Ineligible

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Simon Iff, the mystic, was the most delightfully unclubbable man in the Hemlock Club. But all was forgiven to a man of his powers — and of the extraordinary charm which he radiated, even when sitting silent in his favorite window. It was a genuine triumph for anyone to get him to talk. One Christmas evening after dinner, the editor of the "Emerald Tablet" informed him that the Committee had made a new rule to the effect that the eldest member of the Club who happened to be present must tell a story under penalty. It was a genial lie, and appealed to Simple Simon's sense of humor. "What sort of a story?" he grunted.

"Tell us of the first occasion on which you used your powers of reading men."

The mystic's face darkened. "It's poetic justice. You shall be well paid out for your impudence in inventing new rules. The story is hideous and horrible; the gleams of heroism that shine in it only serve to make the darkness more detestable. But you shall hear it: for one reason, because the result of my interference was to save this Club, and therefore the Universe (which revolves about it) from irreparable disaster.

I.

His Majesty's Sloop "Greyhound" was wrecked in the Bay of Biscay in the month of April, 1804, of the vulgar era. She was carrying dispatches to Sir Arthur Wellesley. Captain Fortescue, who was in charge of them, escaped the wreck, in company with a sergeant of

marines named Glass. They found themselves cast ashore on the north coast of Spain. Many days' journey lay between them and their destination. However, they fell in with friendly guerrillas, who aided them in every way. But the luck changed when they were within sight, almost, of their goal. A battle had taken place; and Masséna, retreating, had chosen a line which cut them off completely from Sir Arthur's positions. Becoming aware of these facts, they broke away at right angles towards some mountainous country, intending to traverse it, and, descending the opposite slopes, to fetch a compass round about the flank of the French army. Unluckily for them, they were perceived as they crossed the first range of hills, and a detachment of light infantry was sent in pursuit.

Immediately on seeing this, their Spanish guide took to his heels. They were thus not only hunted but lost. They knew the general direction of the British lines; they had about two hours' start; otherwise they were hopeless.

They gained the crest of the second range just as their pursuers, spread out in a long line, swarmed over the first; but in beginning their descent, which was excessively steep, with only a narrow mule-path among the enormous tangle of rocks, they came upon a cottage; and the path ended. Fortescue recognized the place, for the guide had spoken of it on the previous day; it was the home of a desperate brigand, a heavy price upon his head from French and English alike. They had no choice, however, but to go on. Chance favored them; the brigand was away, leaving but one drowsy sentinel. Fortescue ran the man through with his sword before he had time to seize his gun.

The two Englishmen found themselves alone in the cottage. Could it be defended? Possibly, but only for an hour or two; reinforcements would arrive in case of a prolonged resistance. The vital question was to find the way to the valley.

The cottage was perched upon the edge of a cliff; they could see the path winding away below. But access to it seemed to be cut off. Glass it was who reasoned out the situation. There must be a way through some cellar. Quickly he searched the cottage. A trap-door was found. Glass descended the ladder. All was well. He found himself in a large room, half filled with barrels of gunpowder. A narrow door gave exit to the path below. "Come on!" cried Fortescue.

"We shall be caught, sir," answered Glass. "Let me stay here; I can delay them long enough to let you get away." The officer saw the good sense of this; his first duty was to deliver the dispatches. He wrung Glass by the hand, and ran out.

The sergeant of marines knew that he had barely an hour; but he had a plan in his mind. His first action was to twist a long match from the gunpowder to that window of the cottage which looked over the cliff; his next to strip himself and the dead sentinel of uniform, and to dress the corpse in his own. He then found a piece of rope and hanged the body in the doorway.

He dressed himself in the brigand's best clothes; but, not content with masculine adornment, he covered himself with the all-sufficing mantilla. He was a smooth-faced good-looking boy; with the shawl, he made a quite passable Spanish girl — to the waist.

