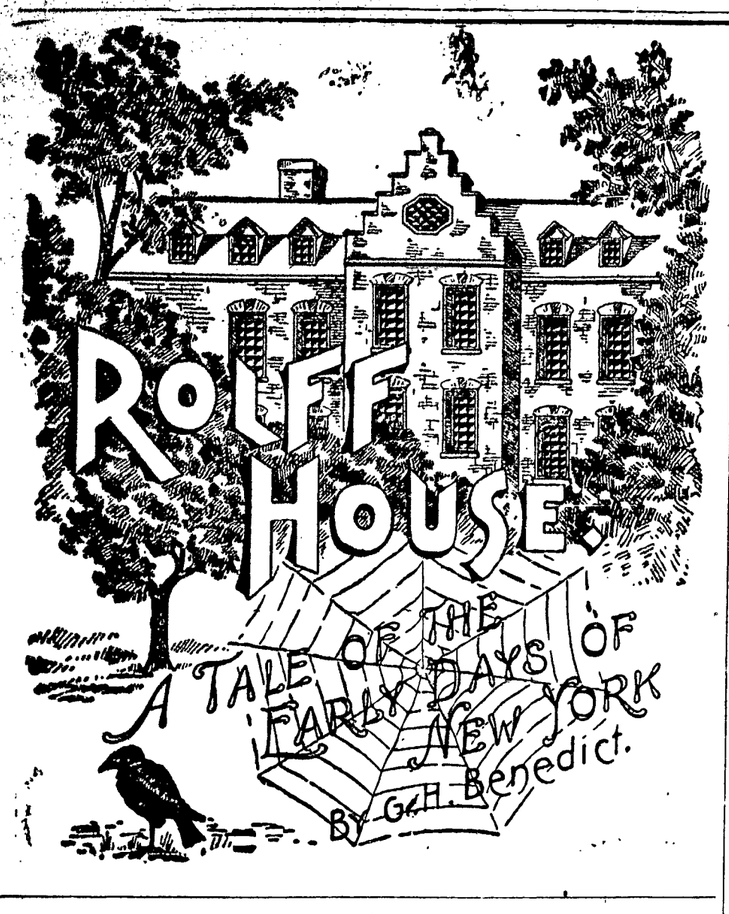

CHAPTER VIII.

A few more days sufficed to complete Claude's arrangements for his departure for Europe. He was anxious to be away. He had no difficulty in raising sufficient money for his purpose—or, rather, it was provided for him by the helpful Mr. Saybrook, his own part in the matter being the simple work of signing the necessary papers. The shrewd lawyer had managed to win his utmost confidence, and the reckless young man scarcely took the trouble to read the papers he was advised to sign. In only one thing did the lawyer find him firm, and that was in his positive refusal to allow Rolff House and the immediate estate to be in any way subject to mortgage or other incumbrance. In fact, one of his first objects had been to provide for the residence of Carl and Margaret in the old house, and their comfort and maintenance during his absence. All his other business affairs he left unreservedly in the hands of his lawyer.

The hardest task was to come. It was that of breaking to Rosa Bruyn his intention to leave home for a period of years. To be sure she knew that he had cherished such an intention previous to his aunt's death. But Claude was well aware it would be a sad parting both to himself and to the maiden he loved with a passionate fervor. He did not see her as often as usual, for his time was full of business demands, and, in truth, he was loth to break to her the news of his arrangements for departure. But the time came when he was under the necessity of announcing his plans.

Full of a feeling of sadness and doubt which he could not shake off, he started one afternoon for farmer Bruyn's home, distant only about half a mile from Rolff House. It was a lovely October day. On his way, he met Rosa, who had started to visit the village on some household shopping errand.

Near where they met, a by-path led to a noble old wood that extended in the rear of Rolff House, and thence to the village. Claude took the hand of Rosa under his arm, and led her unresistingly down the path toward the old wood. As soon as they had entered the wood, and were out of sight and hearing of any chance passers-by on the road, Claude paused, and seated himself on a moss-grown rock, while Rosa took her place beside him.

She was first to speak.

