opening the door, I found the room lit up with funeral tapers, and the apparel of a dead-room spread about. At the further end lay a coffin on trestles, covered with a long sheet, with the figure of an old woman sitting beside it, with long streaming white hair, and her eyes, bright as the lightning, directed towards me with a fiendish stare of exultation. Suddenly she rose up—pulled off the sheet that had covered the coffin—pushed aside the lid—plucked out the body of Miss P—, dashed it on the floor, and trampled upon it with apparent triumph! This horrid dream awoke me, and haunted my waking thoughts. May I never pass such a dismal night again!

I rose from my bed in the morning feverish and unrefreshed; and in a few minutes' time hurried to Miss P—'s room. The mustard applications to the soles of the feet, together with the blisters behind the ears, had produced the usual local effects, without affecting the complaint. Both her pulse and breathing continued calm. The only change perceptible in the colour of her countenance was a slight pallor about the upper part of the cheeks, and I fancied there was an expression about her mouth approaching to a smile. She had, I found, continued, throughout the night, motionless and silent as a corpse. With a profound sigh I took my seat beside her, and examined the eyes narrowly, but perceived no change in them. What was to be done? How was she to be roused from this fearful—if not fatal lethargy?

While I was gazing intently on her features, I fancied that I perceived a slight muscular twitching about the nostrils. I stepped hastily downstairs (just as a drowning man, they say, catches at a straw) and returned with a phial of the strongest solution of ammonia,³ which I applied freely with a feather to the interior of the nostrils. This attempt, also, was unsuccessful as the former ones. I cannot describe the feelings with which I witnessed these repeated failures to stimulate her torpid sensibilities into action; and not knowing what to say or do, I returned to dress, with feelings of unutterable despondency. While dressing, it struck me that a blister might be applied with success along the whole course of the spine. The more I thought of this expedient, the more feasible it appeared; it would be such a direct and powerful appeal to the nervous system—in all probability the very seat and source of the disorder! I ordered one to be sent for instantly—and myself applied it, before I went down to breakfast. As soon as I had dispatched the few morning patients that called, I wrote imperatively to Mr. N— at Oxford, and to Miss P—'s mother, entreating them by all the love they bore Agnes to come to her instantly. I then set out for Dr. D—'s, whom I found just starting on his daily visits. I communicated the whole case to him. He listened with interest to my statement, and told me he had once a similar case in his own practice, which, alas! terminated fatally, in spite of the most anxious and combined efforts of the *élite* of the faculty in London. He approved of the course I had adopted—most especially the blister on the spine; and earnestly recommended me to resort to galvanism—if Miss P— should not be relieved from the fit before the evening—when he promised to call, and assist in carrying into effect what he recommended.

“Is it that beautiful girl I saw in your pew last Sunday, at church?” he inquired suddenly.

“The same—the same!” I replied with a sigh.

Dr. D— continued silent for a moment or two.

“Poor creature!” he exclaimed with an air of deep concern, “one so beautiful! Do you know I thought I now and then perceived a very remarkable expression in her eye, especially while that fine voluntary was playing. Is she an enthusiast about music?”

“Passionately—devotedly—”

³ Liquid smelling-salts.

“We’ll try it!” he replied briskly, with a confident air—“We’ll try it! First, let us disturb the nervous torpor with a slight shock of galvanism, and then try the effect of your organ.”⁴ I listened to the suggestion with interest, but was not quite so sanguine in my expectations as my friend appeared to be.

In the whole range of disorders that affect the human frame, there is perhaps not one so mysterious, so incapable of management, as that which afflicted the truly unfortunate young lady whose case I am narrating. It has given rise to infinite speculation, and is admitted, I believe, on all hands to be—if I may so speak—a nosological anomaly. Van Swieten vividly and picturesquely enough compares it to that condition of the body, which, according to ancient fiction, was produced in the beholder by the appalling sight of Medusa’s head—

“Saxifici Medusævultus.”

The medical writers of antiquity have left evidence of the existence of this disease in their day—but given the most obscure and unsatisfactory descriptions of it, confounding it, in many instances, with other disorders—apoplexy, epilepsy, and swooning. Celsus, according to Van Swieten, describes such patients as these in question under the term “*attoniti*,” which is a translation of the title I have prefixed to this paper: while, in our own day, the celebrated Dr. Cullen classes it as a species of apoplexy, at the same time stating that he had never seen a genuine instance of catalepsy. He had always found, he says, those cases, which were reported such, to be feigned ones. More modern science, however, distinctly recognises the disease as one peculiar and independent; and is borne out by numerous unquestionable cases of catalepsy, recorded by some of the most eminent members of the profession. Dr. Jebb, in particular, in the appendix to his “Select Cases of Paralysis of the Lower Extremities,” relates a remarkable and affecting instance of a cataleptic patient. As it is not likely that general readers have met with this interesting case, I shall here transcribe it. The young lady who was the subject of the disorder, was seized with the fit when Dr. Jebb was announced on his first visit.