He then took up his position at the window by the door, so that the lower part of his body was hidden, and awaited the pursuers. It was near twilight when they arrived. Their leader grasped what he thought to be the situation. "Where is the other?" he cried. Glass smiled divinely. Unluckily for him, he knew only a few words of any tongue but English. But a finger to his lips, and the sign of beckoning, reassured the others; they filed down the path, and crowded into the cottage. "Where's the girl?" cried the leader, "are we in a trap? Look to your arms, men!" Before he had ended, Glass, who had run upstairs to the other room, had touched fire to the match.

“Let Samson perish with the Philistines!” he roared, and at the same moment leaped from the window.

The cottage sprang into the air, killing every man in it; Glass lay fifty feet below upon a thorn-bush, with one arm broken and many bruises, but good for many another day’s adventure. A day later he had scrambled to the valley, where a shepherd showed him kindness, and led him by a circuitous route to the British lines.

Here he found himself a hero; for Fortescue had seen the explosion, and given all due credit to his companion. But the sergeant’s arm went ill; for default of treatment, it had begun to mortify; the same night the surgeon removed it at the shoulder.

Sir Arthur Wellesley himself came to the hospital to salute the gallant lad. “Be glad it is the left arm;” he said brusquely: “Nelson lost his right. And for you, we’ll salve you with a commission as lieutenant in the regular army.” Glass was overjoyed; the loss of his arm seemed little, if he could have a sword at his side, epaulets on his shoulder, and the rank of an officer and a gentleman thenceforward.

II.

Lieutenant Glass, obtaining six months leave, at the end of the campaign of 1805, returned to his ancestral croft on the northwest side of Loch Ness to find that both his father and mother were dead. A friend in Inverness had warned him as he passed through; but piety made him persist in his journey; he might as well spend his leave there as elsewhere.

It was a stone cottage of two rooms, set high above the loch upon the moor. Away westward stretched the desolate slopes of Meallfavournie; below, the gloomy waters of the loch growled with the cold anger of the Highland winter.

There was no other habitation for a couple of miles. Around the croft was a niggard space of cultivated land,

yielding with bitter toil a few oats and a few potatoes; nothing more.

The laird, Grant of Glenmoriston, had sent a man to take possession of the croft, pending instructions from Glass. He was a sturdy lad of sixteen years, self-reliant and secretive; he had kept the cottage in excellent order, and tilled the soil as well as may be in that inhospitable country. Glass kept him on as permanent gardener and servant; but he was rather an accentuation than an alleviation of the loneliness. However, on the first Sunday, when the lieutenant walked down to Strath Errick to church, he found himself the apple of the congregational eye. Even Chisholm, the minister, a dour narrow Calvinist of the oldest school, was moved to make a complimentary reference in his sermon; and, after kirk was over, carried away the officer in triumph to the manse, there to share the miserable substitute for a meal which is all that any Scot dare eat on Sunday, in apprehension of the Divine displeasure.

Chisholm was a widower. He had one daughter, skinny and frosty, with a straight back, thin lips, a peaked nose, bad teeth, and greedy eyes. But her flat chest almost burst as the idea came to her, as it did in a flash, to become Mrs. Lieutenant Glass. It was a way out of her horrible environment; despite the lost arm, he was a fine figure of a man; he was a hero, had been mentioned twice in despatches since he had gained his commission; he would get his company very soon. Promotion was quick in those days. Captain, major, colonel — possibly even General Glass! She saw Strath Errick left far north; instead, presentation at Court, social advancement of every kind; possibly a stately visit or so later on, and a snubbing of the local gentry who had always looked down upon the minister's daughter. She soon discovered that she had four clear months to catch her fish; poor and plain as she was, she had no rivals in the district; Glass, the crofter's son, for all his epaulets, had no more chance to marry into the local

aristocracy than she had. She went to work with infinite thoroughness and persistence; she enlisted her father's aid; she laid siege to Glass in every known form.

