

Was he Dead?

IN the fickle glow of ruddy firelight the great egg of the dinornis swung solemnly through its long arc of motion. There are five eggs of the dinornis in the known world: four are in great museums, and the fifth belongs to my friend Purpel, and is one of the oddest of his many curiosities. The room I enter is spacious, and clad warmly with dark rows of books. Above them the walls are irregularly hidden by prints, pictures, and the poisoned weapons of savage tribes—dark and sombre javelin and arrow—with awful security of death about them, and none of the cold, quick gleam of honest steel. The light flashes on a great brass microscope with its sheltering glass, and half reveals in corners an endless confusion of the dexterous apparatus born of modern science. The glittering student-lamp on the central writing-table stands unlighted, deep in that comfortable confusion of letters, books, and papers, which is dear to certain men I know, and to them only is not confusion. Just above these a thread of steel wire held suspended the giant egg of the dinornis, which, as I have said, was now swinging in a vast round of motion, like a great white planet through the lights and shades of eternal space.

“Purpel,” said I, “that egg cost you a hundred pounds. What demon of rashness possesses you to set it flying round the room?”

“Mercantile friend,” replied the slight figure in the spacious armchair at the fireside, “it is a venture. If there be left in your dollar-driven soul any heirship of your great namesake, Sir Thomas, you will comprehend me. This egg is more dear to me than your biggest East-Indiaman, and yet I risk it, as you do the galleon, for what it fetches me out of the land of mystery. See the huge troubled wake it makes through my columns of pipe-breath.” With this he blew forth a cloud such as went before the Israelites, and contentedly watched the swirl of the egg as it broke through the blue ribbons, dogged by its swift shadow on wall and bookcase.

“Sit down, Gresham,” said my friend.

“Be so good, then, as to stop that infernal egg,” said I. “Do you think I want ten pounds of lime on my head?”

“Bless you,” returned Purpel, contentedly, “for a new idea. Perhaps it may be an *ovum infernale*. What proof have I that it was dinornis hatch? A devil’s egg! There’s meat for thought, Mercator! However,” he continued with a smile, “what is there we will not do for friendship?” And so saying he climbed on a chair, and, seizing the egg, checked its movement and left it hanging as by some witchcraft from its unseen thread.

“Have you seen Vance today? He was to be here at nine. I hope he won’t fail us. My brain has been as fidgety as a geyser all day, and I want a little of his frosty, definite logic.”

“I thought, doctor,” said I, “that it was not always what you liked.”

“What I liked!” said he, “I loathe it sometimes, just as I do my cold plunge of a morning in December; but, bless you, old man, it’s a bitter good tonic for a fellow like me, with a Concord craze and a cross of French science. There he is. Speak of the devil!—How d’ye do, V.? There’s

your pipe on the jar yonder. Have a match?" And, so saying, he struck a lucifer, in whose yellow glare and splutter I noted the strong contrast of the two faces.

Purpel, short and slight, chiefly notable for a certain alertness of head-carriage, untamable brown locks, and a sombre sincerity of visage altogether American in type, mouth over-size and mobile, eyes large and wistful. Great admiration of this man has the shrewd, calm owner of the cool blue eyes which flash now in the gleam of matchlight through the slight eyeglass he wears. The face and head of my friend Vance are moulded, like his mind, in lines of proportioned and balanced beauty, with something architectural and severe about the forehead. Below are distinct features and watchful lips, like those of a judge accustomed to wait and sentence, only a tell-tale curve at the angles, a written record of many laughters, a wrinkle of mirth, says Purpel, who loves him and has for him that curious respect which genius, incapable of self-comprehension, has for talent, whose laws it can see and admire.

We are very old friends, and why I like them is easy to see; but why they return this feeling is less clear to me, who am merely a rather successful merchant, unlike them in all ways and in all pursuits. Perhaps a little of the flavor of their tastes has come to be mine by long companionship; or it may be that Purpel, who is sardonic at times, and talks charades, hovered about the truth when he said I represented in their talks the outside world of common opinion. "A sort of test-man," grins Vance; which troubles me little, knowing surely that they both love me well.

The three meerschaums slowly browning into the ripe autumn of their days were lighted, and we drew our chairs around the smouldering logs, I am afraid that Purpel's feet were on the mantel-ledge, at which I laughed for the hundredth time. "G.," said he—for this was one of his ways, Vance being V.—"don't you know it sends more blood to your head to feed the thinking-mill, and so accounts for the general superiority of the American race?"

"And Congressmen," added Vance.

"And tavern loafers," said I.

"Nonsense!" cried Purpel. "If the mill be of limited capacity, it were useless to run the Missouri over its water-wheel."

"One of your half-thoughts," returned Vance, "and nearly half believed."

"Not at all," said Purpel. "Does not everybody think best when lying down? More blood to the head, more thought and better."

"Well," I exclaimed, rashly, with a gleam of inspiration, "how about the circus fellows, doctor?"

"He's coming on," cried Vance, with a slap on the back. "Try it in your back counting room an hour a day, and you will clean out Vanderbilt in a week."

“Now,” said Purpel, irascibly, “here’s the old story. You think along a railway track, V., and I wander about at my own will, like a boy in a wood. My chances of a find are the better of the two.”

“You’re like a boy in another way, old man,” said the other. “You accumulate a wondrous lot of queer inutilities in those mental pockets of yours.”

“Don’t you know what my pet philosopher says?” returned Purpel. “‘Inutilities are stars whose light has not yet reached us.’ Smoke the pipe of silence, V., if you have no better wisdom than that. To believe anything useless is only to confess that you are a hundred years too young.”

“Come in,” he exclaimed; for there was a knock at the door.

“A gentleman to see you, sir.”

“Show him up,” said Purpel. “What in the name of decency does anyone but you two old heathen want with me at this hour!”

Presently the door opened, and a very ordinary-looking person entered the room. “Dr. Purpel?” said he, looking from one to the other.

“I am Dr. Purpel,” said my friend; “what can I do for you? Take a seat. I beg pardon, but I did not catch your name.”

“Thunderin’ queer if you did,” said the stranger, “when I never give it.”

Vance touched my arm. “Too many for P., wasn’t he?”

