THE SHROUDED WATCHER.

It is many years since the following remarkable incident in my life took place. For the ordinary commonplace details of every day experience my memory is generally held to be indifferent, but the circumstances in this case were such that they have indelibly fixed themselves in my recollection, as though they had occurred yesterday.

At the time I allude to I was a very raw young ensign in the secund regiment of the Guards, and was quartered in the — Barracks, situated in a suburb of the capital of that well-known island-forerun the strategy of which is the Mediterranean highway, within sight of Sicilian Etna, and almost of Northern Africa.

To make a long story short, I will begin by presenting the reader the chief character in it.

Ralph Durston was a young fellow with an odd history. We were not intimate; I did not exactly know. He was understood to have been in one of "John Company's" regiments, but whether horse or foot or both I do not know. He was an Englishman probably, and knew the English residents and garrison. Not that the notoriety was altogether conducive to his fame—beneath the guise of Durston, the cavalryman, lurked the swash-buckler, the joker, the daredevil. He was not of long duration, and when I joined my regiment in the island principality sacred to San Polo, Durston, who was already known to the English residents and garrison, was no longer with us. The reason was, apparently, as not a few ex-British officers managed at that time to do. But for reasons best known to himself and the authorities, and without any explanation, he was not of long duration, and when I joined my regiment in the island principality sacred to San Polo, Durston, who was already known to the English residents and garrison, was no longer with us. The reason was, apparently, as not a few ex-British officers managed at that time to do.

He was well known to be of good family, and, as he had been in the service, my regiment had made him a lieutenant. It was known in our regiment that he thought another corps in garrison had given him the same brevet to his own.

Durston was a most successful player at cards. I have never seen any one beat him at "losing hazards" or the "spot stroke." As to pool, our "lives" were as nothing to him. In a word, Durston was a universal favorite. The skill and the luck of the man were extraordinary. Night after night I have seen him take one bank after another, and his winnings must have almost sufficed to maintain him. As to other traits in his character, I am sorry to say I never heard of one single good or generous soul.

Durston's talk at the mess-table or in the anteroom was of the most cynical flavor it was ever my lot to hear, and his manner was always so incessant and excellent and decent and moral to abide by, truth compels me to add that some very sinister tales of Durston's influence in the island were current at the time I speak of. What has now come to be dignified with the name of hypnotism was unknown as such in those days, but I believe Durston possessed some conjuring powers in this direction, and I am afraid was not alway over-scrupulous in his use of them. Even at this distance of time his portrait stands out clear to my mind's eye, with a kind of Rembrandt-like sheen upon it, by reason of the mysterious shadow in the background, which was to loom up and cover it with the blackness of darkness, ought perhaps to add, for the better understanding of what I mean. But the time was a period of the utmost importance, and the incident came, some ominous whisperings got abroad among us about Durston, and the methods with which he protected so many of his young friends. I have heard of men transferred at will and ecarted from other people's pockets to his own.

The night I speak of was a memorable day of the occurrence of the strange incident, to one phase of which I and others were eye-witnesses.

It was on the 18th of March, a week toward the end of April, 1813. Music has always been a passion with me, and every afternoon preceding Good Friday in that particular week was given to the listening to the gondola band of the Antwerp gondolas, and the glare of the white parade-ground and the monstrous bawling of the drill-sergeant, it was my wont to seek the solitude of the anteroom.

And who that has ever sat in that stately cathedral church, surrounded by its splendor of inlaid marble and coloured glass, and in the dimly lighted atmosphere, odorous with incense, listened to the entrancing strains of the Organ of the 'Cambridge,' could ever forget it? Such exquisite pathos in the solos, impressively mournful, yet sweet, and then the moaning harmonies of the organ as it crept up and yearned and yearned and yearned, or, probably shall ever hear again—while one by one, at intervals, the great burning candles on the sable-draped altar are being solemnly extinguished because the festival is o'er, the taper-flames, so vivacious, so vivid, are they still. Well, the good of Good Friday. I had gone over to see a friend of mine who had been very sick, but during the day had not listened to the gondola band, and return after dark, what a night it was—still, calm, cloudless, a star-specked vault overhead. The air was charged with a kind of tseeing which the gondola-shapely gallery while the dark figure of the boatman monotonously and silently plied his long oars, 'till the moon, lovelier, and rounder, and lights twinkled, flashing back in waving dupicates from the fleetly rippling water. I was soon thrown into the room of one of the officers, proceeding the great flight of steep stone steps, presently found myself in the strait Strada Reale. I was distant, and there I found a hall, or room, where in the midst of the hall, "who comes there?" and "Pass, friend—all's well," had hardly died away when I found myself at the gate of the room. A light shone from an open block. By this time the Paschal moon, all but full, was high in the sky, and cast a great shadow from the blocks that occurred across the parade. I should here explain that Thursdays were the "guest" nights of my regiment at that time, and I was particularly taken aback when I found as usual playing on the open space just outside, fronting the mess-room windows. It must have been past 11 o'clock when I reached barracks; and although most of the outsiders who were allowed in to hear the music on such occasions were gone, I was not. I listened, particularly, to a remarkably tall man in a long dark cloak, and with some sort of hood over his head like a priest, who sat in the window with his back to me. I sauntered into my room, lit a cigar, and came out again to muse in the moonlight of the terrace. I sat down in the room called "Stazione." By this time the loiterers were all gone except the tall cloaked man, who appeared to have taken a fancy to the moonlight, and was first. The open windows of the mess-room were still aglow, and through the boughs of a row of lank trees trimming the courtyard, I could see the distant twinkling lights of the town.

Something in the appearance of this solitary cloaked figure, or rather in the solitary figure I was so startled, and suddenly I was conscious of a kind of chill and numbness creeping through my limbs, with that horrible and unfathomable sensation of something intensely in dreams, when something dreadful is going to happen which one wants to avert.

These bethinkings, however, were all the work of a few seconds. A very instantaneous and extremely perceptive watcher, I heard several voices within the room calling out in excited tones as though some alarum was going on. One voice above all the others came with a kind of strident sharpness through the open window, in which it was easy to recognize Durston's voice. I heard the words rasping out now as I write: "Tell you I dealt myself the ace of spades!" then another voice, and then a hurried whisper; then a terrible imprecation from Durston, which I will not repeat, invoking the Prince of Darkness to destroy and body and form of he what he stated was not the truth.

As the last words struck on my ear, the tall cloaked figure was standing up, with a light, swift spring to the window-sill he was standing under, and disappeared through the muslin curtains. As I watched, I could not have got into it from my position. Another instant, and an ear-piercing scream rang out—a harsh, appalling cry—"Murder!—Murder!—" until the excitement of the corpse was in a state of intense extremity—and to my horror and utter amazement he in the cloak reappeared at the window with the face of Durston before me, apparently struggling desperately. One instant both faces were visible in the moonlight; Durston's ghastly face was thrust through the window open, and covered with a black dominio, from the eyebrows of which I was near enough to catch, as I fancied, a momentary gleam of the most ghastly white I have ever seen, and then in a single of the building. After them I rushed, shouting to the gate- sentry to alarm the guard, but on reaching the rear of the officers' apartments, I was met by the brigadier, and telling the sergeant to take a file and