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THE

DOOM OF THE GREAT CITY;

BEING

The Narrative of a Survivor,

WRITTEN A.D. 1942.

BY

WILLIAM DELISLE HAY.

“ — How can I
Repress the horror of my thoughts, which fly
The sad remembrance ? ”

Sir J. Denham.

LONDON: 1942

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THE DOOM OF THE GREAT CITY.

TAPUAEHARURU, TAUPO, N.Z.,

February 2, 1942.

MY DEAR GRANDCHILDREN.

It is with feelings of no little pleasure that I take up my pen on this my eighty-fourth birthday, and sit down to write to you collectively. I am about to give effect to a narrative that has been long desired on your part, as it has been long promised on mine, for I feel that if delayed any longer, it may be that I shall pass away without having told it. But first, you will be glad to hear that I am still hale and hearty; and how could it be otherwise, living as I do in the most beautiful climate of the world, surrounded with every comfort, and content to bear my weight of years, living again in the joys and pleasures of the numerous family with which I have been blessed? And what a family it is, to be sure, when you come to think of it! There were no less than forty-three of them, old and young, big and little, who came to bid "Grandfather" good morning to-day, and to wish him all the customary felicitations; and then, too, what a pile of letters have I had from all of you who are at a distance in your various homes scattered over Australasia! We have had quite a fête all the morning, turning the assemblage to a profit by setting everyone to work at picking fruit in the peach-orchards and orangeries, which is just in proper condition for market; and splendid fun there was, I can assure you, and no little flirtation either among the youngsters. So you see that, at any rate here

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in Zealandia, we keep to our old-fashioned ways of combining business with pleasure. My *great-granddaughter*, little Laura, who, as you know, is my constant companion, acted as mistress of the ceremonies, and very well, I must say, did she perform her part. At dinner, after they had drunk my health and I had responded, it was little Laura who stood up and proposed the toast of "Our absent friends, all round Lake Taupo,"—which I need not say was drunk enthusiastically. But I will not go further into these details, for I have set myself to write about another and far different subject.

It was after they had all gone—some to catch the last train, and others to take one or other of the lake steamers, which all depart from Tapuaeharuru before sunset—that Laura came to me and, standing demurely before me with her hands crossed behind, made this pretty little speech, in which I dare say she had been carefully coached by her elders :—

"Dear Grandpapa," she said, "your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who love and revere you so much, earnestly and humbly implore you to tell them the story of the GREAT EVENT of your life."

And then the dear little puss kissed me and ran away.

Well, of course I was a little shocked, for you know what my feelings have always been upon this subject; but I cannot say I was wholly unprepared for such a request. Hints have often reached me from many of you to the same effect, and particularly of late have I been admonished to break the silence I have so long imposed upon myself. I am one of the very few survivors now living, of the greatest calamity that perhaps this earth has ever witnessed, and there are doubtless many besides yourselves who would be glad to hear all I have

to say about it. Sixty years ago to-day it is since the event happened, and for nearly the same number of years I have forborne to speak or write anything referring to it, in the endeavour to cloud my memory, if I might, by so doing. It was from the same reason that I came here so many years ago—came to what was then almost a solitude, almost a virgin wilderness, though now one of our most populous rural districts. But the fateful remembrance of that long-ago catastrophe is still as fresh in my mind as it was fifty-nine years back, and even now, as I recall the scenes I witnessed, and marshall my recollections for you, nature recoils in horror, and I shudder at the task before me.

I shall confine myself simply to narrating so much as fell directly within my own observation—which is what you desire, I think—for the full accounts are matters of common information; while your histories will tell you, better than I could, of preceding events, and more particularly of those great changes which followed and partly resulted from the stupendous accident.

To-day, besides being my birthday, is a sad and solemn anniversary, commemorative to the whole world of an awful fatality, and carrying me, who was myself a partaker in it, back to the dread event now buried under sixty years of time. It has always been my practice to spend the night of the 2nd of February in prayer, in meditation, and in communion with Nature in her calmest and most peaceful aspects; to-night I shall spend it in transcribing my terrible reminiscences for you, my grandchildren. Coming from me, your progenitor, and from an actual eyewitness, this relation will bear to you a more vivid reality, though it is probable I can tell you nothing that you have not already learnt

through other sources. I am sitting in my comfortable little study, or "libery," as Laura calls it, surrounded by my books, my collections of objects of art and science and natural history, and the numberless little things that by reason of their various associations become priceless relics to an old man. Everything speaks to me of love, of affectionate regard, and of the dear home ties that through all these years have grown up around me here. The French windows are open, and through them comes just a breath of sweet-scented air, just a soft whiff of summer wind, that faintly stirs the honeysuckle and clematis and creepers that twine along the verandah trellis. I look out through the dusky branches of beautiful trees across the fields below, and catch a glimpse of our famous lake sleeping in the moonlight, and the dim outlines of the distant hills beyond. All this tells of peace, of calm rest, and well-earned happiness. And yet as I sit and muse, things present grow obscure; I am again a young man just entering upon the battle-field of life, striving with poverty, struggling with a crowd of others. I am transported back to the land of my birth across the intervening ocean; a land of chill and sour skies, where the sun has forgotten how to shine; a land of frost and rain, of mist and snow. I am young, but I am scarcely hopeful, for I am oppressed with many cares; I live amid noise and bustle, amid a throng of idlers and workers, good men and bad, rich and poor; I work hard at employment that demands my best energies and absorbs my young strength, and that yields me but scant repayment; I dwell shut in by bricks and mortar, and crushed by stony hearts; I am one among many, a single toiler among the millions of London!!

At the commencement of the fateful year 1882, my widowed mother, my sister, and I, dwelt together in London. I was a merchant's clerk, and had been so for several years, ever since my father's death, by depriving us of the means of existence, had altered my prospects from university life and a learned profession *in posse* to business and a high stool *in esse*. My mother, and my sister, who was some years younger than I, had accompanied me to London, when it was settled that I should go into the counting-house of a merchant to whom I had been introduced by a mutual friend. There was a little money in hand, but very little, and we were glad to accept an offer that was made us. This was that we should inhabit the basement floor of a large building in the very heart of the City, receiving our accommodation free of rent and taxes, in consideration of taking care of the rest of the house, which was divided into offices and board-rooms. Here we had lived for some half-dozen years, up to the time I am writing of. My income had been fifty pounds a year at first, and was now augmented to eighty : to this was added forty pounds a year, being a sum allowed to my mother by some of her relations. Latterly my sister had begun to add a few shillings every week to the general stock by fine needlework, so that we were more comfortable than we were at first. But this united income, that was now something short of £150 per annum, was little more than sufficient to provide us with the bare necessities of existence, while every day things seemed to be growing dearer. To us, who had been accustomed all our lives before to all the comforts and little luxuries of modest competence, our straitened means were a sore trial, while a residence in the murky atmosphere, the dingy gloom, and the incessant roar of the

City, was a piteous exchange from the sweet pastoral quiet of my father's pleasant rural vicarage. I think our great and absorbing affection for one another supported my mother under all our difficulties, and enabled my sister and me to become pretty well reconciled to the dismal change. We had but few friends in London, for neither our means nor our mode of life were compatible with visiting or receiving visitors. Still we were tolerably happy in each other's society, occasionally recreating ourselves with a trip to the suburbs, or a visit to a theatre. Of the three, I was the only one who showed discontent. I was restless in spirit, and chafed under the irksome restraints of my position. I was passionately fond of the country and country pursuits, and wearied unutterably of the monotonous drudgery of my City life, which I likened to the "hard labour" of a prison; moreover, I endured constant torture of mind at the sight of my dear ones undergoing hardship, which, despite my most ardent efforts I was powerless to relieve, for, in the words of the Scottish poet, Burns:—

" In many a way, and vain essay, I courted fortune's favour, O,
 Some cause unseen still stept between, to frustrate each
 endeavour, O;
 Sometimes by foes I was o'erpowered, sometimes by friends
 forsaken, O,
 And when my hope was at the top, I still was worst mis-
 taken, O."

And there were other causes around us, that, to my then high spirit and carefully nurtured mind, increased the loathing I felt at our whole situation in life. Such was the position of your grandfather at the eventful epoch of 1882.

