

THE HOUSE.

A NIGHTMARE.¹

Written at Anurahapura.

I MUST be ready for my friend to-night.

So, such pale flowers as winter bears bedeck
The old oak walls: the wood-fire's cheerful light
Flashes upon the fire-dogs silver-bright.

Wood? why, the jetsam of yon broken wreck
Where the white sea runs o'er the sandy neck

That joins my island to the land when tides

Run low. What curious fancies through my brain
Run, all so wild and all so pleasant! Glides
No phantom creeping from the under sides
Of the grey globe: no avatar of pain
Gathering a body from the wind and rain.

So the night fell, and gently grew the shades

In firelight fancies taking idle form;
Often a flashing May-day ring of maids,
Or like an army through resounding glades
Glittering, with martial music, trumpet, shawm,
Drum—so I build the echoes of the storm

Into a pageant of triumphant shapes.

So, as the night grows deeper, and no moon
Stirs the black heaven, no star its cloud escapes,
I sit and watch the fire: my musing drapes
My soul in darker dreams; the storm's wild tune
Rolls ever deeper in my shuddering swoon:

¹. This, with slight variations, was one of the regular dreams of Allen Bennett Macgregor, just as the "flying" dream, the "naked in church" dream, the "taken in adultery" dream, the "lost tooth" dream, the "being shaved" dream, and many others of specific type recur from time to time in the life of most people.—A.C.

Whereat I start, shudder, and pull together
My mind. Why, surely it must be the hour!
My friend is coming through the wet wild weather
Across the moor's inhospitable heather
To the old stately tower—my own dear tower.
He will not fail me for a sudden shower!

My friend! How often have I longed to see
Again his gallant figure and that face
Radiant—how long ago we parted!—we
The dearest friends that ever were! Ah me!
I curse even now that hateful parting-place.
But now—he comes! How glad I am! Apace

Fly the glad minutes—There he is at last!
I know the firm foot on the marble floor.
The hour-glass turns! What miseries to cast
For ever to the limbo of the past!
He knocks—my friend! O joy for ever-more!
He calls! “Open the door! Open the door!”

You guess how gladly to the door I rushed
And flung it wide. Why! no one's there! Arouse!
I am asleep. What horror came and crushed
My whole soul's life out as some shadow brushed
My body and passed it? All sense allows
At last the fearful truth—This is the house!

This is my old house on the marsh, and here,
Here is the terror of the distant sea
Moaning, and here the wind that wails, the drear
Groans like a ghost's, the desolate house of fear
Whence I fled once from my great enemy—
This is the house! O speechless misery!

Here the great silver candlesticks illumine
The aged book, the blackness blazoned o'er
With golden characters and scarlet bloom
Twined in the blue-tinged sigils wrought for doom,

And dreadful names of necromancer's lore
Written therein; so stood my room before

When the hissed whisper came, "Beware! Beware!
They're coming!" and "They're coming!" when
the wind

Bore the blank echoes of their stealthy care
To creep up silently and find me there,
Hid in the windowless old house, stark blind
For fear—and then—what horrors lurked behind

The door firm barred!—and thus they cried in vain:
"Open the door!" Then crouched I mad with fear
Till at the dawn their footsteps died again.
They can do nothing to me—that is plain—
While the door bars them! What is it runs clear
Truth in my mind? Once more they may be near?

And then came memory. Wide the portal stood
And—what had brushed me as it passed? What
froze

My dream to this awakening—fearful flood
Of horror loosed, loosing a sweat of blood,
An agony of terror on these brows?
God! God! Indeed, indeed this is the house!

The candles sputtered and went out. I stood
Fettered by fear, and heard the lonely wind
Lament across the marsh. A frenzied flood
Of hate and loathing swept across my mood,
And with a shudder I flung the door to. Mind
And body sank a huddled wreck behind.

Nought stirred. Draws hither the grim doom of Fate?

A long, long, while.

Now—in the central core
Of my own room what accent of keen hate,
Triumphant malice, mockery satiate,
Rings in the voice above the storm's wild roar?
It cries "Open the door! Open the door!"