“She was employed in netting, and was passing the needle through the mesh; in which position she immediately became rigid, exhibiting, in a very pleasing form, a figure of deathlike sleep, beyond the power of art to imitate, or the imagination to conceive. Her forehead was serene, her features perfectly composed. The paleness of her colour—her breathing being also scarcely perceptible at a distance—operated in rendering the similitude to marble more exact and striking. The position of the fingers, hands, and arms was altered with difficulty, but preserved every form of flexure they acquired. Nor were the muscles of the neck exempted from this law; her head maintained every situation in which the hand could place it, as firmly as her limbs.

“Upon gently raising the eyelids, they immediately closed with a degree of spasm.⁵ The iris contracted upon the approach of a candle, as in a state of vigilance. The eyeball itself was slightly agitated with a tremulous motion, not discernible when the eyelid had descended. About half an hour after my arrival, the rigidity of her limbs and statue-like appearance being yet unaltered, she sung three plaintive songs in a tone of voice so elegantly expressive, and with such affecting modulation, as evidently pointed out how much the most powerful passion of the mind was concerned in the production of her disorder—as, indeed, her history confirmed. In a few minutes afterwards she sighed deeply, and the spasm in her limbs was immediately relaxed. She complained that she could not open her eyes, her hands grew cold, a general tremor followed; but in a few seconds, recovering entirely her recollection and powers of motion, she entered into a

⁴ I had at home—being myself a lover, thought not a scientific one, of music—a very fine organ.

⁵ This was not the case with Miss P—. I repeatedly remarked the perfect mobility of her eyelids.

detail of her symptoms, and the history of her complaint. After she had discoursed for some time with apparent calmness, the universal spasm suddenly returned. The features now assumed a different form, denoting a mind strongly impressed with anxiety and apprehension. At times she uttered short and vehement exclamations, in a piercing tone of voice, expressive of the passions that agitated her mind; her hands being strongly locked in each other, and all her muscles, those subservient to speech excepted, being affected with the same rigidity as before.”

But the most extraordinary case on record is one⁶ given by Dr. Petetin, a physician of Lyons, in which “*the senses were transferred to the pit of the stomach, and the ends of the fingers and toes—i.e.* the patients, in a state of insensibility to all external impressions upon the proper organs of sense, were nevertheless capable of hearing, *seeing*, smelling, and tasting whatever was approached to the pit of the stomach, or the ends of the fingers and toes! The patients are said to have answered questions proposed to the pit of the stomach—to have told the hour by a watch placed there—to have tasted food, and smelt the fragrance of apricots, touching the part,” etc., etc. It may be interesting to add, that an eminent physician, who went to see the patient, incredulous of what he had heard, returned perfectly convinced of its truth. I have also read somewhere of a Spanish monk, who was so terrified by a sudden sight which he encountered in the Asturias mountains, that, when several of his holy brethren, whom he had preceded a mile or two, came up, they found him stretched upon the ground in the fearful condition of a cataleptic patient. They carried him back immediately to their monastery, and he was believed dead. He suddenly revived, however, in the midst of his funeral obsequies, to the consternation of all around him. When he had perfectly recovered the use of his faculties, he related some absurd matters which he pretended to have seen in a vision during his comatose state. The disorder in question, however, generally makes its appearance in the female sex, and seems to be in many, if not in most instances, a remote member of the family of hysterical affections.—To return, however.

On returning home from my daily round, in which my dejected air was remarked by all the patients I had visited, I found no alteration whatever in Miss P —. The nurse had failed in forcing even arrowroot down her mouth, and, finding it was not swallowed, was compelled to desist, for fear of choking her. ‘We were, therefore, obliged to resort to other means of conveying support to her exhausted frame. The blister on the spine, from which I had expected so much, and the renewed sinapisms to the feet, had failed to make any impression! Thus was every successive attempt an utter failure! The disorder continued absolutely inaccessible to the approaches of medicine. The baffled attendants could but look at her, and lament. Good God! was Agnes to continue in this dreadful condition till her energies sunk in death? What would become of her lover?—of her mother? These considerations greatly disturbed my peace of mind. I could neither think, read, eat, nor remain anywhere but in the chamber, where, alas! my presence was so unavailing!

Dr. D— made his appearance soon after dinner; and we proceeded at once to the room where our patient lay. Though a little paler than before, her features were placid as those of the chiselled marble. Notwithstanding all she had suffered, and the fearful situation in which she lay at that moment, she still looked very beautiful. Her cap was off, and her rich auburn hair lay negligently on each side of her, upon the pillow. Her forehead was white as alabaster. She lay with her head turned a little on one side, and her two small white hands were clasped together over her bosom. This was the nurse’s arrangement: for “poor dear young lady,” she said, “I couldn’t bear to see her laid straight along, with her arms close beside her like a corpse, so I tried

⁶ A second similar case, well authenticated, occurred not long afterwards, at the same place.—They are attributed by Dr. P. to the influence of animal electricity.