"I know why you have brought me here, Claude," she said. "I have seen it in your eyes for days past. Besides, although you have not spoken to me, rumor and gossip have. You are going to leave me. I know that nothing I can say will restrain you. I would not restrain you against your will. You will leave me; and I—I—shall be broken hearted."

The words were simply spoken, but they carried a world of silent suffering in their unaffected tones. Claude was deeply moved.

"But it will only be for a little while," he made haste to say. "A year of two or three, at most—why, darling, it will fly on wings of wind, and, almost before you are aware of it, I will be back to claim you as my bride. We are both young and in vigorous health—why should we indulge in despondent views of the future? It is no great matter to cross the ocean to the old world. Hundreds do it yearly, and the danger is not much greater as far as I am concerned than if I remained quietly at home."

"I know all that you would say, Claude," interrupted Rosa, "and perhaps I am as ready as you to indulge in bright anticipations of the future. Yet a weight has come upon my heart—I do not fear much for any danger to either of us—I scarce can say what I fear. A premonition seems to weigh upon me that we shall never meet again, or, if we do, it will be as strangers. You are going out into the great dazzling world from this quiet little village. I trust you, and yet I fear that absence will lessen your affection, while your free and sociable nature will lead you to form new attachments. For myself, I cannot tell what awaits me. I shall remain true to you, but it may be at an expense of trial and suffering you do not dream of. The future may contain happiness for us, but, to me, it seems hidden behind a cloud."

Claude exerted his utmost power to comfort the despondent girl. And he succeeded in a measure. The nature of Rosa Bruyn was to reflect the moods of others. She possessed great depth of character, and firmness and a resolute spirit were there, but far hidden in the depths, and only to be called forth by [illegible] On the surface, her sweetness and kindliness seemed naturally to appeal for sympathy and support, and hence it was easy for her to take strong impressions from the moods of others. Claude, in particular, exercised an almost supreme control over her. His bold, confident, aspiring nature was the opposite of her quiet, unaggressive disposition, and in his society she rarely failed to catch and reflect his humor, though not the less did her own sweet individuality assert itself in influence upon his somewhat reckless character.

They did not linger long. Rosa had her errand to accomplish, and Ralph accompanied her to the other side of the wood, toward the village, and, after an affectionate parting, and a pledge to see her daily before his departure, he returned to Rolff House.

His mind was full of a weight of care and doubt. Almost unconsciously, he proceeded to his room, and taking down the box that contained the mysterious roll confided to him by his aunt, he examined it long and curiously. Then he read over carefully the paper of instructions that was also contained in the box. There were two keys in the box. From the paper, he learned that the small one was the key to the old south cellar, while a large and massive one, rusty with age and disuse, was the key to the vault of which his aunt had spoken.

Claude had never entered the old cellar. The door had always been kept locked, and his aunt had retained the key. He now resolved to gratify his curiosity in regard to the old cellar and its curious vault—of which he had never heard previous to his aunt's communication, except as a superstitious rumor in the mouths of gossiping people, which he had regarded as silly and false.

With the key in his pocket, he proceeded through the old hall, then down a flight of stairs to the basement, in which there were several rooms, most of them empty and illy lighted. A narrow dark passage led for some distance from the flight of steps by which he had descended toward the south side of the house, and at the end of this passage was a door and another flight of steps that gave access to the south cellar. The massive foundation of Rolff House was divided into several vault-like apartments, separated by heavy stone walls through which there was no communication, and access to each was by a flight of steps from above and a single door.

Claude descended the steps to the old cellar door, and, in the total darkness, searched for the key-hole, and with difficulty inserted the key and turned the rusty wards. Then moving back the door on its creaking hinges, he entered the old cellar.

On entering, he could not distinguish anything for a moment in the dim, uncertain light that came from one small, very narrow window in the heavy foudation wall. Gradually his surroundings became visible, and he found that he was in a quite large rather oblong and dungeon-like room, surrounded by heavy stone walls on all sides. Above his head the heavy beams of the foundation floor were dark with mold and age, and festooned with the cobwebs of generations. The one window was so narrow that it admitted but a faint light, and Claude had to strain his eyes to note these things. In moving about in this dark, underground place, he was surprised to notice a flight of very narrow stone steps in the foundation wall, leading apparently to the outside. He strained his eyes, but could see nothing in the darkness. He cautiously proceeded up the steps, and discovered that the entrance at the top was apparently closed in by a heavy stone slab. Descending the steps, he proceeded to search for the vault. After a time, he discovered a small but massive stone door, that was set in the inner wall of the cellar. This door was the only indication of a vault or receptacle of any kind, but he noticed that the stones surrounding it were of a peculiarly massive kind. A single key hole was cut in the door, but there was no sign of hinge or knob by which it was held in place or might be opened and closed. The heavy stone slab was fitted so nicely into the masonry surrounding it that there was scarce a chance even for dust to enter.

