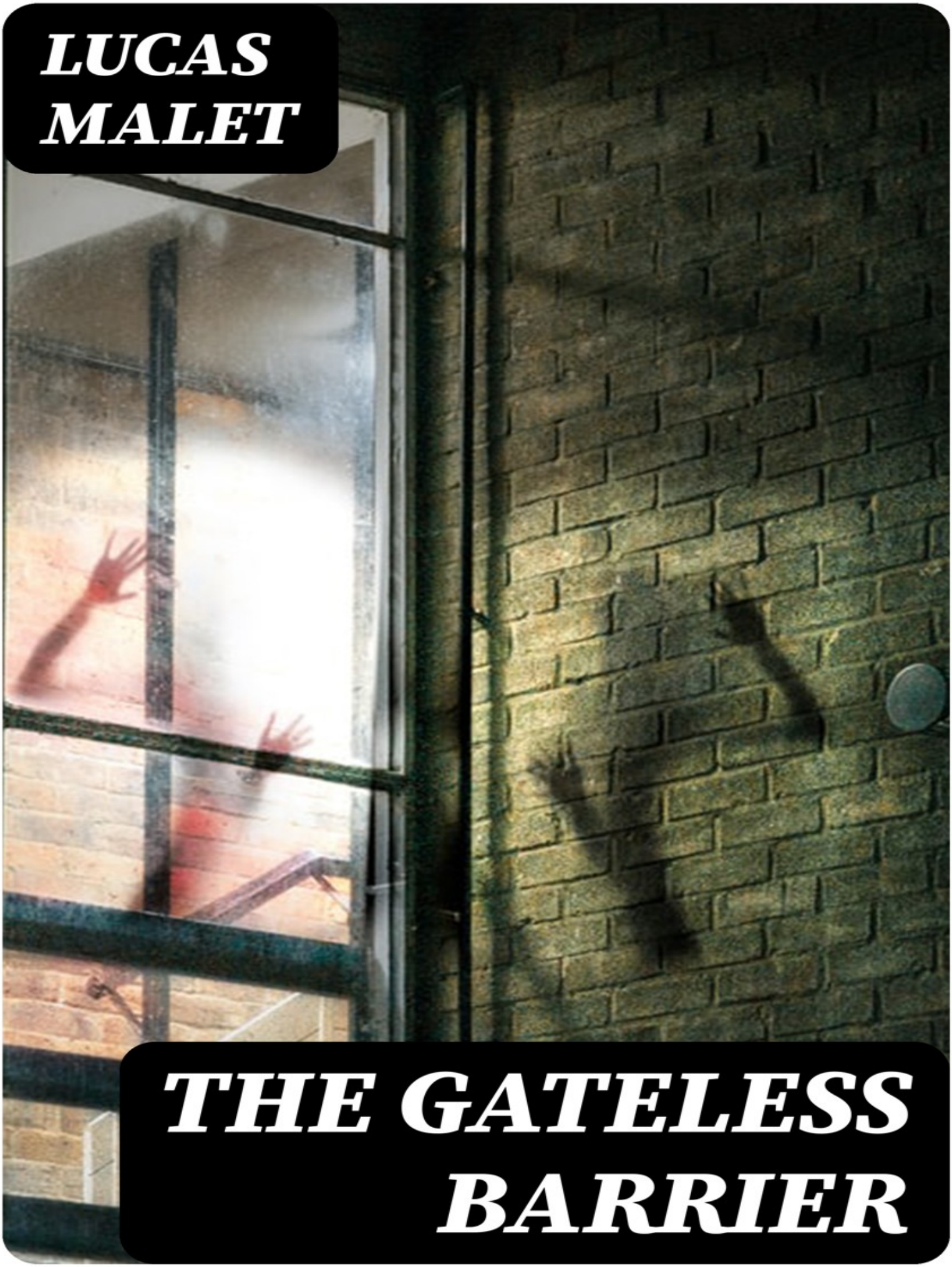
LUCAS MALET
THE GATELESS BARRIER

Lucas Malet

The Gateless Barrier

EAN 8596547218036

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

Preface

Table of Contents

"What is the book?"