The lieutenant, for his part, knew that he might do much better. The salons of London were full of better matches; and his peasant ancestry would not be known there. All Highlanders of rank were "gentry" to the average London mother. But the same instinct that led him to live in the deserted croft made him now hesitate to transplant himself to London; the soil gripped him; he soon determined to throw out a new anchor in the granite; and in March, 1807, he was married to Ada Chisholm in the kirk of Strath Errick. A month later he rejoined his regiment; he had taken his wife to Edinburgh for the honeymoon, and she left him at Leith to return to her father's house, while he set sail for the new campaign in Europe.

He gained his captaincy the same year; two years more elapsed before he saw his wife again. In the summer of 1809 he again distinguished himself in the field, and obtained his majority. A severe wound left him in hospital for three months; and on recovery he asked, and was granted, six months' sick leave.

His wife was enthusiastic; she had traveled all the way to London to meet him; and he arranged to have her presented at Court. Her head was completely turned by its splendor; and she resolutely opposed the spending of the six months in Scotland. They went accordingly to Bath instead, and she revelled in the social glories of the place.

Glass was not at all in love with his wife; and she had no more sex than one of the oatmeal scones; but he was an extraordinarily simple soul, with rigid ideas of honesty. He had accordingly been faithful to her in his absence, while she would no more have thought of deceiving him than of eating grass.

They left Bath in December, 1809. They had been extravagant; and, nolens volens, she was obliged to go

back to her father's manse to live. Probably her husband would get his regiment in a year or so; the war might be over too, by then; and they could live pleasantly enough in London, or a jolly garrison town, for the rest of their lives.

In June, 1810, Glass had a letter from his wife, apprising him of the birth of a son. She proposed to call him Joshua, as his father was so great a captain.

The arrival of Joshua changed Glass as completely as a drug habit or an access of insanity. He knew that he would have to wait a long time for his colonelcy. Short of capturing Napoleon single-handed, he had no chance in the world. His quick rise from the ranks had made him hated by snobbish and incompetent fellow-officers; and the extreme modesty of his manner was no protection. They hated him, as birth without worth always hates worth without birth. Even Wellington — who had never lost sight of him — could not do every thing against so bitter an opposition. His fellow-officers had even laid trap after trap for him, and it had needed all his Scottish caution to avoid them.

These reflections settled him in one momentous decision. He must save ten thousand pounds. Joshua must go to Eton, and start on fair terms, if human determination could secure it. He consequently, from an open-handed, free and easy man, became a miser. Instead of increasing his wife's allowance, he cut it down. And he sent every penny he could save from his pay to a friendly banker in Edinburgh, who promised to double it in five years. I may tell you at once, lest you start the wrong hare, that he kept his word.

III.

That is not such a horrible story, so far, is it? And there seem few elements of tragedy. Well, we go on.

After the banishment of Napoleon to Elba, Major Glass rejoined his wife. This time there was no trip to

Bath. The cottage was furnished with just the extra things needed for Joshua; Glass himself helped to till his own land, and market the produce.

Ada resented this bitterly; there was no open quarrel, but she hid poison in her heart. "I have six thousand pounds in bank," he had said, "but there's no hope of a regiment now the war's over; let us play safe a year or two until we have ten thousand; then we can live where we like, as gentlefolk, and make a greater career for the boy." She saw the prudence of the plan, and could not argue against it; but she really hungered for social pleasures, as only those do who are not born with the right to them.

The boy himself gave no concern on the score of health; he was hardy as a Highland lad should be; but his disposition troubled his father. He was silent and morose, was very long in learning to speak, and he seemed lacking in affection. He would lie or sit, and watch his parents, in preference to playing. When he did play, he did not do so simply and aimlessly, as most children do. Even when he broke his toys, he neither cried nor laughed; he sat and watched them.

Major Glass went back to his regiment at the end of 1814; his wife once again took shelter with her father. But a month later the minister fell ill; in March he died. Another minister occupied the manse; and there was nothing for Mrs. Glass but to go back to the croft on the moor. The boy still worked on the little apology for a farm; and his sister came to help tend Joshua, and assist in the housework.