“Humph!” said Purpel, slightly nettled. “I suppose you can talk without a label. What is your errand?”

“Could I speak with you alone?” returned the stranger.

“I suppose so,” said the doctor, lazily rising, and laying down this pipe. “I shall be back presently, V.” And so saying he walked into a back room, followed by the visitor. The brief absence he had promised lengthened to an hour, when, as the clock struck twelve, he reappeared alone, and, hastily excusing himself, went out again. Vance and I presently ended our chat and went our ways homeward through the drifting snows of the January night.

Early next morning I received a request to meet Vance in the evening at our friend’s rooms. We were still as constant companions as new ties and our varying roads through life would permit, so that any subject of strong interest to one was apt to call all of us together in council; and therefore it was I felt no surprise at a special appointment being thus made. I have already whispered to you that I represented to these men the gentler and better of the commonplaces of business existence. Purpel, I am told, is a fine specimen of what a man of genius becomes with the quickest blood of this century in his veins. Marvellously made to study with success the how,

the why, and the wherefore of nature, he refuses to recognize a limit to philosophic thought, and delights to stand face-to-face with the hundred speechless sphinxes who frown upon us from those unknown lands which his favorite philosopher has described as

“Filled with the quaintest surprises
Of lexleidoscopic sunrises,
Ghosts of the colors of earth—
Where the unseen has its birth.”

Vance, a man of easy circumstances, represents a school of more regular and severe logic, but of less fertility, and for whom the sciences he loves are never so delightful as when he can chain their result within the iron lines of a set of equations. Purpel was at his old tricks again that evening, as we shook the snow from our boots, and, lighting the calumets, settled down into the easy comfort of the positions each liked the best. He was at his old tricks, I have said, for the great egg of the dinornis was swinging majestic in a vast curve, as if propelled at each flight through space by some unseen hand of power.

“I should get into the shadow of the charm it has for you, Purpel,” said I, “if I watched it long.”

“All motion is mystery,” said he, musingly, “and all life is motion. What a stride it has. I suppose if it were big enough, and had a proportional initial impulse, some such world-egg might be set swinging through all eternity.”

“Nothing is endless,” said Vance. “Even the stars are shifting their courses. It would stop as they must. Motion is definite enough; it is only this wretched element of humanity which baffles us.”

“Ay,” said Purpel, “and for all we know it may be playing the mischief with the motor functions of the old globe herself. I don’t suppose that we can have been digging and mining and tunnelling and carting the dirt from this place to that, without damaging the ballast of the poor old egg we live on. Human will may disturb the equilibrium so horribly someday, that we shall go tumbling through space with no more certainty than a lopsided billiard ball.”

“May I be there to see!” said Vance, with a jolly laugh. “I think the dirt account will foot up even during my time. Start something else, stupid—you will take to Planchette next if you go on muddling your smoky old cerebrum much longer. How comes on the murder case?”

“It was about that I wanted to talk to you,” said Purpel. “The anonymous gentleman who disturbed our talk last night is one of the detective force. He was sent to me by Fred Dysart, who is engaged for the nephew and niece. It seems that he wanted me to examine the wounds in the old woman’s body. After making the proper inspection, I went over the premises with the curiosity one has in a case so utterly baffling. I cut off some of the bloodstains on the floor, but found nothing beyond what is usual.”

“Is it always easy to detect bloodstains?” asked I.

“Usually,” he replied, “it is. Always we can say whether or not the stain be blood, and whether it be that of a reptile, a bird, or a mammal, although we cannot be sure as to its being that of man or beast, the corpuscles of which differ only as to size. It has been made probable of late, however, that with very high microscopic powers even this may be attainable.”

“I suppose,” said Vance, “that sometime or other we shall be able to swear to a man from some known peculiarity of his blood-globule. Missing I. S. may be known by his blood-globules, which belong to species *b*, variety 2.”

“I doubt that,” returned Purpel, not noticing the other’s smile. “There does not seem to be anything less individual than the blood. It is the same in structure in youth and age. Individuality lies in the solids.”

“So that,” said Vance, “should the clown fool of Elizabeth have had his arteries run full of the blood of Shakespeare, it would not have helped him to jest the better.”

“No, sir: nor if the case had been reversed, provided the blood were healthy, should we any the less have possessed Hamlet.”

“How odd then,” said I, “that popular phrase and thought should have selected the least individual portions of a man to express his qualities, or to indicate his descent and relationships. You think,” continued I, “that it would be absurd to try and rejuvenate an old man by filling his vessels with young blood.”

“Perfectly so,” said Purpel. “In fact, it has been tried over and over again. The blood of the young has been bought to fill the veins of age, and even ugliness, it is said, has sought a remedy by acquiring the blood which nourished rosy cheeks and rounded limbs.”

“Who first tried it, Purpel?” asked Vance.

“No less a person than Christopher Wren is said to have proposed the use of transfusion, but it was first applied to a man about 1667 by one Daniel Magon, of Bonn. After this in numerous instances the blood of sheep or calves was thrown into the veins of men.”

“And without injury?” asked Vance.

“Yes,” added Purpel. “Nor could any change be perceived in the receiver of the blood from the animal. Not only is this as I state it, but it is still more strange that ammonia salts were employed to keep the blood fluid while using it. The persons who first invented transfusion also threw medicaments into the veins in disease, a method revived of late, but long disused. However, as usual, I am run away with by a doctor’s hobby.”

“I for one,” cried Vance, “regret the failure. Think what delicious confusions of individualities must have resulted. How could the man of twenty, with silken beard and mustache, be expected to honor his bill for the wig he needed last week? The old beldame Nature sets us many queer

sums, but she doesn't allow of her arrangements being so easily upset as they might be in such a case."

"It's a tempting subject, thought," returned Purpel, "and perhaps we are not yet at the end of it."

"A tempting subject!" shouted Vance, in scorn. "Nonsense! You don't suppose I felt a molecule of me in earnest about it. A pretty nice subject for folks who believe that somewhere 'there is an eternal teapot.' You're getting worse all the time, and will want a full course of Emerson."