"According to the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters of the title, we call it *Mu-Mon-Kwan*, which means 'The Gateless Barrier.' It is one of the books especially studied by the Zen sect, or the sect of Dhyâna. A peculiarity of some of the Dhyâna texts—this (story) being a good example—is that they are not explanatory. They only suggest. Questions are put, but the student must think out the answers for himself. He must *think* them out but not write them. You know that Dhyâna represents human effort to reach, through meditation, zones of thought beyond the range of verbal expression; and any thought narrowed into utterance loses all Dhyâna quality.... Well, this story is supposed to be true; but it is used only for a Dhyâna question...."

LAFCADIO HEARN.

"*Exotics and Retrospectives," pages 83, 84.*

The Gateless Barrier

Table of Contents

I

Table of Contents

Laurence leaned his arms upon the broad wooden hand-rail of the bulwarks. The water hissed away from the side. Immediately below it was laced by shifting patterns of white foam, and stained pale green, violet, and amber, by the light shining out through the rounds of the port-poles. Further away it showed blue black, but for a glistening on the hither side of the vast ridge and furrow. The smoke from the funnels streamed afar, and was upturned by a following wind. The great ship swung in the trough, and then lifted—as a horse lifts at a fence—while the seas slid away from under her keel. As she lifted, her masts raked the blue-black night sky, and the stars danced in the rigging.

This was the first time since his marriage, nearly two years before, that Laurence found himself alone and altogether his own master. His marriage was a notable success—every one said so, and he himself had never doubted the fact so far. Yet this solitary voyage, this temporary return to bachelorhood, possessed compensations. He reproached himself, as in duty bound, for being sensible of those compensations. He excused himself to himself. He gave reasons. Doubtless his present sense of freedom and content took its rise not in his enforced absence from Virginia, from her bright continuous talk, her innumerable and perfectly constructed dresses, her perpetual and skilful activities; but in his escape from the highly artificial and materialised society in which she lived and moved and had her being. Laurence had certainly no ostensible cause of complaint against that society. Its members had recited his verses, given a charming performance of his little comedy—in the interests of a

deserving charity—quoted his opinions on literature and politics, and waxed enthusiastic over his strokes at golf and his style at rackets and polo. He had, in fact, been the spoilt child of two New York winters and two Newport summers. No Englishman, he was repeatedly assured, had ever been so popular among the "smart set" of the great republic. It had petted and *fêted* him, and finally given him one of its fairest daughters to wife. And for all this Laurence Rivers was sincerely grateful. His vanity was most agreeably flattered. His natural love both of pleasing and of pleasure was well satisfied. Yet—such is the perversity of human nature—the very completeness of his success tended to lessen the worth of it. He even questioned, at moments, whether that success did not offer the measure of surrounding immaturity of taste and judgment, rather than of the greatness of his personal talent and merit. He was haunted by the conviction that he had never yet given his best, the highest and strongest of his nature, either in thought, or art, or adventure, or even—perhaps—he feared it—in love. The demand had been for a thoroughly presentable and immediately marketable article; and the Best is usually far from marketable, often but doubtfully presentable either. It followed that Laurence had, almost of necessity, kept the best of himself to himself—kept it to himself so effectually that he had come uncommonly near forgetting its existence altogether, and letting it perish for lack of air and exercise.

Now leaning his arms upon the hand-rail of the bulwarks, while the stars danced in the rigging, and the great ship ploughed her way eastward across the mighty ridge and furrow of the Atlantic, gratified vanity ceased to obtain in

him. His thoughts travelled back to periods of his career at once more obscure and more ambitious—to the few vital raptures, the few fine failures, the few illuminating aspirations which he had known. The bottom dropped out of the social side of things, so to speak. He looked below superficial appearances into the heart of it all. Life put off its cheap frippery of fancy dress, Death its cunningly devised concealments and evasions. Backed by the immensities of sea and sky, both stood before him naked and unashamed, in all their primitive and eternal vigour, their uncompromising actuality, their inviolable mystery; while, with a sudden and searching apprehension of the profound import of the question, Rivers asked himself—

"What shall it profit a man—what in good truth—if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

He had been summoned to England by the illness of an uncle whose estates and considerable wealth he would inherit. That illness had been pronounced incurable; but the approaching death of this near relation made small demand upon his intimate feelings. A decent seriousness of thought and speech, concerning the impending event, were all that could reasonably be required of him; for the elder Mr. Rivers was both morose and eccentric, and had given his nephew a handsome allowance on the express understanding that he saw as little of him as possible. A declared misogynist, he had received the announcement of Laurence's proposed marriage with an exasperating mixture of contempt and approval.