In 1815 Major Glass was present at the decisive battles in Belgium. And here befell the fate that transformed this simple career into the tragedy of horror which you have insisted that I should relate to you. The major was in command of the last party that held the shot-swept walls of Hougomont; and he rallied his men for their successful stand against Napoleon's final and desperate effort to regain that critical point. The British

were flooded at one spot; Glass, with a handful of reserves, led a rally, and broke the head of the French dagger-thrust. And then it was that a sabre-stroke beat down his guard; a second blow severed his sword-arm. He was carried hastily to the ruins of the farm, and his wound bandaged; but Napoleon, seeing his troops flung back, ordered another artillery attack; and a cannon-ball, breaking a rafter of the building, brought down the remains of the roof. A heavy beam fell across the Major's legs, and crushed them.

Such, however, was the prime soundness of his constitution that he did not die. It was a helpless, but perfectly healthy, torso which was carried some months later into the little croft above Loch Ness. His wife recoiled in horror — natural horror, no doubt. It was only when he told her that the surgeon said that he might live fifty years that she realized what infinite disaster had befallen her. All her schemes of life had gone to wreck; she was tied to that living corpse, in that wretched cottage, probably for the rest of her life. "Half-pay," she thought; "how long will it take now to make up the ten thousand pounds?"

IV.

If Ada Glass had been a woman of intelligence, either good or evil, she would have found some quick solution. But her thoughts were slow and dull; and she was blinded by the senseless hate in her heart. Her days had been infinitely dull, ever since her father's death; now, in that emptiness, a monster slowly grew. And her husband understood her before she did herself. One day he found it in his mind that she might murder him; she had dismissed the girl who had helped her, saying that now they must save money more carefully than ever. His quick wit devised a protection for himself. Calling the boy Andrew, now a stout fellow of twenty-six years old, he sent him into Inverness for a lawyer.

With this man he had a long private interview, during which several papers and memoranda were selected by the lawyer from the Major's portfolio, in accordance with his instructions.

That evening the lawyer returned to the croft with the new minister of Strath Errick, thus disposing of the difficulty caused by the inability of the soldier to sign papers.

Later that night, Mrs. Glass having returned from Glenmoriston, where she had been sent so as to have her out of the way, the major told her what he had done.

I have placed my money, he explained, in the hands of two excellent trustees. If I should die before Joshua comes of age, the whole will be left to accumulate at the bank, and you must live upon the pension you will receive as my widow. The capital will then be transferred to him at his majority, under certain restrictions. But if I live, I shall be able to bring the boy up under my own eye, and therefore as soon as the capital amounts to ten thousand pounds, we shall not only be able to educate him properly, but to bring him, while yet a child, into those social connections which seem desirable.

Once again the wife could raise no protest; but once again her heart sank within her.

Yet, as the days went by, the hate devoured her vitals, began to eat her up like some foul cancer. She began at last, deliberately, to pass from thought to action, to make her husband's life, hideous at the best, into a most exquisite hell.

You are perhaps aware that our greatest misery is impotence to act freely. Deprivation of a sense or a limb is wretched principally because of the limit it sets to our activities. This, more than anything else, is at the root of our dread of blindness or paralysis. You remember Guy de Maupassant's story of the blind man on whom his family played malicious tricks? It seems peculiarly cruel to us because of the victim's helplessness. Now, of

all the savages upon the earth, there are none more ferocious or more diabolical than the Highlanders of Scotland. Dr. Frazer gives many instances of incredibly vile superstitions, in vogue even at this hour as we sit in the enlightened Hemlock Club. "Scratch the Russian and you find the Tartar?" well, scratch the Scotchman, and you have a being who can give points and a beating to the Chinese or the Red Indian. The sex-instinct is especially powerful in the Celt; where it is nobly developed, we find genius, as among the Irish; but where it is thwarted by a religion like Calvinism, it nearly always turns to madness or to cruelty — which is a form of madness.

