

The Magician

By Lord Lytton

It was deep night, and the Magician suddenly stood before me. "Arise," said he, "and let us go forth upon the surface of the world." I rose, and followed the sorcerer until we arrived at the entrance of a cavern. Pursuing its subterranean course for some minutes,—with the rushing sound of imprisoned waters loud and wild upon the ear, we came at length into a colder and fresher atmosphere; and presently, through a fissure in the rock, the sudden whiteness of the moon broke in, and partially lit up walls radiant with spars, and washed by a deep stream that wound its mysterious way to the upper air. And now, gliding through the chasm, we stood in a broad cell, with its lofty arch open to the sea. Column and spire, brilliant with various crystallizations—spars of all hues, sprang lightly up on either side of this cavern; and with a leap and a mighty voice, the stream, whose course we had been tracking, rushed into the arms of the great sea. Upon that sea, star after star mirrored its solemn lustre; and the moon, clad in a fuller splendour than I had ever before seen gathered round her melancholy orb, filled the cavern with a light, which was to the light of day what the life of a spirit is to that of a mortal. Passionless, yet tender—steadfast—mystic—unwavering—she shone upon the glittering spars; and in a long line, from the cavern to the verge of heaven, her sweet face breathed a quiet joy into the rippling billows—'smiles of the sea.' A few thin and fleecy clouds alone varied the clear expanse of the heavens. And,

"Beautiful," said I, "is this outward world!—your dim realms beneath have nothing to compare with it. There are no stars in the temples of the hidden earth—and one glimpse from the lovely moon is worth all the witchfires and meteors of the giant palaces below."

"Young mortal," said the Wizard in his mournful voice, "thou beholdest my native shore. Beside that sea stood my ancestral halls—and beneath that moon first swelled within my bosom the deep tides of human emotion—and in this cavern, whence we now look forth on the seas and heavens, my youth passed some of its earnest hours in contemplations never known to your lesser race clogged with the mire of ages: for that epoch lies remote in primeval times, which even tradition scarcely pierces. Your first fathers—what of their knowledge know ye?—what of their secrets have ye retained? Their vast and solemn minds were never fathomed by the plummet of your researches. The waves of the black Night have swept over the ancient world; and you can only guess of its buried glories by the shivered fragments which, ever and anon, Chance casts upon the shores of the modern Time."

"Do we sink, then," said I, "by comparison with the men of those distant dates? Is not our lore deeper and more certain? Was not their knowledge the imperfect offspring of confused conjecture? Did they not live among dreams and shadows, and make Truth herself the creature of fantastic Fable?"

"Nay," replied the shrouded and uncertain form beside me, "their knowledge pierced into the heart of things. They consalted the stars—but it was to measure the dooms of earth; and could we recall from the dust their perished scrolls, you would behold the mirror of the living times. Their prophecies, wrung from the toil and rapture of those powers which ye suffer to sleep, quenched, within the soul, traversed the wilds of ages, and pointed out among savage hordes the cities and laws of empires yet to be. Ten thousand arts have mouldered from the earth, and Science is the shadow of what it was. Young mortal, thou hast set thine heart upon Wisdom—thou hast wasted

the radiant hours of opening life amidst the wearisome thoughts of doting sages: thou hast laboured after Knowledge, and in that labour the healthful hues have left thy cheek, and the worm of decay creeps into the core of thy youth while the dew is yet upon its leaf:—and for this labour—and in the transport and the vision that the soul’s labour nurtures—thy spirit is now rapt from its fleshly career on earth,—wandering at will among the chasms and mines wombed within the world—breathing a vital air among the dead,—comraded by Spirits and the Powers that are not of flesh,—and catching, by imperfect glimpse and shadowy type, some knowledge of the arch mysteries of Creation;—and thou beholdest in me and in my science that which thy learning and thy fancy tracked not before. No legend ever chanced upon my strange and solemn being: nor does aught of my nature resemble the tales of wizard or sorcerer that the vulgar fantasies of superstition have embodied. Thou hast journeyed over a land without a chart, and in which even fable has hackneyed not the truth. Thou wouldst learn something of the Being thus permitted to thy wonder;— be it so. Under these sparkling arches—and before my ancestral sea—and beneath the listening ear of the halting moon—thou shalt learn a history of the antique world.”