"Now, Vance," said Purpel, "that's a barred subject; and you know it, too. That kind of regard—"

"Gammon," said Vance, "I meant Emerson's Arithmetic, man. That's what you want—definition of idea, numerical sharpness of thought, a course of mathematics."

"What!" returned Purpel, "do you fancy no one great who cannot excel in algebra? Why, dear fellow, there are lines of research in which a mathematician could not excel, and for success in which a man must be almost as much poet as man of science. This is why imagination is so often highly developed in chemists and physiologists and certain physicists. What is it your philosopher says?—'Science is only Poetry sworn to truth on the altar of nature'; and this explains to us Haller and Davy and Goethe and Faraday, and is seen more or less in the marvellous gift of expression which we so frequently see illustrated in the writings of men of science. The first living naturalist in this country never yet has been able to comprehend how a symbol can come to express a number and be used as its representative. And as to the Emerson business, I don't believe you, V."

"Sir," said Vance, standing under the egg of the dinornis, "you are now talking the language of common humanity, for when a man says, 'I don't believe you,' he is simple, impressive, and unmistakable; but then it is so rare that a philosopher of your school ventures to be thus explicit. It is so easy to dress up a commonplace in new clothes, and foist off the old stupid as a bright and clever fellow."

"He's at my friends again, Gresham, and the best of the fun is, that he can't quote a line of the author he sneers at."

"Can't I?" retorted Vance, enchanted with Purpel's annoyance at this never-failing source of chaff. "Can't quote him? What's that he says about the Devil, P.?—O, where he calls him an 'animated Torrid Zone.' Now that was descriptive enough."

"Confound you, V.," broke in Purpel; "it was humblebee he said that about."

"Then I don't see the connection of ideas," returned the other. "However, he has a neater way of saying one fibs than you have. It's neater, but bless us, P., isn't it—"

"Isn't it what?" cried Purpel. "What are you raging about?"

“Wait a little, and I’ll tell you. There, fill my pipe for me, P., while I quote: ‘If my brother repute my conscience with a lie (not of my telling), surely he has done me a good deed, for whether I lie is immaterial, so as that it causes another introspect. But, as concerns variety, there are two kinds of liars. This man lies to himself, and after is in earnest about it with the world. This other lies only to the world and is not self-deceived. Moreover, each century says to the last, You lie; so that to lie is only to prophesy.’ Now, P., isn’t that a more charitable mode of putting the case than just merely to say it isn’t so? I wish I could give you page and line, but, as you see, my memory is good enough.”

“Wretch,” groaned Purpel, “your memory, indeed! You are too near this man to take in his dimensions.

‘Men there be so broad and ample
Other men are but a sample
Of a corner of their being,
Of a pin-space of their seeing.[’]

Let him answer you himself.”

“I am satisfied,” growled Vance. “Satiated, I may say. Let’s get back to earth again. You were going to tell us about the murder, I believe.”

“Yes, V. I feel really a great interest in the matter. I do not see how the nephew is to escape conviction.”

“What are the circumstances?” I asked.

“The victim,” replied Purpel, “was an old Quaker lady of slight means, who lived in a small three-story house off of Mill Street. On the day of the murder she drew a hundred dollars, which, as usual, she kept upon her person. The lower rooms were sub-let to others. She herself lived in a third-story back room. The house is separated on the west by an alley from a blank wall of the warehouse. On the north there is a narrow area bounded by a tenement house, about to be altered for some purpose, and at present without inhabitants above the first story. The old woman’s rocking chair was in its usual place, facing a table, and with its back to the north window. It had been pushed away from the table, and the body lay beside it on the floor. All of the blood, or nearly all, was in front of the chair, on the ceiling, walls, and table.”

“Who gave the alarm?” asked I.

“No one,” he answered, “until in the morning her niece found her on the floor with her throat cut. By the by, it must have been done early, because the girl left her at nine, and she usually read the paper little later, and she was in bed by ten. Now when found she lay alongside of her chair, dressed.”

“But about the nephew?” said I.

“The nephew,” continued Purpel, “is a man of forty or thereabouts. Like the rest of them, he seems to have led at sometime an easier life, but is now a reporter in a small way, and is said to be engaged to the niece, his cousin. There is some evidence that he has plagued the old woman a good deal for money, and that he is one of your luckless people never actually starving, but never distinctly succeeding. He came to the house in the afternoon, stayed to tea, and remained with the old lady to read the paper to her after the niece left. The girl says he was alone with her only about a quarter of an hour, and she heard him shut the street door before she herself had finished undressing. When arrested he was found to have on his person fifty dollars in notes, one of which was identified by the clerk of the insurance company who paid the annuity. The most careful inspection detected no bloodstains upon any of his clothes, and he wore the same suit both days. Now, Vance, how does it strike you?”

“I have no decision to give,” was his reply. “You have told me enough to hang him, and hanged I suppose he will be.”

“There are numberless possibilities in his favor,” said I.

“True,” added Vance, “but at present it is the fashion to hang folks. What is his name?”

“Upton,” said Purpel—“Denis Upton.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Vance. “Why, Gresham, you know that man. He was a small clerk in my uncle’s employ. Don’t you recall him—a cleverish fellow, one of your massive youngsters, with huge, shaggy features and awkward ways. I am very sorry. I heard he had gone under the social ice a good while ago; but what a hideous ending! I must see him, P.”

Somewhat awed by this unlooked-for revival of an old acquaintance, we suffered the talk to die out, and presently broke up and walked thoughtfully homeward.

I went next day with my friends, first to the house of Mrs. Gray, and then to visit Upton in jail. We accompanied the officer in charge through the various rooms, and Purpel and Vance carefully studied them in turn. In the room where the murder was done there were jets of dried blood on the walls, and a ghastly semi-fluid pool on the floor, but none behind the woman’s chair, the back of which was towards the north window.

Struck with the defective nature of the evidence, we left the house and made our visit to the prisoner, or rather Vance made his, for we waited in the keeper’s rooms. By and by he returned, and as he had an engagement we agreed to meet at night and hear his account of the interview.

“I suppose it is our man, Vance?” said I.

