The S. S.

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To say that there are epidemics of suicide is to give expression to what is now a mere commonplace of knowledge. And so far are they from being of rare occurrence, that it has even been affirmed that every sensational case of felo de se published in the newspapers is sure to be followed by some others more obscure: their frequency, indeed, is out of all proportion with the extent of each particular outbreak. Sometimes, however, especially in villages and small townships, the wildfire madness becomes an all−involving passion, emulating in its fury the great plagues of history. Of such kind was the craze in Versailles in 1793, when about a quarter of the whole population perished by the scourge; while that at the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris was only a notable one of the many which have occurred during the present century. At such times it is as if the optic nerve of the mind throughout whole communities became distorted, till in the noseless and black−robed Reaper is discerned an angel of very loveliness. As a brimming maiden, out−worn by her virginity, yields half−fainting to the dear sick stress of her desire—with just such faintings, wanton fires, does the soul, over−taxed by the continence of living, yield voluntary to the grave, and adulterously make of Death its paramour.

"When she sees a bank
Stuck full of flowers, she, with sigh, will tell
Her servants, what a pretty place it were
To bury lovers in; and make her maids
Pluck 'em, and strew her over like a corse."3

The mode spreads—then rushes into rage: to breathe is to be obsolete: to wear the shroud becomes comme il faut, this cerecloth acquiring all the attractiveness and éclat of a wedding−garment.

The coffin is not too strait for lawless nuptial bed; and the sweet clods of the valley will prove no barren bridegroom of a writhing progeny. There is, however, nothing specially mysterious in the operation of a pestilence of this nature: it is as conceivable, if not yet as

1 "Well−made, healthy children bring much into the world along with them. . . .

"When Nature abhors, she speaks it aloud: the creature that lives with a false life is soon destroyed.

Unfruitfulness, painful existence, early destruction, these are her curses, the tokens of her displeasure."

2 "And Argos was so depleted of Men (i e. after the battle with Cleomenes) that the slaves usurped everything—

ruling and disposing—until such time as the sons of the slain were grown up."

3 Beaumont and Fletcher: The Maid's Tragedy..explicable, as the contagion of cholera, mind being at least as sensitive to the touch of mind as body to that of body.

It was during the ever−memorable outbreak of this obscure malady in the year 1875 that I ventured to break in on the calm of that deep Silence in which, as in a mantle, my friend Prince Zaleski had wrapped himself. I wrote, in fact, to ask him what he thought of the epidemic. His answer was in the laconic words addressed to the Master in the house of woe at Bethany:

"Come and see."

To this, however, he added in postscript: "But what epidemic?"

I had momentarily lost sight of the fact that Zaleski had so absolutely cut himself off from the world, that he was not in the least likely to know anything even of the appalling series of events to which I had referred. And yet it is no exaggeration to say that those events had thrown the greater part of Europe into a state of consternation, and even confusion. In London, Manchester, Paris, and Berlin, especially, the excitement was intense. On the Sunday preceding the writing of my note to Zaleski, I was present at a monster demonstration held in Hyde Park,

in which the Government was held up on all hands to the popular derision and censure—for it will be remembered that to many minds mysterious accompaniments of some of the deaths daily occurring conveyed a still darker significance than that implied in mere self−destruction, and seemed to point to a succession of purposeless and hideous murders. The dcmagogues, I must say, spoke with some wildness and incoherence. Many laid the blame at the door of the police, and urged that things would be different were they but placed under municipal, instead of under imperial, control. A thousand panaceas were invented, a thousand aimless censures passed. But the people listened with vacant ear. Never have I seen the populace so agitated, and yet so subdued, as with the sense of some impending doom. The glittering eye betrayed the excitement, the pallor of the cheek the doubt, the haunting fear. None felt himself quite safe; men recognized shuddering the grin of death in the air. To tingle with affright, and to know not why—that is the transcendentalism of terror. The threat of the cannon's mouth is trivial in its effect on the mind in comparison with the menace of a Shadow. It is the pestilence that walketh by night that is intolerable. As for myself, I confess to being pervaded with a nameless and numbing awe during all those weeks. And this feeling appeared to be general in the land. The journals had but one topic; the party organs through politics to the winds. I heard that on the Stock Exchange, as in the Paris Bourse, business decreased to a minimum. In Parliament the work of law−threshing practically ceased, and the time of Ministers was nightly spent in answering volumes of angry "Questions", and in facing motion after motion for the "adjournment" of the House.

It was in the midst of all this commotion that I received Prince Zaleski's brief "Come and see".

I was flattered and pleased: flattered, because I suspected that to me alone, of all men, would such an invitation, coming from him, be addressed; and pleased, because many a time in the midst of the noisy city street and the garish, dusty world, had the thought of that vast mansion, that dim and silent chamber, flooded my mind with a drowsy sense of the romantic, till, from very excess of melancholy sweetness in the picture, I was fain to close my eyes. I avow that that lonesome room—gloomy in its lunar bath of soft perfumed light—shrouded in the sullen voluptuousness of plushy narcotic−breathing draperies—pervaded by the mysterious spirit of its brooding occupant—grew more and more on my fantasy, till the remembrance had for me all the cool refreshment shed by a midsummer−night's dream in the dewy deeps of some Perrhoebian grove of cornel and lotos and ruby stars of the asphodel. It was, therefore, in all haste that I set out to share for a time in the solitude of my friend.

Zaleski's reception of me was most cordial; immediately on my entrance into his sanctum he broke into a perfect torrent of wild, enthusiastic words, telling me with a kind of rapture that he was just then laboriously engaged in co−ordinating to one of the calculi certain new properties he had discovered in the parabola, adding with infinite gusto his "firm" belief that the ancient Assyrianis were acquainted with all our modern notions respecting the parabola itself, the projection of bodies in general, and of the heavenly bodies in particular; and must, moreover, from certain inferences of his own in connection with the Winged Circle, have been conversant with the fact that light is not an ether, but only the vibration of an ether. He then galloped on to suggest that I should at once take part with him in his investigations, and commented on the timeliness of my visit. I, on my part, was anxious for his opinion on other and far weightier matters than the concerns of the Assyrians, and intimated as much to him. But for two days he was firm in his tacit refusal to listen to my story; and, concluding that he was disinclined to undergo the agony of unrest with which he was always tormented by any mystery which momentarily baffled him, I was, of course, forced to hold my peace. On the third day, however, of his own accord he asked me to what epidemic I had referred. I then detailed to him some of the strange events which were agitating the mind of the outside world. From the very first he was interested: later on that interest grew into a passion, a greedy soul−consuming quest after the truth, the intensity of which was such at last as to move me even to pity.