The Tale of Kosem Kesamim

“Along the shores which for thirty centuries no human foot has trod, and upon plains where now not one stone stands upon another, telling even of decay—was once the city and the empire of the Wise Kings; for so termed by their neighbours were the monarchs that ruled this country. Generation after generation they had toiled to earn and preserve that name. Amidst the gloom of mysterious temples and the oracular learning of the star-read priests, the youth of each succeeding king was reared into a grave and brooding manhood. Their whole lives were mystery. Wrapped in the sepulchral grandeur of the imperial palace; seen rarely, like gods, they sent forth, as from a cloud, the light of their dread but benignant laws: the courses of their life were tracked not—but they were believed to possess a power over the seasons and elements, and to summon, at their will, the large-winged spirits that flit to and fro across the earth, governing, like dreams, with a vague and unpenetrated power the destiny of nations and the career of kings.

There was born to this imperial race a son, to whom seer and king alike foretold a strange and preternatural fate. His childhood itself was of a silent, stern, and contemplative nature. And his learning, even in his boyish youth, had ransacked all that the grey priests could teach him.

But when wind encounters wind the meeting is warfare—the warfare is storm. Wind meets with wind when the mind of youth soars from earth to seek wisdom and the heart of youth ranges heaven to find love.”

The Magician paused for a moment, and then, in a voice far different from the cold and solemn tone in which his accents were usually clothed, he broke forth:—

“O, beautiful, beyond the beauty of these sicklied and hoary times, was the beauty of Woman in the young world! The glory of Eden had not yet departed from her face, and the lustre of unwearied Nature glowed alike upon earth and earth’s majestic daughters. Age after age Man invents and deserts some worship of idols in his yearning for symbols of a Power beyond the reach of his vision and the guess of his reason. But never yet has he forsaken the oldest idolatry of all—the adoration of earthly beauty as the fairest image of celestial good. Yet to me, for I am that prince of whose throne and whose people no record in Time remains,—to me even the love of Beauty was a passion less ardent than the desire of Knowledge! My mind Launched itself into the depth of things—I loved step after step to trace effect to its first cause. Reason was a chain

from heaven to earth, and every link led me to aspire to the stars themselves. And the wisdom of my wise fathers was mine; I knew the secret of the elements, and could charm them into slumber, or arouse them into war. The mysteries of that dread chemistry which is now among the sciences that sleep—by which we can command the air and walk on its viewless paths, by which we can wake the thunder, and summon the cloud, and rive the earth; the exercise of that high faculty—the Imagining Power—by which Fancy itself creates what it wills, and which, trained and exercised, can wake the spectres of the dead—and bring visible to the carnal eye the Genii that walk the world;—the watchful, straining, sleepless science, that can make a sage’s volume of the stars;—these were mine, and yet I murmured—I repined!—what higher mysteries were yet left to learn! The acquisition of to-day was but the disappointment of the morrow, and the dispensation of my ambition was—to desire!

It was evening, and I went from the groves of the sacred temple to visit one whom I loved. The way spread over black and rugged masses of rock, amidst which the wild shrub and dark weed sprung rife and verdant; for the waste as yet was eloquent of some great revolution in the earlier epochs of the world—when change often trod the heels of change; and Earth was scarcely reconciled to the sameness of her calm career. And I stood beneath the tree where SHE was to meet me; my heart leaped within me as I saw her footsteps bounding along—she came with her sweet lips breathing the welcome of human love, and I laid my head on her bosom and was content.

And, “Oh,” said she, “art thou proud of thy dawning fame? The seers speak of thee with wonder, and the priests bow their heads before thy name.”