This, then, must be the mysterious vault. Claude examined it closely and most curiously. Why was it built, and what did it contain? Why were its contents so jealously guarded, and access to it so hedged in by strange conditions? Was here hidden the stored wealth which he felt sure his aunt had saved, as well as the remaining treasures of his grandfather's suspiciously-gotten fortune? Claude asked himself these questions. He could not help but think that the heavy stone door concealed the secret of much that was mysterious in his life and circumstances.

Would he ever learn the secret, and solve the mystery? He almost felt shaken in his plan to leave the country. By waiting, in a month or two, the secret might be his. But, no—his old pride and determination arose. He half murmured and half thought, as he gazed on the impassive stone door, "Be your secret or your treasure what it may, I alone possess the key, and I can wait. I have made my plans, and I will carry them out. The secret here shut up will wait for me."

Claude was as good as his word. Ere a fortnight more had passed, he had taken leave of Rolff House, of his friends, of wearisome business details, of the sober Dutch village, and, lastly, of sweet and tearful Rosa Bruyn, and was on his way across the broad Atlantic.

CHAPTER IX.

It was not many days before Jacobus Bruyn took occasion to call upon Lawyer Saybrook to consult with him in regard to the Rolff property.

As may be imagined, the sudden departure for Europe of the young heir of Rolff House had been the cause of unlimited gossip in the little place. In some mysterious manner, pretty much all of the legal transactions in which Claude had been engaged had leaked out and become the subject of public talk, and, naturally, the truth had been improved upon in various ways as the details passed from mouth to mouth.

The good burghers shook their heads gravely as they commented on the recklessness of the young man, and many were the predictions that he would soon "come to a bad end." And when Lawyer Saybrook's name was mentioned, there were knowing nods and winks, and voices were lowered as comments were freely made on the sharp bargains he had driven with the young man in supplying him with money for his European trip.

These stories had of course come to the ears of Farmer Bruyn. The Rolff property adjoined his lands on its western side. The old wood, mentioned in a previous chapter, extending across into the bounds of the property of the shrewd, acquisitive old farmer, and for years he had had his eyes on it and the adjoining meadow land as a most desirable addition to his farm if it ever became purchasable. But so long as the aged mistress of Rolff House lived no such result was posible. The old lady would not listen to a proposition to sell a foot of her lands. But now rumor was busily circulating the tale that young Rolff had privately deeded all of the land in question to Lawyer Saybrook as security for certain moneys advanced him, and already the public was beginning to look upon the shrewd lawyer as the coming owner of Rolff House.

Farmer Bruyn credited these tales; and he had no doubt that, if the lawyer became the owner of the property, he would soon be disposed to put it in the market for sale. So he hastened at once to inquire into the matter.

The man of law was delighted to see the old farmer. He shook his hand with cordial warmth, and the keen, self-satisfied twinkle in his eyes indicated that perhaps the visit was not unexpected by him. Nevertheless, he professed surprise that the farmer could have any business with him in regard to the Rolff estate, and handed him a chair and sat down beside him with a well-assumed air of interest and innocence.

It was a subject for the pencil of a Hogarth—the pale, smooth, keen-visaged lawyer, leaning back in his chair, with a countenance full of mystification that was belied by the intelligent twinkle of his eye, as the blunt, straightforward farmer stated the object of his visit.

"Why, this is strange, very strange," remarked the lawyer, as the old man concluded. "In fact, I think I may say it is a complete surprise. Why, really, my dear sir——"

"No need for surprise," interrupted the farmer. "I want the old wood and the meadow land between it and the road. I've had my eyes on that piece of land for years, and I'm ready to pay a good round price for it, money down."