to make her look as much asleep as possible!” The impression of beauty, however, conveyed by her symmetrical and tranquil features, was disturbed as soon as, lifting up the eyelids, we saw the fixed stare of the eyes. They were not glassy, or corpse-like, but bright as those of life, with a little of the dreadful expression of epilepsy. We raised her in bed, and she, as before, sat upright, but with a blank, absent aspect, that was lamentable and unnatural. Her arms, when lifted and left suspended, did not fall, but *sunk* down again gradually. We returned her gently to her recumbent posture, and determined at once to try the effect of galvanism upon her. My machine was soon brought into the room; and when we had duly arranged matters, we directed the nurse to quit the chamber for a short time, as the effect of galvanism is generally found too startling to be witnessed by a female spectator. I wish I had not myself seen it in the case of Miss P—! Her colour went and came—her eyelids and mouth started open—and she stared wildly about her, with, the aspect of one starting out of bed in a fright. I thought at one moment that the horrid spell was broken, for she sat up suddenly, leaned forwards towards me, and her mouth opened as though she were about to speak!

“Agnes! Agnes! dear Agnes! Speak, speak! but a word! Say you live!” I exclaimed, rushing forwards. Alas! she heard me—she saw me—not, but fell back in bed in her former state! When the galvanic shock was conveyed to her limbs, it produced the usual effects—dreadful to behold in all cases—but agonising to me in the case of Miss P—. The last subject on which I had seen the effects of galvanism,⁷ previous to the present instance, was the body of an executed malefactor; and the associations revived on the present occasion were almost too painful to bear. I begged my friend to desist, for I saw the attempt was hopeless, and I would not allow her tender frame to be agitated to no purpose. My mind misgave me for ever making the attempt. What, thought I, if we have fatally disturbed the nervous system, and prostrated the small remains of strength she had left? While I was torturing myself with such fears as these, Dr. — laid down the rod, with a melancholy air, exclaiming, “Well! what *is* to be done now? I cannot tell you how sanguine I was about the success of this experiment!—Do you know whether she ever had a fit of epilepsy?” he inquired.

“No—not that I am aware of. I never heard of it, if she had.”

“Had she generally a horror of thunder and lightning?”

“Oh—quite the contrary! she felt a sort of ecstasy on such occasions, and has written some beautiful verses during their continuance. *Such* seemed rather her hour of inspiration than otherwise!”

“Do you think the lightning itself has affected her?—Do you think her sight is destroyed?”

“I have no means of knowing whether the immobility of the pupils arises from blindness, or is only one of the temporary effects of catalepsy.”

“Then she believed the prophecy, you think, of the world’s destruction on Tuesday?”

⁷ A word about that case, by the way, in passing. The spectacle was truly horrific. When I entered the room where the experiments were to take place, the body of a man named Carter, which had been cut down from the gallows scarce half an hour, was lying on the table; and the cap being removed, his features, distorted with the agonies of suffocation, were visible. The crime he had been hanged for was murder; and a brawny, desperate ruffian he looked. None of his clothes were removed. He wore a fustian jacket and drab knee-breeches. The first time that the galvanic shock was conveyed to him will never, I dare say, be forgotten by any one present. We all shrunk from the table in consternation, with the momentary belief that we had positively brought the man back to life; for he suddenly sprang up into a sitting posture—his arms waved wildly—the colour rushed into his cheeks—his lips were drawn apart, so as to show all his teeth—and his eyes glared at us with apparent fury. One young man, a medical student, shrieked violently, and was carried out in a swoon. One gentleman present, who happened to be nearest to the upper part of the body, was almost knocked down with the violent blow he received from the left arm. It was some time before any of us could recover presence of mind sufficient to proceed with the experiments.

“No—I don’t think she exactly *believed* it; but I am sure that day brought with it awful apprehensions, or, at least, a fearful degree of uncertainty.”

“Well—between ourselves, —, there was something *very* strange in the coincidence, was not there? Nothing in life ever shook my firmness as it was shaken yesterday! I almost fancied the earth was quivering in its sphere!”

“It *was* a dreadful day!—One I shall never forget! *That* is the image of it,” I exclaimed, pointing to the poor sufferer—“which will be engraven on my mind as long as I live! But the worst is perhaps yet to be told you: Mr. N—, her lover, to whom she was very soon to have been married, HE will be here shortly to see her—”

“My God!” exclaimed Dr. D , claspng his hands, eyeing Miss P— with intense commiseration—’What a fearful bride for him!”

“I dread his coming—I know not what we shall do! And then there’s her *mother*, poor old lady! —her I have written to, and expect almost hourly.”

“Why, what an accumulation of shocks and miseries!—it will be upsetting *you!*” said my friend, seeing my distressed appearance.

“Well,” he continued, “I cannot now stay here longer—your misery is catching; and, besides, I am most pressingly engaged; but you may rely on my services, if you should require them in any way.”

My friend took his departure, leaving me more disconsolate than ever. Before retiring to bed, I rubbed in mustard upon the chief surfaces of the body, hoping, though faintly, that it might have some effect in rousing the system. I kneeled down, before stepping into bed, and earnestly prayed, that as all human efforts seemed baffled, the Almighty would set her free from the mortal thralldom in which she lay, and restore her to life, and those who loved her more than life! Morning came—it found me by her bedside as usual, and her in no wise altered, apparently neither better nor worse! If the unvarying monotony of my description should fatigue the, reader, what must the actual monotony and hopelessness have been to me!