Then the passion of my soul broke forth, and I answered,

“What is this petty power that I possess, and what this barren knowledge? The great arch secret of all, I have toiled night after night to conquer, and I cannot attain it. What is it to command even the dark Spirits at war with Heaven—if we know not the nature of those whom we command? What I desire is not knowledge, but the source of knowledge. I wish that my eye should penetrate at once into the germ and cause of things: that when I look upon the outward beauty of the world, my sight should pierce within, and see the mechanism which causes and generates the beauty working beneath. Enough of my art have I learned to know that there is a film over human eyes which prevents their penetrating beyond the surface; it is to remove that film, and dart into the essence, and survey the One Great Productive Spirit of all Things, that I labour and yearn in vain. All other knowledge is a cheat; this is the high prerogative which mocks at conjecture and equals us with a God!”

Then Lyciah saw that I was moved, and she soothed me into rest with the coo of her sweet songs.

Midnight had crept over the earth as I returned homeward across that savage scene. Rock heaped on rock bordered and broke upon the lonely valley that I crossed; and the moon was still, and shining, as at this hour, when its life is four thousand years nearer to its doom. Then suddenly I saw moving before me, with a tremulous motion, a meteoric Fire of an exceeding brightness. Ever as it moved above the seared and sterile soil, it soared and darted restlessly to and fro; and I thought, as it danced and quivered, that I heard it laugh from its burning centre with a wild and frantic joy. I fancied, as I gazed upon the Fire, that in that shape sported one of the children of the Elementary Genii; and, addressing it in their language, I bade it assume a palpable form. But the Fire darted on unheedingly, save that now the laugh from amidst the flame came distinctly and fearfully on my ear. Then my hair stood erect, and my veins curdled, and my knees knocked together; I was under the influence of an awe; for I felt that the Power

was not of this world, nor of any world of which the knowledge ye call magic had yet obtained a glimpse. My voice faltered, and thrice I strove to speak to the Light—but in vain: and when at length I addressed it in the solemn adjuration by which the sternest of the Fiends are bound, the Fire sprang up from the soil—towering aloft—with a livid but glorious lustre, bathing the whole atmosphere in its glare,—quenching, with an intenser ray, the splendours of the moon,—and losing its giant crest in the far Invisible of Heaven!

And a voice came forth, saying—”Thou callest upon inferior Spirits; I am that which thou hast pined to behold—I am The Living Principle of the World!”

I bowed my face, and covered it with my hands, and my voice left me; when again I looked round, behold, the Fire had shrunk from its momentary height, and was (now dwarfed and humble) creeping before me in its wavering and snake-like course. But fear was on me, and I fled, and fast fled the Fire by my side; and oft, but faint, from its ghastly heart came the laugh that thrilled the marrow of my bones. The waste was past, and the giant temple of the One God rose before me; I rushed forward, and fell breathless by its silent altar. And there sat the High Priest; for night and day some One of the sacred host watched by the altar; he was of great age, and the tide of human emotion had ebbed from his veins; but even he was struck with my fear, and gazed upon me with his rayless eyes, and bade me be of cheer, for the place was holy. I looked round; the Fire was not visible, and I breathed freely; but I answered not the Priest, for years had dulled him into stone, and when I rose his eye followed me not. I gained the purple halls set apart for the king’s son. And the pillars were of ivory inlaid with gold; the gems and perfumes of the East gave light and fragrance to the air; the gorgeous banquet was spread; and music from unseen hands swelled from floor to roof as I passed along. But lo! by the throne, crouching beneath the purple canopy, I saw the laughing Fire; and it seemed, lowly and paled, to implore protection. I paused, and took the courtiers aside, and asked them to mark the flame; but they saw it not—only for me did it gleam and burn. Then knew I that it was indeed a Spirit of that high race, which, even when they take visible form, are not visible save to the students of the Dread Science! And I trembled but revered.

And the Fire stayed by me night and day, and I grew accustomed to its light. But never, by charm nor spell, could I draw further word from it; and it followed my steps with a silent and patient homage. By degrees there came over me a vain and proud delight to think that I was so honoured; and I looked upon the changeful face of the Fire as upon the face of a friend.