I do not think you will find it easy to realize the mon-

strous proportions of the "Great City." For miles and miles around us on every side were streets and squares and endless ranks of houses, ever extending outwards, and absorbing suburb after suburb beneath stone and brick. The population—some four millions in number—was a nation in itself, and, like nations, the population of London had its individual characteristics. The tendency of modern times has been to curtail the inordinate increase of large cities, and you can best picture London to your minds by supposing an aggregation of our towns and cities, seaports and villages, massed together in one vast conglomeration along the banks of the ancient Thames. Various parts of London had their own distinctive peculiarities, differences in both body and spirit, so to speak. There was a wide contrast in the city of splendid mansions at the West End, for instance, and the factories and artisans' dwellings at the East; while the tone and sentiment in politics, religion, or taste, was strongly adverse in such opposite quarters as Chelsea and Whitechapel; just as the manners and customs of Mayfair differed from those of Walworth. The quarter where we lived, "The City," was a large central area, being the portion of London devoted exclusively to business of every kind; it was the great emporium of the vast commerce of the country, the universal mart or exchange of Britain. By night the "City" was but sparsely populated, while in the day-time the press and throng in every corner of it was something prodigious. But descriptions of London are plentiful, and every school-boy is familiar with them, while much also has been written about its inhabitants at that period; yet I would fain add something to what has been said. It was the opinion I formed at the time, and the opinion

I still continue to hold, that London was foul and rotten to the very core, and steeped in sin of every imaginable variety. I was far from being a purist then, and yet I thought so; judge if I should not think so now far more strongly, when simplicity and openness of manners, truth, and honesty, are of a verity the inheritance of my children's children. Utterly unversed in open vice, from the very nature of your surroundings and bringing up, you could not contemplate the Londoners of those days without a feeling of disgust and loathing springing up within you. And yet London was esteemed as a great centre of religion; hundreds of Christian sects, enthusiastic and sincere, existed within it, and among their votaries were doubtless many who acted upon the principles they professed. They were followers of false gods, perhaps, and, indeed, so we now esteem them; but what of that? Pagan piety and Pagan virtue are piety and virtue still. I might write a long essay upon the singular anomalies of that old-world city, but such is not my present purpose; yet something I will add of what I saw around me to incline me to the belief in the black enormity of London sin.

I was in business, and business I found was an elaborate system of fraud, chicanery, and deceit. He was esteemed an upright man who never broke the *letter* of the law, no matter how he might tamper with its *spirit*, while morality and honest principle in commerce were abstractions of which the law took little notice, and business men less. He was called "smart," and "a sharp, sound, practical man," who knew how to take advantage of others, and who could enrich himself by impoverishing his fellows in "fair business." In the learned professions—so called—things were much the same. The laws were

good, though inordinately cumbrous, and lawyers administered them for their own advantage, and at the expense of their unhappy clients. The law was a terrible engine of justice, but its intricate machinery was clogged with rusty "precedents," and could not be got to move without a liberal oiling in the shape of fees. Hence arose the saying, that the law had one interpretation for the rich, and another altogether for the poor. The medical profession was conducted upon similar principles; the doctor—if he knew how—would keep his patient ill in order to increase his fees, and making suffering and death his daily sport, traded upon them for his own profit. Clergymen and ministers of religion, whether belonging to the State Church or to independent bodies, made "the cure of souls" a means of livelihood; they quoted the maxim, "the labourer is worthy of his hire," applying its point to themselves; they kept alive "religious feeling" among the masses by incessant and endless quarrels among themselves on points of dogma and doctrine, extorting money in the cause of "truth" from the public, and either keeping it themselves or squandering it in various foolish and useless ways. And they made one religion for the rich and another for the poor, as anyone might learn by comparing a sermon preached before a fashionable congregation with one delivered to paupers. The merest infraction of moral integrity in one of the humbler classes was visited as intolerable; among the rich and high-born sin flourished under the hallowing sanction of religion, and vice luxuriated in the shadow of the Church. Purity of life was a simple impossibility, and chastity of soul would have been sought for in vain amongst Londoners. Theatres, music-halls, and similar institutions, appealed to the most depraved appetites;

people flocked to gaze admiringly at a fashionable courtesan and her attendant harlots, or thronged to listen to obscene and filthy songs, or to witness indecent exhibitions, especially if these involved the risk of life or limb to the performers. Money flowed into the treasuries when such were the inducements, and eager rivalry in their production was the inevitable consequence. Clergymen, aristocrats, and art professors joined in extolling the stage as "the educator of public taste," while young girls crowded to enter the ballet as the proper road to a life of delightful immorality. The press groaned daily under the weight passing through it of novels which tintured absolute crimes with poetry and romance, which clothed the worst sensuality in the white robes of innocence, and which taught and argued in favour of every vice. Serial journals adapted to every class, rested their claims to attention on the obscenity, scurrility, or blasphemy of their pages, disguised under a film of moral platitude. Such were some of the causes at work, here were some of their immediate results. Among the higher ranks of society immorality was so common as to excite but small attention; frequent divorce suits proved this; scandalous disclosures of high life were of common occurrence; they gratified the public taste while serving to show the deeper depths below. Pleasure-seeking being the only employment of the wealthy and governing class, they elevated it into a "cult," and wearied with the tameness of mere harlotry, gluttony, and show, brought "art" to their aid and invented "æstheticism" as a cloak for higher flights of sin. The men of the "upper ten thousand" were trained from their cradles for a life of sensuous enjoyment. They held themselves aloof from commoner clay as from

an inferior race, and they looked upon inordinate luxury as their paramount right. In their code of honour the payment of just debts had no place, unless the debt were contracted by gambling among their fellows. The "golden youth" were banded together into social guilds, bearing imbecile insignia, and using mysterious passwords, whose vicious meaning only the initiate might know. They had peopled a whole suburb with the villas of their concubines, whom the stage and the streets had furnished, while their elders sought amusement from almost infantile charms. Strange and unnatural were the crazes and fashions that pervaded this society: wearied with dissipation carried to excess, they were ever seeking new varieties, new emotions, new vices; they worshipped beauty, but it was not the beauty of created Nature, but that of art—and such art!—that most enchanted them. Ladies were divided into two "mondes," the proper and the improper, but it was by no means easy to define the exact limits of either grade. The Phrynes of the period held their court and received adoration from the men, though not recognised by their high-born sisters; yet these were eager to copy the manners, dress, and accomplishments of the courtesan, styling themselves "professional beauties," or veiling their hyper-passionate sensibilities under the pseudonym of "intensity;" while matrimony, even among the most externally decorous, was as much a matter of business as downright mercenary prostitution. The members of this highest rank lived in the very perfection of luxuriousness; their mansions, equipages, and servants, all were on a scale of magnificence as great as could be compassed. Dresses and furniture were splendid and costly. They fared sumptuously every day. Poverty was carefully excluded

from their view, and came not within their cognisance, and ultra-extravagance was commended from the pulpit as a means of wisely diffusing wealth, and as an "encouragement to trade." It was said that the spendthrift vanities and caprices of the wealthy were a source of good, promoting industry, and developing arts and sciences among the workers; "wherefore," said these reasoners, "lavish and profuse prodigality is the commendable duty of the rich, as thereby they foster trade and benefit those who minister to their enjoyment." When such theories were generally received, it is needless to say that politicians were blind to comparisons drawn from the history of the latter days of Rome, of Venice, or of Bourbon France. And this state of things had, of course, its dire and disastrous effects upon all grades of society below. People of the next rank, whose wealth had been gained from other sources than that of passive hereditary accumulation, busied themselves in the endeavour to gain admission within the pale of "polite society;" they sought to imitate with exactness every eccentricity of the nobles, and courted ruin to effect their purpose. A step lower, and the same procedure was invested with the grotesque addition of "vulgarity." This abstraction consisted mainly, as I conceived, in a lack of "refinement:" it meant a want of ease and inherent use in forms of speech, manners, and usages; it conveyed the idea of eagerness where cold indifference should have been felt; or it displayed a sense of actual pleasure, where *blasé* and captious disdain ought only to have been manifested. Throughout the great masses of the middle class, so styled, there beat the mighty pulse of London life. In this section was contained business and professional men.

of every degree and kind, from the wealthy banker, the opulent trader or manufacturer, and the sordid promoter of bubble companies, down to the struggling professional man, the actor, and the ignoble clerk. It was divided into a multiplicity of grades or strata, the lowest mingling with the vast democracy of labour below, the highest, by dint of golden passports, passing current among the aristocracy. It was in this division of the social system that the real life of the great city was mainly manifest; here were to be found the chief law-makers and the chief law-breakers; here was every vice most obnoxious to the senses; here, too, was to be found what was left of virtue and goodness. Down through the middle class filtered every evil of aristocratic birth, losing nothing in the process, we may be sure, save the semblance of polish and the grace of courtly elegance; while up from the lowest depths there constantly arose a stream of grosser, fouler moral putrescence, which it would be a libel on the brutes to term merely bestiality. Do not think there was *no* good in London; there was, much; but it was so encompassed and mixed with evil as to be barely recognisable; while the influences of exuberant vice were such as to warp the integrity of men's ideas of what was right, to benumb their perceptions of moral turpitude, and to lower the standard of excellence to the very mud. Besides, I only set out to tell you something of the wickedness I saw and knew and felt in London; merely a brief epitome, such as might serve to sustain the view I propounded of the guilt of that city. Have I said enough, my grandchildren? But a few words more, and I pass to the dread narrative itself.