"I am sincerely sorry for you," he had written on this occasion. "The more so that you appear to labour under the

impression that the step you have in contemplation is calculated to secure your happiness. This, you must pardon my remarking, is obviously absurd. I grant that you are under a moral obligation to perpetuate our family and secure the succession to our estates in the direct line. I cannot, therefore, but be glad that you should adopt the recognised means to attain the above ends. I should, however, respect both your motives and your intelligence more highly had you done this in a rational and scientific spirit, without indulgence in sentimental illusions which every sane student of human history has long since perceived to be as pernicious to the moral, as they are enervating to the mental health. I could say much worthy of your attention upon this point; but, in your present condition of emotional inebriation, it would be a waste of energy on my part,—I might add, a throwing of pearls before swine. Still, justice, my dear Laurence, compels me to own that, even so, I must ever consider myself in a measure your debtor, since the fact of your existence, your remarkably sound physical condition, your normal and slightly unintelligent outlook on life, have combined to relieve me of the odious necessity of sacrificing my time and my personal liberty to the interests of our family, by entering into those domestic relations, which you appear to regard with as much thoughtless complacency as I with reasoned repulsion and distrust."

This being the attitude of the elder Mr. Rivers's mind, it followed that when, by his request, Mr. Wormald, the family solicitor, summoned his nephew and heir to attend his deathbed, the young man's wife was not included in that

gloomy invitation. And this Laurence could not by any means honestly regret. Virginia at a disadvantage was an idea almost inconceivable. Yet so immediate and concrete a being would not, he felt, shade quite gracefully into the mortuary landscape. She would not suit it, neither would it suit her. For she was almost amazingly in harmony with her modern, mundane environment; and, save in the way of costly mourning costumes, it seemed incredible that death should have any dominion over her. It struck him, moreover, that if he gauged the position aright, Virginia, notwithstanding her many charms and much cleverness, would have to take a back seat in his eccentric uncle's establishment. And Virginia in a back seat was again an idea almost inconceivable. So he said—

"It's an awful nuisance to have to leave you like this, but this is going to be a pretty dismal bit of business anyhow. I'd much better just worry through it alone. You'll join me later when it's all over, and we are free to take possession and knock the place in shape. Stoke Rivers is really rather delightful, though it is not very large. There used to be some good pictures and books and things in it I remember. I believe my uncle is a virtuoso in his way, though he is such a cross-grained old chap. You'll enjoy the place, at all events for a few months every year, I think, Virginia. And you can have all your own people over in turn, you know; and show them how the savage English do it in their savage little island. You'll make the neighbourhood sit up, I fancy. It'll be amusing."

But as Laurence leaned his arms upon the broad hand-rail of the bulwarks, in the chill of the March night, while the

water hissed away from the side, and the engines drummed and pounded, and the bows of the great ship lifted against the far, blue-black horizon, he began to wonder whether he had not been somewhat over hasty in proposing chronic invasion of Stoke Rivers by all Virginia's smart friends in turn. They were well-bred, hospitable, amusing, very much up-to-date. He owed them thanks for a most uncommonly good time. But they seemed a trifle thin, a trifle superficial and ephemeral just now, in face of the immensities of ocean and sky, and of the ancient mysteries of Life and Death.

II

Table of Contents

Not until after dinner, on the evening of his arrival, was Laurence admitted to his uncle's presence. The aspect of the room was rich though sombre. Long in proportion to its width, with a low, heavily-moulded ceiling, the walls of it were panelled in black oak three parts of their height. The space between the top of the panelling and the cornice was hung with dark blue silk-damask, narrow diagonal lines of yellow crossing the background of the raised pattern. The short, full curtains drawn over the wide window were of the same handsome material. So were the counterpane and hangings of the half-tester, ebony bed. This last was elaborately carved. Two couchant sphinxes, the polished surface of whose cup-like breasts glowed in the firelight, supported the footboard, as did a couple of caryatides—naked to the loins—the canopy. Near the fireplace stood an oaken table, on which lay a few well-bound books. The

further end of it was covered by a cloth of gold and crimson embroidery—evidently fashioned from some priestly vestment—upon which rested a *memento mori*, about four inches in height, cut out of a solid block of rock crystal, the olive crown which encircled the brow being of pale, green jade.

