

The Curse

By Anonymous

—The deed was foul,
But grievously the forfeit has been paid.'

ASTOLPHO

I am again free—free, save from the torture of my own thoughts, which, like the furies of old, are ever present to lash me. I am once more in the deserted home of my fathers—I am no longer a fettered maniac, crouching spaniel-like before the glare of my savage keeper. There is no one to whom I dare open my mind. It may be a childish morbid feeling, but still I dare not, cannot do it. The presence of man is hateful to me—all seem to look on me with loathing and hatred. I must unload my breast—I must give some vent to the fire which burns within me, and record my tale of desolation; any thing is preferable to unbroken silence; and it is matter of consolation that when I am gone, some perchance may pity me, when they peruse the strange record of my blasted fate.

The second son of a family more distinguished for unblemished antiquity than possessions or wealth, I was early thrown, in a great measure, on my own resources, and sought in foreign climes that fortune which there was no chance of finding at home. I was successful beyond hope or expectation; and, ere my health had been lost and strength wasted by the withering influence of a tropical clime, I was on my way homeward, rich almost beyond my wildest desires.

'Now am I indeed happy,' I exclaimed as the palm-clad hills of Bombay faded from my sight—'now am I happy indeed.' For home, with all its ecstatic associations, rushed full and strong on my mind; I had a father whom I revered—a brother whom I loved as brother never was loved before; I was going to see them, to live with them, never more to part. But there was one in whom was concentrated the love of father and of brother, and more than both—one who for years, ay 'even from my boyish days,' had ever formed a part of my musings by day, my dreams by night; the thoughts of whose love and constancy had been my guiding polar star in all difficulties, the zest of my prosperity, the solace of my darker hours;—deprived of whom life seemed but a 'salt-sown desert,' though invested with all that was glorious or great, and with whom a crust of brown bread and a squalid hovel seemed richer than the banquet of a Roman emperor, or the palace of an eastern magician whose slaves were mighty genii, and to whom the elements themselves were ministering spirits.

Helen Vere—my hand shakes like palsied age as I trace her name—Helen Vere was my first, my only love; I loved her before I knew what the passion was, and it grew with my years, and strengthened with my strength. I see her at this moment before me, plain and distinct, as if she 'were still in the flesh.' Her slender, exquisitely formed person; her glorious bust, faultlessly white as uncontaminated snow, delicately intersected with veins vying with the dreamy azure of an Italian sky; her large dark swimming eyes, where passionate love and maiden bashfulness dwelt, twin sisters; her hand—her—but I injure by this attempt at description—her peerless beauty might be dreamt of, but never, never could be painted by poet or limner.

We were young when we parted—she was but a girl, and I but few steps beyond boyhood—and we loved almost as children love, without a dream of change or alteration. We pledged no vows, made no sworn promises;

‘For never having dream’d of falsehood, we
Had not one word to say of constancy.’

I never dreamt of change; I would as soon have thought that the sun could cease to shine, or the planets keep their nightly watch among the countless armies of heaven.

I had not heard from her for some time; the communication with the East, especially with that quarter where I was situated, was irregular and uncertain, and many months had passed since I had heard from home. I learned afterwards that a letter had come a day after I sailed—would to God I had received it!—but I must not anticipate.

My passage home was long and tedious, but at last the welcome cry from the mast-head was heard, and in a few hours my foot pressed the sacred soil of Britain: I felt as if inspired by a new existence; the air seemed richer and more balmy than the aromatic gales of Ceylon, for Helen Vere breathed it. That delicious moment richly repaid me for years of toil and privation and grief—I was *happy*: how strange the word seems *now*!

I lost not a moment, but pressed homeward; and soon the proud, free, cloud-mantled mountains of my native Scotland rose before me. The sight brought back my home associations with redoubled force and vividness; and then, for the first time, the thought struck me, what if Helen be sick—be dead? I never dreamt of picturing her as changed—my heart swelled almost to bursting—I trembled like a man at whose strength a raging fever has scoffed—a cold clammy perspiration burst from every pore, and though but twelve miles from home, I felt as if I could as easily have travelled a million—I could not go on, were death itself the penalty of my delay.