To return to the point, Ada Glass set her wits to work. The hideous loneliness of the Highlands in the eye of all those who have not the true soul of the artist is a true antecedent condition to morbid imagination; and Ada Glass and her sexlessness the pendant to it.

She began operations by neglect. She postponed attention when he called for her; and she became careless in the preparation of his meals. He saw the intention, and agonized mentally for weeks. Ultimately he resolved to kill himself in the only way possible, by refusing food. She retorted by the tortures of Tantalus, setting spiced and savory foods under his nose, so that he was physically unable to resist — after a while. The fiendishness of this was heightened by its manner; the whole plan was carried out with inconceivable hypocrisy on both sides. She would use such words of love and tenderness as had never occurred to her on the honeymoon.

Such courses are set upon a steepening slope of damnation. Soon ideas incredibly abominable came into her mind, perhaps suggested by the tortures of hunger and thirst to which she submitted him. For she varied her pleasure by offering him sweet smelling foods that on tasting were found to be seasoned with salt and pepper, so that only extreme hunger would make a man eat of them. Then she would excite his thirst by such

hot dishes, and put salt in the water which he demanded to assuage it. But always she would apologize and blame herself, and weep over him, and beg forgiveness. And he would pretend to be deceived, and grant his pardon. And then she would speak of love, and —— but no! gentlemen, I must leave you to dot the i's and cross the t's in the story.

Presently — after months of this miserable comedy — she took it into her head to excite his jealousy. (I want you to remember all the time, by the way, that these people were absolutely alone, with no distraction whatever, save the rare and formal visits of the minister. And Glass was far too proud and brave to speak of what was going on.) She began to set her cap at the gardener. As I said, she had no more feeling than a saucepan; it was all bred out of her by Calvinism; but she knew how to act. She knew her husband's own stern view of marriage; she thought she would break his spirit by infraction of her vows. For that is what it had come to, though she probably did not realize it; she wanted to see the hero of a dozen campaigns snivel and whine and whimper like a cur. Many women indulge a similar ambition.

So she set herself to snare the gardener. It was an easy task. He was a rough, rude laborer, a vigorous, healthy animal. And she wooed him as she had seen the fine ladies of Bath do with their cavaliers. Once his first shyness was overcome, he became her slave; and from that moment she began to play her next abominable comedy. Her husband must suspect for a long while before he knew for certain. And so she laid her plans. She watched the fleeting thoughts upon his face hour by hour. Soon she imbued her lover with hatred of his master; and she persuaded him one day to kiss her in the room where the Major lay on his pallet of straw. She had long since deprived him of a bed, urging the trouble of making it up. The spasm of pain upon his face, the violent words that he addressed to her, these were her greatest triumph so far. She went on with her

plan; she went to the utmost extremity of shamelessness; the gardener, with no sensibility, thought it merely a good joke, in the style of Boccacio. For weeks this continued, always with increasing success; then Glass suddenly made up his mind to bear it — or something in his heart broke. At least it became evident that he was no longer suffering. Her refinement imagined a new device, a thing so abominable that it almost shames manhood even to speak of it. She resolved to corrupt the child. Joshua was now old enough to understand what was said to him; and she privately coached him in hate and loathing for his father. Also, she taught him the pleasures of physical cruelty. (I told you this was a hideous story.)

Major Glass, deprived of all exercise, had become terribly obese. He was a frightful object to look upon; a vast dome of belly, a shrunk chest, a bloated and agonized face. Four stumps only accentuated the repulsion. It was only too easy to persuade the child to play infamous tricks. By this time she had thrown off the mask of her hypocrisy; she taunted him openly, and jeered; she spat out rivers of hate at him; and she let him know that she no longer wished the society of Bath, that she was glad that he might live half a century; for never until now had she known pleasure. And she incited the boy to stick long pins into the helpless log. "You're not even like a pig any more," she laughed one night, "you're like a pincushion!" And Joshua, with an evil laugh, walked up upon that word, and thrust three pins into the tense abdomen. He ran to his mother gleefully, and imitated the involuntary writhings of the sufferer.