In a deep-seated, high-backed armchair—placed between the table and the outstanding pillars of the chimney piece—propped up by dark silken pillows, his spare frame wrapped in a long, fur-lined, violet, cloth dressing-gown, a violet, velvet skull-cap on his head, sat Mr. Rivers.

Laurence, who had not seen his uncle for the last five or six years, was conscious of receiving an almost painfully vivid impression at once of physical feebleness and intellectual energy. The elder man's face and hands appeared transparent as the crystal *memento mori* on the table beside him. His long, straight nose showed thin as a knife. His wide, lip-less mouth seemed to shut with a spring, like a trap. The bone of the face and hands was salient, as of one suffering starvation. Yet the blue-grey eyes, though sunk in their cavernous sockets, were brilliant, alert, full of an almost malevolent greed of observation. Laurence noted that a spotless cleanliness and order pervaded the room and the person of its occupant. The angular and attenuated face was shaven with scrupulous nicety. The finger-nails were carefully polished and pointed. An open collar and wristbands of fine lawn showed exquisitely white against the purple cloth and fur of the dressing-gown. It was evident that Mr. Rivers, whatever the peculiarities of his temper or

of his opinions, treated illness and approaching dissolution with an admirable effect of stoicism and personal dignity.

As Laurence—himself conspicuously well-groomed, in evening dress, no mark of his long journey upon him, save in a complexion tanned by sun and sea-wind, and by the directness of glance and vigour of movement that remains, for a while, by every true sea-lover after he comes ashore—crossed the space between the door and fireplace, the old man raised himself a little in his chair.

"Believe me, I am very sensible of the consideration you show in so immediately gratifying my desire to see you, my dear Laurence."

"I was very happy to come, sir," the younger man answered. But he was not unconscious of a point of irony in the cold, level tones of the voice, or in the persistent scrutiny of the brilliant eyes. These appeared to regard him as they might some row of figures—mentally casting up, subtracting, dividing, intent on arriving, with all possible despatch, at a conclusive and final result. The effect was not precisely encouraging, nor were the words which followed.

"That is well," Mr. Rivers said. "But it is desirable you should understand from the outset that which you have undertaken. You may be detained here. The disease from which I suffer is, as you have been informed, incurable; though it is, I am happy to say, neither offensive or infectious. But though the final result is assured, the moment of its advent is uncertain. Neither I, nor the physicians who amiably expend their limited and somewhat empirical skill upon me, can determine the date at which this disease will prove fatal. I shall regret to cause you

inconvenience, but the event is beyond my control. I may keep you waiting."

"The longer the better, sir," Laurence said, smiling, and his smile was sincere and genial, of the sort which inspires confidence.—"That is," he added, "if you do not suffer unduly."

"When the mind has realised the greatness of its own powers, and trained itself to their exercise, the will can almost invariably reduce suffering to endurable proportions," Mr. Rivers replied contemptuously, as dealing with a matter obvious, and so beneath discussion. He raised one transparent hand, pointed towards a chair, and then let his wrist drop again upon a supporting silken cushion. As he did so the two heavy rings he wore—one an amethyst set in brilliants and engraved with Arabic characters, the other a black scarab on a hoop of rough gold—slipped up the long phalange of his second finger to the knotted knuckle, and back again, with a dry rattle and chink.

"Oblige me by sitting down, Laurence," he said. "I wish you to labour under no misapprehension as to my intentions in sending for you. A certain amount of business may need attention; but all that you can discuss with my agent, Armstrong,—a very worthy, though prejudiced person. My affairs are in order. I am not called upon to waste any of the time remaining to me upon them. Let me explain myself. The disease—for, to do so, I must refer to it once again—which is in process of destroying certain organs, and consequently paralysing certain functions of my body, has in no degree affected my mind. This retains the completeness of its lucidity. Indeed, I am disposed to believe

that my enforced physical inactivity, and the small number of objects presented to my sight—I never leave this room—tend to exalt and stimulate my intellectual powers. You recall the legend of the ancient philosopher who plucked out his eyes, that, undisturbed by the vision of irrelevant objects, he might attain to greater concentration of thought. Disease, in limiting my activities, has gone far to confer upon me the boon which the philosopher in question strove, rather violently, to bestow upon himself. I have ever been a student. I propose to continue so to the last. My interest is unabated. My passion for knowledge—the sole passion of my life—remains in full force."