"Of course, of course," replied the lawyer. "You come directly to the point, like a practical man; but, really, my dear sir, I fear you misapprehend the whole matter. I am not responsible for any stories that may be circulating about my transactions with the young heir who is my client. It is strange, very strange, how such stories get started, but I cannot assure you that all you hear is true, or that the property you desire is for sale or likely to be."

"Come, no beating about the bush," said the farmer, bluntly. "I got my story straight enough. The land is as good as yours. I want it. Now, if it is to be sold at any time, I'd like the first chance."

"Well, now, really, really," said the lawyer, straightening up in his chair, "I fear I will be compelled to lose a fine chance for a bargain. We can't believe all we hear, Mr. Bruyn. People will talk, you know. To be sure, I can't tell what may happen, nor can I deny or affirm that the property you mention may or may not be in the market one of these days. But, my dear sir, so far as any legal transactions I may have arranged with my young friend are concerned, I can assure you that public rumor is very much at fault. I may or may not have entered into certain arrangements that give me a prospective lien on various portions of the Rolff estate. There are mortgages, to be sure—and there may be some private contracts; but, sir, these may be intended as a mere matter of security, made with the understanding——"

"No matter for your understanding," interrupted the farmer. "I know you've got some hold on this property; and I know and you know that that young prodigal will never be able to claim it back. I want the land, and you don't. You're a lawyer, and what can you want of land except to drive a sharp bargain? I am willing to pay more than it is worth. Now, if you want to make a bargain——"

"Ah, if I do, my dear sir; but what if I don't? Eh, sir—what if I don't? Let us suppose for a moment—merely suppose for the sake of argument, my dear sir—that I have or may be able to have this property at my disposal. Does it naturally follow that I would wish to sell it? Would it not be more natural to assume that if, after many years of hard professional drudgery, I have managed to acquire a little money, and, in the legitimate course of my profession, have had an opportunity to invest it in a manner looking to the acquisition of certain lands, it may be my object to retire from my profession and settle down as a private country gentleman? Perhaps I am tired of professional life; perhaps I desire to pass the evening of my days as a rural gentleman and amateur agriculturist instead of a harrassed, overworked lawyer. Would anything be more natural, my dear sir? Furthermore, I have an only son, Mr. Bruyn, and although I have afforded him a good education, it does not necessarily follow that I wish him to be a lawyer like myself. I may have a different ambition for him. I may desire to see him become an honest, thriving agriculturist. Ah, Mr. Bruyn, professional life is full of care and the chances of failure are very large, while the tiller of the soil has an almost certain reward. Why should I not desire to see Ralph established ere I die in possession of a snug landed property? It is possible—I do not say probable—that the property we have been talking about may some day come into my hands; in fact, the possibilities in the case may not be limited to the possession of even this choice bit of the Rolff property. It wouldn't be a bad idea for a shrewd and enterprising man to get possession of the whole estate—eh, Mr Bruyn? Mind, I do not say that there is any such chance at present; but who can tell what opportunities the future may offer? If any such happy fortune should be mine, I am inclined to think, Mr. Bruyn, that nothing would tempt me to dispose of a foot of the land. It would rather be my ambition to become your good neighbor; and there would be no probability of your estate and mine ever being joined during my lifetime; none at all, I assure you—unless, indeed—but no matter; the idea is so remote that——"

"No, no—what is it?" interrupted the farmer. "I am here to talk about joining these lands, and if there is a chance I want to know it. Come, what were you going to say? Out with it."

"Well, well—if your curiosity must be gratified. The thought flashed across my mind that I have an only son and you an only daughter; and if it should be that we become owners of adjoining estates, why, there might be such a thing as arranging terms for the ultimate union of the estates without any need of barter or sale. A mere suggestion, you will perceive, my dear Mr. Bruyn—quite improbable, in fact. In truth, I have never thought of the matter before, and have never said a word to Ralph on the subject; though, now I come to think of it, I have heard him speak admiringly of your daughter. And, really, my dear sir, you must allow me to congratulate you on the possession of such a lovely child. If I were Ralph, now—but, really, this subject is one that perhaps should not be trenched upon in a discussion based so entirely upon probabilities and the mere chances of fortune, so to speak."