I may as well here restate the facts as I communicated them to Zaleski. The concatenation of incidents, it will be remembered, started with the extraordinary death of that eminent man of science, Professor Schleschinger, consulting laryngologist to the Charité Hospital in Berlin. The professor, a man of great age, was on the point of contracting his third marriage with the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Herr Geheimrath Otto von Friedrich. The contemplated union, which was entirely one of those marriages de convenance so common in good society, sprang out of the professor's ardent desire to leave behind him a direct heir to his very considerable wealth. By his first two marriages, indeed, he had had large families, and was at this very time surrounded by quite an army of little grandchildren, from whom (all his direct descendants being dead) he might have been

content to select his heir; but the old German prejudices in these matters are strong, and he still hoped to be represented on his decease by a son of his own. To this whim the charming Ottilie was marked by her parents as the victim. The wedding, however, had been postponed owing to a slight illness of the veteran scientist, and just as he was on the point of final recovery from it, death intervened to prevent altogether the execution of his design. Never did death of man create a profounder sensation; never was death of man followed by consequences more terrible. The Residenz of the scientist was a stately mansion near the University in the Unter den Linden boulevard, that is to say, in the most fashionable Quartier of Berlin. His bedroom from a considerable height looked out on a small back gareden, and in this room he had been engaged in conversation with his colleague and medical attendant, Dr. Johann Hofmeier, to a late hour of the night. During all this time he seemed cheerful, and spoke quite lucidly on various topics. In particular, he exhibited to his colleague a curious strip of what looked like ancient papyrus, on which were traced certain grotesque and apparently meaningless figures. This, he said, he had found some days before on the bed of a poor woman in one of the horribly low quarters that surround Berlin, on whom he had had occasion to make a post−mortem examination. The woman had suffered from partial paralysis. She had a small young family, none of whom, however, could give any account of the slip, except one little girl, who declared that she had taken it "from her mother's mouth" after death. The slip was soiled, and had a fragrant smell, as though it had been smeared with honey.

The professor added that all through his illness he had been employing himself by examining these figures. He was convinced, he said, that they contained some archaeological significance; but, in any case, he ceased not to ask himself how came a slip of papyrus to be found in such a situation,—on the bed of a dead Berlinerin of the poorest class? The story of its being taken from the mouth of the woman was, of course, unbelievable. The whole incident scorned to puzzle, while it amused him; seemed to appeal to the instinct—so strong in him—to investigate, to probe. For days, he declared, he had been endeavoring, in vain, to make anything of the figures.

Dr. Hofmeier too, examined the slip, but inclined to believe that the figures— rude and uncouth as they were—were only such as might be drawn by any schoolboy in an idle moment. They consisted merely of a man and a woman seated on a bench, with what looked like an ornamental border running round them. After a pleasant evening's scientific gossip, Dr. Hofmeier, a little after midnight, took his departure from the bedside. An hour later the servants were roused from sleep by one deep, raucous cry proceeding from the professor's room. They hastened to his door; it was locked on the inside; all was still within. No answer coming to their calls, the door was broken in. They found their master lying calm and dead on his bed. A window of the room was open, but there was nothing to show that any one had entered it. Dr. Hofmeier was sent for, and was soon on the scene. After examining the body, he failed to find anything to account for the sudden demise of his old friend and chief. One observation, however, had the effect of causing him to tingle with horror. On his entrance he had noticed, lying on the side of the bed, the piece of papyrus with which the professor had been toying in the earlier part of the day, and had removed it. But, as he was on the point of leaving the room, he happened to approach the corpse once more, and bending over it, noticed that the lips and teeth were slightly parted. Drawing open the now stiffened jaws, he found—to his amazement, to his stupefaction—that, neatly folded beneath the dead tongue, lay just such another piece of papyrus as that which he had removed from the bed. He drew it out—it was clammy. He put it to his nose,—it exhaled the fragrance of honey. He opened it,—it was covered by figures. He compared them with the figures on the other ship,—they were just so similar as two draughtsmen hastily copying from a common model would make them. The doctor was unnerved: he hurried homeward, and immediately submitted the honey on the papyrus to a rigorous chemical analysis: he suspected poison—a subtle poison—as the means of a suicide, grotesquely, insanely accomplished. He found the fluid to be perfectly innocuous,—pure honey, and nothing more.

The next day Germany thrilled with the news that Professor Schleschinger had destroyed himself. For suicide, however, some of the papers substituted murder, though of neither was there an atom of actual proof. On the day following, three persons died by their own hands in Berlin, of whom two were young members of the medical profession; on the day following that, the number rose to nineteen, Hamburg, Dresden, and Aachen joining in the frenzied death−dance; within three weeks from the night on which Professor Schleschinger met his unaccountable end, eight thousand persons in Germany, France, and Great Britain, died in that startlingly sudden and secret manner which we call "tragic," many of them obviously by their own hands, many, in what seemed the servility of a fatal imitativeness, with figured, honey−smeared slips of papyrus beneath their tongues. Even now—now, after

years—I thrill intensely to recall the dread remembrance; but to live through it, to breathe daily the mawkish, miasmatic atmosphere, all vapid with the suffocating death—ah, it was terror too deep, nausea too foul, for mortal bearing.

Novalis has somewhere hinted at the possibility (or the desirability) of a simultaneous suicide and voluntary return by the whole human family into the sweet bosom of our ancient Father—I half expected it was coming, had come, then. It was as if the old, good−easy, meek−eyed man of science, dying, had left his effectual curse on all the world, and had thereby converted civilization into one omnivorous grave, one universal charnel−house.

I spent several days in reading out to Zaleski accounts of particular deaths as they had occurred. He seemed never to tire of listening, lying back for the most part on the silver−cushioned couch, and wearing an inscrutable mask. Sometimes he rose and paced the carpet with noiseless foot−fall, his steps increasing to the swaying, uneven velocity of an animal in confinement as a passage here or there attracted him, and then subsiding into their slow regularity again. At any interruption in the reading, he would instantly turn to me with a certain impatience, and implore me to proceed; and when our stock of matter failed, he broke out into actual anger that I had not brought more with me. Henceforth the negro, Ham, using my trap, daily took a double journey—one before sunrise, and one at dusk—to the nearest townlet, from which he would return loaded with newspapers. With unimaginable eagerness did both Zaleski and I seize, morning after morning, and evening after evening, on these budgets, to gloat for long hours over the ever−lengthening tale of death. As for him, sleep forsook him. He was a man of small reasonableness, scorning the limitations of human capacity; his palate brooked no meat when his brain was headlong in the chase; even the mild narcotics which were now his food and drink seemed to lose something of their power to mollify, to curb him. Often rising from slumber in what I took to be the dead of night—though of day or night there could be small certainty in that dim dwelling—I would peep into the domed chamber, and see him there under the livid−green light of the censer, the leaden smoke issuing from his lips, his eyes fixed unweariedly on a square piece of ebony which rested on the coffin of the mummy near him. On this ebony he had pasted side by side several woodcuts—snipped from the newspapers—of the figures traced on the pieces of papyrus found in the mouths of the dead. I could see, as time passed, that he was concentrating all his powers on these figures; for the details of the deaths themselves were all of a dreary sameness, offering few salient points for investigation. In those cases where the suicide had left behind him clear evidence of the means by which he had committed the act, there was nothing to investigate; the others—rich and poor alike, peer and peasant—trooped out by thousands on the far journey, without leaving the faintest footprint to mark the road by which they had gone.