Laurence sat listening, nursing his knee. The speaker's attitude was impressive, in a way admirable. His detachment, his calm, his acumen, commanded his hearer's respect.

"Yes, yes. I see—that's fine," Laurence said under his breath.

A slightly ironical expression passed across the elder man's attenuated face.

"I am, of course, glad that my sentiments meet with your approval. But I fear that approval may prove premature. I have not yet fully explained myself."

Laurence smiled at him good-temperedly. "All right, sir; I'm listening," he said.

"I must frankly admit I did not require your presence with a view to having you endorse my opinions. These are, I trust, too much the outcome of close and lengthened thought to stand in need of support from the agreement of another mind. I have never desired disciples, having the

evidence of the history of all great religious, political, and scientific movements to prove conclusively that it is the invariable habit of the disciple to falsify his master's teaching, to attach himself to the weak rather than the strong places of such teaching, to betray intellectually with some emotional, some hysterical kiss. The disciple resembles those parasitic plants of the tropic forests, that strangle the tree upon which they climb upward toward the air and light."

He paused a moment, turned his head against the pillows, with a movement of almost distressing weakness. Then, gathering himself together by a perceptible exercise of will, he looked searchingly at Laurence again, and resumed his speech.

"Nor have I required your presence here during these last days or weeks—as the case may be—with a view to offering to you, or receiving from you, that which is usually termed affection. I am not aware of any demand, or supply, in myself of that very much overrated commodity. I deny the actuality, indeed, of its existence. Subjected to analysis, it can always be resolved into workings of self-interest, or into the gratification, more or less gross, of the animal passions. It is the generator of all the practical folly and intellectual sloth which go to retard the progress of science, and the rule of high philosophy among men. As between ourselves, my dear Laurence, any pretence of affection would be transparently ridiculous. We are barely acquainted. My departure will very clearly be to your advantage. Moreover, our tastes and characters are so divergent, that any real

community of interests, any real bond of sympathy, is clearly out of the question."

During the course of this address the young man's pleasant smile had broadened almost to the point of laughter.

"I understand, I really do understand," he said. "And now that we've cleared the decks for action in this very comprehensive manner, I grow—if I may mention it—most uncommonly curious to learn what you did send for me here for."

"I sent for you because there is one matter regarding which my information is conspicuously defective, and because your conversation, your habits, your very appearance, and gestures may serve to enlighten me. I have lived among books, and objects of art of no mean value. I have enjoyed communion, both by letter and in speech, with many of the most distinguished minds of the present century. But I never associated, I have never cared to associate, with the average man of the world, of the clubs and the racecourse, the man of intrigues, of, in short, society. He appeared to me to weigh too lightly in the scale to be a worthy object of study. I ignored him, and in so doing dropped an important link out of the chain of being. For these persons breed, they perpetuate tendencies, they influence and modify the history of the race. Not to reckon with such persons, is not to reckon with a persistent and active factor in intellectual and moral evolution."

Laurence had risen to his feet. He stood with his hands behind him and his back to the fire. He was amused, but he was also slightly nettled.

"Ah!" he said, "exactly. And so you sent for me. You took for granted I was that sort. You wanted to see how we do it."

"Yes," Mr. Rivers answered, "it did appear to me that you were calculated to fulfil the conditions. In any case you were the only example of the type available. Our connection by blood, and the relation in which you stand to my property, gave me certain claims upon your time and your consideration. I wish very much to observe you. I wish to study you from the psychological and other points of view. You need not attempt to assist me. Be yourself, please. Be passive. I need no co-operation on the part of my subject. This will really give you very little trouble, while it will afford me interesting occupation during the period—whether short or protracted, I know not—which must elapse before disease has run its course and procured dissolution."