There was a man who had told years beyond the memory of the living—a revered and famous soothsayer—to whom, in times of dread and omen, our priests and monarchs themselves repaired for warning and advice. I sought his abode. The Seer was not of our race—he came from the distant waters of the Nile, banished by the hierophants of Egypt for solutions more clear than their own of the mysteries of Osiris and Naith. It was in the very cavern in which we now stand that the Seer held his glittering home—lamp upon lamp then lighted up, from an unflinching naphtha, these dazzling spars, hailed as a beacon by the seamen who brought the merchandize of the world into yonder bay, then so loud and swarming, now so desolate and still. Hither had my feet often turned in boyhood, and from the shrivelled lips of the old Egyptian had much of my loftiest learning been gleaned; for he loved me; and seeing with a prophet eye far down the lengths of Time, he foretold the dates at which Nations should be no more; and yet, far as he could look, beheld me living still; me, the infant he had cradled on his lap.

It was on that night, when the new moon scatters its rank and noxious influence over the foliage and life of earth, that I sought the Egyptian. The Fire burned with a fiercer and redder light than its wont, as it played and darted by my side. And when, winding by the silver sands, I

passed into the entrance of the cave, I saw the old man sitting on a stone. As I entered, the Seer started from his seat in fear and terror—his eyes rolled—his thin grey hairs stood erect—a cold sweat broke from his brow—and the dread master stood before his pupil in agony and awe.

“Thou comest,” muttered he with white lips. “What is by thy side? Hast thou dared to seek knowledge with the Soul of all Horror—with the ghastly Leper of—? Avaunt! bid the fiend begone!”

His voice seemed to leave the old man, and with a shriek he fell upon his face on the ground.

“Is it,” said I, appalled by his terror—“is it the Fire that haunts my steps at which thou tremblest? Behold, it is harmless as a dog; it burns not while it shines: if a fiend, it is a merry fiend, for I hear it laugh while I speak. But it is for this, dread sire, that I have sought thee. Canst thou tell me the nature of the Spirit?—for a Spirit it surely is. Canst thou tell me its end and aim?”

I lifted the old man from the earth, and his kingly heart returned to him: he took the wizard crown from the wall, and he placed it on his brows; for he was as a monarch among the Things that are not of clay. And he said to the Fire— “Approach!” The Fire glided to his knees. And he said, “Art thou the Spirit of the Element, and was thy cradle in the Flint’s heart?”

And a voice from the flame answered “No.”

And again the Egyptian trembled.

“What art thou, then?” said he.

And the Fire answered, “Thy Lord.”

And the limbs of the Egyptian shook as if in the grasp of death.

And he said, “Art thou a Demon of this world?”

And the Fire answered, “I am the Life of this world—and I am not of other worlds.”

“I know thee—I fear thee—I acknowledge thee!” said the Egyptian; “and in thy soft lap shall this crowned head soon be laid.”

And the Fire laughed.

“But tell me,” said I,—for, though my blood stood still, my soul was brave and stern—“Tell me, O seer! what hath this Thing with me?”

“It is the Great Ancestor of us all!” said the Egyptian, groaning.

“And knows it the secrets of the Past?”

“The secrets of the Past are locked within it.”

“Can it teach me that which I pine to know? Can it teach me the essence of things—the nature of all I see? Can it raise the film from the human gaze?”

“Hush, rash prince!” cried the Egyptian,—“Seek not to know that which will curse thee with the knowledge. Ask not a power that would turn life into a living grave. All the lore that man ever knew is mine; but that secret have I shunned, and that power have I cast from me, as the shepherd casts the viper from his hand. Be moderate and be wise. And bid me exorcise the Spirit that accosts thee from the Fire!”

“Can it teach me the arch mystery? When I gaze upon the herb or flower, can it gift my gaze with the power to pierce into the cause and workings of its life?”

“I can teach thee this,” said the Fire; and it rose higher, and burned more fiercely, as it spoke, till the lamps of naphtha paled before it.

“Then abide by me, O Spirit!” said I; “and let us not be severed.”