While I was sitting beside Miss P—, I heard my youngest boy come downstairs, and ask to be let into the room. He was a little fair-haired youngster, about three years of age, and had always been an especial favourite of Miss P—’s—her “own sweet pet”—as the poor girl herself called him. Determined to throw no chance away, I beckoned him in, and took him on my knee. He called to Miss P , as if he thought her asleep; patted her face with his little hands, and kissed her. “Wake, wake!—Cousin Aggy, get up!” he cried—“Papa say ‘tis time to get up! Do you sleep with eyes open?⁸ Eh?—Cousin Aggy?” He looked at her intently for some moments, and seemed frightened. He turned pale, and struggled to get off my knee. I allowed him to go, and he ran to his mother, who was standing at the foot of the bed, and hid his face behind her.

I passed breakfast-time in great apprehension, expecting the two arrivals I have mentioned. I knew not how to prepare either the mother or the betrothed husband for the scene that awaited them, and which I had not particularly described to them. It was with no little trepidation that I heard the startling knock of the general postman; and with infinite astonishment and doubt that I took out of the servant’s hands a letter from Mr. N— for poor Agnes! For a while I knew not what to make of it. Had he received the alarming express I had forwarded to him; and did he write to Miss P? Or was he unexpectedly absent from Oxford when it arrived? The latter supposition was corroborated by the post-mark, which I observed was Lincoln. I felt it my duty to open the letter. Alas! it was in a gay strain—unusually gay for N—; informing Agnes that he had been suddenly summoned into Lincolnshire, to his cousin’s wedding, where he was very happy, both on account of his relative’s happiness, and the anticipation of a similar scene being

⁸ I had been examining her eyes, and had only half closed the lids.

in store for himself! Every line was buoyant with hope and animation; but the postscript most affected me.

“*P.S.—The tenth of July*, by the way, my Agnes! *Is it all over with us, sweet Pythonissa? Are you and I at this moment on separate fragments of the globe? I shall seal my conquest over you with a kiss when I see you! Remember, you parted from me in a pet, naughty one!—and kissed me rather coldly! But that is the way that your sex always end arguments, when you are vanquished!*”

I read these lines in silence;—my wife burst into tears. I hastened to send a second summons to Mr. N—, and directed it to him in Lincoln, where he had requested Miss P— to address him. Without explaining the precise nature of Miss P—’s seizure, I gave him warning that he must hurry up to town instantly; and that, even then, it was doubtful whether he would see her alive. After this little occurrence, I could hardly trust myself to go upstairs again, and look upon the unfortunate girl. My heart fluttered at the door, and when I entered I burst into tears. I could utter no more than the words, “poor—poor Agnes!” and withdrew.

I was shocked, and indeed enraged, to find, in one of the morning papers, a paragraph stating, though inaccurately, the nature of Miss P—’s illness. Who could have been so unfeeling as to make the poor girl an object of public wonder and pity? I never ascertained, though I made every inquiry, from whom the intelligence was communicated.

One of my patients that day happened to be a niece of the venerable and honoured Dean of —‘ at whose house she resided. He was in the room when I called; and to explain what he called “the gloom of my manner,” I gave him a full account of the melancholy event which had occurred. He listened to me till the tears ran down his face.

“But you have not yet tried the effect of *music*—of which you say she is so fond! Do not you intend to resort to it?” I told him it was our intention, and that our agitation was the only reason why we did not try the effect of it immediately after the galvanism.

“Now, doctor, excuse an old clergyman, will you?” said the venerable and pious dean, laying his hand on my arm; “and let me suggest that the experiment may not be the less successful, with the blessing of God, if it be introduced in the course of a religious service. Come, doctor, what say you?” I paused.

“Have you any objection to my calling at your house this evening, and reading the service appointed by our church for the visitation of the sick? It will not be difficult to introduce the most solemn and affecting strains of music, or to let it precede or follow.” Still I hesitated—and yet I scarce knew why. “Come, doctor, you know I am no enthusiast—I am not generally considered a fanatic. Surely when man has done his best, and fails, he should not hesitate to turn to God!” The good old man’s words sunk into my soul, and diffused in it a cheerful and humble hope that the blessing of Providence would attend the means suggested. I acquiesced in the dean’s proposal with delight, and even eagerness; and it was arranged that he should be at my house between seven and eight o’clock that evening. I think I have already observed, that I had an organ, a very fine and powerful one, in my back drawing-room; and this instrument had been the ‘eminent delight of poor Miss P—. She would sit down at it for hours together, and her performance would not have disgraced a professor. I hoped that on the eventful occasion that was approaching, the tones of her favourite instrument, with the blessing of Heaven, might rouse a slumbering responsive chord in her bosom, and aid in dispelling the cruel “charm that deadened her.” She certainly could not last long in the condition in which she now lay. Everything that medicine could do, had been tried—in vain; and if the evening’s experiment—our forlorn hope, failed—we must, though with a bleeding heart, submit to the will of Providence, and resign her to the grave. I looked forward with intense anxiety—with alternate hope and fear—to the engagement of the evening.