There are some of our modern essayists who

argue that "London was not such a bad place after all!" There are others, more profound, who yet are blinded by their pity for the sufferers in the fearful tragedy, to such a degree that they fail to see the odious colours of the evil that lies hidden behind the awful pall. Sadly, solemnly, grievingly, I must repeat—the old metropolis of England harboured Vice and Sin as its dearest, most cherished inhabitants. Evil! It was surely seen in the crowded police-courts; it was surely seen in the public-houses that stood thick on every street, in the infuriate or imbecile wretches who thronged their bars, in the thousand victim-votaries of Bacchus who reeled daily and nightly to and fro among them, in the huge extent of the traffic in strong drink, in the potency of "the trade" as a political engine, and in the intemperate and misdirected zeal of "temperance" advocates; it was seen most flagrantly on the "day of rest"—a day of horrors to sober citizens—when crowds of the democracy pervaded suburbs, parks, and streets, flooding them with a riotous mob, making day and night hideous with the roaring of licentious songs, swearing and obscenity, turning for inspiration to the public-house—their only refuge—and not to the church, and holding nothing and nobody sacred from their ruffianly horse-play and outrageous mischief; why, certain great thoroughfares—notably on the Surrey side—were perilous for decent pedestrians after dark on any night, but especially on Sundays, and the lady had need of stout protectors who ventured to encounter the gangs of blatant ruffians that asserted supremacy within them. Prostitution—I do not like to enlarge upon such a topic, but I must if I am to paint the picture faithfully—prostitution flourished so abundantly in London as scarcely to be looked upon as a vice at all, except by

the most rigorous. Women of this class haunted the busier streets at all hours of the day, while evening drew them forth in legions, into all parts where pleasure-seekers congregated. Nor were they confined to the streets: they thronged into every place of entertainment, music halls were specially devoted to their interests, at casinos and dancing rooms they were constant attendants; certain theatres—by no means inferior ones—were little better than brothels behind the scenes, while even churches were invaded by these daughters of the horse-leech. They, too, had their social organisations, their infinite variety of cliques, their nice dividing-lines, their numerous distinctions; there was a wide gulf between the concubine of a wealthy patrician—herself, perhaps, the nominal lessee, manageress, and leading actress of a popular theatre—and the coarse creature who haunted the purlieus of Ratcliffe Highway; while the strata between these two extremes were of endless diversity. Several reasons there were for the growth of this shocking sin in London; a necessary evil in great towns, it had here reached extraordinary limits as an outcome of a false social system, as a result of unwise Governmental regulations, partly owing to the uncurbed licentiousness of the men, and perhaps due most particularly to the inordinate passion for dress that had eaten up the whole minds of the women of that age. Was this no evil? Feminine indulgence in extravagance of attire was the bane of London at that era. Ladies of the wealthy classes placed no bounds upon their love of dress, and women of every rank imitated those above them. London women, young and old, rich and poor, comely and ugly, were prepared to sacrifice fathers, brothers, husbands, relatives and friends, their homes,

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religion, consciences, virtue and honour—everything, in short—so long as they could flaunt in gorgeous costumes. And men were human then as now, and not too scrupulous in London, as I have said; so what wonder if prostitution flourished rampantly, while Chastity laid down her head and died! Evil!—one seemed to see it everywhere! In those latter days there had been past years of terribly bad weather, destroying harvests, and adding to the iniquity of the land-system of the country a very close cause of distress for all agriculturists; there had been long and severe depression in trade, augmented by the fact that the manufacturing industry of the country was fast going from her, owing to the want of public spirit and the avaricious selfishness that had supplanted the old British feeling, owing also to continual strife between capital and labour. Such distress as was then felt throughout the rural districts of the United Kingdom had seldom before been equalled; it reacted upon the urban populations, and peculiarly on that of London; every profession, trade, or mode of earning money was over-crowded in its ranks and was curtailed in its action; while, if positive destitution overtook the already existing poor, it also touched ranks that had been heretofore far removed from its approach; extensive emigration palliated but could not cure the disease; and the piteous efforts of the thousands who were struggling with adversity in manifold paths of life were something sad to see, sad to remember. Two trades alone seemed to gain where others lost. The sale and consumption of intoxicating drink attained frightful proportions; the traffic that women offered in themselves appeared daily on the increase; both the publican and the prostitute flourished and grew fat. Was not this an appalling

spectacle? Yet there was money in London; for the swollen city was at once the richest and the poorest in the world: side by side with the direst degradation of poverty there existed the superb opulence. And, you will ask, was there then no charity?—had religion no practical work to do? As it seemed to me, looking on the surface and at what was public, religion was occupied with priestly dreams of heaven and of hell, with the building of churches and the multiplication of chapels, with sectarian strife and conflicting dogmas, with cumbrous “proofs” of itself, and with proselytising in distant lands. The poor asked for dinners, and religion handed them divinity; the rich sought pleasure, and were offered purgatory. Occasionally, some hysterical “revival” gave a brief frenzied interest to a particular creed, and left only well-filled asylums as a memento on its subsidence. This was not the religion that London wanted in those days. And charity—it was curiously understood and diabolically practised in its public aspects. Mendicancy was a misdemeanour by law, and paupers were treated worse than felons. The rich man grudgingly doled a meagre crumb from his abundance, denying himself no jot or tittle of his accustomed enjoyment, whatever the misery that cried to him for aid; the wealthy trader placed his name high upon subscription lists, and booked the sum he gave among his outlay for advertisements. Societies were formed, cursed with legal strength and status, to “organise” public benefactions, to divert private benevolence into their own channels, to steal ninepence from every shilling that was given for the poor, to stamp out poverty by oppressive measures, and to drive and grind the poor man down into a moral—hell! Such were the public charities of

London; yet there were deeds of love and kindness done in the obscurity of that city, that breathed the true spirit of the religion erst preached on the shores of Galilee; and it was often the poor man who was his fellow's best and only benefactor. God knows what it all might have come to under a different train of circumstances; even the lamb-like reverence for his "superiors" of the Briton might have been worn out at last. Already Republicanism was whispered in the public-houses, and Socialism was not unknown in London, though these were chiefly of exotic growth; while there were men of a different type—men who dared to think for themselves, who looked for the coming of some social cataclysm, and who were heard to compare the "Great City" to those Cities of the Plain that the old Biblical legend tells of as being destroyed by fire from heaven.

Enough! Even a great-grandfather's garrulity must be checked in its reminiscent flow.

On the 1st of February, 1882, I left business early, about half-past three in the afternoon, if I remember aright, and went home. The next day being my birthday, I had resolved, with my employer's permission, to make it a holiday; and in order that we might all enjoy it to the best advantage, a little excursion had been planned among us. My mother, my sister, and I, had agreed to accept the invitation of some of our few friends, and to go out to their house on the evening of the 1st, remaining with them until late on the following day. As our friends resided in a locality called Lordship Lane, not far from the suburb of Dulwich, we anticipated no little pleasure from the excursion, and it was consequently with feelings of delighted expectation that I hurried home from business that afternoon, to carry off my two dear

ones with me on our projected visit. But our plans were overthrown by the horrible state of the weather. For weeks before, London had been stifled in a fog of varying density, but that afternoon it had grown so dense that my mother did not like to venture through it, especially since of late there had been tales about of accidents occurring from this cause, and my sister of course could not leave our mother. However, the two dear creatures had prepared everything for my departure, and were determined that I should go off alone; they were also extremely anxious that I should, if invited to do so, remain the second night at the Forresters', as my intimacy with young Wilton Forrester was likely to be of great service to me, and my good mother was anxious for me to "cultivate the friendship," as she said. I was much disappointed at their determination not to go, and would fain have stopped myself, but maternal counsels prevailed, and I set off. I found my way, not without considerable difficulty, to the railway station at Ludgate Hill. Everything was wrapped in murky gloom, though it wanted quite an hour of sunset, and the gas-lamps that were alight all day were wholly insufficient to penetrate the cloudy atmosphere with their sickly lights. I got into a train that went in my direction, and congratulated myself with the thought that I should soon be out of the worst of the fog, at any rate. I do not remember whether anyone ever attempted to write a history of London fogs, their gradual rise and progress, or gradual increase in duration and density, up to their terrific culmination; but such an essay would form a deeply interesting one. A London fog was no mere mist: it was the heavy mist, in the first place, that we are accustomed to in most latitudes, but it was that mist