“Miserable boy!” cried the Egyptian; “was this, then, the strange and preternatural doom which my Art foresaw was to be thine, though it deciphered not its nature? Knowest thou that this Fire, so clear—so pure—so beautiful—is——”

“Beware!” cried the voice from the Fire; and the crest of the flame rose, as the crest of a serpent about to spring upon its prey.

“Thou awest me not,” said the Egyptian, though the blood fled from his shrivelled and tawny cheeks. “Thou art—”

“The Principle of the Living World,” interrupted the voice.

“And thine other name?” cried the Egyptian.

“Thy Conqueror!” answered the voice; and straight as the answer went forth, the Egyptian fell, blasted as by lightning, a corpse at my feet. The light of the Fire played with a blue and tremulous lustre upon the carcase, and presently I beheld by that light that the corpse was already passed into the loathsomeness of decay—the flesh was rotting from the bones—and the worm and the creeping thing which the rottenness generates, twined in the very jaws and temples of the Sage.

I sickened and gasped for breath.—“Is this thy work, oh fearful fiend?” said I, shuddering. And the Fire, passing from the corpse, crept humbly to my feet; and its voice answered— “Whatever my power, it is thy slave!”

“Was that death thy work?” repeated my quivering lips.

“Thou knowest,” answered the Fire, “that death is not the will of any Power—save One. The death came from His will, and I but exulted over the blow!”

I left the cavern; my art, subtle as it was, gave me no glimpse into the causes of the Egyptian’s death. I looked upon the Fire, as it crept along the herbage, with an inquisitive, yet timorous eye. I felt an awe of the Demon’s power; and yet the proud transport I had known in the subjection of that power was increased, and I walked with a lofty step at the thought that I should have so magnificent a slave. But the words of the mysterious Egyptian still rang in my ear—still I shuddered and recoiled before his denunciation of the secret I desired to know. And, as I passed along the starry solitude, the voice of the Fire addressed me with a sweet and persuasive tone. “Shrink not, young Sage,” it said, or rather sang, “from a power beyond that of which thy wisest ancestors ever dreamed; lose not thy valour at the drivelling whispers of age: when did age ever approve what youth desires? Thou art formed for the destiny which belongs to royal hearts—the destiny courts thee. Why dost thou play the laggard?”

“Knowledge,” said I, musingly, “can never be productive of woe. If it be knowledge thou canst give me, I will not shrink. Lo! I accept thy gift!”

The Fire played cheerily to and fro. And from the midst of it there stepped forth a pale and shadowy form, of female shape and of exceeding beauty; her face was indeed of no living wanness, and the limbs were indistinct, and no roundness swelled from their vapoury robes; but the features were lovely as a dream, and long yellow hair—glowing as sunlight—fell adown her neck. “Thou wouldst pierce,” said she, “to the Principle of the World. Thou wouldst that thine eye should penetrate into my fair and mystic dominion. But not yet; there is an ordeal to pass. To the Whole Knowledge thou must glide through the Imperfect!” Then thin female kisses my eyes, and vanished, and with it vanished also the Fire.

Oh, beautiful!—Oh, wondrous!—Oh, divine! A scale had fallen from my sight—and a marvellous glory was called forth upon the face of earth. I saw millions and millions of spirits shooting to and fro athwart the air—spirits that my magic had never yet invoked—spirits of rainbow hues, and quivering with the joy which made their nature. Wherever I turned my gaze, life upon life was visible. Every blade of grass swarmed with myriads invisible to the common eye—but performing with mimic regularity all the courses of the human race; every grain of dust, every drop of water, was a world—mapped into countless tribes, all fulfilling mortal destinies

through the agency of mortal instincts,—hunger and love and hate and contest. There was no void in space, no solitude in creation. Bending my eyes below, I saw emerging from the tiny hollows of the earth those fantastic and elfin shapes that have been chiefly consecrated by your Northern Bards: forth they came merrily, merrily—now circling in choral dances, now chasing gossamers whose airy substance eludes the glass of science. If all around was life, it was the life of enchantment and harmony—a subtle, pervading element of delight. Speech left me for very joy, and I gazed, thrilled and breathless, around me—entered, as it were, into the innermost temple of the great system of the universe.