On returning home, late in the afternoon, I found poor Mrs. P— had arrived in town, in obedience to my summons; and heart-breaking, I learnt, was her first interview, if such it may be called, with her daughter. Her groans and cries alarmed the whole house, and even arrested the attention of the neighbours. I had left instructions, that in case of her arrival during my absence, she should be shown at once, without any precautions, into the presence of Miss P—; with the hope, faint though it was, that the abruptness of her appearance, and the violence of her grief might operate as a salutary shock upon the stagnant energies of her daughter. “My child! my child! my child!” she exclaimed, rushing up to the bed with frantic haste, and clasping the insensible form of her daughter in her arms, where she held her till she fell fainting into those of my wife. What a dread contrast was there between the frantic gestures—the passionate lamentations of the mother, and the stony silence and motionlessness of the daughter! One little but affecting incident occurred in my presence. Mrs. P— (as yet unacquainted with the peculiar nature of her daughter’s seizure) had snatched Miss P—’s hand to her lips, kissed it repeatedly, and suddenly let it go, to press her own hand upon her head, as if to repress a rising hysterical feeling. Miss P—’s arm, as usual, remained for a moment or two suspended, and only gradually sunk down upon the bed. It looked as if she voluntarily continued it in that position, with a cautioning air. Methinks I see at this moment the affrighted stare with which Mrs. P— regarded the outstretched arm, her body recoiling from the bed, as though she expected her daughter were about to do or appear something dreadful! I subsequently learned from Mrs. P— that her mother, the grandmother of Agnes, was reported to have been twice affected in a similar manner, though apparently from a different cause; so that there seemed something like a hereditary tendency towards it, even though Mrs. P— herself had never experienced anything of the kind.

As the memorable evening advanced, the agitation of all who were acquainted with, or interested in the approaching ceremony, increased. Mrs. P—, I need hardly say, embraced the proposal with thankful eagerness. About half-past seven, my friend Dr. D— arrived, pursuant to his promise; and he was soon afterwards followed by the organist of the neighbouring church—an old acquaintance, and who was a constant visitor at my house, for the purpose of performing and giving instructions on the organ. I requested him to commence playing Martin Luther’s hymn—the favourite one of Agnes—as soon as she should be brought into the room. About eight o’clock, the dean’s carriage drew up. I met him at the door.

“Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it!” he exclaimed as soon as he entered. I led him upstairs; and, without uttering a word, he took the seat prepared for him, before a table on which lay a Bible and Prayer-Book. After a moment’s pause, he directed the sick person to be brought into the room. I stepped upstairs, where I found my wife, with the nurse, had finished dressing Miss P—. I thought her paler than usual, and that her cheeks seemed hollower than when I had last seen her. There was an air of melancholy sweetness and languor about her, that inspired the beholder with the keenest sympathy. With a sigh, I gathered her slight form into my arms, a shawl was thrown over her, and, followed by my wife and the nurse, who supported Mrs. P , I carried her downstairs, and placed her in an easy recumbent posture, in a large old family chair, which stood between the organ and the dean’s table. How strange and mournful was her appearance! Her luxuriant hair was gathered up beneath a cap, the whiteness of which was equalled by that of her countenance. Her eyes were closed; and this, added to the paleness of her features, her perfect passiveness, and her being enveloped in a long white unruffled morning dress, which appeared not unlike a shroud at first sight—made her look rather a corpse than a living being! As soon as Dr. D— and I had taken seats on each side of our poor patient, the solemn strains of the organ commenced. I never appreciated music, and especially the sublime hymn of Luther, so much as on that occasion. My eyes were fixed with agonising scrutiny on Miss P—.— Bar after bar of the music melted on the ear, and thrilled upon the heart; but, alas!

produced no more effect upon the placid sufferer than the pealing of an abbey organ on the Statues around! My heart began to misgive me: if *the* one last experiment failed! When the music ceased, we all kneeled down, and the dean, in a solemn tone of voice, commenced reading appropriate passages from the service for the visitation of the sick. When he had concluded the 71st Psalm, he approached the chair of Miss P—, dropped upon one knee, held her right hand in his, and in a somewhat tremulous voice, read the following affecting verses from the 8th chapter of St. Luke:

“While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the master.

“But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not; believe only, and she shall be made whole.

“And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.

“And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, *Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.*”

While he was reading the passage which I have marked in italics, my heated fancy almost persuaded me that I saw the eyelids of Miss P—, moving. I trembled from head to foot; but, alas! it was a delusion.

The dean, much affected, was proceeding with the fifty-fifth verse, when such a tremendous and long-continued knocking was heard at the street door as seemed likely to break it open. Everyone started up from their knees, as if electrified—all moved but unhappy Agnes—and stood in silent agitation and astonishment. Still the knocking was continued, almost without intermission. My heart suddenly misgave me as to the cause.