supercharged with coal smoke, with minute carbonaceous particles, "grits" and "smuts," with certain heavy gases, and with a vast number of other impurities. It was chiefly the result of the huge and reckless consumption of coal carried on over the wide-extending city, the smoke from which, not being re-consumed or filtered off in any way, was caught up and retained by the vapour-laden air. The fog was the most disagreeable and dangerous of all the climatic sufferings that Londoners had to bear. It filled the nostrils and air-passages of those who breathed it with soot, and choked their throats and lungs with black, gritty particles, causing illness and often death to the aged, weakly, and ailing; it also caused headaches, and oppression, and all the symptoms that tell of the respiration of vitiated air. Londoners were well accustomed to the inconvenience of these fogs, and looked upon them in the light of a regular institution, not caring to investigate their cause with a view to some means of mitigating them. The fog in the city had been known from time immemorial, especially in those districts lying near to the river, or to localities that had originally been marshes; but it was only of late years that the recurrence of fogs during autumn, winter, and spring, had assumed such alarming proportions. Even twenty years before the period I am writing of, the fog was seldom so thick and foul in character, or it was so only over very limited areas; while if it continued for more than a few hours at a time, that was considered a fact to be severely commented upon. But the plague had increased in severity of late—so much so, that its density turned day into night, and clothed night in impenetrable obscurity; its extent was greater, involving all the districts between Hampstead and the Surrey hills,

and stretching from Woolwich to Bayswater; its continuance was such that weeks at a time often passed over while the detestable mantle still hung above the streets. The late years of incessant rain and cold had proved conducive to the prevalence of fogs, which now appeared in unwonted seasons with all their worst features. Besides the constant annoyance from impeded traffic, from the want of light, and from the injury to health, there were other reasons for dismay; accidents by river, rail, and road were frequent and disastrous; vessels collided upon the Thames, trains ran off the lines, and their passengers were maimed or killed; while garotters, burglars, and all the guilds of open crime, revelled in contented impunity. Yet still, no one seemed to think the "institution" other than a huge joke, and not a serious evil to be earnestly combated by science, with energy and municipal wealth for helpers.

In the train, as I was journeying through the fog, I was introduced to a new feature of the prevalent affliction—a forerunner of what was so soon to follow. Although it was too murky within the carriage, in spite of the feeble glimmer of an oil-lamp overhead, for the passengers to distinguish one another very clearly, yet conversation was carried on, perhaps all the more volubly on that account. One subject engrossed attention, and from the frequent ejaculations of dismay and manifest terror that it excited, I bent forward to listen to what was said. The principal speaker was sitting at some distance from me, but his voice rose dominant above the rest, and this is the substance of what I heard:—

“Yes, gentlemen,”—he was saying,—“the report’s true enough, God help us! In fact, there’s no doubt

about it at all. I was down Thames Street myself to-day, and actually saw some of the bodies being carried along. Down Bermondsey way, in some of those crowded little streets and courts, was where it happened. They say the fog got suddenly so awfully thick that you couldn't see your hand before your face. About midday I should think it was ; and I can well believe it, for it was nearly as bad when I was down there, a couple of hours later. Well, they told me that in some of those streets the people were choked with the fog ; regularly strangled and killed outright ; men, women, and children. Some were in their shops and houses, and some were in the street, but they just dropped where they stood. I was that scared, that when I saw them carrying a couple of bodies into a public-house, I just turned and came away as fast as I could. Some said there was hundreds dead, and others said it was not above a dozen altogether. I don't know, nobody seemed to know, the rights of it ; they couldn't, you see, the fog was still so dense. But, good God ! gentlemen, just fancy what it would be if the like was to happen in the City. Some were talking about gas from the sewers ; I don't know anything about that, but I know it's made me so nervous that, business or no business, I go out of town to-night, and stop out till the fog clears off."

A moment later we came to a station, and the speaker got out. I set down what he had said as a gross exaggeration, as did most of my fellow travellers ; still I could not help a horrid feeling of dread and foreboding coming over me. I suppose there was a good deal more conversation in the carriage, but I remember nothing of it. By-and-by we came to my station, and I left the train. Here the fog was nothing more than a light

white mist; indeed, the real London fog never crossed the Surrey hills. I took my way up Lordship Lane, breathing more freely, and seeming to get inspirited at every step, so marked was the change from the heavy atmosphere I had come out of. I need not tell you of the cordial and kindly reception that I found awaiting me. The Forresters were a genial, old-fashioned family, inhabiting a comfortable, old-fashioned house standing in its own walled garden, and looking down upon the trim plastered villas that were springing up all around it. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Forrester, three daughters, and the son, Wilton, who was my senior by a few years, and who was a physician, though not in practice. They were in good circumstances, but not what the world then considered rich. I had made Dr. Wilton Forrester's acquaintance some two years before under somewhat singular circumstances, which had led to my introduction to his family, and by degrees to our present intimacy. The family were very hospitable, and subsequent events, of which you are aware, showed them to be kind and warm-hearted in no common degree. On that memorable evening they gave me a most kind welcome, expressing ready disappointment at not seeing my mother and sister with me. It was agreed that in the morning Wilton and I should go into town and fetch them out; nothing short of my promise to that effect would pacify the good people. I will pass over the details of the pleasant evening that followed dinner; it was like all such evenings among an agreeable family circle. I soon saw that no tidings had reached these amiable folk relative to the rumour I had heard in the train, and I forbore to speak on the subject, as the girls were full of jokes about the fog, and well primed with

a hundred amusing anecdotes of the strange predicaments that were constantly befalling people in the clouded streets. They might well laugh who were removed beyond the influence of the fog, but such was the fashion in which everyone was accustomed to treat the subject—*until that night*.

Afterwards, when Mr. Forrester, Wilton, and I were sitting over our pipes in the smoking-room, I told them the story as I had heard it. They were infinitely shocked, as may be imagined, and slightly incredulous; the affair was so novel in character, so contrary to all previous experience, that we hesitated to accept it for truth, rather preferring to suppose that some unforeseen accident of a less unheard-of description had been the basis from which the rumour had sprung. Naturally, we continued to talk of nothing else, and I remember that Wilton gave us the benefit of his scientific acquirements in our various speculations. As our talk bore very much upon the explanation of the subject of my narrative, I shall endeavour to recall the substance of it for you. It began by my observing that I could not understand how the fog—however bad it might be—could become sufficiently thick or poisonous as to destroy life. Moreover, we had been accustomed, more or less, to London fogs ever since London existed, and I had never heard that people had been killed by them in that way before; the present fog had lasted since Christmas, and was not so thick to-day as it had been sometimes previously. My argument therefore was, that as the fogs had not before been found directly hostile to life, it was to be presumed they were not so now, since no distinctly new element had been imported into them. You perceive, my children, that, young and unthinking as I was,

my spirits had risen with my surroundings, and under their influence I was inclined to take the usual Londoner's view, and to scoff at the idea of a time-honoured nuisance turning out an actual danger. But both my companions were of different opinion. The elder Forrester said there was clear evidence that the fog injured health, even to the point of proving very quickly fatal to old people, and to those who were suffering from chest complaints or pulmonary weakness of any kind. There was clear evidence that it already did do so. The statistics of the death-rate showed this to be so beyond dispute. It was also evident to old inhabitants of London that the fogs were becoming aggravated every year, and the injury they did was increasing in due proportion. He did not see that we were justified in supposing the fogs to have attained the worst extent of virulence, although he sincerely trusted they had; and if it was shown that they were at present directly injurious to health, and an immediate cause of death to certain invalids, it could be easily understood how the intensification of the fog would tend to the detriment of human life. Yet he was not prepared to credit the report I had heard, because it really seemed too much in the nature of a fable, and he thought such an event could scarcely happen under present existing circumstances. Although he saw the possibility of such accidents in some distant period of the future, yet he could not realise to his mind their actual occurrence now. Such was the old gentleman's opinion; meanwhile Wilton had been fidgeting in his seat, occasionally shaking his head, and giving vent to smothered ejaculations. When his father finished speaking, he said somewhat as follows:—

“The more I come to think of the rumour you have

heard, the more I am inclined to admit the possibility of its entire truth. I recollect a case that was brought into hospital during the very severe fogs of a couple of winters ago.* It was that of a cabman, who had suddenly pitched headlong off his seat, and was picked up dead. The cause of death was at first supposed to be fracture of the skull, and it was held that the fall had resulted from drunkenness. However, the post-mortem threw an entirely different light upon the case. From it we had reason to conclude that the fall must have taken place after life was extinct, and there was no sign of any organic disease or chronic mischief to account for it. The cause of death was evident from the state of the lungs and air-passages, which were highly congested. The bronchi and tubes ramifying from them were clogged with black, grimy mucus, and death had evidently resulted from a sudden spasm, which would produce suffocation, as the lungs would not have the power in their clogged condition of making a sufficiently forcible expiratory effort to get rid of the accumulated filth that was the instrument of death. That was the only case of actual death from inhalation of London fog that I have seen myself, but there have been many others exactly similar reported." †

After some more cases of the same kind had been quoted, Mr. Forrester began speculating as to the way in which the fog might have acted in destroying life, in the instance of the people in Bermondsey. His theory was, that the air underwent some extraordinary chemical changes; that, loaded with carbon in a finely-divided

* 1880.