I turned off the road and entered a little country churchyard. It had long been deserted, the village to which it had been attached having long since gone to decay; a few grey, moss-covered stones alone remained to chronicle where the house of God had been; but the hand of time had spared the dwellings of mouldering mortality, and the damp, rude headstones still remained, to tell that the dust and ‘dry bones’ which they covered had once been living and breathing man. Our hereditary family tomb was here; a strange, old, gloomily fantastic pile, largely furnished, by some rural sculptor, with angels and cross bones and armorial bearings. It was the last place I had visited when I left home; and I sat down on one of the projecting angles, and mused on the chances which had befallen me since then. A sabbath-like calm pervaded the scene; nothing was heard save the slight breeze rustling the clumps of withered hemlock, or, at intervals, the sweet wild murmur of the humble-bee, gathering its treasure from the buttercups and blue-bells. No one can resist the sympathies of nature altogether, and my mind soon grew calm and tranquil as the scene around me.

While I thus sat in my musing mood, I heard some one behind me repeat those noble words of inspiration, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord’; and, on turning round, I beheld an old man, a peasant as his dress betokened, leaning on his staff and gazing on a little grave almost concealed by the charnel herbage which encircled it on every side. ‘Ay,’ he continued, as if unaware of my presence, ‘blessed indeed are they who die in the Lord; but the wicked man and the persecutor has no bonds in his death; he may flourish for a season as a green bay-tree; he may enlarge his bounds, and cast forth his arms in his pride; but the time shall come when they will seek him, but shall not find him, and the place which knew him once shall know him no more for ever:

“For why? the way of godly men
Unto the Lord is known;
Whereas the way of wicked men
Shall quite be overthrown.”

So saying, he began to clear away the grass and weeds from the little stone; and having done so, he sat down, as if musing on those who slept below.

Absorbed as I was with my own thoughts, my curiosity at last prevailed, and I said to him, ‘Good morrow, old man; I see you are, like myself, a visitor of the dead: may I ask whose resting-place you contemplate with such an interest?’

He now for the first time seemed aware of my presence, and, looking up and touching his broad blue bonnet, he replied:

‘They who sleep here, sir, were those of whom the world was not worthy—the true salt of the earth, even they who wandered about on the earth desolate, afflicted, tormented; and having come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, are now set down at the right hand of God.’ Here he took off his cap, and looked for a moment or two up to the bright blue heavens, as if he beheld the glorious situation he described. ‘In a word,’ he continued, ‘they who sleep here are two martyrs, who wrote their testimony against the defections of the land and the breaking of the covenant, even in the precious letters of their blameless blood. They fell unknown, unlamented, and unrevenged, by a world lying in sin; but there is One above before whom even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground unmarked; and *He* will avenge the innocent blood even in *His* own good time; for the blood of his saints is precious in his eyes.’

My curiosity being excited by this exordium, I requested him to tell me the story to which he referred. ‘It’s a simple tale,’ he said, ‘and little different from hundreds of other passages which our land had the misfortune to see when the bloody giant of prelacy triumphed in his pride and cruelty; but ye are a young man, and who knows but God in providence may yet call you to act in defence of his laws and his prerogative, even as they did? Surely all these things were given as an ensample to us, to act as they did, if ever the stern necessity of the times demand; which may a gracious God in his providence forfend!’

THE STORY OF JOHN CRAIG AND ISOBEL ROSS

It was in those days when the bloody persecutor of God’s saints, Charles the Second, was striving to root out all religion from our land, and when the booted and spurred apostles of prelacy went about like roaring lions seeking whom they might devour, that John Craig, a singular godly youth, did take to wife Isobel Ross, a maiden fair as to worldly externals, but, what was far better, of an enlightened and sober piety, not in any way tainted with the defections or errors which then so rife prevailed. They loved and were beloved more than usually falls to the lot of us poor shreds; and, not without reason, they promised themselves many, many days of happiness and joy. But a continuance of prosperity is not to be looked for in this vale of sorrow and tears; every month the persecution grew more and more bitter, and honest men durst no more worship God after the manner of their fathers, but were compelled to pray among glens and the rocks and caves of the earth, as if they were evil-doers, breaking and setting at nought the laws of the land.

Ye see that tomb there—it is the burial-place of the Erskines of Rath—(here I started—it was the tomb of my fathers the old man pointed to, but I said nothing). Sir John Erskine, who sleeps

there, grandfather to the present laird, was one of the most violent persecutors in this part of the country. The folk said he had a looking to some post under the king, which made him the more active in hunting out the rebels, as they were called; and he exceeded even the rude hirelings of soldiers themselves in his oppressions and violences; some of them indeed clean shrunk from participating in many of his deeds, which however was milk and honey to that bloodthirsty apostate James Sharp, whose appetite for carnage nothing could quench or slacken.