The old farmer remained plunged for some time in a brown study.

"I never thought of this before," he said, at last. "I supposed if you got hold of any of this Rolff property you would want to sell it. But if you don't there's an end of that. To be sure, I have my daughter—and a rare girl she is, if I say it myself, and I don't intend she shall marry any rake or scatter-brains. There's young Rolff has been showing her attentions, and the girl was foolish enough to encourage him—for his looks and manners, I suppose. But I saw only one thing in his favor—he was going to have this property, but I soon made up my mind he'd never know enough to keep it, and I was right. Of course, he'll waste the property, and somebody will get it, and I shall be glad if it falls into no worse hands than your own. If it does, and you ever want to sell it, you can consider me a customer."

"If I ever have an opportunity to sell it, and desire to do so, I shall consider your offer, Mr. Bruyn," replied the lawyer, with an emphasis on the "if."

"And if you don't," continued Mr. Bruyn, "why, I hope we shall be good neighbors. More than that I can't say now."

"It is not necessary to say more, my dear sir," pursued Mr Saybrook. "What more could I desire than to be your good neighbor? Yet it seems to me that the two estates hold a sort of natural relationship to each other, and I do not wonder at your desire to come into possession of at least part of the Rolff lands. But how much better it would be if the two whole properties could be united one of these days? It would make one of the finest estates in the country. Why, if I should ever get hold of the Rolff property I should feel quite as anxious to buy your lands as you possibly could be to buy mine. If I have an ambition it is to found a house, as it were—to raise the Saybrooks to the position of estate owners, and leave Ralph at my death securely settled in a handsome property. In fact, I may say that I have made this ideal my life work. As events now shape, perhaps my ambition is not impossible of accomplishment. Ah, Mr. Bruyn, if my anxiety and efforts for Ralph could be thus rewarded, how happy I should be. No one can tell the interest I have taken in that boy. If I say it myself, he is a young man of rather uncommon parts, and of an intelligence and business turn quite remarkable for his years. No spendthrift about him, Mr. Bruyn—no, no, I assure you; it don't run in the blood. I feel the utmost confidence that he will be able to take care of the money and property I shall be enabled to leave him. I have taken great pains in his bringing up, my dear sir; and I venture to believe that he does me no discredit."

"No doubt of it," replied the farmer. "I have a good opinion of the lad myself. He's steady, and that's the main thing."

"Steady, Mr. Bruyn—why, sir, I feel that his character is founded on a rock, as it were, and cannot be moved. I have never known him to commit an improper or immoral act, or to manifest a single extravagant or wild trait."

The old farmer did not dissent from this eulogism; and, in fact, it was true enough in its way. Ralph had enough of worldly shrewdness to have a keen regard for his reputation, and, as character went in the retired community, he was a most exemplary young man, but one of a kind who was much more respected and liked by his elders than by those of his own age.

Farmer Bruyn soon took his departure, and the lawyer remained cogitating over the interview and its probable effects till Ralph came in.

The young man saw at once, by his father's gratified smile, that some favorable event had happened, and bent on him an enquiring glance.

"Old Bruyn has been here," said the father. "He bit on the bait I dropped in the proper quarter regarding my little transactions with Claude. He seems to regard me already as the practical controller of the Rolff property, and was all ready to buy the old wood lot and adjoining meadows, which I happened to know he has had a hankering for this long while. Of course I was chary of coming to any terms, and I fancy managed to advance your claims in a manner that will set he highest effect. Everything works all right so far. I think there will be nothing in the way of your beginning your attentions to Miss Rosa at once. Then if young Claude only gets entangled in some way in Europe, or happily dies, or we can keep him there and unsuspicious of our plans till everything is in favorable shape, success will be ours. But I dare not make public the deeds as yet. We must not run the chance of his hearing of anything irregular. In a bold step like this, much depends on the chances. Our only plan is to wait. You see the propriety of that, Ralph?"

"Yes, of course. It wouldn't do for the young cub to know that you had got his signature to papers that deed away all his property, and be none the wiser."

"Yes, Ralph—but speak low. What was that noise?"

"What noise?"

"I thought I heard a sound, as if somebody might be listening."