I looked round for the Fire—it was gone. I was alone amidst this new and populous creation, and I stretched myself voluptuously beneath a tree, to sate my soul with wonder. As a Poet in the height of his delirium was my rapture—my veins were filled with Poesy, which is intoxication—and my eyes had been touched with Poesy, which is the creative power—and the miracles before me were the things of Poesy, which is the enchanter's wand.

Days passed, and the bright Demon which had so gifted me appeared not, nor yet did the spell cease; but every hour, every moment, new marvels rose. I could not touch stone nor herb without coming into a new realm utterly different from those I had yet seen, but equally filled with life—so that there was never a want of novelty; and had I been doomed to pass my whole existence upon three feet of earth, I might have spent that existence in perpetual variety—in unsatisfied and eternally new research. But most of all, when I sought Lyciah I rejoiced in the gift I possessed; for in conversing with her my sense penetrated to her heart, and I felt, as with a magnetic sympathy, moving through its transparent purity, the thoughts and emotions which were all my own.

By degrees I longed indeed to make her a sharer in my discovered realms; for I now slowly began to feel the weariness of a conqueror who reigns alone—none to share my power or partake the magnificence in which I dwelt.

One day, even in the midst of angelic things that floated blissfully round me—so that I heard the low melodies they hymned as they wheeled aloft—one day this pining, this sense of solitude in life—of satiety in glory—came on me with intense increase of force. And I said, “But this is the Imperfect state; why not achieve the Whole? Why not ascend to that high and empyreal Knowledge which admits of no dissatisfaction, because in itself complete? Bright Spirit,” cried I aloud, “to whom I already owe so great a benefit, come to me now— why hast thou left me? Come and complete thy gifts. I see yet only the wonders of the secret portions of the world—touch mine eyes that I may see *the cause* of the wonders. I am surrounded with an air of life; let me pierce into the principle of that life. Bright Spirit, minister to thy servant!” Then I heard the sweet voice that had spoken in the Fire—but I saw not the Fire itself. And the voice said unto me— “Son of the Wise Kings, I am here!”

“I see thee not,” said I. “Why hidest thou thy lustre?”

“Thou seest the Half, and that very sight blinds thee to the Whole. This redundant flow of life gushes from me as from its source. When the midcourse of the river is seen, who sees also its distant spring? In thee, not myself, is the cause that thou beholdest me not. I am as I was when I bowed my crest to thy feet; but thine eyes are not what then they were!”

“Thou tellest me strange things, O Demon!” said I; “for why, when admitted to a clearer sight of things, should my eyes be only darkened when they turn to thee?”

“Does not all knowledge, save the one right knowledge, only lead men from the discovery of the primal cause? As Imagination may soar aloft, and find new worlds, yet lose the solid truths of

this one—so thou mayest rise into the regions of a preternatural lore, yet recede darklier and darklier from the clue to Nature herself.”

I mused over the words of the Spirit, but their sense seemed dim.

“Canst thou not appear to me in thine old, wan, and undulating brightness?” said I after a pause.

“Not until thine eyes receive power to behold me.”

“And when may I be worthy that power?”

“When thou art thoroughly dissatisfied with thy present gifts.”

“Dread Demon, I am so now!”

“Wilt thou pass from this pleasant state at a hazard—not knowing that which may ensue? Behold, all around thee is full of glory, and musical with joy! Wilt thou abandon that state for a dark and perilous Unknown?”

“The Unknown is the passion of him who aspires to know.”

“Pause; for there is terror in thy choice,” said the Invisible.

“My heart beats steadily.—I brave whatsoever be the penalty that attends on my desire!”

“Thy wish is granted,” said the Spirit.

Then straightway a pang, quick, sharp, agonising, shot through my heart. I felt the stream in my veins stand still, hardening into a congealed substance—my throat rattled, I struggled against the grasp of some iron power. A terrible sense of my own impotence seized me—my muscles refused my will, my voice fled—I was in the possession of some authority that had entered, and claimed, and usurped the citadel of my own self. Then came a creeping of the flesh, a numbing sensation of ice and utter coldness; and lastly, a blackness, deep and solid as a mass of rock, fell over the whole earth—I had entered DEATH!