Well, sir, to keep to our tale: word was brought him early one morning that there was a conventicle, or field-preaching, in a glen up among the hills: see yonder it is, where a clump of black fir-trees are growing. This was an opportunity of serving the king not to be lost; so he got his servants to arm, called out the military who were quartered in the village, and set out at full speed to the place. But God had other things in reserve for those at that meeting; for, getting timely notice from a herd-boy who had seen the host advancing, they all escaped save and excepting John Craig, who fell suddenly, before he was aware, into the hands of the persecutors.

Being but a young man, and never before convicted of correspondence with the hill-folks, many thought that he would get free, or a short imprisonment, or small fine; but Sir John was enraged at the ill success of his expedition, and determined to wreak his vengeance on the poor lad, as a fearful example to the rest of the country. So he commanded him to be tied on a trooper's horse, and led him down the hill till they came to his own little cottage, where his wife Isobel was waiting his arrival to breakfast.

It was a fine, calm, clear, winter morning, the ground was covered with snow hardened by a keen frost, and the sun shone brightly and cheerily, as if on a scene of joy and festivity. His wife hearing the noise ran out to welcome her John, and beheld him a fettered prisoner, and in the hands of those whose tender mercies she well knew were horrid cruelties!

But the God whom she served did not forsake her in this her moment of bitterness and despair; she felt nerved with a strength which no human power could ever invest her with; and she went up to her husband firmly and tearlessly, as if she knew not that he was soon to be a bleeding corse, and she a friendless, houseless widow. She whispered a word of courage and consolation in his ear, she chafed his stiff, half-frozen hands, she parted his long brown hair over his brow—for his arms were tied—and with the corner of her apron she wiped the sweat from his cheek, and the foam of pain and agony from those lips from which she had often drained deep draughts of love and delight.

The murderous ruffian now tendered the test, as the only means of escape from death—instant death; and what a test! a compromise of conscience, a trampling on the tenderest feelings of devotion and principle. The agonized husband cast an eye of bitter meaning on his wife, and she at once understood the appeal, and nobly she answered it. 'John Craig,' she said, with a voice slightly broken, for the woman and the wife were holding a fearful strife in her breast,—'John Craig, care not for me; I am friendless, I am poor, I have none on earth to care for me but you, but God will care for me, John; He is the father of the fatherless, and the husband of the widow; *He* who has cared for me up till this time will give me strength to witness this last trial—to drain to the dregs this cup of unmingled bitterness and grief. We have often prayed together, dear John, when we were safe in our own sweet cottage, when we feared no danger and suffered no evil; and shall we not pray now when the shades of death compass us around, and hem us in on every side? come, John, let us pray to *Him* who is the hearer of prayer, and who hath not told any of the seed of Jacob to seek *His* face in vain.' And he looked on her and was comforted, and shook away the first and only tear he had shed; and there they knelt on the frozen ground, the husband

and the wife, and prayed a prayer which made even the rude and thoughtless troopers turn aside and weep.

But Sir John's heart was hardened; he rudely broke in on their devotions, cursed their canting whine, and commanded the helpless and manacled man to kneel down on a little stone, and the troopers to prepare their carbines. He obeyed without a murmur; but when he rose to take his place as commanded, all men wondered at the change which that short season of prayer had wrought on his countenance. His eye was no longer clouded and downcast, but gleamed with an exultation and light which seemed to reflect something beyond the grave—brighter and more glorious than the sun in his unclouded pride; he kissed the pale and bloodless cheek of his Isobel, and walked with a stately and unflinching step to the appointed place; but, before he kneeled down, he looked steadily at Erskine castle, the windows of which were glittering in the morning sun, and many thought that a shade of sorrow passed over his manly brow. He stood as if entranced for a moment or two, and then spake in tones more sorrowful than angry. 'We are commanded to pray for our enemies, and from my soul I beseech that my blood may not be laid to the charge of this man, but I may not conceal what God commands me to speak: I shall indeed fall by your hands, but I will not fall unavenged; you will not see it—none here present will see it—but as surely as I speak, it will come to pass. Yet three generations, and the proud house of Rath will cease to be, and fearful will the curse fall: would I could avert it! but God has decreed it, and what mortal shall stay *His* hand, or say unto *Him*, What doest thou? Farewell, time-farewell, all created comforts; welcome, eternity—welcome, heaven— welcome, eternal life. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Amen! and amen!'¹

Here he bent his head and ceased to speak. The troopers unslung their muskets and took aim, and the miserable wife kneeled down also, covering her eyes firmly with both hands. She saw nothing—she heard nothing; and when she came to her recollection, the band had retired, and her young goodman was lying at her feet, with his brains sprinkled over his fair and manly face. She stretched the body out on the snow, for she had now no home—the wretches had burned the cottage to the ground—and after closing those eyes which had never spoken to her but in the language of peace and love and joy, she prayed to their common God, and found comfort such as the world can neither give nor take away.