This was perhaps the reason that, after a time, Zaleski discarded the newspapers, leaving their perusal to me, and turned his attention exclusively to the ebon tablet. Knowing as I full well did the daring and success of his past spiritual adventures,—the subtlety, the imagination, the imperial grip of his intellect—I did not at all doubt that his choice was wise, and would in the end be justified. These woodcuts—now so notorious—were all exactly similar in design, though minutely differing here and there in drawing. The following is a facsimile of one of them taken by me at random:.The time passed. It now began to be a grief to me to see the turgid pallor that gradually overspread the always ashen countenance of Zaleski; I grew to consider the ravaging life that glared and blazed in his sunken eye as too volcanic, demonic, to be canny: the mystery, I decided at last—if mystery there were—was too deep, too dark, for him. Hence perhaps it was, that I now absented myself more and more from him in the adjoining room in which I slept. There one day I sat reading over the latest list of horrors, when I heard a loud cry from the vaulted chamber. I rushed to the door and beheld him standing, gazing with wild eyes at the ebony tablet held straight out in front of him.

"By Heaven!" lie cried, stamping savagely with his foot.

"By Heaven! Then I certainly am a fool! It is the staff of Phæbus in the hand of Hermes!"

I hastened to him. "Tell me," I said, "have you discovered anything?"

"It is possible."

"And has there really been foul play—murder—in any of these deaths?"

"Of that, at least, I was certain from the first."

"Great God!" I exclaimed, "could any son of man so convert himself into a fiend, a beast of the wilderness—"

"You judge precisely in the manner of the multitude," he answered somewhat petulantly.

"Illegal murder is always a mistake, but not necessarily a crime. Remember Corday. But in cases where the

murder of one is really fiendish, why is it qualitatively less fiendish than the murder of many? On the other hand, had Brutus slain a thousand Cæsars—each act involving an additional exhibition of the sublimest self−suppression—he might well have taken rank as a saint in heaven."

Failing for the moment to see the drift or the connection of the argument, I contented myself with waiting events. For the rest of that day and the next Zaleski seemed to have dismissed the matter of the tragedies from his mind, and entered calmly on his former studies. He no longer consulted the news, or examined the figures on the tablet. The papers, however, still arrived daily, and of these he soon afterwards laid several before me, pointing, with a curious smile, to a small paragraph in each. These all appeared in the advertisement columns, were worded alike, and read as follows:

"A true son of Lycurgus, having news, desires to know the time and place of the next meeting of his Phyle. Address Zaleski, at R— Abbey, in the county of M—."

I gazed in mute alternation at the advertisement and at him. I may here stop to make mention of a very remarkable sensation which my association with him occasionally produced in me. I felt it with intense, with unpleasant, with irritating keenness at this moment. It was the sensation of being borne aloft—aloft—by a force external to myself—such a sensation as might possibly tingle through an earthworm when lifted into illimitable airy heights by the strongly−daring pinions of an eagle. It was the feeling of being hurried out beyond one's depth—caught and whiffed away by the all−compelling sweep of some rabid vigour into a new, foreign element.

Something akin I have experienced in an "express" as it raged with me—winged, rocking, ecstatic, shrilling a dragon Aha!—round a too narrow curve. It was a sensation very far from agreeable.

"To that," he said, pointing to the paragraph, "we may, I think, shortly expect an answer. Let us only hope that when it comes it may be immediately intelligible."

We waited throughout the whole of that day and night, hiding our eagerness under the pretence of absorption in our books. If by chance I fell into an uneasy doze, I found him on waking ever watchful, and poring over the great tome before him. About the time, however, when, could we have seen it, the first grey of dawn must have been peeping over the land, his impatience again became painful to witness: he rose and paced the room, muttering occasionally to himself. This only ceased, when, hours later, Ham entered the room with an envelope in his hand. Zaleski seized it—tore it open—ran his eye over the contents—and dashed it to the ground with an oath.

"Curse it!" he groaned. "Ah, curse it! unintelligible—every syllable of it!"

I picked up the missive and examined it. It was a slip of papyrus covered with the design now so hideously familiar, except only that the two central figures were wanting. At the bottom was written the date of the 15 th of November—it was then the morning of the 12 th —and the name "Morris." The whole, therefore, presented the following appearance:

My eyes were now heavy with sleep, every sense half−drunken with the vapour−like atmosphere of the room, so that, having abandoned something of hope, I tottered willingly to my bed, and fell into a profound slumber, which lasted till what must have been the time of the gathering in of the shades of night. I then rose. Missing Zaleski, I sought through all the chambers for him. He was nowhere to be seen. The negro informed me with an affectionate and anxious tremor in the voice that his master had left the rooms some hours before, but had said nothing to him. I ordered the man to descend and look into the sacristy of the small chapel wherein I had deposited my calèche, and in the field behind, where my horse should be. He returned with the news that both had disappeared. Zaleski, I then concluded, had—undoubtedly departed on a journey. I was deeply touched by the demeanour of Ham as the hours went by. He wandered stealthily about the rooms like a lost being. It was like matter sighing after, weeping over, spirit. Prince Zaleski had never before withdrawn himself from the surveillance of this sturdy watchman, and his disappearance now was like a convulsion in their little cosmos. Ham implored me repeatedly, if I could, to throw some light on the meaning of this catastrophe. But I too was in the dark. The Titanic frame of the Ethiopian trembled with emotion as in broken, childish words he told me that he felt instinctively the approach of some great danger to the person of his master. So a day passed away, and then another. On the next he roused me from sleep to hand me a letter which, on opening, I found to be from Zaleski. It was hastily scribbled in pencil, dated "London, Nov. 14 th ," and ran thus:

"For my body—should I not return by Friday night—you will, no doubt, be good enough to make search. Descend the river, keeping constantly to the left; consult the papyrus; and stop at the Descensus Æsopi. Seek diligently, and you will find. For the rest, you know my fancy for cremation: take me, if you will, to the

crematorium of Père−Lachaise. My whole fortune I decree to Ham, the Lybian."

Ham was all for knowing the contents of this letter, but I refused to communicate a word of it.

I was dazed, I was more than ever perplexed, I was appalled by the frenzy of Zaleski. Friday night! It was then Thursday morning. And I was expected to wait through the dreary interval uncertain, agonized, inactive! I was offended with my friend; his conduct bore the interpretation of mental distraction. The leaden hours passed all oppressively while I sought to appease the keenness of my unrest with the anodyne of drugged sleep. On the next morning, however, another letter—a rather massive one—reached me. The covering was directed in the writing of Zaheski, but on it he had scribbled the words: "This need not be opened unless I fail to reappear before Saturday." I therefore laid the packet aside unread.