“Go—go—see if”—stammered my wife, pale as ashes—endeavouring to prop up the drooping mother of our patient. Before anyone had stirred from the spot on which he was standing, the door was burst open, and in rushed Mr. N—, wild in his aspect, frantic in his gesture, and his dress covered with dust from head to foot. We stood gazing at him as though his appearance had petrified us.

“Agnes! —my Agnes!” he exclaimed, as if choked for want of breath.

“AGNES!—Come!” he gasped, while a smile appeared on his face that had a gleam of madness in it.

“Mr. N—! what are you about? For mercy’s sake, be calm! Let me lead you, for a moment, into another room, and all shall be explained!” said I, approaching and grasping him firmly by the arm.

“AGNES!” he continued in a tone that made us tremble. He moved towards the chair in which Miss P— lay. I endeavoured to interpose but he thrust me aside. The venerable dean attempted to dissuade him, but met with no better a reception than myself.

“Agnes!” he reiterated in a hoarse whisper, “why won’t you speak to me? what are they doing to you?” He stepped within a foot of the chair where she lay—calm and immovable as death! He stood by watching his movements, in terrified apprehension and uncertainty. He dropped his hat, which he had been grasping with convulsive force, and before anyone could prevent him, or even suspect what he was about, he snatched Miss P— out of the chair, and compressed her in his arms with frantic force, while a delirious laugh burst from his lips. We rushed forward to extricate her from his grasp. His arms gradually relaxed—he muttered, “Music! music! a dance!” and almost at the moment that we removed Miss P— from him, fell senseless into the arms of the organist. Mrs. P— had fainted; my wife seemed on the verge of hysterics; and the nurse was

crying violently. Such a scene of trouble and terror I have seldom witnessed! I hurried with the poor unconscious girl upstairs, laid her upon the bed, shut and bolted the door after me, and hardly expected to find her alive: her pulse, however, was calm as it had been throughout the seizure. The calm of the Dead Sea seemed upon her!

I feel, however, that I should not protract these painful scenes; and shall therefore hurry to their close. The first letter which I had dispatched to Oxford after Mr. N—, happened to bear on the outside the words, “*special haste!*” which procured its being forwarded by express after Mr. N—. The consternation with which he received and read it may be imagined. He set off for town that instant in a post-chaise and four; but finding their speed insufficient, he took to horseback for the last fifty miles, and rode at a rate which nearly destroyed both horse and rider. Hence his sudden appearance at my house, and the frenzy of his behaviour! After Miss P— had been carried upstairs, it was thought imprudent for Mr. N— to continue at my house, as he exhibited every symptom of incipient brain fever, and might prove wild and unmanageable. He was therefore removed at once to a house within a few doors off, which was let out in furnished lodgings. Dr. D— accompanied him, and bled him immediately, very copiously. I have no doubt that Mr. N— owed his life to that timely measure. He was placed in bed, and put at once under the most vigorous antiphlogistic treatment.

The next evening beheld Dr. D—, the Dean of , and myself around the bedside of Agnes. All of us expressed the most gloomy apprehensions. The dean had been offering up a devout and most affecting prayer.

“Well, my friend,” said he to me, “she is in the hands of God. All that man can do has been done; let us resign ourselves to the will of Providence!”

“Ay, nothing but a miracle can save her, I fear,” replied Dr. D—.

“How much longer do you think it probable, humanly speaking, that the system can continue in this state, so as to give hopes of ultimate recovery?” inquired the dean.

“I cannot say,” I replied with a sigh. “She *must* sink, and speedily. She has not received, since she was first seized, as much nourishment as would serve for an infant’s meal!”

“I have an impression that she will die suddenly,” said Dr. D— “possibly within the next twelve hours; for I cannot understand how energies can recover from, or bear longer, this fearful paralysis!”

“Alas, I fear so too!”

“I have heard some frightful instances of premature burial in cases like this,” said the Dean. “I hope you will not think of committing her remains to the earth, before you are satisfied, beyond a doubt, that life is extinct.” I made no reply—my emotions nearly choked me—I could not bear to contemplate such an event.

“Do you know,” said Dr. D—, with an apprehensive air, “I have been thinking latterly of the awful possibility, that, notwithstanding the stagnation of her physical powers, her MIND may be sound, and perfectly conscious of all that has transpired about her!”

“Why—why,” stammered the Dean, turning pale—“what if she has—has heard all that has been said!”⁹

“Aye!” replied Dr. D—, unconsciously sinking his voice to a whisper, “I know of a case—in fact, a friend of mine has just published it—in which a woman—“ There was a faint knocking at the door, and I stepped to it, for the purpose of inquiring what was wanted. While I was in the act of closing it again, I overheard Dr. D—’s voice exclaim in an affrighted tone, “Great God!” and

⁹ In almost every known instance of recovery from catalepsy, the patients have declared that they heard every word that had been uttered beside them!

on turning round, I saw the Dean moving from the bed, his face white as ashes, and he fell from his chair as if in a fit. How shall I describe what I saw on approaching the bed?