The rest of the tale is short, and will not tire out your patience. The murdering crew spent the whole of that day in the village, and none dared to visit the widowed mourner, lest they should be suspected of treasonable communing; such was the nature of these fearful times. That night a storm raged, such as no one remembered ever having witnessed. The wind howled, and swept over the hills and down the glens, as if the prince of darkness had been riding in triumph at the good services rendered him by his liege vassals. The snow fell fast and thick, and the mountain burns foamed and boiled, and roared like mighty rivers diverted from their proper channels. The next morning some pitying neighbours sought the lone cottage on the hill; but what a scene presented itself! There lay the martyr, calm as when he first entered into his rest, half shrouded in the drifted snow, and by his side his young widowed wife, cold and stiff and dead, the big tears-frozen on her wan cheek. But they had been tears of holy rapture and joy; she had found comfort in death, for a calm smile still seemed to linger about her mouth, and, like the holy Stephen, those who stood around 'saw *her* face as it had been the face of an angel.'

They both lie here, doubtless in hope of a glorious and blessed resurrection, and in that tomb sleeps their murderer, till the thunder of the last dread trumpet call the oppressor and the oppressed before His throne, who will judge all men according to the deeds done in the flesh,

¹ These concluding exclamations are almost verbatim from the *Scots Worthies*.

whether they be good or whether they be evil. God alone knows his fate; but, sir, not for all the wealth of the Indies ten times told, would I change that little neglected hillock of earth for yonder proud sculptured tomb. The curse has not yet fallen on the house of the spoiler; but as sure as that noontide sun is shining over our heads, it will come, and that quickly. The blood of Abel cried not in vain from the earth, neither will that of John Craig and Isobel Ross; for precious in God's sight is the blood of his saints.

It was long after the old man had ceased to speak, that I looked up, and when I did so he was gone. I was sitting alone, between the patrician tomb and the humble earthen mound, through the long rank grass of which the piping wind whistled in wild fitful gusts, as if the inhabitants of the tombs were lamenting their destinies and woes.

When at last I rose, I felt as if I were recovering from some strange sickness or troubled dream. '*The third generation,*' I continued repeating, over and over to myself,—'the third generation. 'Tis indeed come. What if the strange legend of that old dotard should be true? But no! 'tis but an idle tale—the invention of credulous superstition—an old wife's fable, to frighten children withal. May the curse light on the inventor of such an improbable farrago!' But for all this, I felt a kind of nameless awe and apprehension hang over me, and I half wished that I had never seen the peasant, and never heard his tale.

When going out of the enclosure, I saw some farmers ride past in the direction of my father's house, with favours in their hats, as if for a bridal; and between intervals of joyous shouts of laughter, I heard mention made of Rath house, as the scene of some such festivity. I could not prevail on myself to question the many groups as to particulars, but rode on, congratulating myself on my good fortune in reaching home on such an occasion, when all would be mirth, and happiness, and festivity.

Rath house, the seat of my fathers, stands at the extremity of a steep perpendicular line or curtain of rock, which, without break or stay, goes sheer down full twenty fathoms, till it ends in a deep and rapid stream, rushing through a narrow gorge, and scantily studded with a sort of dwarfish stunted brushwood, through which the boiling and bubbling of the water is seen at broken intervals.

Along the ridge of this steep it was the custom, when any marriage occurred in the family, for the bridal procession to ride to church, which stood in a glen about half a mile distant; and on such an occasion the bride and bridegroom rode double, that is, on one horse, the lady sitting behind, on an ancient pad used only for that purpose. 'Twas one of those old antiquated observances which almost every family of any standing has, and which is kept up merely because practised by former generations; and as the ceremony generally took place a little after mid-day, so I fully calculated on meeting the joyous throng midway at least. 'It will be my brother's bridal,' said I, 'and my father will be there—and my old uncle, Heaven bless him! will be there—and Helen Vere, perchance, will be there as bridemaids. Little does she dream how soon she may ride the principal feature in a similar solemnity.' The thought of Helen inspired me with new vigour; the legend of the churchyard was all forgotten. I spurred up my horse, and ere long the gray towers and turrets of my fathers rose before me, gloriously sprinkled by the fervid beams of an unclouded July sun. I recognised a friend in every stone, an old acquaintance in every tree. I even thought I knew the crows'-nests which I had so often despoiled; and I could swear to the initials of my name, which, with Helen's assistance, I had feloniously carved out of the smooth bark of a huge chestnut-tree.