I waited all through Friday, resolved that at six o'clock, if nothing happened, I should make some sort of effort. But from six I remained, with eyes strained towards the doorway, until ten. I was so utterly at a loss, my ingenuity was so entirely baffled by the situation, that I could devise no course of action which did not immediately appear absurd. But at midnight I sprang up—no longer would I endure the carking suspense. I seized a taper, and passed through the doorway. I had not proceeded far, however, when my light was extinguished. Then I remembered with a shudder that I should have to pass through the whole vast length of the building in order to gain an exit. It was an all but hopeless task in the profound darkness to thread my way through the labyrinth of hall and corridors, of tumble−down stairs, of bat−haunted vaults, of purposeless angles and involutions; but I proceeded with something of a blind obstinacy, groping my way with arms held out before me. In this mariner I had wandered on for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when my fingers came into distinct momentary contact with what felt like cold and humid human flesh. I shrank back, unnerved as I already was, with a murmur of affright.

"Zalcski?" I whispered with bated breath.

Intently as I strained my ears, I could detect no reply. The hairs of my head, catching terror from my fancies, erected themselves.

Again I advanced, and again I became aware of the sensation of contact. With a quick movement I passed my hand upward and downward.

It was indeed he. He was half−reclining, half−standing against a wall of the chamber: that he was not dead, I at once knew by his uneasy breathing. Indeed, when, having chafed his hands for some time, I tried to rouse him, he quickly recovered himself, and muttered: "I fainted; I want sleep—only sleep." I bore him back to the lighted room, assisted by Ham in the latter part of the journey. Ham's ecstasies were infinite; he had hardly hoped to see his master's face again. His garments being wet and soiled, the negro divested him of them, and dressed him in a tightly−fitting scarlet robe of Babylonish pattern, reaching to the feet, but leaving the lower neck and fore−arm bare, and girt round the stomach by a broad gold−orphreyed ceinture. With all the tenderness of a woman, the man stretched his master thus arrayed on the couch. Here he kept an Argus guard while Zaleski, in one deep unbroken slumber of a night and a day, reposed before him. When at last the sleeper woke, in his eye,— full of divine instinct,—flitted the wonted falchion−flash of the whetted, two−edged intellect; the secret, austere, self−conscious smile of triumph curved his lip; not a trace of pain or fatigue remained. After a substantial meal on nuts, autumn fruits, and wine of Samos, he resumed his place on the couch; and I sat by his side to hear the story of his wandering. He said:

"We have, Shiel, had before us a very remarkable series of murders, and a very remarkable series of suicides. Were they in any way connected? To this extent, I think—that the mysterious, the unparalleled nature of the murders gave rise to a morbid condition in the public mind, which in turn resulted in the epidemic of suicide. But though such an epidemic has its origin in the instinct of imitation so common in men, you must not suppose that the mental process is a conscious one. A person feels an impulse to go and do, and is not aware that at bottom it is only an impulse to go and do likewise. He would indeed repudiate such an assumption. Thus one man destroys himself, and another imitates him—but whereas the former uses a pistol, the latter uses a rope. It is rather absurd, therefore, to imagine that in any of those cases in which the slip of papyrus has been found in the mouth after death, the cause of death has been the slavish imitativeness of the suicidal mania—for this, as I say, is never slavish. The papyrus then—quite apart from the unmistakable evidences of suicide invariably left by each self−destroyer—affords us definite and certain means by which we can distinguish the two classes of deaths; and we are thus able to divide the total number into two nearly equal halves.

"But you start—you are troubled—you never heard or read of murder such as this, the simultaneous murder of thousands over wide areas of the face of the globe; here you feel is something outside your experience, deeper than your profoundest imaginings. To the question 'by whom committed?' and 'with what motive?' your mind can conceive no possible answer.

And yet the answer must be, 'by man, and for human motives,'—for the Angel of Death with flashing eye and flaming sword is himself long dead; and again we can say at once, by no one man, but by many, a cohort, an army of men; and again, by no common men, but by men hellish (or heavenly) in cunning, in resource, in strength and unity of purpose; men laughing to scorn the flimsy prophylactics of society, separated by an infinity of self−confidence and spiritual integrity from the ordinary easily−crushed criminal of our days.

"This much at least I was able to discover from the first; and immediately I set myself to the detection of motive by a careful study of each case. This, too, in due time, became clear to me,—

but to motive it may perhaps be more convenient to refer later on. What next engaged my attention was the figures on the papyrus, and devoutly did I hope that by their solution I might be able to arrive at some more exact knowledge of the mystery.

"The figures round the border first attracted me, and the mere reading of them gave me very little trouble. But I was convinced that behind their meaning thus read lay some deep esoteric significance; and this, almost to the last, I was utterly unable to fathom. You perceive that these border figures of two different lengths, drawings of snakes, the Greek delta, and a heart−shaped object with a dot following it. These succeed one another in a certain definite order on all the slips. What, I asked myself, were these meant to represent— letters, numbers, things, or abstractions? This I was the more readily able to determine because I have often, in thinking over the shape of the Roman letter S, wondered whether it did not owe its convolute form to an attempt on the part of its inventor to make a picture of the serpent; S being the sibilant or hissing letter, and the serpent the hissing animal. This view, I fancy (though I am not sure), has escaped the philologists, but of course you know that all letters were originally pictures of things, and of what was S a picture, if not of the serpent? I therefore assumed, by way of trial, that the snakes in the diagram stood for a sibilant letter, that is, either C or S. And thence, supposing this to be the case, I deduced: firstly, that all the other figures stood for letters; and secondly, that they all appeared in the form of pictures of the things of which those letters were originally meant to be pictures.

Thus the letter 'm,' one of the four 'liquid' consonants, is, as we now write it, only a shortened form of a waved line; and as a waved line it was originally written, and was the character by which a stream of running water was represented in writing; indeed it only owes its name to the fact that when the lips are pressed together, and 'm' uttered by a continuous effort, a certain resemblance to the murmur of running water is produced. The longer waved line in the diagram I therefore took to represent 'm'; and it at once followed that the shorter meant 'n,' for no two letters of the commoner European alphabets differ only in length (as distinct from shape) except 'm' and 'n,' and 'w' and 'v'; indeed, just as the French call 'w' 'double−ve,' so very properly might 'm' be called 'double−en.' But, in this case, the longer not being 'w,' the shorter could not be 'v': it was therefore 'n.' And now there only remained the heart and the triangle. I was unable to think of any letter that could ever have been intended for the picture of a heart, but the triangle I knew to be the letter A. This was originally written without the cross−bar from prop to prop, and the two feet at the bottom of the props were not separated as now, but joined; so that the letter formed a true triangle. It was meant by the primitive man to be a picture of his primitive house, this house being, of course, hut−shaped, and consisting of a conical roof without walls. I had thus, with the exception of the heart, disentangled the whole, which then (leaving a space for the heart) read as follows:

ss
"mm anan . . . san
cc

But "c" before "a" being never a sibilant (except in some few so−called "Romance" languages), but a guttural, it was for the moment discarded; also as no word begins with the letters "mn" except "mnemonics" and its fellows—I concluded that a vowel must be omitted between these letters, and thence that all vowels (except "a") were omitted; again, as the, double "s" can never come after "n" I saw that either a vowel was omitted between the two "s 's," or that the first word ended after the first "s."