This game recommenced every night. The intervals were but anticipations of some further abomination. He had long prayed audibly for death; now he began to beg her for some means of it. She laughed at him contemptuously. "If you hadn't settled the money as you did, I might have thought of it. After all, I ought to marry again."

He answered her in an unexpected vein. "I'll make it easy for you. One night, when snow threatens, take Joshua down to a neighbor's. Pretend you are ill, and stay the night. Leave the door open when you go; I think a chill would kill me. And I want to die so much!" She gloated over the weakness of his spirit. "If you'll swear on the Bible to do that," he went on, "I'll tell you the great secret." Instantly she became attentive; she divined something of importance. "When I was in Spain," continued Glass, "I was quartered in a certain castle belonging to one of the grandees. He was an old man, paralysed, as helpless as I am today. His lady, at the first of the invasion, had buried the family treasure in a secret place. There are diamonds there, and pieces of eight, and many golden ornaments. They told me this one night under the following strange circumstances ——" he broke off. "Give me water! I'm faint, of a sudden." She brought it to him. Presently he continued in a firmer voice. "One day we were attacked by a body of French troops — a reconnaissance in force. The castle was surrounded. I and the few men with me, our retreat cut off, prepared to defend ourselves, and our host and hostess, to the last. We were driven from floor to floor. But one of my men, sore wounded, lying below, determined on a desperate resource. He managed to crawl to the cellar, where great quantities of wood were stored; and he set it on fire. The French, alarmed, beat a hasty retreat from the precincts; I and my few remaining men pursued them to the gates. The fight would doubtless have been renewed, but at that moment the plumes of our dragoons appeared in the distance. The French sprang to their horses and were off. I returned hastily to the castle, and we succeeded in extinguishing the fire. I bore the lady in my own arms into the fresh air, through all the smoke; two of my men rescued the old count. That afternoon they had a long conference together, and in the evening said that they had decided to tell me of the treasure.

"In case misfortune should happen to them both, I was to pledge myself to convey the paper, which they then entrusted to me, to their only son, who was fighting in our army. I readily agreed. A few nights later the devil tempted me; I opened the paper. It was a mass of meaningless figures, a cipher; but I had the key. I worked it out; I went to the place indicated; there lay the treasure. But my heart smote me; not mine be a fouler than the sin of Achan! I replaced the earth. I returned, and prayed all night for a clean heart.

"Shortly afterwards I changed my quarters; we were retreating. On our next advance I returned to pay a visit to my kind hosts. Alas! They had been murdered by a band of guerillas. As duty bade, I sought the son; but again I was too late; he had fallen in battle on the third day of our advance.

"I have kept the secret locked in my breast; I would not touch the treasure, though it was now as much mine as anybody's, because I had been tempted. But now I see necessity itself command me; I am no longer man enough to endure the torture which I suffer ——" Here his voice broke. "I will give you the key if you will do as I say; and when I am dead you are free to go and find it."

Ada Glass made her mind up in a moment. She was eager. After all, there were other pleasures in the world than — what she had been enjoying.

"Take the Bible," said Glass, "and swear!" She did so without a tremor. It was an oath to commit murder; but the Scots mind does not halt in such a case.

"Good," said the Major. "Now look in the uniform case; you'll find the cipher sewn into my tunic; it's in the lining of the left sleeve." His wife obediently unpicked the stuff. A small map, with a row of hieroglyphic figures, was in her hand. "Now tell me the key!" Glass began to breathe with difficulty; he spoke in a faint voice. "Water!" he whispered. She brought him a full glass, and he drank it, and sighed happily. "The key's a

word," he said. "What? I can't hear you." She came over close to him. "The key's a word. It's in the Bible. I'll remember it if you'll read the passage. I marked it in the book. It's somewhere in Judges." He was evidently speaking with the greatest possible effort; and even so, she could hardly hear him. She brought the Bible across to him, but it was too dark to read; so she fetched the lamp and set it upon the floor at his side. "About Chapter Eight: I can't remember." "Chapter which?" "I think it's eight." "Eight?" "Yes." It was the faintest murmur. He had been like that for some days; now it alarmed her; might he die without revealing the secret? She fetched some whiskey, and gave it to him to drink.