Mr. Saybrook arose and went to the inner door, and looked around in the hall that divided the office from the living apartments, but he saw nothing, and returned apparently satisfied to his chair.

"It was a bold stroke, Ralph—perhaps a dangerous one—but I felt I could trust the young fool's utter carelessness, and the result was so essential that I determined to risk it. After reading him the papers he supposed he was to sign, I managed to change them, and present others to him for his signature in a way that did not disclose the trick. So here they are in good shape, all properly endorsed and witnessed, and they will be hard to get over when the proper time comes. But we must be cautious. My actions have been sagaciously planned, and all undertaken in view of a possible contingency, which I now consider to be inevitable. I mean the outbreak of war with England. In that case our young gentleman will be safely kept out of our way for a number of years, there is no telling how long, but long enough, I am certain. My only anxiety is lest he should take the alarm and want to return to this country. In my letters I shall take every measure to quiet any apprehensions, and I hope to draw him out on points that will be of future use to us."

"What a general you would make!" exclaimed the admiring son, as this rehearsal of his father's plans was concluded.

"Ah Ralph," was the reply, "remember, there is strategy in other fields than war, and the best general always wins."

CHAPTER X.

The fall passed into winter, and the new year at last drew near.

Anthony Saybrook had not been unmindful of his engagement with Claude to visit the old south cellar on New Year's day, and note whether the mysterious signs appeared on the door of the vault therein. In fact, he had awaited most anxiously the arrival of the appointed day. Spite of the ease he had had in explaining to Claude the secret of the old lady's mysterious instructions he was greatly puzzled in his mind as to their nature and meaning. They must mean something important, he argued. The old lady was too practical and sagacious to have given such strange and explicit directions without some very definite object in view. "Can it be possible," mused the lawyer, "that she has carefully saved her earnings and deposited them in the old vault, and that great wealth is there awaiting this young prodigal. It is not improbable. Knowing his reckless and naturally spendthrift disposition, she might have adopted such a plan of keeping the money out of his hands till he should have arrived at years of greater discretion. But who is to judge thereof, and give the mysterious sign that is to unlock the doors of the vault, provided young prodigal reforms within five years? Can it be old Carl—or Margaret? Faith, I shouldn't wonder. Either would be shrewd and trustworthy enough; and, really, the plan wouldn't be so bad for keeping the money safe till Claude got a little experience of the world. But I'll wager the old lady never counted on the possibility of any new proprietor coming into possession of Rolf House before the secret of the vault was revealed. Suppose there is a fortune lying in there snugly locked up! It makes Rolff House the greater prize. Yes, yes—it is a prize worth having; and I must and will have it, unless the devil himself fights against me."

New Year day at last arrived; and, immediately after a hearty dinner, Anthony Saybrook proceeded to the old mansion, and, lifting the great rusty knocker of the heavy oaken door, sent a loud alarm through the vacant halls and rooms, that echoed and re-echoed as if giving warning that a dangerous enemy was at hand.

Old Carl answered the summons.

"Good day, Mr. Crum," said the lawyer, with a pleasant smile."

"Good day," answered the old man. "Come in. I know the object of your visit."

"Ah! — Claude informed you, of course. Very good, indeed—it saves the trouble of explanation. I presume we may as well proceed at once to the old cellar. It is my plan to transact all business as speedily as possible; and, as this is a holiday, and I have invited my friend Mr. Bruyn over to have a social glass and pipe with me at four o'clock, I will adhere to my plan on this occasion."

"Curse your plan!" muttered old Carl under his breath; and then he said aloud, "I'll get a light," and at once started off to procure it, leaving the lawyer standing in the cold, gloomy old hall.

"Scant courtesy," he said to himself, as he gazed after the old man with a peculiar glitter in his eyes; "but it's all the same to me, Mr. Crum; I fancy I shall be able to get even with you one of these days."

Old Carl presently returned, with a candle in a tin lantern, and beckoning to the lawyer, led the way to the stair case, and down into the basement. They traversed the dark passage that led to the cellar stairs, and old Carl descended them and unlocked the door, and held the lantern that the lawyer might safely descend.

In a moment they both stood in the old gloomy cellar, and the old man led the way with his lantern to the vault.

