

'Oh, you are the caretaker!' exclaimed Phileas, a light breaking in on his mind. He took off his hat and made the old man a whimsical bow. 'I beg a thousand pardons! Do you live in this house?'

'Wot's dat to you?' the German said testily, though he had seemed somewhat appeased by the change in the young man's manner.

'I come here,' explained Phileas, 'to see, if possible, the owner of this place.'

'You can not him see.'

'Why not?'

The man waved his arms.

'He is not here. He is gone far.'

'Where has he gone?'

The Teuton pondered the question in his slow and heavy mind, evidently deciding against giving an answer; and Phileas, eager, alert, and burning with curiosity, asked another:

'Do you live on the premises?'

'I live over dere, in dat white house,' and he pointed to a low structure, which Phileas had not until that moment observed, since it was almost entirely hidden by trees.

'Well, can you tell me anything about the gentleman who lived here recently?'

'De gentlemen is gone. He is not here now,' repeated the old man.

'Has he been gone long?'

'Nein, nein!'

'What was he like?'

'Like?' echoed the caretaker, misunderstanding the import of the question. 'He's gone.'

'I mean can you describe his appearance?' asked Phileas.

'Nein, nein!' responded the Teuton, who was either genuinely ignorant of the questioner's meaning or chose to appear so. 'He was a good gentlemen,' he said, after a reflective pause; while Phileas, non-plussed, was casting about for the simplest form of a query.

'Was he old?'

'Most seventy.'

'Tall?'

'Yah, and not much fat.'

'He is gone you say to—to—'

But the other remained imperturbable.

'To I know not where,' he answered.

'Will he be gone long?'

'Oh, yah! He stay not long by here.'

'Could you tell me his name?'

'Nein, nein!' replied the caretaker; and Phileas could not tell whether he did not know the name or whether he refused to reveal it.

'Might I see the house?' the lawyer inquired next, perceiving that no further information was to be had through the medium of questions.

'It is not for de renting.'

'Are you sure of that?' Phileas asked quickly, and the old man was plainly puzzled. 'For if it be, I can very easily get you a tenant.'

He also slipped a bill into the German's toil-worn hand. The latter, after minutely examining the bill—which, as Phileas put it, was for any trouble he might have,—and attentively surveying the young man from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, agreed to show him the interior of the house.

'You stay by here once,' he said. 'I go for bring key.'

He shuffled off behind the leafy screen whence he had come, and Phileas was left for a moment more in the full enjoyment of the delightful scene in its absolute repose. Returning with the key, the caretaker led the way into the hall, and thence into the parlor and dining-room, where the cool, damp smell precluded the idea of very recent occupation. The latter apartment was plainly but tastefully furnished in chintz-covered furniture. A few choice engravings hung upon the wall; and on the mantelpiece a tiny Dresden clock had stopped at the hour of three,—a trifling circumstance that somehow fixed itself within the lawyer's consciousness.

From room to room went the oddly assorted pair;

for the German, conscientiously fulfilling the duties of his office, would not let Phileas out of his sight. The bedrooms upstairs were still more plainly furnished, after the manner of a seaside cottage; but there was not the smallest thing in any of them to suggest the character, tastes, or habits of their late occupants, unless an austere simplicity could be considered as a guide. The hall at the top of the first flight of stairs had evidently been used as a sitting-room, and had retained a more individual look than the rest of the dwelling. There stood a large lounging chair, with a sofa covered with a Persian rug; while in the recess of the window, commanding a fine view of the bay, was a writing table. Above this, upon the wall, was a screen upon which were illuminated the words: 'Here is the place of my repose.'

The young attorney paused there, his eyes wandering out of the window and over the water, with its ripples transformed into molten gold by the vivid sunshine. He tried to throw himself into the mind of the man who had lounged here or worked here, and had expressed in those few significant words the secret of the charm which this lovely spot must have held for him,—especially if he were one who was weary after many tribulations and the stress of a varied life. Surely it might well be the man of whom he was in search,—a search that had so far proved futile.

As Phileas thus pondered, he brought his eyes from the study of the landscape to a consideration of the objects immediately at hand; while the German waited with a curious, stolid patience. The lawyer's keen glance was caught by a folder which lay carelessly upon the writing table. As he took it up, he noted a trifling circumstance which made his heart beat fast with an eager, almost boyish elation. It was ever so slight a pencil mark at the name of a hotel in Boston. It might mean nothing or it might mean everything. That folder was a comparatively recent issue, and it had evidently been consulted by some one who had sat at that table and had considered the idea of travel. Phileas knew the hotel so indicated to be a modest and unpretentious one in a quiet neighborhood,—just such as he fancied might appeal to a man who was leaving 'the place of his repose' to avoid impertinent intrusion.

Phileas threw down the folder with studied carelessness (for it seemed that the German's eyes were upon him), but not before he had made a mental note of the street and the hotel. He also paid a cordial tribute of praise for the view which that window afforded; and the caretaker, who had begun to warm to his office of guide, presently grew rapturous over that prospect, and others which he declared could be seen from the different windows, and upon the situation of the house in general. He also let fall here and there a remark that permitted the lawyer some insight into the habits and character of the gentleman who had gone. The man's English became more confused as he advanced in his recital. Once launched, however, he never faltered for a moment in the pæan of praise he poured forth, the greater part of which was incomprehensible to his hearer.

Phileas would have given much to be assured that the various hints which the Teuton let drop did, indeed, apply to the man whom he sought, and not to some other old gentleman of eccentric habits, who had chosen to make his abode at times in this solitary place, and to keep his coming and going a secret. By the time he had concluded the tour of the house, he was quite convinced that it was hopeless to expect information from the stolid and uncommunicative guide, who even when warmed to admiration of the dwelling and its surroundings, never departed from his habitual reticence with regard to any vital matter.

As he turned to go downstairs, Phileas perceived an engraving. It represented the solitary figure of a man whose hair was whitened with the frosts of years, whose figure was bent, and whose attitude was one of intense dejection. Under it was written, in a small but eminently characteristic hand, a verse from a Greek poet that seemed to fit the theoretical personage whom he had been so busy in constructing. He remembered that Mrs. Wilson had casually mentioned John Vorst's