“I am sorry to say it is,” he replied, “and a more wretched being I have never seen. He told me a long story of endless ill luck and disappointments, through all of which this girl has clung to him tenaciously. He did not pretend to conceal from me that he had gambled and drunk at times, but his evil fortunes seem to have depended less on these vices than upon a certain want of practicality, if there be such a word.”

“There is such a thing,” said I.

“You wouldn’t know him, Gresham. He is one of your colossally built men, with huge features, and nothing very nice about his face but his smile.”

“Smile!” said Purpel, “could the poor fellow smile?”

“So we are made,” said Vance; “the moment rules us. I saw a fellow garroted in Havana, who killed a mosquito on his cheek a minute before they pinioned him.”

“It seems ghastly,” said I. “Is he greatly alarmed about himself?”

“No,” returned Vance. “He comprehends his position, but I do really think he is so wretched with running the gauntlet of untiring ill luck, that he is in a manner indifferent, except as to this girl.”

“And what of her?”

“Well, P., she is rather a character. I saw her at his request, and found a woman about thirty, with that hard, bony style of face which belongs to the acid type of Quaker. She must have had a rather dull sort of life, what with the old woman and the weary waiting for a future that never came. We had a pretty long talk, and at last she said, ‘Does thee think him guilty?’ I said, ‘No.’ And indeed, I do not. ‘Does thee think it would clear him if another were to confess?’ I said, ‘Yes, certainly,’ astonished, as you may suppose. Then she said, ‘If thee wouldn’t mind, I would like to be alone.’ And so I came away.”

A few days after this little talk, the woman was released, as no kind of suspicion appeared to cling to her; while about the man Upton the toils gathered closer and closer. As this story is only in a manner connected with ourselves and our talks, which, after all, are what I want to render, I hasten through the acts of this ugly drama. As Vance had foreseen, according to a present fashion Upton was convicted, and within a day or two his history and reputed crime were forgotten in the roar of the great city’s tide of busy life, only to be recalled anew when the story of the gallows should be told to eager readers over comfortable breakfast-tables.

Amidst the general neglect, we three alone held to a sturdy belief in the innocence of the convicted man, who, like a hare sore beset by hounds, seemed to have cast himself down to await the coming death; altogether indifferent to its approach, so much worse did life seem to be than any death he could conceive of.

About a week before the day set for turning over this man’s case to the judgment-seat of God, we met as of custom. It was a common habit with us, as it may be with other like circles, to sit a little time silent over the first freshly lighted pipes.

By and by the pleasant glamour of our Lady of the Leaf would come between us and the day’s long labors and vexations; and, slaves no longer to custom or the world of men, we drifted away whithersoever the tides of thought or fancy might choose to carry us. It had been agreed that we

should talk no longer of the tragedy which most men had already forgotten, and so it was that our chat turned on other matters.

“I saw today,” said Vance, “that someone has been speculating upon the propable effect on the German mind of the use of tobacco; but I suspect that before long there will be no nation sufficiently smokeless for comparison.”

“Possibly, not,” said I. “It is said that the Indian, the primary smoker, has never used it to that excess which other races have done.”

“He lives out of doors,” said Purpel, “and the pipe has no bane for the dweller in tent or wigwam.”

“I can vouch for that,” returned Vance; “but, how curious it is that we alone should chew, and that the German soldier, who chewed inveterately during the Thirty Years’ War, should have utterly abandoned the vice.”

“I never knew of the facts,” said Purpel; “but all honor to the Dutchman. As to tobacco, it is utterly vain to oppose it; nor do I for one believe that it is hurtful when moderately used by men of matured development. I might, I don’t say I would, give up this old meerschaum for a wife; but I think I should like to be as certain of the woman’s power to soothe and charm as I am of my pipe’s, before I ventured on the exchange. I suppose it does hurt some folks’ cerebral organs, but it seems to me somehow very strange that this or that drug should have the power to interfere with the machinery of a thing as spiritual as thought. It is really impossible, reason as we may, for us to disassociate the higher mental qualities from some relationship with a sphere of activities beyond those which we can study.”

“And yet,” said Vance, “we have, scientifically speaking, every evidence to relate thought in all its forms to material changes in brain tissue. Given certain conditions which insure the integrity of nerve-matter—and we think, remember, imagine. Take any one of these away, and we do these things ill or not at all.”

“To me,” said Purpel, “the strangest part of the problem lies in the fact that, whereas the forms of mental activity are so distinct, we have no notable differentiation in the tissues of the various parts of the brain set apart for their production.”

“Nor,” said Vance, “is there any apparent distinction in texture between the average brain and that of La Place or Newton.”

“Difference of bulk or weight there probably is,” added Purpel; “but nothing that accounts for the vast separation in the character of the products of the contrasted brains we are talking of.”

“Of course, it bewilders *me*,” said I, humbly. “If you see a very strong man, one exceptional in his way, he seems always to possess a vast quantity of muscle; now, the amount of increase of brain-tissue needed to make the difference between commonplace and genius seems to be so small as to fill me with astonishment.”

“But, G.,” said Purpel, “do not you think it quite impossible to compare the two forms of result? The muscle is only one element in the making of a perfect human machine for the evolution of physical force such as motion. The nerves stand for something here, and the nerve-centres also; for in spite of the popular notion that a muscular man alone is strong, it really seems as though amount of muscle-mass might be but the least important element in the case, and nerve-force the greatest.”

“How so?” said I.

“Because,” said Purpel, “you may see the slightly-built insane man exhibiting the power of an athlete.”

“Considering, then,” said Vance, “the whole nerve-muscular apparatus for causing motion, we see it attain its maximum of power in the insane or convulsed—”

“It is so said,” broke in Purpel, “but whether truly or not, I doubt a little. An insane man is so indifferent to the pains which often come of utterly reckless exertion, that it is hard to compare the vigor thus exhibited with that of health. If I understood you aright, you were going on to point out that the mental organs possess no power to produce, when diseased, the highest mental result.”

“Not unless genius be truly madness—for the ‘great wit’ of the couplet means that, I presume,” said I.

“I do not believe much in their near alliance!” exclaimed Purpel. “And I fully agree with the great Frenchman, who said of this theory that, were it so, genius would more often be inherited.”

“And is it not?” said Vance.