"Oh, is it this," she said, "about Samson in the mill? It's marked in red." "Yes," he said, still very faintly, "read from there." She sat down by his head, and began to read. After each verse she questioned him; he signed to her to go on. Presently she came to the verse "And Samson said 'Let me perish with the Philistines'." "It's there," he said. "It's ——" his voice died away to nothing. "You're not ill, are you?" she cried in alarm. "I'm going to die," he gasped out, word by word. "Tell me the word!" she screamed, "for God's sake, man, don't die first!" "It's ——" Again the voice died away. "Do, do try!" she said, putting her ear over his mouth. Instantly, with utter swiftness, his iron jaw closed like a vice upon her ear. She pulled away, screaming, but she might as well have tried to dislodge a bulldog. Indeed, she helped him to roll over toward the lamp. A jerk of one stump, and the oil flamed among the straw of the pallet.

The dying shrieks of his mother woke Joshua. He jumped out of bed, came into the room, saw the two bodies writhing in the flames. He clapped his hands gleefully, and ran out into the snow.

"I admit it's a pretty ghastly story," cried Jack Flynn, who had evoked it; "but I don't see what in heaven's name it has to with you, and saving the Hemlock Club!"

"Because, my young friend, as usual, you have not condescended to wait for the end of it. The events that I have been at the pains to recount occurred during the usurpation of George the Third, so-called." (It was the club custom always to speak of the Georges as usurpers.) "My part begins in the year 1850 of the vulgar era."

In February of that year an anonymous book entitled "A Jealous God," was published through a well-known firm — I forget the name for the moment. The book made a great stir in religious circles. The author, evidently an authority on theology, had taken the teachings of Victorian Science as a commentary, and his work was principally intended to complete the ruin of Deism. The author insisted upon the cruelty and imbecility of nature; pointed out that all attempts to absolve the Creator from the responsibility must culminate in Manichaeism or some other form of Dualism; and proceeded to interpret the wisdom of the Deity as His ability to trick His creatures, His power as His capacity to break and torture them, and His glory as witnessed chiefly by the anguish and terror of His victims. I need hardly say, that the author, although anonymous, professed himself a member of the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren.

He was proposed for this club, as a prominent and deserving heretic of great originality; and I was the youngest member of the committee appointed to inquire into the matter. I took an instinctive dislike to the unknown author; I opposed the election with my ability. I proved that the book was perfectly orthodox, being but an expansion of John III:16. I pointed out that Charles Haddon Spurgeon had endorsed the principal teachings of the book; that evangelical clergymen all over England were doing the same thing, with only negligible modifications; but I was overruled.

We then proceeded to inquire into the authorship of the book; we discovered that his name was Joshua Glass."

A thrill of terrible emotion passed through the old man's hearers. "I refused to withdraw my opposition. I investigated; and I discovered the facts which tonight I have set forth before you."

"But there's nothing in the rules against that sort of thing!" interrupted one of the men.

"You will not let me finish!"

"I beg your pardon."

"I studied the facts with intense care; I tried to trace to their true source the phenomena displayed by all parties. Ultimately I came to a conclusion. I began to believe that in this case a physical correspondence with the mental and moral state exhibited might exist…."

"And so?" interrupted Jack Flynn, excitedly, a gleam in his eye. "I insisted upon a physical examination. I found a malformation so curious and monstrous that, despite his human parentage, it was impossible to admit him any title to membership of our race."

There was a long silence of complete astonishment. The old magician opened his case, drew out a long cigar, and lighted it. "Anyone coming my way?" he asked, rising.

"I'm coming, if I may, sir," said Flynn, sprightly. "I want to talk mysticism for an hour, to get the taste out of my mouth."