

harm, and will doubtless interest you; so if you wish it I will try to relate my history."

We all with one voice urged him to proceed, and after a moment's hesitation he said:

"I am not, as you might suppose, suffering the pangs of a guilty conscience, but the fearful oppression of a cruel and relentless fate. In the first place, I am not an American, as you may already have suspected; on the contrary, I was born in the south of France. My father was a banker, of Jewish extraction, and my mother was the daughter of an English consul. Grandfather returned to England, and my mother was then left without a single relative in the country. My father, though generally of an agreeable disposition, unfortunately for us all proved to be a man of strange temper. Many years passed ere his peculiarities began to exhibit themselves. If my mother discovered them before she was successful in disguising her knowledge of them, though it is probable that they were for the most part latent till the tide of fortune turned against him, and he suddenly beheld his wealth slipping surely and rapidly from his possession. He had resort to alcohol to buoy up his spirits and brace his nervous system. But this soon had no effect, and he sought a more powerful and deadly stimulant. He began to drink absinthe. Each day he took larger and more frequent doses, until his nerves were completely shattered by the seductive and extraordinary liquor. From opulence we sank to the very threshold of poverty. Happily we succeeded in saving our home from the general wreck, and we were not turned into the street, as seemed so probable at one time. I was by this time old enough to turn myself to account, and with the remainder of the family—four brothers all older than myself—succeeded in earning enough to supply our daily needs. I fortunately secured a place as assistant in the post office; two of my brothers already had employment in a bank, another had just finished a course in pharmacy and compounded prescriptions at an apothecary's, while the oldest was private clerk to a wealthy wine merchant. We might have obtained money by selling some of our furniture, much of which was of curious workmanship and great antiquity, but nothing short of actual starvation would have induced us to part with it. Among other rare articles we possessed a complicated and elaborately constructed musical clock. The devil himself must have designed the infernal thing. It had been made specially for one of my father's remote ancestors, a vicious and cruel old duke, by a celebrated clockmaker of that period, who was said to be also an alchemist and magician of extraordinary power. He must have been Satan himself. It was always supposed that this man had invested the clock with strange powers and properties, but we had never up to the beginning of our misfortunes remarked in it anything out of the ordinary. There were vague traditions that had been handed down with it from generation to generation. Chief among them was one that hinted that the time-stained dial had looked down on several deeds of darkness. These in some mysterious way it possessed the power of recording, and if one held

the secret he might have them pictured before him; in fact, he could bring up in a sort of panorama all that had ever passed at any time in front of the dial. We did not believe any of these things; if we had we might have rid ourselves of the diabolical machine and our family history might have run differently. But the mysteries of the future are sealed to us, and we continued to regard the old clock with that reverence and affection which one always has for things of that sort that have been handed down from father to son for many generations. The clock was an exceptionally large one—so large, indeed, that a person of average height could easily enter the case and close himself in behind the massive carved door. Once, when a lad of goodly size, I happened to be left alone in my father's bedroom where the clock always stood, and I was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable desire to enter the case in search of the secret springs which I imagined must exist there. I boldly opened the door, and had almost closed myself in, when I felt a dreadful pricking sensation all over my body. This pricking sensation grew each moment more intense, and I was oppressed by a feeling of faintness and heat. I was also horrified to discover that the ticking had stopped. Much frightened, I hastened to get out, and the instant I did so the pricking sensation disappeared and the pendulum resumed its monotonous swing. My brain reeled and I was glad to make my escape from the room. I never dared to repeat the experiment. I knew if I were discovered tampering with the clock my father would be very angry, and his anger was a thing to be dreaded, as the caravan dreads the simoon.

"My father at length began to have occasional attacks of a peculiar and violent delirium, and during these attacks he was extremely unmanageable, though he showed no inclination to do any one bodily harm. Sometimes, however, he injured himself more or less, and we considered the feasibility of placing him under some sort of constant surveillance, but my mother thought it best to permit him, at least for a time longer, his full liberty. One morning, however, he was discovered insensible in his bed, and my mother was nowhere to be found. A window which opened into the garden bordering the river was ajar; clothing, jewels and articles of furniture were strewn about the apartment in wild confusion. On my father's brow was a frightful gash which had bled profusely, dyeing the bed and carpets crimson. There had evidently been a commotion and a struggle; but as all the walls of the old house were exceptionally thick, not a soul had heard a sound. So soon as my father's insensible form could be removed to another room a search was instituted for my mother. All the closets and every place where she could possibly have been concealed were carefully examined, but with no success. We were about to conclude that she had been carried off by brigands, when I happened to notice that the old clock had stopped, and remembering my old experience with it I rushed to it and tore open the locked door. There before me, insensible and apparently lifeless, lay the form of my poor mother. We tenderly took her out, but all