“No,” replied Purpel. “Talents are often matter of descent; and as a rule, two clever people are more apt to leave able descendants than two fools; but genius, so far as I can remember, is very rarely inherited.”

“No doubt, you are correct,” said Vance; “and, in fact, there is a curious and self-born difficulty in the continuity of any great faculties in a line of descent.”

“How?” said I.

“Thus,” returned Vance. “It has been clearly shown that the descendants of great men are few in number; and this depends upon a law of the human economy, by virtue of which the over-use of the intellectual powers lessens the activity of the generative faculties, and thus, because a man is a hero, or statesman, or poet, he is likely to leave fewer descendants; and for a similar reason these run a greater risk of being imperfect creatures than the babies of the next mechanic.”

“The children of the brain slay the children of the body,” said Purpel.

“A rather bold mode of statement,” replied Vance, “but, to return a little—when I think it over, it does seem to me that the diseased brain may often turn out the larger amount of product; but then the quality is poor, while the muscle, brain, and system give you in the crazed—if the public be correct—not only amount of force, but swiftness of motion, and unequalled endurance of exertion. In other words, the best is evolved only when a morbid element is thrown in. What say you to that, P.?”

“I still doubt the facts,” cried Purpel.

“Ah, ha!” said I, “you and V. seem to have exchanged parts tonight. How is it, V.?”

“Which accounts for his talking so well,” said Purpel; “but, to return again.”

“Is there such a thing possible as stimulating the mental organs with electricity?”

“No,” said Purpel. “Some few of the central organs of motion and sensation may be galvanized in animals so as to give response. But many nerve-centres, those included, to which we assign the parentage of mental states, make no sign when irritated in this manner.”

Said Vance; “You cannot reach them in life, I mean in man.”

“No,” returned Purpel; “but we can reach them in living animals.”

“Where? alas!” was the answer. “You have a practical impossibility of reply, either owing to the injury done, or because the animal is defective in its power to express mental states.”

“Why not try it on man?” said I.

“Would you be pleased to volunteer?” retorted Vance, with a laugh.

“You can find a man to do anything conceivable,” I continued; “but for this especial business you must look farther.”

“Well,” said Vance, “to return on our tracks. If, as Purpel told us last week, the organs of special sense record only in their own language the prick of a pin or an electric shock—”

“Stop,” said I; “what do you mean?”

“Only this,” said Purpel, taking up the thread of talk, “that if you hurt the globe of the eye so as to press on the optic nerve, you will feel it as a flash of light only. So in the mouth, an electric discharge is felt as a taste, and a like conclusion is probable as to hearing.”

“I see,” said I; “and now, Vance, as I interrupted you, what were you about to say?”

“I was thinking,” said he, “that in like manner irritating or electrizing the nerves which must run from one mental organ to another might call out the special function of the part, whether as thought, memory, fancy, or whatnot. However, I presume one would get about as orderly replies as when disease does act on these nerve-wires, or as when a thunderstorm meddles with the telegraph lines.”

“Humph!” returned Purpel; “you had best not get beyond your last, old friend, and your last is a little ahead of most of your notions.”

“Well,” said I, with one of those queer flashes of inspiration that come to a dull fellow who lives enough among his intellectual betters to rub off on him, now and then, a little of their phosphorus—“well,” said I, “of course, Purpel, such an experiment tried on a living man would produce endless confusion of mind and all kind of interferences; but suppose you could keep alive only the intellectual organs, and could contrive to stimulate them one at a time.”

I never can tell whether Vance is in earnest or in jest, unless he takes out his pencil and a card and begins, Let $a+b=etc.$, and let q be etc. This time his soul on a sudden revolted at the wildness of the talk into which we had wandered.

“Ho, ho!” said he, “who started all this nonsense?” And then he went off into a furious tirade against the feebleness with which men talked, and urged the need for mathematical training and the like.

Meanwhile, Purpel had passed into one of his thoughtfulest of moods, and was slowly navigating about the room around chairs and tables. At last he exclaimed: “Yes, yes, it must be that even thought and imaginations have a material basis without which we should know them not. Even Paul could conceive of no resurrection that did not include the body. If I can take a severed hand and keep it alive two or three days, and it responds to a blow by muscular motion, and sweats, and *is* alive, why not be able someday to keep alive the brain-organs separately, and get replies from them, which, even if disordered, would tell us what they do, what their work is?”

“Do you mean,” said I, “that it is in any way possible after a part is dead to restore it to life?”

“That depends,” he returned, “upon what you call alive. A great savant secured the hand of a man guillotined at 8 A.M. After fourteen hours it was cold and stiff. He then threw into its arteries blood taken from his own arm. Presently the fluid began to flow from the veins. The supply was kept up in this manner, and the returning blood was aerated by agitation. In a few minutes the member flushed, and then began to assume the hue of life. The stiffness of death departed, and the muscles contracted when struck or when galvanized. As long as he sustained the supply of blood—and he did this for six hours—so long did the separated part exhibit all the phenomena of life. Was it dead before? We cannot say that it was not alive afterwards.”

“It appears, then,” said Vance, “that life is what one of your biologists called it, an assemblage of conditions—of more or less interdependent conditions.”

“A partial statement of the case,” continued Purpel, “for there is more in life than so vague a definition covers.”

“But,” said I, “can you in like manner revive the brain?”

“I was about to say so,” said he. “The same experimenter repeated his process on dogs apparently dead from various causes, and by letting out the blood from the veins of the neck so as to relieve the over-distended heart, and then throwing blood into the arteries of the head, he succeeded in restoring certain of his animals to life. As the blood entered, the visage altered, the features moved, the eyes opened, and the pupils changed their size under varying amounts of light. Of course the brain acted, but how completely we cannot say.”

“And,” said Vance, “has this been tried on man?”

“No,” replied Purpel, “not under precisely the same conditions; but there is no reason why it should not succeed as well with him as with the dog. In but few, I presume, would recovery occur, but in some, at least, it might do so.”

“What a hideous thought,” said Vance, “to bring a man back to life only to die anew. There are some folks for whom I would prefer not to assume such a responsibility.”

“Yet,” said Purpel, “we assume it for every dying man we preserve alive. The doctor’s instinct is to save life. The after-consequences lie not with him.”