From this state I was roused by the voice of the Demon. “Awake, look forth!—Thou hast thy desire!—Abide the penalty!” The darkness broke from the earth; the ice thawed from my veins; once more my senses were my servants.

I looked, and behold, I stood in the same spot, but how changed! The earth was one crawling mass of putridity; its rich verdure, its lofty trees, its sublime mountains, its glancing waters, had all been the deceit of my previous blindness; the very green of the grass and the trees were rottenness, and the leaves (not each leaf one and inanimate as they seemed to the common eye) were composed of myriads of insects and puny reptiles, battered on the corruption from which they sprang. The waters swarmed with a leprous life—those beautiful shapes that I had seen in my late delusion were corrupt in their several parts, and from that corruption other creatures were generated living upon them. Every breath of air was *not* air, a thin and healthful fluid, but a wave of animalculae, poisonous and foetid; for the Air is the Arch Corrupter, hence all who breathe die; it is the slow, sure venom of Nature, pervading and rotting all things; the light of the heavens was the Sickly, loathsome glare that steamed from the universal Death in Life. The World was one dead carcase, from which everything the World bore took its being. There was not such a thing as beauty!—there was not such a thing as life that did not generate from its own corruption a loathsome life for others! I looked down upon myself, and saw that my very veins swarmed with a motelike creation of shapes, springing into hideous existence from mine own disease, and mocking the Human Destiny with the same career of life, love, and death. Methought it must be a spell, which change of scene would annul. I shut my eyes with a frantic horror, and I fled, fast, fast, but blinded; and ever as I fled a laugh rang in my ears. I stopped not till I was at the feet of Lyciah, for she was my first involuntary thought. Whenever a care or fear possessed me, I had been wont to fly to her bosom, and charm my heart by the magic of her sweet voice. I was at the

feet of Lyciah—I clasped her knees—I looked up imploringly into her face—God of my Fathers! the same curse attended me still! Her beauty was gone. There was no whole,—no one life in that Being whom I had so adored. Her life was composed of a million lives; her stately shape, of atoms crumbling from each other, and so bringing about the ghastly state of corruption which reigned in all else around. Her delicate hues, her raven hair, her fragrant lips—Pah! What, what was my agony! I turned from her again,—I shrank in loathing from her embrace,—I fled once more,—on—on. I ascended a mountain, and looked down on the various leprosies of Earth. Sternly I forced myself to the task; sternly I inhaled the knowledge I had sought; sternly I drank in the horrible penalty I had dared.

“Demon!” I cried, “appear, and receive my curse!”

“Lo, I am by thy side evermore,” said the voice. Then I gazed, and, behold, the Fire was by my side; and I saw that it was the livid light which the jaws of Rottenness emits; and in the midst of the light, which was as its shroud and garment, stood a Giant shape—which was the shape of a Corpse that had been for months buried. I gazed upon the Demon with an appalled yet unquailing eye, and, as I gazed, I recognised in those ghastly lineaments a resemblance to the Female Spirit that had granted me the first fatal gift. But exaggerated, enlarged, dead,—Beauty rotted into Horror.

“I am that which thou didst ask to see face to face.—I am the Principle of Life.”

“Of Life! Out, horrible mocker!—hast thou no other name?”

“I have! and that name—CORRUPTION!”

“Bright Lamps of Heaven!” I cried, lifting my eyes in anguish from the loathly charnel of the universal earth; “and is this, which men call Nature,—is this the sole Principle of the World?”

As I spoke, the huge carcass beneath my feet trembled. And over the face of the corpse beside me there fell a fear.—And lo! the heavens were lit up with a pure and glorious light, and from the midst of them there came forth a Voice which rolled slowly over the charnel earth as the voice of thunder above the valley of the shepherd. “SUCH,” said the Voice, “IS NATURE, IF THOU ACCEPTEST NATURE AS THE FIRST CAUSE—SUCH IS THE UNIVERSE WITHOUT A GOD!”