"This is the vault?" queried the lawyer.

"Yes," curtly responded the old man.

Anthony Saybrook examined the door carefully. There was no sign of the mysterious marks that were to be the signal of the breaking of the prohibition against the door being opened.

This was all that the lawyer's duty required of him. But his curiosity was increased by the sight of the vault and its massive structure. He examined it closely. He noted how nicely the door fitted, and wondered as to its thickness. He scanned keenly the massive masonry that surrounded it, and mentally concluded that no such solid structure could have been built for a trifling purpose. Why had old Magnus Rolff had it built? This question came up in his mind, and set him to trying to weave a theory to explain it. He concluded that it must have been intended for the deposit of some precious treasure. Public gossip may be more than half right about it, he thought. A smile flitted across his face as he called to mind the superstitious report that no one could enter it or handle its contents except he sold himself to the devil. "Suppose I should be the one to outwit the devil," he exclaimed mentally, and again the smile flitted across his face.

"Rather a queer piece of masonry, this," he said in an inquiring tone, turning to old Carl, after having finished his inspection of the vault.

"I don't know," responded the old man; "it is according to how you look at it."

"Well, how do you look at it, if I may be so bold as to enquire?" responded the lawyer, in an inquisitive tone.

"As a very simple matter, without a bit of mystery about it," was the reply. "In their better days, the family had many valuable articles, and it was very natural that a great house like this should have a private strong place, where valuable papers or articles could be kept safe from prying eyes and fire."

"So, so—very keen, very sagacious, Mr. Crum," replied the lawyer, who saw at once that old Carl was not disposed to encourage him in any curiosity about the vault. "And now, if it is just as agreeable to you, I should like to be left alone here a few moments, that I may carry out certain instructions of your young master."

Mr. Saybrook had taken a fancy that he would like to closely examine the old cellar, and hence his request to be left alone.

But old Carl had no notion of indulging him in his curiosity.

"It would afford you little pleasure, methinks, to be left alone here in the dark," he answered. "I cannot leave you the lantern, as I am growing old, and it is not safe for me to be wandering around in the dark passages above without a light."

"I will light you up the stairs and through the passage, if that is all," answered the lawyer, "and then return and fulfill my duty here."

Seeing that any attempt to evade the request would prove useless, the old man replied, somewhat bluntly.

"It is not in accordance with my instructions to leave you alone here."

"Instructions from whom?" demanded the lawyer, sharply.

"That question concerns me and not you," responded the old man, with a suspicion of warmth in his tone. "But to save words, I will say that my instructions were to accompany you down here once each year, on New Year's Day, until I received orders to the contrary, but under no circumstances to allow any one in here alone, or, in fact to allow anybody in here except yourself, at the time and in the manner I have stated."

Anthony Saybrook was too shrewd to pick a quarrel with the old man under the circumstances. He was surprised and annoyed that Claude should have left any such instructions, but a moment's reflection convinced him that it did not necessarily imply any suspicion of himself, but might have been the result of extra care in so instructing old Carl that he would guard well the vault.

"Well, well, Mr Crum, we will not quarrel over the matter," he made haste to reply. "Please hand me your lantern a moment, and I will more carefully perform my duty of inspection."

The old man handed him the lantern, and he critically examined the vault again, and, in doing it, managed to so throw the light as to allow it to penetrate the recesses of the old cellar. But the furtive glimpses of dark recesses in the heavy stone wall, and of the steps in the outer wall, afforded him only so much satisfaction as to increase his curiosity. In a far corner, he saw what seemed to be several heavy chests piled one upon another. He would have given a good round sum to have stayed and critically examined the old cellar, but Carl's eyes were fixed on him with a steady and observing gaze, so he suppressed his curiosity, and handing back the lantern, followed his guide up to the great hall again. Here he took a prompt leave, and was on his way home again.

"The old watch dog," he muttered, as he strode along, "he was suspicious of me as if he knew my secret resolves. My first step must be to get him out of the house. Ah, if events only favor me, there will be no trouble. I fancy, however, that I can manage the matter. Let me think—let me think."

And so, planning and gloating over his anticipated triumph, Anthony Saybrook soon reached home.

[To be continued.]