Laurence listened in silence; and while he did so, he ceased to be nettled, he ceased even to be inclined to treat these singular proposals humorously. For there appeared to him a certain pathos in the earnest desire of this recluse and student now, at the eleventh hour, to acquaint himself with just that which he had so arrogantly despised, namely the Commonplace. It was slightly wounding to personal vanity to be thus selected, from among the millions of mankind, as a fine, thorough-paced example and exponent of the Commonplace. But Laurence was kind-hearted. He also possessed a fund of practical philosophy. No—decidedly the position was not a flattering one! Yet it was rather original, and, moreover, how could one in common charity refuse any little pleasure to a dying man?

"Very well, sir," he said. "I think I quite grasp the necessities of the inquiry. I'm quite willing to be operated on, and I promise to play fair and not let the evidence be faked. But I'm afraid you'll get bored first. I am likely to be more illuminated than illuminating."

"I am obliged to you," Mr. Rivers said. "To-night I will not further detain you. Pray give any orders you please to Renshaw. He is a well-trained and responsible servant. There are horses in the stable. Good-night. I repeat that I am obliged to you."

III

Table of Contents

Finding it unlikely that his uncle would ask for him before evening, and that consequently he had plenty of time at his disposal, Laurence embarked after breakfast upon a survey of the house. When a boy at school he had occasionally passed a couple of nights at Stoke Rivers. His recollections of these visits were not gay. He had been glad enough to go away again. It followed that his impressions of the house itself were vague and confused. He now found that it was constructed in the shape of a capital L reversed. The base of the letter, facing east and west, contained kitchens, offices, and servants' quarters. The main building—at right angles to it—was two stories in height, and consisted of suites of handsome rooms opening on to a wide corridor. The windows of the latter looked south, those of the rooms north. The colouring and furnishings resembled, in the main, those of Mr. Rivers' bedroom. Dark panelled walls, rich,

sombre hangings of dark blue, crimson, or violet obtained throughout. In the drawing-rooms were some noble landscapes by Cuyp, Ruysdael, and other Dutch masters of note. There was also an admirable collection of Italian ivories, small figures of exquisite workmanship; and several glass cases containing fine antique and renaissance gems. The walls of the libraries were lined with books—a curious and varied collection, ranging from ancient black-letter volumes down to the latest German treatise, on natural science or metaphysics, of the current year. Laurence promised himself to make nearer acquaintance with these rather weighty joys at a more convenient season. Meanwhile, in contrast to the otherwise distinctly old-fashioned character of the house, he remarked a very complete installation of electric light, and an ingenious system of hot-air ventilation, by means of which a temperature of over seventy degrees was maintained throughout the whole interior. This produced a heavy and enervating atmosphere of which Laurence—fresh from the strong clean air of the Atlantic—became increasingly and disagreeably sensible. It made him at once restless and inert; and as he wandered, rather aimlessly from room to room, he was annoyed by finding a slight nervousness gained on him—he, whose nerves were usually of the steadiest, happily conspicuous by their absence, indeed, rather than by their presence!

"Upon my word, this beats the American abomination of steam heat," he said to himself.

His visit to the library, where the smell of old leather bindings added to the deadness of the air, nearly finished

him. He went out on to the corridor, and paced the length of it, past the flying staircase of black oak leading to the upper corridor, and back again. A broad strip of deep-pile, crimson carpet was spread along the centre of the polished floor. On one hand, between the doors of the living-rooms, hung a collection of valuable copper-plate engravings, representing classic ruins in Italy and Greece. While on the other, in the spaces between the windows, were ranged a series of busts—Augustus, Tiberias, Nero, the two Antonines, Caligula, and Commodus—set on tall columnar pedestals of dark green or yellow marble. The blind, sculptured faces deepened the general sense of oppression by their rigidity, their unalterable and somewhat scornful repose.

Out of doors the March morning was tumultuous with wind and wet, offering marked contrast to the dry heat, the almost burdensome order and stillness reigning within. The air of the corridor was perhaps a degree fresher than that of the library he had just quitted. Laurence leaned his arms on a stone window-sill, and glanced in a desultory way at the day's *Times*, which he had picked up off the hall table in passing. But Chinese railway concessions, plague reports from Bombay, even the last racing fixtures, or rumours of fighting on the North-West Indian Frontier, failed to arouse his interest. In his present humour, these items of news from the outside world seemed curiously unimportant and remote. He stared at the wide, well-wooded, rain-blurred landscape. The scene at which he had assisted last night, the intimate drama moving forward relentlessly even now to its close in that well-appointed room upstairs—and the extraordinary character of the chief actor in that drama—his