Thus I got

"m ns sanan . . . san,"

or, supplying the now quite obvious vowels,

"mens sana in . . . sano."

The heart I now knew represented the word "corpore," the Latin word for "heart" being "cor," and the dot—showing that the word as it stood was an abbreviation—conclusively proved every one of my deductions.

"So far all had gone flowingly. It was only when I came to consider the central figures that for many days I spent my strength in vain. You heard my exclamation of delight and astonishment when at last a ray of light pierced the gloom. At no time, indeed, was I wholly in the dark as to the general significance of these figures, for I saw at once their resemblance to the sepulchral reliefs of classical times. In case you are not minutely acquainted with the technique of these stones, I may as well show you one, which I myself removed from an old grave in Tarentum."

He took from a niche a small piece of close−grained marble, about a foot square, and laid it before me. On one side it was exquisitely sculptured in relief.

"This," he continued, "is a typical example of the Greek grave−stone, and having seen one specimen you may be said to have seen almost all, for there is surprisingly little variety in the class. You will observe that the scene represents a man reclining on a couch; in his hand he holds a patera, or dish, filled with grapes and pomegranates, and beside him is a tripod bearing the viands from which he is banqueting. At his feet sits a woman—for the Greek lady never reclined at table. In addition to these two figures a horse's head, a dog, or a serpent may sometimes be seen; and these forms comprise the almost invariable pattern of all grave reliefs. Now, that this was the real model from which the figures on the papyrus were taken I could not doubt, when I considered the seemingly absurd fidelity with which in each murder the papyrus, smeared with honey, was placed under the tongue of the victim. I said to myself: it can only be that the assassins have bound themselves to the observance of a strict and narrow ritual from which no departure is under any circumstances permitted—perhaps for the sake of signalling the course of events to others at a distance. But what ritual? That question I was able to answer when I knew the answer to these others,— why under the tongue, and why smeared with honey? For no reason, except that the Greeks (not the Romans till very late in their history) always placed an obolos, or penny, beneath the tongue of the dead to pay Iris passage across the Stygian river of ghosts; for no reason, except that to these same Greeks honey was a sacred fluid, intimately associated in their minds with the mournful subject of Death; a fluid with which the bodies of the deceased were anointed, and sometimes—especially in Sparta and the Pelasgic South—

embalmed; with which libations were poured to Hermes Psuchopompos, conductor of the dead to the regions of shade; with which offerings were made to all the chthonic deities, and the souls of the departed in general. You remember, for instance the melancholy words of Helen addressed to Hermione in Orestes:

And so everywhere. The ritual then of the inurdcrers was a Greek ritual, their cult a Greek cult—preferably, perhaps, a South Greek one, a Spartan one, for it was here that the highly conservative peoples of that region clung longest and fondliest to this semi−barbarous worship.

This then being so, I was made all the more certain of my conjecture that the central figures on the papyrus were drawn from a Greek model.

"Here, however, I came to a standstill. I was infinitely puzzled by the rod in the man's hand. In none of the Greek grave−reliefs does any such thing as a rod make an appearance, except in one well−known example where the god Hermes—generally represented as carrying the caduceus, or staff, given him by Phoebus—appears leading a dead maiden to the land of night. But in every other example of which I am aware the sculpture represents a man living, not dead, banqueting on earth, not in Hades, by the side of his living companion. What then could be the significance of the staff in the hand of this living man? It was only after days of the hardest struggle, the cruelest suspense, that the thought flashed on me that the idea of Hermes leading away the dead female might, in this case, have been carried one step farther; that the male figure might be no living man, no man at all, but Hermes himself actually banqueting in Hades with the soul of his disembodied protégée! The thought filled me with a rapture I cannot describe, and you witnessed my excitement. But, at all events, I saw that this was

a truly tremendous departure from Greek art and thought, to which in general the copyists seemed to cling so religiously. There must therefore be a reason, a strong reason, for vandalism such as this. And that, at any rate, it was no longer difficult to discover; for now I knew that the male figure was no mortal, but a god, a spirit, a DÆMON (in the Greek sense of the word); and the female figure I saw by the marked shortness of her drapery to be no Athenian, but a Spartan; no matron either, but a maiden, a lass, a LASSIE; and now I had forced on inc lassie dæmon, Lacedæmon.

"This then was the badge, the so carefully−buried badge, of this society of men. The only thing which still puzzled and confounded me at this stage was the startling circumstance that a Greek society should make use of a Latin motto. It was clear that either all my conclusions were totally wrong, or else the motto mens sana in corpore sano contained wrapped up in itself some acroamatic meaning which I found myself unable to penetrate, and which the authors had found no Greek motto capable of conveying. But at any rate, having found this much, my knowledge led me of itself one step further; for I perceived that, widely extended as were their operations, the society was necessarily in the main an English, or at least an English−speaking one—for of this the word "lassie" was plainly indicative: it was easy now to conjecture London, the monster−city in which all things lose themselves, as their headquarters; and at this point in my investigations I despatched to the papers the advertisement you have seen."

"But," I exclaimed, "even now I utterly fail to see by what mysterious processes of thought you arrived at the wording of the advertisement; even now it conveys no meaning to my mind."

"That," he replied, "will grow clear when we come to a right understanding of the baleful motive which inspired these men. I have already said that I was not long in discovering it. There was only one possible method of doing so—and that was, by all means, by any means, to find out some condition or other common to every one of the victims before death. It is true that I was unable to do this in some few cases, but where I failed, I was convinced that my failure was due to the insufficiency of the evidence at my disposal, rather than to the actual absence of the condition. Now, let us take almost army two cases you will, and seek for this common condition:

let us take, for example, the first two that attracted the attention of the world—the poor woman of the slums of Berlin, and the celebrated man of science. Separated by as wide an interval as they are, we shall yet find, if we look closely, in each case the same pathetic tokens of the still uneliminated striæ of our poor humanity. The woman is not an old woman, for sue has a 'small young' family, which, had she lived, might have been increased: notwithstanding which, she has suffered from hemiplegia, 'partial paralysis.' The professor, too, has had not one, but two, large families, and an 'army of grand−chihdren'; but note well the startling, the hideous fact, that every one of his children is dead! The crude grave has gaped before the cock to suck in every one of those shrunk forms, so indigent of vital impulse, so pauper of civism, lust, so draughty, so vague, so lean—but not before they have had time to dower with the ah and wo of their infirmity a whole wretched "army of grand−children." And yet this man of wisdom is on the point, in his old age, of marrying once again, of producing for the good of his race still more of this poor human stuff. You see the lurid significance, the point of resemblance,—you see it? And, O heaven, is it not too sad? For me, I tell you, the whole business has a tragic pitifulness too deep for words.