“If I were the vitalized victim,” said Vance, “I should look upon you very much as Frankenstein’s monster did upon his maker. You would have to provide me with board and lodging to the uttermost limit of my secondary existence; and as to what expensive tastes I might bring back with me from the nether world, who can say?”

“I would risk it,” said Purpel, smiling. “Who’s there?” he added; for at this moment his servant opened the door in haste, exclaiming: “Here’s a woman, sir, would come up all I could do!” “Who—what?” said Purpel, as a figure swept past the man into the room, and stood facing the light, a strange and unpleasant intruder.

“Good gracious!” said Vance. “Miss Gray, what on earth brought you here at this hour?” It was the niece of the murdered woman.

The figure before us threw back a worn tweed cloak, and stood erect, in a faded silk dress fitting closely her gaunt frame. She held a Quaker bonnet in her hand, and her face and hair were wet with the sleet of the storm without. A stern, set face, with the features drawn into lines of pain and care, a weary look about the mouth, and the eyes of one hunted down by a sorrow too awful for mortality to bear.

“Can nothing be done?” said the woman. “Must he die?”

So startling was this appearance, that for a moment all of us were alike confounded. Then Purpel said kindly, "Sit down by the fire, Miss Gray"; and presently he had taken her bonnet and cloak and seated her close to the blazing logs, which I quickly piled on the fire.

For a moment the warmth seemed to capture her physical sense of comfort, and she bent over, holding both hands to the blaze. Then, on a sudden, she turned to Vance, and exclaimed, with a quick look of curious cunning: "I don't want thee to tell, but—I did it. I want thee to go with me to—to—somebody, and let me tell them the way it was done; but don't tell him. He'd say it wasn't so. Thee won't tell him, will thee?"

"Of course not," said Vance; "but, Miss Gray, no one thinks you did it."

"But they'll believe me. They'll believe me," she cried. "Come, we have no time to lose. Where's the bonnet? Let me go."

"What shall we do, Purpel?" said I.

He made me no answer, but as she rose he faced her, and, placing a hand on each of her shoulders, said, firmly: "We none of us think he did it, my poor woman. We are sure he did not. We have done and are doing all we can to save him. Will not this content you, without your taking a lie upon your own soul? You are half-crazed—and no wonder; but you know that you did not do this thing. Still no one has a right to stop you, and I myself will go with you to the district attorney, and secure you a hearing, although as to his believing you I have the gravest doubts."

"Yes," she cried, "who else could have done it? I believe I did it. I can see myself doing it. I mean I did it. Isn't thee ashamed to be near me? Come!" Purpel made us a sign to remain, and was leaving the room, when she turned suddenly. "And if," she exclaimed, "O, gracious God! if, if they will not—believe me, and—they kill him, surely—surely, he must come back and see me, and say, 'Little woman?'—Perhaps thee doesn't know that's what he calls me. Sometimes 'little woman,' and sometimes 'little thee and thou.' What was I saying? He will say, 'The dead lie not, being so near to God, and I am white of this sin.'"

"This is horrible," cried Vance. "For God's sake, take her away. Stay, and I will get a hack from the corner." And so saying, he left the room, followed by Purpel and Miss Gray, who paused a moment on the threshold to say to me, "Thee does not think him guilty?"

"Who—I?" I returned; "no indeed."

"Well," she added, "don't thee mind me. I ask everybody that." And then impatiently turning to Purpel, she added, "Why does thee wait? Thee will get into trouble should thee try to keep me."

I was too excited for sleep, and therefore piled up the logs anew, and, lighting a pipe, occupied myself with such thoughts as chose to be my guests until my two friends came back, having

restored the poor half-crazed girl to the kindly custody of a lady of her own sect, from whose home she had escaped that evening. It were needless to add that, although Miss Gray told a story of the murder cunningly consistent, it broke down under the slightest inspection, and she finally owned to the authorities her complete innocence of all share in the murder. From this time, however, she continued to invent similar but varying accounts, until at last her mind gave way totally, and she was sent to an asylum for the insane.

To return to ourselves. Purpel and Vance, after telling me what they had done upon leaving me, silently sat for a time, until at last Purpel broke out abruptly in this wise:

“If a man should return from the dead, surely he would be believed, and why should he not be made to speak? Vance, do you think there would be wrong done to any if—if—it were possible so far to resuscitate a dead man as to get from him a confession of guilt or innocence?”

“What,” said I, “as your *savant* revived his dogs?”

“Why not?” returned Purpel.

“Well, of all the wild schemes!” cried Vance.

“Wild or not,” said Purpel, “it is possible, and especially after death from asphyxia.”

“But what would the law say, Purpel,” said I, “in case you revived the man permanently?”

“We need not do that,” he replied.

“Need not,” said Vance. “Why, man, to let him die after revival would be murder.”

“Queer dilemma,” said I. “The law kills a man; you bring him to life again, ask a question or two, and let him depart. Suit for malpractice by surviving relatives.”

“The law has had its way with him, hanged him, and pronounced him dead,” said Purpel; “will it go back on its verdict and say he was not dead? I would take that risk, and in this case without a fear.”

“And I also,” added Vance; “but the thing is absurd. Why talk about it at all! Let us go, it is near daybreak.” And so the talk ended.

For the next week Purpel was unusually silent, and we saw little of him until the day after that which hastened poor Denis Upton out of the world. He died, like many a man, asserting his freedom from guilt; but experience had too distinctly taught the worthlessness of this test of innocence, and few pitied his fate or doubted the justice of his punishment.

As usual, we met at Purpel’s rooms quite late at night, and found him in a singularly restless mood, walking about and muttering half-aloud, while his great dinornis-egg swung to and fro above him, apparently as restless as its owner.

“Another chance gone,” he said. “Another; and life so short, so very short.”

“What are you maundering about, P.?” said Vance.

“Only a little disappointment,” returned the other.

“Pass your hat round,” said Vance, “and we will drop in our little sympathies. What’s all that stuff in the corner, P.?” he asked, pointing to a pile of tubing, battery-cells, and brass implements.