The moment before I had left Miss P— lying in her usual position, and with her eyes closed. They were now wide open, and staring upwards with an expression I have no language to describe. It reminded me of what I had seen when I first discovered her in the fit. Blood, too, was streaming from her nostrils and mouth—in short, a more frightful spectacle I never witnessed. In a moment, both Dr. D— and I seemed to have lost all power of motion. Here, then, was the spell broken! The ‘trance over!’—I implored Dr. D— to recollect himself, and conduct the Dean from the room, while I would attend to Miss P—. The nurse was instantly at my side, but violently agitated. She quickly procured warm water, sponges, cloths, etc., with which she at once wiped away and encouraged the bleeding. The first sound uttered by Miss P— was a long deep-drawn sigh, which seemed to relieve her bosom of an intolerable sense of oppression. Her eyes gradually closed again, and she moved her head away, at the same time raising her trembling right hand to her face. Again she sighed—again opened her eyes; and, to my delight, their expression was more natural than before. She looked languidly about her for a moment, as if examining the bed-curtains—and her eyes closed again. I sent for some weak brandy-and-water, and gave her a little in a teaspoon. She swallowed it with great difficulty. I ordered some warm water to be got ready for her feet, to equalise the circulation; and while it was preparing, sat by her watching every motion of her features with the most eager anxiety. “How are you, Agnes?” I whispered. She turned languidly towards me, opened her eyes, and shook her head feebly—but gave me no answer.

“Do you feel pain anywhere?” I inquired. A faint smile stole about her mouth, but she did not utter a syllable. Sensible that her exhausted condition required repose, I determined not to tax her newly-recovered energies; so I ordered her a gentle composing draught and left her in the care of the nurse, promising to return by and by, to see how my sweet patient went on. I found that the Dean had left. After swallowing a little wine and water, he recovered sufficiently from the shock he had received, to be able, with Dr. D—’s assistance, to step into his carriage, leaving his solemn benediction for Miss P—.

As it was growing late, I sent my wife to bed, and ordered coffee in my study, whither I retired, and sat lost in conjecture and reverie till nearly one o’clock. I then repaired to my patient’s room; but my entrance startled her from a sleep that had lasted almost since I had left. As soon as I sat down by her, she opened her eyes—and my heart leaped with joy to see their increasing calmness—their expression resembling what had oft delighted me while she was in health. After eyeing me steadily for a few moments, she seemed suddenly to recognise me. “Dr.!” she whispered, in the faintest possible whisper, while a smile stole over her languid features. I gently grasped her hand; and in doing so my tears fell upon her cheek.

“How strange!” she whispered again in a tone as feeble as before. She gently moved her hand into mine, and I clasped the trembling lilled fingers, with an emotion I cannot express. She noticed my agitation; and the tears came into her eyes, while her lip quivered, as though she were going to speak. I implored her, however, not to utter a word, till she was better able to do it without exhaustion; and, lest my presence should tempt her beyond her strength, I bade her good-night—her poor slender fingers once more compressed mine—and I left her to the care of the nurse, with a whispered injunction to step to me instantly if any change took place in Agnes. I could not sleep! I felt a prodigious burden removed from my mind; and woke my wife that she might share in my joy.

I received no summons during the night; and on entering her room about nine o’clock in the morning, I found that Miss P— had taken a little arrow-root in the course of the night, and slept calmly, with but few intervals. She had sighed frequently; and once or twice conversed for a

short time with the nurse about *Heaven*—as I understood. She was much stronger than I had expected to find her. I welcomed her affectionately, and she asked me how I was—in a tone that surprised me by its strength and firmness.

“Is the storm over?” she inquired, looking towards the window.

“Oh, yes—long, long ago!” I replied, seeing at once that she seemed to have no consciousness of the interval that had elapsed.

“And are you all well?—Mrs. — [my wife], how is she?”

“You shall see her shortly.”

“Then no one was hurt?”

“Not a hair of our heads!”

“How frightened I must have been!”

“Poh, poh, Agnes! Nonsense! Forget it!”

“Then—the world is not—there has been no—is all the same as it was?” she murmured, eyeing me apprehensively.

“The world come to an end—do you mean?” She nodded, with a disturbed air. “Oh, no, no! It was merely a thunder-storm.”

“And is it quite over, and gone?”

“Long ago! Do you feel hungry?” I inquired, hoping to direct her thoughts from a topic I saw agitated her.

“Did you ever see such lightning?” she asked, without regarding my question.

“Why—certainly it was very alarming—”

“Yes, it was! Do you know, doctor,” she continued, with a mysterious air—“I—I—saw—yes—there were strange faces in the lightning—”

“Come, child, you rave!”

“—They seemed coming towards the world.”

Her voice trembled, the colour of her face changed.

“Well—if you *will* talk such nonsense, Agnes, I must leave you. I will go and fetch my wife. Would you like to see her?”