But this brings me to the discussion of a large matter. It would, for instance, be interesting to me to hear what you, a modern European, saturated with all the notions of your little day, what you consider the supreme, the all−important question for the nations of Europe at this moment. Am I far wrong in assuming that you would rattle off half a dozen of the moot points agitating rival factions in your own hand, select one of them, and call that 'the question of the hour'? I wish I could see as you see; I wish to God I did not see deeper. In order to lead you to my point, what, let me ask you, what precisely was it that ruined the old nations—that brought, say Rome, to her knees at last? Centralization, you say, top−heavy imperialism, dilettante pessimism, the love of luxury. At bottom, believe me, it was not one of these high−sounding things—it was simply war; the sum total of the battles of centuries. But let me explain myself: this is a novel view to you, and you are perhaps unable to conceive how or why war was so fatal to the old world, because you see how little harmful it is to the new. If you collected in a promiscuous way a few millions of modern Englishmen and slew them all simultaneously, what, think you, would be the effect from the point of view of the State? The effect, I conceive, would be indefinitely small, wonderfully transitory; there would, of course, be a momentary lacuna in the boiling surge: yet the womb of humanity is full of sap, and uberant; Ocean−tide, wooed of that Ilithyia whose breasts are many, would flow on, and the void would soon be filled. But the effect would only be thus insignificant, if, as I said, your millions were taken

promiscuously (as in the modern army), not if they were picked men—in that case the loss (or gain) would be excessive, and permanent for all time. Now, the war−hosts of the ancient commonwealths—not dependent on the mechanical contrivances of the modern army—were necessarily composed of the very best men:

the strong−boned, the heart−stout, the sound in wind and limb. Under these conditions the State shuddered through all her frame, thrilled adown every filament, at the death of a single one of her sons in the field. As only the feeble, the aged, bided at home, their number after each battle became larger in proportion to the whole than before. Thus the nation, more and more, with ever−increasing rapidity, declined in bodily, and of course spiritual, quality, until the end was reached, and Nature swallowed up, the weaklings whole; and thus war, which to the modern state is at worst the blockhead and indecent affaires d'honneur of persons in office—and which, surely, before you and I die will cease altogether—was to the ancient a genuine and remorselessly fatal scourge.

"And now let me apply these facts to the Europe of our own time. We no longer have world−serious war—but in its place we have a scourge, the effect of which on the modern state is precisely the same as the effect of war on the ancient, only,—in the end,—far more destructive, far more subtle, sure, horrible, disgusting. The name of this pestilence is Medical Science. Yes, it is most true, shudder—shudder—as you will! Man's best friend turns to an asp in his bosom to sting him to the basest of deaths. The devastating growth of medical, and especially surgical, science—that, if you like, for us all, is 'the question of the hour!' And what a question! of what surpassing importance, in the presence of which all other 'questions' whatever dwindle into mere academic triviality. For just as the ancient State was wounded to the heart through the death of her healthy sons in the field, just so slowly, just so silently, is the modern receiving deadly hurt by the botching and tinkering of her unhealthy children. The net result is in each case the same—

the altered ratio of the total amount of reproductive health to the total amount of reproductive disease. They recklessly spent their best; we sedulously conserve our worst; and as they pined and died of anæmia, so we, unless we repent, must perish in a paroxysm of black−blood apoplexy. And this prospect becomes more certain, when you reflect that the physician as we know him is not, like other men and things, a being of gradual growth, of slow evolution: from Adam to the middle of the last century the world saw nothing even in the least resembling him.

No son of Paian he, but a fatherless, full−grown birth from the incessant matrix of Modern Time, so motherly of monstrous litters of 'Gorgon and Hydra and Chimæmras dire'; you will understand what I mean when you consider the quite recent date of say, the introduction of anæsthetics or antiseptics, the discovery of the knee−jerk, bacteriology, or even of such a doctrine as the circulation of the blood. We are at this very time, if I mistake not, on the verge of new insights whelm will enable man to laugh at disease—laugh at it in the sense of over−ruling its natural tendency to produce death, not by any means in the sense of destroying its ever−expanding existence. Do you know that at this moment your hospitals are crammed with beings in human likeness suffering from a thousand obscure and subtly−ineradicable ills, all of whom, if left alone, would die almost at once, but ninety in the hundred of whom will, as it is, be sent forth 'cured,' like missionaries of hell, and the horrent shapes of Night and Acheron, to mingle in the pure river of humanity the poison−taint of their protean vileness? Do you know that in your schools one−quarter of the children are already purblind? Have you gauged the importance of your tremendous consumption of quack catholicons, of the fortunes derived from their sale, of the spread of modern nervous disorders, of toothless youth and thrice loathsome age among the helot−classes? Do you know that in the course of my late journey to London, I walked from Piccadilly Circus to Hyde Park Corner, during which the I observed some five hundred people, of whom twenty−seven only were perfectly healthy, well−formed men, and eighteen healthy, beautiful women? On every hand—with a thrill of intensest joy, I say it!—is to be seen, if not yet commencing civilisation, then progress, progress—wide as the world—toward it: only here—at the heart—is there decadence, fatty degeneration. Brain−evolution—and favouring airs—and the ripening time—and the silent Will of God, of God—all these in conspiracy seem to be behind, urging the whole ship's company of us to some undreamable luxury of glory—when lo, this check, artificial, evitable. Less death, more disease—that is the sad, the unnatural record; children especially—so sensitive to the physician's art— living on by hundreds of thousands, bearing within them the germs of wide−spreading sorrow, who in former times would have died.

And if you consider that the proper function of the doctor is the strictly limited one of curing the curable, rather than of self−gloriously perpetuating the incurable, you may find it difficult to give a quite rational answer to this simple question: why? Nothing is so sure as that to the unit it is a cruelty; nothing so certain as that to humanity it is a wrong; to say that such and such an one was sent by the All Wise, and must therefore be not