† Dr. Broadbent, one of the leading physicians of that day in London, also, I believe, had one or two such cases that came under his notice during the same fog.

condition, and with the various products of combustion, there might happen—possibly under an electrified condition of the atmosphere—a sudden increase of affinity, by which carbonic oxide would be formed in prodigious quantity. As this gas is fatal to life, every breathing thing within the area of its influence would die. But Wilton combated this opinion; he said:—

“If what you were supposing were to be possible, and were actually to happen, there would be a sudden alteration in the volume of the surrounding air; this would be sufficient, I think, to produce formidable air-currents whose progress and agitation would be quite rapid enough to preserve such an admixture of oxygenated air as would prevent the ill effects to life that you are afraid of. No; I see only one way in which the fog is likely to act as a life-destroying agent—apart, that is, from its action in carrying poisonous germs and spreading epidemics, which illustrates its slower action—but as a rapid and immediate extinguisher of vitality the cause must be bronchial spasm. You see that each inspiration draws into the lungs a quantity of gritty particles; these necessarily inflame and lacerate the structures with which they are brought in contact, besides mechanically choking the passages; hence follows spasm of the bronchi, spasm of the glottis. Usually there exists the power to recover from this rapidly. Prolonged or energetic coughing brings up the cause of obstruction and relieves the muscular contraction, and the asthma or ‘choking fit’ is over. But suppose,” continued Wilton, “such an aggravation of the fog, such an increase in its density, compression and carriage of mechanical impurity, as to make each one inspiration contain the same amount of irritative matter as do, say a score or so of inspirations

at present. What would be the effect of that? There would not be the chance of a recovery; each gasp would only aggravate the distress, suffocation complete and sudden would be inevitable. That is the way in which the cabman's death was brought about; and that is the way, in my opinion, in which the Bermondsey affair took place.

“The more I study these things in my mind the gloomier become my forebodings. We do not know the laws which govern the fogs of London, because in some measure they are artificial, and so differ from other mists. We only know that they have tended to become ‘worse,’ as we express it, of late years. How are we to know that this intensifying has reached its limits? May not the loss of life be even more serious from this cause? It is a pity that Government, and private individuals too, have not been readier in striving after some means of abating what we have long known to be an intolerable nuisance, and what seems about to become a very grave evil. Scientists have indeed made suggestions, but no steps have as yet been taken to determine their practical utility. Perhaps this accident in Bermondsey may direct attention to the subject.”

I can remember yet the indescribable thrill which passed through me during these conversations. How wonderful it seems to me, looking back upon these events, that the warning never came until too late to be of service, that the cause for alarm so shortly preceded the blow. About the very time that we were sitting talking, scenes were enacting not so far from us that——but I must proceed regularly with my tale.

As you may guess, the horrible rumour which I had heard so circumstantially detailed, together with the

conversation arising out of it later in the evening, went with me to my bed, and, impressed deeply on my mind, filled my sleep with all the wild phantasmagoria of frightful dreams. I rose in the morning feeling feverish and unrefreshed, and filled with a weird presentiment of evil that I was powerless to shake off. I drew up the blind, and looked out of the window. The sun was shining in a pale, sickly kind of way through the mist, which, however, seemed to be lightening a good deal. Towards the south one could see for a considerable distance, the mist being light and hazy; but in an opposite direction it deepened into a dense brown fog-bank, which lay along the line of the Surrey hills, completely shutting out all view beyond. I turned away with a shudder as my thoughts flew to my dear ones who were far in the depths of that hideous obscurity. Downstairs the family party was assembled for breakfast, the ladies light-hearted and full of raillery, the men depressed and anxious. There was a discordant tone in our voices, and an absent-mindedness in our manners which brought down on our heads many a light shaft of feminine wit; for both the Forresters, father and son, were, like me, oppressed with a troubled sense of something wrong, the result of our last night's talk. We were all most eager for the arrival of the morning papers, hoping they might relieve our fears, but neither the post nor the papers made their appearance. This was extraordinary, when ten o'clock came and still no tidings from the outer world had reached us. Our evident uneasiness had extended itself to the ladies, in spite of our efforts to seem cheerful, making dismal attempts at jocularities, saying that the postman must have lost his way in the fog, and so forth. But it was all to no use; a portentous gloom hung over us

and refused to be lifted. At length we could bear it no longer, and making some excuse about going to see what had delayed the post we three men sallied out, and took our way down the hill in the direction of East Dulwich. Now up to this time I do not recollect that I had any actual sense of fear. A feeling, indefinable and objectless, of despondency and nervous shrinking I have already confessed to—just such an inexplicable sensation of presentiment, of *waiting* for some unknown, un-thought of horror that was lying ready to appear, but was at present shrouded from view, which everyone knows as an accompaniment to that class of dreams we call nightmare: yet I had in no sense realized the immediate approach of evil to myself or to those I loved. I think I have pretty accurately expressed the nature of my inward feelings up to the moment when the two Forresters and I commenced our walk. But every moment after that brought nearer and nearer to my mind the horrid reality of dread; fixed deeper inwardly a fuller horror as events became known and an agony of unutterable fear gradually filled every sense and thrilled every nerve within me. Aye, my grandchildren, little can you understand the utter intensity of that all-absorbing terror, which even now causes my very soul to quake within me as I write. This is no exaggeration; wait, and read the awful tale, if I can command myself to finish it.

As we came out into the high-road, we overtook a gentleman who was proceeding in the same direction as ourselves. He was a neighbour of the Forresters, and was known to them, so we fell into conversation. Like us, he had been much perturbed by the non-appearance of the postman, and he was now on his way to try and

obtain tidings of him. From him we gained the first startling piece of intelligence. This gentleman had seen the "special edition" of an evening paper the previous night, and in it, he said, was an account of the accident in Bermondsey. The report said that over five hundred lives were certainly lost, but that, owing to the dense fog in the locality, and the difficulty of getting men to enter it, the exact total could not yet be known. It went on to add that although people in the adjacent district asserted the cause of the calamity to have been simply a sudden and overwhelming access of fog, this *could not* have been the true reason, *because it was contrary to all previous experience*; "wherefore," said this sapient journal, "we must suppose that a gush of foul sewer-gas, or some similar poisoning of the thick and heavy air, produced the fatal effect;" a piece of reasoning which almost moved Wilton to laughter. This is a fair illustration of how strangely fixed in the London mind was the notion that their fog was always to be, what it always *had been*, innocuous to the generality of people—an idea which had served to prevent any steps being taken in the direction of rendering it really so. Now, as we had seen reason to admit the possibility of the mere fog acting as a direct destroyer, we were sadly disheartened by this confirmation of the evil news. It is easy now to follow the train of conclusions which made our vague anxieties assume a more vivid shape.

Firstly, supposing it proved that the fog could kill an individual—and Wilton had proved that—what was to hinder its killing a number of individuals in a certain spot? and *that* was now proved to our minds. Again, if the fog could attain to such virulence over any special locality, there was no just reason for supposing that its

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area of destructive maleficence might not be enlarged to an almost indefinite extent. So thinking and talking, we passed on down the road towards East Dulwich.