over-stimulated brain and atrophied affections, his greed of experiment and of acquiring information, even yet, in the very article of death—depressed Laurence's imagination as the close atmosphere depressed his body. It was all so painfully narrow, barren, hungry, joyless, somehow. And meanwhile, he, Laurence, was required to play the fool—not for the provocation of laughter, which would after all have had a semblance of cheerful good-fellowship in it. But in cold blood, as an object lesson in the manner and customs of the average man; a lesson the result of which would be tabulated and pigeon-holed by that unwearying intelligence, as might be the habits of some species of obscure, unpleasant insect. The young man had developed slight intolerance of the exclusively worldly side of things lately. It seemed by no means improbable he might develop equal intolerance of the exclusively intellectual side before long, at this rate.

"I seem qualifying as a past-master in the highly unprofitable act of quarrelling with my bread and butter," he said to himself. "If I chuck society, and proceed to chuck brains as well, for a man like myself, without genius and without a profession, what the devil is there left?"

Meditating thus, he had left his station at the window, and walked to the extreme end of the corridor farthest away from the servants' wing of the house. It was closed by a splendid tapestry curtain, whereon a crowd of round-limbed cupids drove a naked and reluctant woman, with gestures of naughty haste, towards a satyr, seated beneath a shadowy grove of trees upon a little monticule, who beckoned with one hand while with the other he stopped the notes of his

reed pipe. The tapestry was of great beauty and indubitable worth; but the subject of it was slightly displeasing to Laurence, a trifle gross in suggestion, as had been the sphinxes and caryatides of the carven ebony bed.

"Oh! of course there's that sort of thing left," he said to himself, recurring to his recent train of thought. "But, no thank you, I flatter myself I can hardly find satisfaction in those low latitudes at present."

Having, however, an appreciation of all fine artistic work, he laid hold of the border of the curtain, wishing to feel its texture. To his surprise, it was of very great weight, padded and lined with leather, as are curtains covering the doors of certain Roman churches.

Laurence pulled the corner of it towards him and passed behind it. The curtain fell back into position with a muffled thud, leaving him standing in a narrow, dark, cupboard-like space, closed by a door, of which it took him some stifling seconds to find the handle. He fumbled blindly in the dark, an almost childish sense of agitation upon him. He felt as in dreams, when the place to be traversed grows more and more contracted, walls closing down and in on every hand, while the means of exit become more maddeningly impossible of discovery. To his surprise, he turned faint and broke into a sweat. It was not in the least an amusing experience.

At last the handle gave, with a click, and the door opened, disclosing a large and lofty room quite unlike any one which he had yet visited. It was delicately fresh both in atmosphere and colouring. It wore a gracious and friendly look, seeming to welcome the intruder with a demure

gladsomeness. A certain gaiety pervaded it even on this unpropitious morning. The great bay-window, facing east, gave upon a stately Italian garden, beyond the tall cypresses, white statues, and fountains of which spread flat, high-lying lawns of brilliantly green turf. These were crossed by a broad walk of golden gravel leading to an avenue of enormous lime-trees, the domed heads of which were just touched with the rose-pink buds of the opening spring.

The furniture of the room was of satin-wood, highly polished and painted with garlands of roses, true-lovers' knots of blue ribbon, dainty landscapes, ladies and lovers, after the manner of Boucher. The chairs and sofas were upholstered in brocade, the predominating colours of which were white, pale yellow, and pale pink. An old-fashioned, square, semi-grand piano—the case of it in satin-wood and painted like the rest—stood out into the room. On a spindle-legged table beside it lay a quantity of music, the printing very black, the pages brown with age. Close against these was a violin case covered with faded, red velvet, on which were stamped initials and a crest.

Laurence's eyes dwelt on these things. And then—surely there should be a harp in the further left-hand corner, the strings of it covered by a gilded, stamped leather hood? Yes, it was there right enough.—And a tall escritoire, with a miniature brass balustrade running along the top of it, should stand at right angles to the chimney-piece, upon which last, doubled by the looking-glass behind, should be tall azure and gold *Sèvres* jars, an Empire clock—the golden face of it set in a ring of precious garnets—figures in Chelsea china and branched, gold candlesticks.