merely permitted, but elaborately coaxed and forced, to live, is to utter a blasphemy against Man at which even the ribald tongue of a priest might falter; and as a matter of fact, society, in just contempt for this species of argument, never hesitates to hang, for its own imagined good, its heaven−sent catholics, protestants, sheep, sheep−stealers, etc. What then, you ask, would I do with these unholy ones? to save the State would I pierce them with a sword, or leave them to the slow throes of their agonies? Ah, do not expect me to answer that question—I do not know what to answer. The whole spirit of the present is one of a broad and beautiful, if quite thoughtless, humanism, and I, a child of the present, cannot but be borne along by it, coerced into sympathy with it. 'Beautiful' I say: for if anywhere in the world you have seen a sight more beautiful than a group of hospital savants bending with endless scrupulousness over a little pauper child, concentrating upon its frailty the whole human skill and wisdom of ages, so have not I. Here have you the full realization of a parable diviner than that of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Beautiful then; with at least surface beauty, like the serpent lachesis mutus; but, like many beautiful things, deadly too, inhuman. And, on the whole, an answer will have to be found. As for me, it is a doubt which has often agitated me, whether the central dogma of Judaism and Christianity alike can, after all, be really one of the inner verities of this our earthly being—the dogma, that by the shedding of the innocent blood, and by that alone, shah the race of man find cleansing and salvation. Will no agony of reluctance overcome the necessity that one man die, 'so that the whole people perish not'? Can it be true that by nothing less than the 'three days of pestilence' shall the land be purged of its stain, and is this old divine alternative about to confront us in new, modern form? Does the inscrutable Artemis indeed demand offerings of human blood to suage her anger? Most sad that man should ever need, should ever have needed, to foul his hand in the µ í"á—üí áú µ á of his own veins! But what is, is. And can it be fated that the most advanced civilisation of the future shall needs have in it, as the first and chief element of its glory, the most barbarous of all the rituals of barbarism—the immolation of hecatombs which wail a muling human wail? Is it indeed part of man's strange destiny through the deeps of Time that he one day bow his back to the duty of pruning himself as a garden, so that he run not to a waste wilderness? Shall the physician, the accoucheur, of the time to come be expected, and commanded, to don the ephod and breast−plate, anoint his head with the oil of gladness, and add to the function of healer the function of Sacrificial Priest? These you say, are wild, dark questions. Wild enough, dark enough. We know how Sparta—the 'man−taming Sparta' Simonides calls her—answered them. Here was the complete subordination of all unit−life to the well−being of the Whole. The child, immediately on his entry into the world, fell under the control of the State: it was not left to the judgment of his parents, as elsewhere, whether he should be brought up or not, but a commission of the Phyle in which he was born decided the question. If he was weakly, if he had any bodily unsightliness, he was exposed on a place called Taygetus, and so perished. It was a consequence of this that never did the sun in his course light on man half so godly stalwart, on woman half so houri−lovely, as in stern and stout old Sparta. Death, like all mortal, they must bear; disease, once and for all, they were resolved to have done with. The word which they used to express the idea 'ugly,' meant also 'hateful,' 'vile,' 'disgraceful'—and I need hardly point out to you the significance of that fact alone; for they considered—and rightly—that there is no sort of natural reason why every denizen of earth should not be perfectly hale, integral, sane, beautiful—if only very moderate pains be taken to procure this divine result. One fellow, indeed, called Nancleidas, grew a little too fat to please the sensitive eyes of the Spartans: I believe he was periodically whipped. Under a system so very barbarous, the super−sweet, egoistic voice of the club−footed poet Byron would, of course, never have been heard: one brief egoistic 'lament' on Taygetus, and so an end. It is not, however, certain that the world could not have managed very well without Lord Byron. The one thing that admits of no contradiction is that it cannot manage without the holy citizen, and that disease, to men and to nations, can have but one meaning, annihilation near or ultimate. At army rate, from these remarks, you will now very likely be able to arrive at some understanding of the wording of the advertisements which I sent to the papers."

Zaleski, having delivered himself of this singular tirade, paused: replaced the sepulchral relief in its niche: drew a drapery of silver cloth over his bare feet and the hem of his antique garment of Babylon: and then continued:

"After some time the answer to the advertisement at length arrived; but what was my disgust to find that it was perfectly unintelligible to me. I had asked for a date and an address: the reply came giving a date, and an address, too—but an address wrapped up in cypher, which, of course, I, as a supposed member of the society, was expected to be able to read. At any rate, I now knew the significance of the incongruous circumstance that the

Latin proverb mens sana etc. should be adopted as the motto of a Greek society; the significance lay in this, that the motto contained an address—the address of their meeting−place, or at least, of their chief meeting−place. I was now confronted with the task of solving—and of solving quickly, without the loss of an hour—this enigma; and I confess that it was only by the most violent and extraordinary concentration of what I may call the dissecting faculty, that I was able to do so in good time. And yet there was no special difficulty in the matter. For looking at the motto as it stood in cypher, the first timing I perceived was that, in order to read the secret, the heart−shaped figure must be left out of consideration, if there was any consistency in the system of cyphers at all, for it belonged to a class of symbols quite distinct from that of all the others, not being, like them, a picture−letter.

Omitting this, therefore, and taking all the other vowels and consonants whether actually represented in the device or not, I now got the proverb in the form mens sana in . . . pore sano. I wrote this down, and what instantly struck me was the immense, the altogether unusual, number of liquids in the motto— six in all, amounting to no less than one−third of the total number of letters! Putting these all together you get mnnnnr, and you can see that the very appearance of the 'm's' and 'n's' (especially when written) running into one another, of itself suggests a stream of water. Having previously arrived at the conclusion of London as the meeting−place, I could not now fail to go on to the inference of the Thames; there, or near there, would I find those whom I sought. The letters 'mnnnnr,' then, meant the Thames: what did the still remaining letters mean? I now took these remaining letters, placing them side by side: I got aaa, sss, ee, oo, p and i.

Juxtaposing these nearly in the order indicated by the frequency of their occurrence, and their place in the Roman alphabet, you at once and inevitably get the word Æsopi. And now I was fairly startled by this symmetrical proof of the exactness of my own deductions in other respects, but, above all, far above all, by the occurrence of that word 'Æsopi.' For who was Æsopus? He was a slave who was freed for his wise and witful sallies: he is therefore typical of the liberty of the wise—their moral manumission from temporary and narrow law; he was also a close friend of Croesus: he is typical, then, of the union of wisdom with wealth—true wisdom with real wealth, lastly, and above all, he was thrown by the Delphians from a rock on account of his wit:

he is typical, therefore, of death—the shedding of blood— as a result of wisdom, this thought being an elaboration of Solomon's great maxim, 'in much wisdom is much sorrow.' But how accurately all this fitted in with what would naturally be the doctrines of the men on whose track I was! I could no longer doubt the justness of my reasonings, and immediately, while you slept, I set off for London.