As we entered that part of Lordship Lane which formed the main street of East Dulwich, and where such shops and public-houses as the suburb boasted were to be found, we became aware of a very great commotion going on. The fog was here somewhat denser than on the higher ground we had left, though it was still only a whitish mist. But the usually quiet street, so far as we could see through the mist, presented a most unaccustomed spectacle. People were rushing wildly to and fro, groups were gathered in the roadway, on the pavement, inside and outside of the public-houses and the shops; all seemed imbued with ungovernable and frantic excitement, and on every face might be traced the same expression, panic, terror, fear! What was the matter?

Hastily we mingled with the throng, anxiously we questioned first one and then another. None seemed to know exactly what had occurred; none were possessed of details, yet the very vagueness of the thousand rumours lent potency to their fears, while all concurred in one frenzied outburst—THE FOG! Some told us that all access to town was shut off by an impenetrable wall of fog; others said that no person or vehicle of any kind had come out of town that morning. Some spoke of the entire cutting off of all communication with London as a temporary nuisance and a good joke, but their blanched faces and quivering lips too plainly showed the dread that was at work within them; while others there were who told of men that had essayed to penetrate the vaporous veil, and who had returned, scared and choking,

to speak of dead men lying in the street whose bodies they had stumbled over, to tell of the suffocating intensity of the dreadful fog. So asking and so answered, we came to Champion Hill railway station, where a large but awestricken crowd was gathered. Here we learnt the fullest details that were yet known. All traffic into and out of London was indeed suspended, or rather, had never commenced. No trains had come out from the London termini, no response had been received to signals or telegrams; while men who had started to walk into town had either never returned, or else had shortly retraced their footsteps, panting and half-strangled. Telegrams from other suburbs and outskirts of town brought intelligence of a precisely similar state of things existing in those localities. No one had come from London, no one had succeeded in entering it. Such public conveyances as were wont to start every morning with their freight of "City men," had made efforts to do so in vain. They had been forced to relinquish the attempt, owing not only to the black obscurity, but also to the unbreathable character that the fog seemed to have assumed. Crowds of men who lived in the suburbs and were employed in the City by day, thronged the stations, a dreadful panic having taken possession of them and altered their usual demeanour. Instead of the accustomed noise, bustle, and brisk hurry, white-faced groups consulted together in whispering tones; and many, utterly demoralized by excess of terror, had gone home to carry off their families to some place of greater safety. All round the "Great City" lay a wide belt of suburban districts, and these were now—so it seemed—given up to confusion, peopled with panic, and invaded with dismay. What were my feelings now?

Judge for yourselves. Do you suppose I can tell you? A man came down the station steps, as we terrified wretches cowered together below, loudly exclaiming:—

“I tell you, it’s damned nonsense; they CAN’T be all killed in London!”

All killed! The words went to my heart like a knife. Can you fancy the very extravagance of dread? It was mine then. Can you imagine the utmost climax of terror? I knew it at that moment. How I looked, what I said or did, what I thought even, these things I know not. The awful pang had shot into my heart and brain, had benumbed my inmost soul.

Fear! It was scarcely such a sense: I had no thought of personal danger, hardly a recollection even of the too possible fate of those dear ones who were more to me than life; the agony that held me then, that has pursued me through sixty years of time to hold me now, was no common sense of fear. It was that overwhelming, all-mastering dread which men alone can know who are on a sudden taught their own immeasurable littleness; who are witnesses of some stupendous event, whose movement shows the hand sublime of Nature, the supremacy of offended God!

Yes, you know now, though I knew not then, the full extent of that hideous catastrophe: how, like the sudden overflow of Vesuvius upon the towns below; like of yore the wings of the angel of death had overshadowed the sleeping hosts of Assyria; or like that yet older tale, a world had sunk beneath the waters, so, in like manner, the fog had drawn over midnight London an envelope of murky death, within whose awful fold all that had life had died.

Can you understand now the train of reasoning which

led your grandfather to expatiate on all that was vile and wicked in the once-entitled "Modern Babylon"? Do you not see why I rather recall the evil and forget the good? Else were not my grief multiplied a thousand-fold, my anguish of pity more absorbing? And thus reflecting, may I not look up to Heaven still reverencing Just God; still dwelling in earnest faith on the love and mercy of Him Who is the Father of His creatures?

Although our knowledge of what had actually taken place was as yet extremely vague and limited, still we were sensible that the "Great City" beyond us lay stupefied, paralysed, to all seeming devoid of life, and that at an hour—it was now approaching noon—when it was usually busiest. This was alone unparalleled and horrifying, and as minute chased minute by and still no news relieved prevailing fears, and still the horrid fever of suspense made things seem darker, so the first consternation spread and deepened until a vast wave of awful, unheard-of terror rushed back from the outskirts of London. By this time every vehicle that could be put in motion was loaded with goods and with women and children, while crowds of people of all stations and sexes were hurrying along the roads which led to the country. Whither, none knew or cared; their only anxiety was to get away beyond the influence of the LONDON FOG, which their magnified panic believed was steadily advancing outward from the town. I cannot think that my own faculties had remained unshaken amid the frenzy of fear that boiled up around me; yet the deep sense of awe that fell upon me seemed to banish all merely personal fears. By-and-by, soon after noon I think, I noticed a sensible alteration in the fog; it became lighter around us, while puffs of wind were now

to be felt at short intervals. The line of mansions along the crest of Champion Hill, previously invisible from the lower ground where we were, now came out into view. I was pretty sure that the fog was becoming more tenuous—"lifting," in short. The recollection of my mother and sister came before my mind so strongly that I resolved instantly to make my way to them. I intimated my resolution to the Forresters, my companions. They did not attempt to dissuade me, but the old man wrung my hand and said, "Come back to us, my lad, if ——" and he nodded and turned away. Then I passed on my road into London.

It was but a step away from the remaining groups of people collected about the railway station and the last houses of East Dulwich, and I was at once alone. My way at first lay up Champion Hill, along a road bordered by fields and gardens belonging to the mansions higher up. Once these were passed, rows of smaller dwellings lined the road which passed along the crest of the high ground to Denmark Hill, whence the streets were continuous and part of London. As I came down the street that emerged upon Denmark Hill, I began to be dreadfully affected by the fog, that seemed to become worse at every step. It was very thick and dark upon the Camberwell side of the hill, and appeared to have a peculiar irritating pungency which made me cough incessantly, until I found that by muffling my nose and mouth in my woollen wrapper I was able to endure it better. After a while, either the density of the fog had greatly decreased or my throat became more callous to it, for I was able to breathe without any difficulty. At this time I was still oppressed by a feeling of unutterable awe, which absorbing presence seemed to leave no room

for any other sentiment. Added to this there now came over me a terrible sense of loneliness, indescribably horrible indeed in such a situation. I traversed the foggy street, seeing objects but indistinctly at ten yards distance. I saw no living being, no faces at the shrouded windows, no passers by, no children playing in the gardens or the road; not even a sparrow fluttered past to convey to me the sense of companionship. And then the frightful, muffled stillness that seemed to hold me down in a nightmare trance; not a sound of traffic, no rattle of carriages and carts, no scream and rumble of trains, no clamour of children or costermongers, no distant hum of the midday city, no voice or whisper of a sound; not the rustling of a leaf, not the echo of a foot-fall, nothing to break the deathly stillness but the panting of my laboured chest and the beating of my trembling heart. Below the brow of Denmark Hill, in the street leading into Camberwell, I stumbled over something in the path. It was the body of a policeman lying stretched across the pavement. Horrified, I stooped beside him, striving to find a spark of life, but he was cold and dead. There he lay, as he had probably been struck down upon his beat, the face fixed and set, the skin of a mottled bluish cast, some black moisture hanging about the nose and lips and on the beard. It seemed to me the first realization of some horrible dream; I would have shouted for aid, but my voice sank back upon my lips and I dared not cry aloud. Hastily I fled on upon my way. Alas! horror lay thick before me, and thicker yet. As I came out into the open square called Camberwell Green I saw three cabs standing on the rank; the horses had fallen and were lying dead between the shafts, while at a little

distance an indistinct mass upon the sidewalk was probably the bodies of the drivers; I ventured not to approach them. I faced the road leading to London Bridge, meaning to take it; some huge object loomed up before me through the fog. Approaching, I found this to be an omnibus; but, O God!—did ever man before me witness such a sight? I supposed subsequently that this was some belated car from the Middlesex side of the river, that with its load of passengers had struggled bravely on through the gathering gloom of the preceding night to this point, where it had been overtaken by the death-dealing acceleration of fog. We know from the printed accounts that there was abundant evidence discovered to prove that the crisis occurred at different hours in several localities. This was the object that barred my road, seen indistinctly and weirdly in the misty light, as I suddenly came upon it. Drawn across the roadway, probably by the plunging of the horses in their last suffocative agony, it presented a spectacle more appallingly hideous than the most distempered imagination could easily picture to itself. Ah! I can see it yet, in all the vivid ghastliness that was burnt indelibly into my remembrance. The driver, and those who occupied the front seats, still sat, but not as they sat in life. The attitudes of the corpses showed the sudden agony and spasm of their deaths. The driver hung forward sustained by the belted apron, his clenched hands thrown out before him, and in one he still clutched a portion of his whip that he had broken possibly in the final struggle. On either side of him were other bodies showing too plainly the effects of the convulsion that had overpowered them. One sat still upright, his arms thrown back and grasping at the rail, his head, supported from