“Well,” replied Purpel, “you may laugh if you like—but I meant to have made the effort to resuscitate the poor wretch they hanged yesterday. It might have succeeded partially or completely, but at the least I should have tried, and even entire failure would have taught me something.”

Vance tapped his forehead, looking at me. “Quite gone,” said he; “the wreck of a fine mind, Gresham.”

But Purpel was too deeply interested for jesting, and replied, rather fiercely for him: “Have your joke, if it pleases you to be merry over such a theme as yesterday’s. I, for one—”

“Purpel, Purpel,” said Vance, interrupting him, “nobody thinks of jesting about that. I was only smiling at your woful visage. That woman’s face haunts me like a ghost. Was it her words which brought you to think of this strange experiment?”

“Those, and my own ideas on the scientific aspect of the subject,” said Purpel; “but, no matter; poor Upton’s friends interposed at the last minute, and denied me the chance of a trial.”

“If the opportunity should recur,” said Vance, “let me see the experiment.”

“I shall be very glad to do so,” returned Purpel. “Today I the more sorrowfully regret my failure in this present instance, because I have learned that which more than ever makes me certain that an innocent man was murdered yesterday—a man as guiltless of blood as you or I, Vance.”

“Indeed,” said I, “what has occurred?”

“I will tell you,” he said. “Do you remember the relation of Mrs. Gray’s house to those nearest it?”

“Perfectly,” said I.

“It was separated by an alley from a blank wall on the west, and by a space of eight or ten feet from a small house on the north,” said Vance.

“Exactly,” continued Purpel; “and in this house were windows a little above the level of those belonging to Mrs. Gray’s residence. When the police examined the premises they found the

window of the room opposite to Mrs. Gray's with the shutters barred. Her own dwelling had no outside shutters. On the lower story lived a cobbler, who was distinctly shown to have been elsewhere at the time of the murder."

"I remember the man," said I. "He exhibited the utmost nervousness during his cross-examination. You do not think him guilty, Purpel?"

"Certainly not," said the latter. "The other tenants had been ordered out by the landlord, so that he might make a change in the house, which with the next two was to be altered into a carpenter's shop. They had already begun to repair the roof, and the two upper stories were piled full of lumber for the purpose of serving as scaffolding on the roof, which was to be raised several feet."

"But what kept the cobbler there?" said I.

"He had still three months to stay before his lease was out," said Vance. "I remember the question in court, and his reply. Go on, P."

"I myself," continued Purpel, "have never before inspected his premises; but this morning, under an impulse which I can scarcely explain, I set out quite early and found the cobbler at work. I explained to him that I had felt some curiosity about the Gray murder, and asked him to go with me over the house. At first he was crusty enough, but a little money and a bland word or two made him willing. I went directly to the room opposite to Mrs. Gray's. It was pitch-dark, and I felt an oppressive consciousness that I was about to learn something strange and terrible connected with the woman's fate. The cobbler opened the window, and the chill of what I might call expectant horror passed away with the light of day. The cobbler assured me that, owing to various causes, among others the failure of the owner, the lumber on the floor had remained unused. The window-sash was easily raised or lowered; the space between that and the opposite window was nine feet ten inches, as I learned by measurement. I next proceeded to examine the window-ledge and sash, but found nothing. Then I turned over the boards lying nearest to the wall, but still in vain; the cobbler assuring me repeatedly that 'them detectives had been and done just the same.' At last, however, I raised a board which lay flat against the wall, partly below the window; and on it, near to one end, I found four small spots not over a line wide, and further along a larger one—dark brown, nearly black spots. What were they? A hundred years ago no man on God's earth could have told: in an hour or two I should know. Do you wonder I was excited?"

"Wonder," said I—"it is terrible; I am almost sorry you found them. What next, Purpel?"

"I thought," said he, "that my quest was at an end. You shall hear how strangely I was mistaken. I turned to the cobbler, without pointing out the spots, and asked him to bring me up some sharp tool. In a minute or two he returned with his cobbler's knife, and with this I readily shaved away the chips now on yonder table, which were the only portions of the plank thus stained. As I was about to hand him the knife, a chill went through me, with one of those singular mental presentiments such as sometimes foreshadow the idea about to appear to you in full distinctness

of conception. The knife was perfectly new. ‘This tool is very sharp, I see,’ said I; ‘it must have been recently bought.’

“‘Well,’ said he, snappishly, ‘what then—suppose it was? I ain’t got no more time to waste. Give me my knife, and let me shut up the place.’ Without heeding him, I continued, ‘When did you buy that knife?’”

“Think I should have postponed that question,” said Vance, “until we were downstairs.”

“Don’t stop him,” cried I. “What next, Purpel?”

“The man said, of course, he didn’t see as it was any of my business. I replied, that it was easy to get an answer in other ways, upon which he surlily closed the window, muttering to himself while I went slowly downstairs. Once in his shop, I turned on him quite abruptly and repeated my question, upon which he ordered me to put down the knife and clear out. Then I made a rash venture. Said I, ‘You bought that knife not very long after the murder. Where is the old knife?’ You should have seen the man—he looked at me a moment quite cowed, and then exclaimed:

“‘You don’t mean to say you think I done it. I swear I didn’t. I don’t know nothin’ about them knives, except just that I missed my old knife the day that ’ere murder was done; I missed it, sir, and I kind a knowed them as done it must have stole my knife, so I went and buyed a new one, and was afeared to say more about it.’

“‘Great heavens!’ said I, ‘you have hanged an innocent man, you coward! Afraid! what were you afraid of?’

“‘Don’t be hard on me, sir,’ he said. ‘I am a poor man, and if I’d a told about this, don’t you think I’d a laid in jail for witness; and who was to look after my wife and little uns?’

“‘Is this possible?’ said I. ‘You fool, your wife and babies would have been well enough cared for; and now—Why did I not think of all this a week ago?’

“‘You won’t speak of it,’ said the man, ‘you won’t tell nobody.’

“‘Tell!’ said I, ‘come along with me, instantly.’ He pleaded very hard, but I was altogether remorseless; and in half an hour he had made his confession to the district attorney. There, Vance, you have my story.”

We drew long breaths, Vance and I, and a vision of the gallows went through my brain, filling me with a horror too deep for speech.