"Of my haps in London I need not give you a very particular account. The meeting was to be held on the 15 th , and by the morning of the 13 th I had reached a place called Wargrave, on the Thames. There I hired a light canoe, and thence proceeded down the river in a somewhat zig−zag manner, narrowly examining the banks on either side, and keeping a sharp outlook for some board, or sign, or house, that would seem to betoken any sort of connection with the word 'Æsopi.' In this way I passed a fruitless day, and having reached the shipping region, made fast my craft, and in a spirit of diablerie spent the night in a common lodging−house, in the company of the most remarkable human beings, characterized by an odour of alcohol, and a certain obtrusive bonne camaraderie which the prevailing fear of death could not altogether repress. By dawn of the 14 th I was on my journey again—on, and ever on. Eagerly I longed for a sight of the word I sought: but I had misjudged the men against whose cunning I had measured my own. I should have remembered more consistently that they were no ordinary men. As I was destined to find, there lay a deeper, more cabalistic meaning in the motto than any I had been able to dream of. I had proceeded on my pilgrimage down the river a long way past Greenwich, and had now reached a desolate and level reach of land stretching away on either hand. Paddling my boat from the right to the left bank, I came to a spot where a little arm of the river ran up some few yards into the hand. The place wore a specially dreary and deserted aspect: the land was flat, and covered with how shrubs. I rowed into this arm of shallow water and rested on my oar, wearily bethinking myself what was next to be done. Looking round, however, I saw to my surprise that at the end of this arm there was a short narrow pathway—a winding road—leading from the river−bank. I stood up in the boat and followed its course with my eyes. It was met by another road also winding among the bushes, but in a slightly different direction. At the end of this was a little, low, high−roofed, round house, without doors or windows. And then—and then—tingling now with a thousand raptures—I beheld a pool of water near this structure, and then another low house, a counterpart of the first—and then, still leading on in the same direction, another pool—and then a great rock, heart−shaped—

and then another winding road—and then another pool of water. All was a model—

exact to the minutest particular—of the device on the papyrus! The first long−waved line was the river itself; the three short−waved lines were the arm of the river and the two pools; the three snakes were the three winding roads; the two triangles representing the letter A were the two high−roofed round houses; the heart was the rock! I sprang, now thoroughly excited, from the boat, and ran in headlong haste to the end of the last lake. Here there was a rather thick and high growth of bushes, but peering among them, my eye at once caught a white oblong board supported on a stake: on this, in black letters, was marked the words, 'Descensus Æsopn.' It was necessary, therefore, to go down: the meeting−place was subterranean. It was without difficulty that I discovered a small opening in the ground, half hidden by the underwood; from the orifice I found that a series of wooden steps led directly downwards, and I at once boldly descended. No sooner, however, had I touched the bottom than I was confronted by an ancient man in Hellenic apparel, armed with the Greek ziphos and peltè. His eyes, accustomed to the gloom, pierced me long with an earnest scrutiny.

" 'You are a Spartan?' he asked at length.

" 'Yes,' I answered promptly.

" 'Then how is it you do not know that I am stone deaf?'

I shrugged, indicating that for the moment I had forgotten the fact.

" 'You are a Spartan?' he repeated.

I nodded with emphasis.

" 'Then, how is it you omit to make the sign?'

"Now, you must not suppose that at this point I was nonplussed, for in that case you would not give due weight to the strange inherent power of the mind to rise to the occasion of a sudden emergency—to stretch itself long to the length of an event I do not hesitate to say that no combination of circumstances can defeat a vigorous brain fully alert, and in possession of itself.

With a quickness to which the lightning−flash is tardy, I remembered that this was a spot indicated by the symbols on the papyrus: I remembered that this same papyrus was always placed under the tongue of the dead; I remembered, too, that among that very nation whose language had afforded the motto, to 'turn up the thumb' (pollicem vertere) was a symbol significant of death. I touched the under surface of my tongue with the tip of my thumb. The aged man was appeased. I passed on, and examined the place.

"It was simply a vast circular hall, the arched roof of which was supported on colonnades of what I took to be pillars of porphyry. Down the middle and round the sides ran tables of the same material; the walls were clothed in hangings of sable velvet, on which, in infinite reproduction, was embroidered in cypher the motto of the society. The chairs were cushioned in the same stuff.

Near the centre of the circle stood a huge statue of what really seemed to me to be pure beaten gold. On the great ebon base was inscribed the word Ë'Ê'—ÃÏ" . From the roof swung by brazen chains a single misty lamp.

"Having seen this much I reascended to the land of light, and being fully resolved on attending the meeting on the next day or night, and not knowing what my fate might then be, I wrote to inform you of the means by which my body might be traced.

"But on the next day a new thought occurred to me: I reasoned thus: 'these men are not common assassins; they wage a too rash warfare against diseased life, but not against life in general. In all probability they have a quite immoderate, quite morbid reverence for the sanctity of healthy life. They will not therefore take mine, unless they suppose me to be the only living outsider who has a knowledge of their secret, and therefore think it absolutely necessary for the carrying out of their beneficent designs that my life should he sacrificed. I will therefore prevent such a motive from occurring to them by communicating to another their whole secret, and—if the necessity should arise—letting them know that I have done so, without telling them who that other is. Thus my life will be assured.' I therefore wrote to you on that day a full account of all I had discovered, giving you to understand, however, on the envelope, that you need not examine the contents for some little time.

"I waited in the subterranean vault during the greater part of the next day; but not till midnight did the confederates gather. What happened at that meeting I shall not disclose, even to you. All was sacred—solemn—full of awe. Of the choral hymns there sung, the hierophantic ritual, liturgies, pæans, the gorgeous symbolisms—of the wealth there represented, the culture, art, self−sacrifice— of the mingling of all the tongues of Europe—I shall not speak; nor shall I repeat names which you would at once recognize as familiar to you—though I may, perhaps, mention that the 'Morris,' whose name appears on the papyrus sent to me is a

well−known littérateur of that name. But this in confidence, for some years at least.

"Let me, however, hurry to a conclusion. My turn came to speak. I rose undaunted, and calmly disclosed myself; during the moment of hush, of wide−eyed paralysis that ensued, I declared that fully as I coincided with their views in general, I found myself unable to regard their methods with approval—these I could not but consider too rash, too harsh, too premature. My voice was suddenly drowned by one universal, earth−shaking roar of rage and contempt, during which I was surrounded on all sides, seized, pinioned, and dashed on the central table. All this time, in the hope and love of life, I passionately shouted that I was not the only living being who shared in their secret. But my voice was drowned, and drowned again, in the whirling tumult. None heard me. A powerful and little−known anæthetic—the means by which all their murders have been accomplished—was now produced. A cloth, saturated with the fluid, was placed on my mouth and nostrils. I was stifled. Sense failed. The incubus of the universe blackened down upon my brain. How I tugged at the mandrakes of speech! was a locked pugilist with language! In the depth of my extremity the half−thought, I remember, floated, like a mist, through my fading consciousness, that now perhaps—now—there was silence around me; that now, could my palsied lips find dialect, I should he heard, and understood. My whole soul rose focused to the effort—my body jerked itself upwards. At that moment I knew my spirit truely great, genuinely sublime. For I did utter something—my dead and shuddering tongue did babble forth some coherency. Then I fell back, and all was once more the ancient Dark. On the next day when I woke, I was lying on my back in my little boat, placed there by God knows whose hands. At all events, one thing was clear—I had uttered something—I was saved. With what of strength remained to me I reached the place where I had left your calèche, and started on my homeward way. The necessity to sleep was strong upon me, for the fumes of the anæsthetic still clung about my brain; hence, after my long journey, I fainted on my passage through the house, and in this condition you found me.

"Such then is the history of my thinkings and doings in connection with this ill−advised confraternity: and now that their cabala is known to others—to how many others they cannot guess—I think it is not unlikely that we shall hear little more of the Society of Sparta."