behind, was erect and left the face in view. Oh, the insupportable horror of that dead man's look! The staring eyes, the gasping mouth, the livid skin, the strained and tortured whole. Below them lay the horses, dead in their harness; above and behind, the roof of the vehicle that had been full-occupied with men, was now loaded with their bodies. One or two had dropped from the top and lay upon the ground below, while one hung head-downwards over the side. I could see the interior of the car where women had chiefly sat. Poor creatures! they had been coming home, perhaps, after their day's work or evening's pleasure, and now I saw them entwined together in a twisted, contorted heap, that made me fancy I could even behold the writhing, the piteous interlacing of hands, the convulsive catching at each other, and hear the choking shrieks and cries for succour that too surely here had made more dreadful the spasm and terror of sudden death.

Oh, pitying heaven! For sixty years I have prayed unceasingly that the hideous memories of that awful day might be blotted from my mind.

I turned in an excess of horror from that grim load of dead, and rather than pass by it I took another road. So great was the effect of these horrors upon my mind, so terrible was the emotion I experienced, that I pursued my way with difficulty. Sometimes I fell upon my face or upon my knees in a very frenzy of agitation, while my mind kept working in a voiceless prayer to the Supreme. Tottering and shaking in every limb I went on my way, swaying and staggering with the palsy and delirium of abject dread. Scarcely knowing what I did, I followed the tramway rails in the centre of the road, caring little in which direction they led me. But the fog,

unmerciful before, had mercy to me then ; its loathsome mantle shrouded numberless deadly horrors from my view, and veiled a veritable Valley of the Shadow of Death as I passed through it. Gradually I recovered in some degree from the first intensity of my emotions, and walked on, still trembling, but calmer. I kept my eyes bent upon the ground, and held along the tramway, not daring to look up in case my eyes might again encounter some fearful spectacle. Often I passed by dark objects of whose dismal character I was but too well convinced, though I avoided their inspection. Several times I saw the body of a man or of a woman lying close to the track. At length I came to a bridge ; it was Vauxhall Bridge, and here I lingered for a while, listening to the sound of the waters beneath. The plashing of the river was a friendly sound in my ears, the first sound that had broken the deep stillness of the fog-bound region since I had entered it ; it cheered me up in some indescribable way. I passed across the bridge and again took my way onward through the streets of the silent city.

Not far from the bridge, upon the Middlesex side, I came upon another awful sign of the impartiality and completeness of the tremendous catastrophe. Close to the edge of the pavement there stood a carriage—one of those elegant and voluptuously-appointed vehicles which the wealthiest people were wont to use. The spot I had now reached was no great distance from the fashionable quarter of London, where every night one might see numbers of such carriages conveying aristocratic parties to and from their residences. It seemed as though this equipage must have missed its way in the obscurity, and been brought to a stand, for one of the gorgeously-liveried flunkeys lay prone beside the door,

while his fellow had fallen from his perch behind. The coachman, huddled up upon his seat, appeared as though watching his horses, which lay in a confused heap below him, their smooth and silken coats still handsome beneath the bravery of silver harness. I noticed a coronet upon the emblazoned panels, and as I looked through the window of this splendid carriage my eye was caught by the glitter of jewellery, the gleam of white skins, and the flash of bright colours. O sad, heartrending spectacle! An elderly lady reclined in a corner, while stretching forward, with arms encircling her as though imploring help, were two fair girls. The piteous agony and terror that distorted those once lovely faces was rendered more fearfully startling by the magnificence of their dress and adornments. Weak and unstrung in nerve as I was, my tears flowed at the sight of these patrician beauties, fresh from the tender frivolities of the Court or the ball-room, lying out here, the victims of that clammy, relentless fog. Again I turned and fled, but not for far, till once more my steps were arrested. And here was a strange and woeful antithesis to the last picture—one of those sights too common to be noticeable in living London, yet how infinitely, solemnly mournful in the city of the dead! Two miserable little bodies in the gutter, two poor little ragged urchins, barefooted, filthy, half-naked outcasts of the stony streets, their meagre limbs cuddled round each other in a last embrace, their poor pinched faces pressed together and upturned to heaven. To them, perhaps, death had been but release from life. What a contrast to the occupants of that carriage, not a stone's-throw off! One common doom, one common sepulchre of gloomy fog, there was for the richest and the poorest, the best and the worst alike.

I went hurriedly on, my faculties whirling confusedly with these accumulating shocks. I felt as though I were left alone on earth, and indeed I was the only living creature amid multitudes of dead that but a few hours ago had filled the houses and the streets around me with life. Why had I been left to live when Death had garnered such a mighty harvest? O London! surely, great and manifold as were thy wickednesses, thy crimes, thy faults, who stayed to think of these in the hour of thy awful doom, who dared at that terrible moment to say thy sentence was deserved? And I, a lingering survivor of thy slain, oh, pity that it should have been my task to tell of thy CORRUPTION, to bear witness to thy PUNISHMENT!

It was strange that all this while I had not felt any distinct apprehension for my mother and sister. I had not connected them in my mind with the idea of death. I had yearned to be with them when danger and alarm was all around. I longed intensely to see their dear faces, to hear their dear voices, and to lead them beyond the bounds of the ghastly metropolis; but I had somehow no realised sense of the approach of danger to them personally. But now the first shadowy suspicion of what might be came into my mind; vague, it may be, yet sufficient to spur my footsteps more quickly onward. The thought that the all-pervading death could seize upon my treasures had not definitely come before my mind; such a fear was too monstrous, too appalling for me to entertain; for you know, my grandchildren, that those two darling women were all the ties I then had in the world; on them my whole affections were centred; they were the sum and substance of my life. Now that I had conceived the dim possibility of the approach of

evil to them I was instantly overwhelmed by the desire to be with them. These thoughts were mingled with those terrifying emotions that I have told you were evoked by the scenes I was witnessing. Pressing my hands over my eyes to try and shut out the now more frequently recurring spectacles of death, I staggered forward till at length I came beneath the wall of Buckingham Palace. There was a slight stir in the air, and a perceptible lightening of the grimy vapours, as I turned into the space before the palace. I saw the outline of the trees in St. James's Park, and above the high façade of the palace I caught a glimpse of the flagstaff, with the drooping standard hanging almost motionless. As I passed the gates a sudden dazzle of scarlet caused me to start; it was the sentry in his box. Standing upright as though in life, propped against the wall of the sentry-box, his rifle resting butt-end upon the ground, his hands crossed upon the barrel, the heavy bearskin on his brows adding to the look of stern, resolved despair that was expressed in his set and staring eyes. There he remained, steadfast in death—a dead sentinel watching the dead. Not far in front of the gate lay the body of a woman—God knows who or what! She lay there upon her face with extended arms, her rich furs and silks dabbled in the mud, her delicately-gloved and jewelled hands vainly grasping at the stones, her painted cheek and yellow hair pressed into the mire of the gutter. Bethink you, was it not enough to unman me to pass through these familiar places in the hours of daylight, and to see nothing but a dreadful series of deaths spread out into a continuous panorama of horror before me? Aye! do you wonder now that sixty years have failed to efface these awful details from my mind?

Imprinted, burnt upon my memory, such recollections must remain with me till I, too, am claimed by Death!

I think that at this juncture some kind of madness came over me. For some time past my brain had seemed to reel, sickened with its terrible impressions; yet still striving with outstretched hands to blind my sense of sight, unsteadily yet frantically I hurried forward. Down the Mall, behind terraces of palatial mansions, and through Trafalgar Square, I reached the Strand. Scarcely can I pourtray in words the dire and dismal scenes that met my vision here. From Charing Cross and onwards, I crept along, one solitary shuddering wretch, amid such a hecatomb of deathly woe, as may well defy the power of man to truthfully describe. For here, where on the previous night had throbbed hot and high the flood-tide of London's evening gaiety, was now presented to my poor fevered sight, the worst, most awful features of the whole terrific calamity. I had entered into the very heart and home of Horror itself.