But other thoughts now occupied my mind, for I heard the joyous shouts of many a light-hearted boy and maiden; and presently, turning a corner of the way, I saw indeed a bridal

procession, advancing in all its glittering circumstance and panoply. My heart beat high. 'I will meet them on foot,' I said, 'as an unknown individual, and their joy and surprise will be the greater.' So I turned my horse in to an adjoining field, and, mantling my face in my capacious cloak, I pursued my way, filled with a variety of contending feelings, which I can neither analyse nor describe.

On came the procession. My father (according to usage) rode first, on an ancient steed, which had faithfully served him for more than twenty years. The old man was feeble, and more bent than when I parted with him; yet still I was rejoiced to see that time had laid his hand but gently on his honoured head. His eye had waxed dim, however, and he rode past me without stop or recognition. Then came my relations,—distant connexions, whom I had never seen, or, having seen them merely as children, did not know. The ignorance was mutual. I was merely regarded as a spectator of the solemnity of the day. At last the bridegroom appeared, on a gallant piebald steed, which proudly pranced beneath his joyful burden, as if he gloried in the weight. I could not be mistaken; it was indeed my brother, my only darling brother, who, from a laughing lad, had grown up into a noble man,—a man whom in a crowded street you would turn back and gaze upon, as a perfect model of his race. Grace and power were in every motion and look; the light ease of the Apollo was admirably blended with the nerve and muscle of the Hercules.

He rode up, and, as usual, the bride sat behind him, tall, slender, and nobly fashioned, and bashfully retiring as the graceful gazelle. I was about to speak, when a passing gust of wind blew aside her veil, and there I beheld Helen! ay, Helen Vere, my first, my only love, and my all but pledged bride. What misery, and despair, and rage, were concentrated in that little moment! All my hopes, all the wanderings, and toils, and privations, became but as empty wind by that look. I seemed in a moment to live over fifteen long years of my life. My first feelings of love—my parting kiss—my dreams of her when far away, danced wildly in my brain. She was another's bride! The sudden shock was too much for feeble frail reason to sustain. I forgot where I was—what I was doing. I rushed forward; I threw out my arms, like one battling with some tempest-vexed sea. I screamed, I laughed, I shouted ha, ha, ha! till the rocks echoed as with the howling of a thousand wolves. My blood felt like liquid fire; my eyes seemed starting from their burning sockets; my veins were swollen to agony, and my heart seemed glowing and crackling, as if the infernal fire of a whole eternity were concentrated in its narrow limits. 'Welcome, my love! welcome, my lady bride!' I shouted, 'you have kept your troth bravely—we shall have a merry bridal—ha, ha, ha, ha! But who laughs?' I exclaimed, startled at the hideous sound of my own maniac voice—'who dares laugh at us—ha! she rides with a demon—'tis death, death himself—see you not the fleshless limbs through the bravery of his crimson robes—down, down fiend!—down, in God's name or the devil's, to your native hell!' And, possessed with the wild fantasy which my whirling brain had conjured up, I rushed at my brother to pull him from his seat. I had the nerve of a giant—I was blind with the fury of raging madness: the horse with its riders were near the edge of the rock—I sprang forward at the imaginary enemy, and oh, horror! horror! horror! over they went, horse and riders, over the naked craggy precipice. All I have described passed in a moment of time—the pair, thank God! never, on this earth at least, knew their murderer.

The moment they fell, my reason returned like a flash of light—I was fascinated, rooted to the spot, gazing into the abyss of death and horror. I saw, I marked every thing; I saw the steed with its burden dash from point to point; I even noted the sparks which the hoofs of the agonised brute struck from the flinty side of the ravine, and I distinctly heard a low but terribly clear shriek of

mortal agony mingling with the sullen crash which told they had reached their grave at the bottom.

The frenzy again came upon me; I lost all thought, all fear: regardless of the tremendous height, I swung myself down by bush and stone, getting footing and holding which in no other circumstances I could have found or availed myself of. I heard a confused murmur of voices above me, the gradual diminishment of which was the only index to my progress; and at length, bruised and breathless, but strong with fever and madness, I reached the bottom.