“*Tell N— to come to me to-day—I must see HIM. I have a message for him!*” She said this with a sudden energy that surprised me, while her eye brightened as it settled on me. Her last words surprised and disturbed me. Were her intellects affected! How did she know— how could she conjecture that he was within reach? I took an opportunity of asking the nurse whether she had mentioned Mr. N—’s name to her; but not a syllable had been interchanged upon the subject.

Before setting out on my daily visits, I stepped into her room, to take my leave. I was quitting the room, when, happening to look back, I saw her beckoning to me. I returned.

“I **MUST** see N— this evening!” said she, with a solemn emphasis that startled me; and as soon as she had uttered the words, she turned her head from me, as if she wished no more to be said.

My first visit was to Mr. N—, whom I found in a very weak state, but so much recovered from his illness as to be sitting up, and partially dressed. He was perfectly calm and collected; and, in answer to his earnest inquiries, I gave him a full account of the nature of Miss P—’s illness. He received the intelligence of the favourable change that had occurred with evident though silent ecstasy. After much inward doubt and hesitation, I thought I might venture to tell him of the parting—the twice-repeated request she had made. The intelligence blanched his already pallid cheeks to a whiter hue, and he trembled violently.

“Did you tell her I was in town? Did she recollect me?”

“No one has breathed your name to her!” I replied.

“Well, doctor, if, on the whole, you think so—that it would be safe,” said N—, after we had talked much on the matter—“I will step over and see her; but—it looks very—very strange!”

“Whatever whim may actuate her, I think it better, on the whole, to gratify her. Your refusal *may* be attended with infinitely worse’ effects than an interview. However, you shall hear from me again. I will see if she continues in the same mind; and if so, I will step over and tell you.”—I took my leave.

A few moments before stepping down to dinner, I sat beside Miss P , making my usual inquiries; and was gratified to find that her progress, though slow, seemed sure. I was leaving, when, with similar emphasis to that she had previously displayed, she again said:

“*Remember!* N— MUST be here to-night!”

I was confounded. What could be the meaning of this mysterious pertinacity? I felt distracted with doubt, and dissatisfied with myself for what I had told to N—. I felt answerable for whatever ill effects might ensue; and yet what could I do?

It was evening—a mild, though lustrous July evening. The skies were all blue and white, save where the retiring sunlight produced a mellow mixture of colours towards the west. Not a breath of air disturbed the serene complacency. My wife and I sat on each side of the bed where lay our lovely invalid, looking, despite her illness, beautiful, and in comparative health. Her hair was parted with negligent simplicity over her pale forehead. Her eyes were brilliant, and her cheeks occasionally flushed. She spoke scarce a word to us as we sat beside her. I gazed at her with doubt and apprehension. I was aware that health could not possibly produce the colour and vivacity of her complexion and eyes; and felt at a loss to what I should refer it.

“Agnes, love! —How beautiful is the setting sun!” exclaimed my wife, drawing aside the curtains.

“Raise me! Let me look at it!” replied Miss P— faintly. She gazed earnestly at the magnificent object for some minutes; and then abruptly said to me:

“He will be here soon?”

“In a few moments I expect him. But—Agnes—why do you wish see him?”

She sighed, and shook her head.

It had been arranged that Dr. D— should accompany Mr. N— my house, and conduct him upstairs, after strongly enjoining on him the necessity there was for controlling his feelings, and displaying as little emotion as possible. My heart leaped into my mouth—as the saying is—when I heard the expected knock at the door.

“N— is come at last!” said I in a gentle tone, looking earnestly at her, to see if she was agitated. It was not the case. She sighed, but evinced no trepidation.

“Shall he be shown in at once?” I inquired.

“No—wait a few moments,” replied the extraordinary girl, and seemed lost in thought for about a minute. “Now!” she exclaimed; and I sent down the nurse, herself pale and trembling with apprehension, to request the attendance of Dr. D— and Mr. N—.

As they were heard slowly approaching the room, I looked anxiously at my patient, and kept my fingers at her pulse. There was not a symptom of flutter or agitation. At length the door was opened, and Dr. D— slowly entered, with N— upon his arm. As soon as his pale trembling figure was visible, a calm and heavenly smile beamed upon the countenance of Miss P—. It was full of ineffable loveliness! She stretched out her right arm; he pressed it to his lips, without uttering a word.

My eyes were riveted on the features of Miss P—. Either they deceived me, or I saw a strange alteration—as if a cloud were stealing over her face. I was right!—We all observed her colour fading rapidly. I rose from my chair; Dr. D— also came nearer, thinking she was on the verge of

fainting. Her eye was fixed upon the flushed features of her lover, and gleamed with radiance. She gently elevated both her arms towards him, and he leaned over her.

“PREPARE!” she exclaimed, in a low thrilling tone ;—her features became paler and paler—her arms fell. She had spoken—she had breathed her last. She was dead!

Within twelve months poor N— followed her; and, to the period of his death, no other word or thought seemed to occupy his mind but the momentous warning which had issued from the lips of Agnes P—, PREPARE!

I have no mystery to solve, no *denouement* to make. I tell the facts as they occurred; and hope they may not be told in vain!