Somewhere near the middle of the Strand, an impulse I can scarcely define drove me to seek refuge from the piled horrors of the street. Although it was so central a thoroughfare as to have gained for itself the cant name of "High Street, London," yet I had but little personal acquaintance with it. One place I knew slightly, a tavern-restaurant, where I had occasionally dined or supped with acquaintances. Thither I bent my steps, picking my way in shivering dread among the corpses that strewed the way—aye! strewed the pavement and the roadway so thickly, O God! so thickly! Somehow I think I must have hoped to find there friendly, sympathizing, *living* faces; I know not else why I, a lonely

wanderer among those thousand mute, stricken victims, should have been seized with another soul-shaking shock, another paroxysm of maddening fear. I had entered the half-open doors of the restaurant, and passed within the bar, where still many of the gas-lamps burnt brightly, mixing with the murky daylight and adding a baleful ghastliness to the scene. No voice, no sound were there to welcome or to check me. I stood unheeded in a house of the dead. Behind the bar a heap of women's clothes huddled in a corner caught my eye: I needed not to look more closely to see that it was a barmaid, for nearer to me was another, drawn down as though by some unseen force from behind, her hands still grasping the handles of the beer-engine, her head fallen back upon her shoulders, her body half-hanging, half-crouched upon the floor. Poor girls! The last time I had seen them—only a few days before—they had stood there in all the vanity of youth and beauty, decked with flowers, cheap jewellery, and flashy clothes, smiling on the customers they supplied, bandying "chaff" with their admirers, and listening greedily to the vapid compliments of the boozy dandies, some of whose bodies now lay prostrate at my feet. So had they been occupied up to the sudden awful moment when the FOG-KING had closed down upon his prey. I dared not pass beyond the threshold of the house, yet the one rapid glance that my eye took of the scene within sufficiently impressed its details on my memory. There were the half-empty glasses upon the counter, those who had been drinking from them lying stark upon the floor; men in all the frippery of evening dress, the cigar or cigarette just fallen from their twisted lips; men in less conspicuous attire; here and there a woman or two; most of them, alas! showing too plainly

by the garish ostentation of their garments the class to which they belonged; further on, in the supper-room behind, I could see the dishes and supper equipage upon the tables, while, in the chairs around them, on the floor below, and leaning across the tables themselves, in all the dreadful confusion of sudden death, in all the hideous contortion of paralyzed panic, were the mortal remains of those who had been sitting there joyously supping, when the hour of doom had struck. Ah! and there was one sad group that struck me more than all the rest, from which, too, they seemed to differ strangely; it was a man and a woman—boy and girl, perhaps I should rather say—who occupied the corner of a couch close to the door. Her arms were thrown around his neck, her face was pressed down into his bosom, and he, holding her to him with convulsive embrace, lay back in his seat, his strangled face upturned with such a yearning agony of entreaty for aid where aid there was none, with such expression in the glassy eye, in the parted lips, from which I fancied I could still hear issue the hoarse accents of despairing prayer and frenzied supplication, that the sight seemed to congeal the remaining life-current within me. Dizzy with affright, my whirling brain drew some strange analogy between that young man and myself, between the dead girl he clasped in his dead arms and my sister.

Again I was in the Strand, striving to pass a hideous barrier of carriages and cabs, interlocked, overturned and confounded in one still medley of death; the bodies of horses, of men, and of women intermixed in the horrible confusion. I crossed the street the better to avoid it, and came under the portals of one of the principal theatres. The doors stood open and the gas-

lights were flaming within; but few bodies lay about the entrance as I stepped inside, impelled by a swift fascination I was powerless to resist. I passed down the gay and glittering corridor that led into this temple of pleasure; becoming in some degree accustomed to the sight of death, I walked unheeding past the silent, crouching forms of those who had been the guardians of the place. Proceeding, I opened a swing door, drew aside a curtain and stood within the theatre. Pity me, my grandchildren, pity me. Oh, if you have hearts that feel—and I know you have—you will pity your miserable grandfather. Of all the awful sights imprinted on these eyes that day, relentlessly impressed upon a too-faithful memory, I witnessed then the most horrible, the most gruesome, the most ghostly and unutterably terrific of all. I stood upon the floor of the theatre, close to the stage, within the portion of the house then called “the stalls,” and from that point I had a full and instant view of the whole interior. The gas still burnt, and threw a light upon the scene more brilliant than perhaps it had been on the previous night; and the people—no, *not* the people, the DEAD!—there under the glaring light they sat, they lay, they hung over the benches, the galleries, the boxes, in one tremendous picture of catastrophe! Beside me were soft and delicate women with their shimmering silks and dainty dresses, with jewels sparkling on their necks and arms, with bouquets and fans and other frivolous etcetera, still emanating the perfume and rich odours of the toilette; and with them were men in their sombre garments and starched courtliness, all huddled in their places in every attitude of frantic woe. Behind them stretched the “pit,” filled with its crowd of commoner folk, mingled and inextricably involved in

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a chaos of heads and limbs and bodies, writhed and knotted together into one great mass of dead men, dead women, and dead children, too. Overhead, tier above tier, rose the galleries, loaded with a ghastly freight of occupants, some of whose bodies hung forward across the front. And the orchestra and stage had also their grim array of horrors. The scenery was set to represent some ancient palace hall, and the stage was open to its furthest limit. Piled upon the boards in fantastic heaps were the bodies of numbers of ballet girls, whose spangled, thousand-hued and tinselled costumes, and all the gorgeous effects of spectacle and ballet, made infinitely more fearful that still and silent scene. Right in the centre and front of the stage there lay one corpse, still fair in death, with streaming hair and jewelled arms, with royal robes and diadem, the queen and sovereign of the pageant; and she—oh, mercy!—had fallen prone upon the footlights. The dull, low flames had scorched and burned some of her drapery, and a sickening smoke still rose from the spot where a once white and rounded bosom pressed down upon the jets, now charred and—oh, why was reason left me to remember these sights? I turned to hasten out once more into the only less terrible street, and as I moved I stumbled over the body of a man. He had passed for youthful, possibly, the night before, but death had lifted the mask that art had made, and I saw the wrinkled face beneath the cracking paint, the false teeth half ejected from the drawn lips in their last fearful gasp, the claw-like hands clutching desperately at the chair, and the whole false roundness of the form lost in a shrunken, huddled heap.

Sickened almost to death at the horrors before me, like a drunken man I reeled out into the street again.

What boots it to recall the long succession of frightful sights I witnessed by the way? All up the Strand bodies lay thick as on some battle-field, save that never battle-field was so grimly terrible as this. Here was a part of the town that had been thronged with pleasure-seekers and with those who catered for them, when the crisis came. Cabs, carriages, and omnibuses were numerous here, some overturned in the struggle of their horses, some grouped together or standing singly in all directions, but all silent and motionless, with dead horses fallen from their shafts, with dead men and dead women upon and within them. Oh, appalling and doleful memory, why cannot I fly the remembrance? And bodies of men, of women, and even of children, gaily-dressed and ragged intermixed, were piled upon the pavements. Yes, there they lay, the old, the young, the rich, the poor; of all ranks, and stations, and qualities, all huddled in one cold and hideous death; while open eyes, piteous faces, distorted limbs, and strange, unnatural attitudes, told the tremendous tale of that sudden midnight agony.

At length I reached our home; I entered the house and descended to the basement where we dwelt. Impatiently and fearfully I opened the door and passed into the sitting-room. Yes, there they were. The fire was cold and gray, but the cat lay curled upon the rug in her accustomed place. In the armchair sat my mother, and beside her, on a stool, my sister, just as they often loved to sit, with arms embracing each other. Was it my voice that broke the horrid stillness of the room—so hoarse, so changed? "Mother! sister! darlings!" No answer. Nearer I went, treading slowly and tremblingly. Again my hoarse accents jarred the heavy air

as I knelt and took my mother's hand. "Mother! sister!
awake!"

Ah! God of mercy! The horrid truth came home to me
at last. Dead! dead!!

* * * * *

Children, I can write no more. I am shaken—unutter-
ably shaken by these recollections. Much more I saw and
knew, but, in pity's sake, press me not to tell you of it.
And when you read elsewhere, or others tell you of **THE**
DOOM of that **GREAT CITY**, think with tender sorrow of the
awful load of memory that has so long been borne
by **YOUR GRANDFATHER**.

"The rich, the poor, one common bed
Shall find in the unhonour'd grave
Where weeds shall crown alike the head
Of tyrant and of slave."

Marvell.

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