At first I could discern nothing; my eye was bloodshot and dim—I was dizzy too, and sick and faint; for the first excitation had begun to wear away. At last I saw something dark mingled with white; it grew plainer and plainer, like the phantasmagorical scene of a magic lantern; my sight gradually regained its wonted power—my reason and consciousness returned, and I saw what will haunt me till the spirit hath parted with the flesh—even longer, it may be.

It was very terrible to be sitting there in that wild fastness beside the dead, who but minutes—moments ay, had been rioting in life, and health, and joy—and I had caused the change; but for me, they still had been tenants of this glad and sunny earth, had still felt the blessed freshness of the western breeze which now whirled the withered oak leaves around their unconscious forms. The solitude was awful. I have been in the wild battle, where death held his bloodiest carnival,—I have been at sea when the masts were sprung, and the breakers a-head were already baptising the bows of the devoted ship,—and I have been in a city whose walls were crumbling, and whose palaces were sinking under the tornado and earthquake;—at that moment I would have rushed into the whole of these united, if that could be, as a blessed refuge from the calm, still quiet of death and desolation which that lonely gulf now presented.

Helen's face, by some chance, was untouched; unmutated; her head resting on the side of the horse, she seemed as if peacefully gazing at me, as she was wont in bygone years, when reposing with me on the sunny side of some green gowan-decked hill. I could not believe that what had happened was real—I spoke to her—I grasped her hand yet warm with recent life—I laughed, I upbraided her for her cold apathy and neglect. 'What! not one word, Helen, after our long absence? Is this kind? 'Tis but to try, my love—speak, Helen, speak but one word to say that you are still my own little black-haired laughing Helen.' My eye glanced on the fearfully mutilated form of my brother—the damning reality at once pressed upon my brain—for an instant I felt torments to which the severest bodily agony would be pleasure and ease—but madness, blessed madness, came to my relief; and I awoke, as after a long and troubled sleep, in the very room where I had slept when a child.

A strange fancy struck me: I thought for a moment that I was still a boy, that my residence in India, the fearful crag, and the lapse of fifteen long years, were but the visionary creations of the erratic dream of a single night; and I almost expected to hear the laughing voice of Helen Vere outside my chamber-door, chiding me for lying so long a-bed, when the sun had risen two hours before, and the tame stock-doves would be wearying for their accustomed food.

Two old withered hags, sick-nurses I presume, sat on each side of my couch in earnest converse, and I gently raised myself on my elbow to listen. 'In truth,' said one, 'tis an awful story; 'tis lucky the old man died before he knew it was his son.' 'What strange fancies he had, to be sure,' quoth the other; 'because the bride was timersome, and did not like riding a-horseback, he must needs have the bridemaids to take her place: well, well, old folks will have their fancies; the laird was ever particular in keeping up the freaks of the family.' I could hear no more—'She *was* true then!' I yelled, and sunk back stunned and senseless, like one stricken by a million thunderbolts.

I found myself naked and chained in a dungeon of a madhouse; it was cold, piercing cold; the night was wild and stormy, a high hoarse-voiced wind shook the dark tall trees which grew around the window, and their shadows, reflected by the bright moonlight, danced and flickered on the roof and walls of my cell like demons laughing at me, and mocking my distress; a great moping screech-owl was perched outside the gratings of the window; and as the neighbouring church-clock chimed the hour of one, it slowly and sluggishly raised its head for a moment, opened its heavy dull eye, and then slumbered as before: the clanking of chains was sullenly heard at intervals; and above, and below, and from every side, came fearful demoniac-like gusts of screaming and laughter, and shrieks of insensate agony, and wild dark blasphemies and execrations.

Thanks be to God, I am again in my sound mind—the fierce remembrance of the above fearful passages has softened down into a settled permanent melancholy. I cannot bear society—I see no one but the old clergyman of the village, whose pious communings have tended in no small degree to make me bear my lot with patience. But when I look at the desolation which pervades my paternal mansion and lawns, when I look at my worn-out frame, and my hair prematurely gray with sorrow and watching, and think that with me one of the oldest families in the land will cease to exist, a feeling of unspeakable loneliness will ever and anon steal upon me; and I think with chastened wonder upon the ways of that God which are past finding out, and which baffle and put to fault the wisest imaginings of our poor, erring, short-sighted race.