At last, Vance said, “And is it blood, Purpel?”

“Beyond a doubt,” answered the latter, “and as surely the blood of Mrs. Gray.”

Here he crossed the room, and, returning, showed us the chips he had cut away, each with its drop of dark brownish red.

“But,” said I, after a pause, “this might have been blood from the finger of one of the workmen.”

“Might have been, but is not,” returned Purpel.

“And the cobbler,” added Vance—“is he free from suspicion?”

“You forget,” said I, “that he proved an alibi without flaw.”

“Moreover,” continued Purpel, “I noticed that the cobbler is left-handed, which in a trade like his must be a very awkward defect. Now, if you will remember one of our former talks, you will recall that I considered the murder to have been done by a man who, standing behind the woman, suddenly placed a hand on her mouth and with the other inflicted a single wound in the neck. That wound was made with the right hand, being deepest on the left side of her neck. The men—I suspect there were two—gained access to the empty rooms of the house I visited today. At night they opened the window and put a plank across, quietly. The old woman, who was, as you have heard, quite deaf, is first startled by the cold air from the opened window. She rises suddenly, and is seized from behind. Perhaps she struggles, resisting the effort to rob her. Perhaps the murder may have been prearranged. It matters not now. There is resistance, a sharp knife drawn athwart the throat, and the robbery is effected. One confederate is probably somewhat bloody, the other less so or not at all. The latter shuts the window behind them, withdraws the plank, and bars the shutters of the cobbler’s house, through which they escape, unnoticed.”

“If,” said Vance, “your view be correct, they premeditated only plunder at first, but in passing through the cobbler’s workroom they probably seized the knife as a weapon which might prove useful.”

“I suspect it was as you state it, Purpel,” said I. “The persons who did this deed must have been thorough adepts in crime, or they would have been incapable either of planning such a scheme or of carrying it out so calmly as to leave only these very slight traces. The little blood you found probably dropped on the plank as they crawled over it.”

“There might have been more,” returned Purpel; “and had I made this examination earlier, I should possibly have found further traces, since it is scarcely conceivable that a red-handed murderer should have failed to put a wet hand somewhere, in such a way as to leave a mark.[”]

“And what better for it all is poor Upton?” said Vance. “We shall find few, I think, so credulous as to believe the tale we have heard tonight.”

And so it proved; for although every effort was made to set the matter in a clear light before the public, it was generally regarded as only a barefaced attempt on the part of Upton’s friends to save his memory from just reproach.

Months went by, and we had ceased at length to talk of the horrible tragedy which for a little while had disturbed the still waters of our quiet lives. One evening, late in the next winter, both Vance and myself received from Purpel a hasty note, stating that he meant next day to attempt the experiment which he had failed to try in the former instance. When we met in the evening, he explained to us that he had made such arrangements as would enable him to secure the body of a criminal who was to be hanged on the following morning. The man in question was a friendless wretch, who had been guilty of every known crime, and who was at last to suffer for one of the most cold-blooded murders on the records of the courts. His body was to be delivered to Purpel as soon as possible after the execution. Our friend, for obvious reasons, desired to have no other assistance than our own, and he now proceeded to instruct us carefully as to the means he intended to use, so that no time should be lost during the necessary operations.

On the following day, a little after noon, we assembled in the laboratory back of Purpel's house, where he was accustomed to carry on such of his researches as involved the use of animals. It was a bare whitewashed room, scantily furnished, and rather too dark. We lit the gaslights, however, above the central table, and with a certain awe awaited the coming of the body. Thanks to Purpel's purse, we had not long to rest in suspense. In about an hour after the execution, a covered wagon was driven into the stable at the side of the lot, and the two men in charge deposited the corpse on the table, and drove away, with a good round fee as their reward,

Purpel hastily withdrew the sheet in which the man was wrapped, and exposed a powerful frame clad in a red shirt and worn black clothes. The face was mottled red and white, marked with many scars, and of utterly wolfish ferocity.

"The body is warm," said Purpel; "and now, as to the heart," he added. "I cannot hear it beat but possibly the auricles may still be moving faintly."

As speedily as possible arrangements were made, by opening a vein in the neck, so as to relieve the heart, and allow the outflow of blood. Then a simple pump capable of sucking up blood from a basin of fluid and of forcing it into the brain was fitted by double tubes to the two great arteries which supply the brain. Vance was then taught how to move the chest walls by elevating the arms and alternatively compressing the breast, so as to make artificial breathing.

"It is very clever," said Vance, coolly, "but it won't work, P."

"Well," said the latter, "if I get a partial success it will suffice. I have no desire to restore a scoundrel like this to the world again." So saying, the experiment began, while profound silence was kept by one and all of us.

At last said Purpel, "Look!" The mottled tints of the visage were slowly fading away. The eyes lost their glaze, the lips grew red, slight twitches crossed the face here and there. At last the giant's chest heaved once slowly, as of itself, then paused, and stirred again.

I looked at Purpel: he was deadly pale.

Said Vance, huskily: "Stop, Purpel, stop!—he will live. I will not go on."

“A moment,” urged Purpel, “only a moment.”

“Look!” said I; for the eyes rolled to and fro, and I even thought they seemed to follow my movements.

Suddenly said Vance, “Who spoke? What was that?” A hoarse murmur startled us all.

“He spoke,” said I. “It spoke.”

“Impossible!” said Purpel. “Raise his head a little. Lift the plank.”

“Hush!” I cried.

A whisper broke from the lips of the wretch before us. “The plank,” he said—“only an old woman—the plank.”

We looked at one another, each whiter than his fellow.

“I will not stand this,” screamed Vance. “You hear—you hear—Mrs. Gray—this man did it. He—he killed her—killed Mrs. Gray.”

“Gray,” said the living dead man, “gray hair, yes.”

“Purpel,” said I, sternly, “this is enough. You must stop.”

“Nay, I will stop,” exclaimed Vance; and with an uncontrollable impulse he overturned the vase of blood on the floor.

“It is well,” said Purpel. “Hush, V. What is that he says? See, the color changes. Ah! he said, ‘Mother, mother!’”

“No more, and enough!” cried Vance. “Have we sinned in this thing? Let us go.”

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