

And the bees in the innermost foliage  
 Make a pleasant dreamy sound ;  
 In the heart of every blossom  
 They have stores of richness found,  
 And they fly but slowly homeward  
 With their fruit of labor crowned.

So, amid thy leaves, O Willow !  
 Does Memory's music ring ;  
 And under thy drooping branches  
 I feel once more Life's spring,  
 And dreams of the Past to my spirit  
 Their fragrant treasures bring.

## The Symbol of Darkness.

A TALE OF AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY.

TO PREVENT misconceptions with regard to the characters which figure in the following chapters, the reader is informed that the 'Unknown Quantity,' who is mentioned last in the title, is, in fact, the hero of our tale. The 'Symbol of Darkness,' who has the post of honor, is, on the other hand, a total scamp ; a moral lunatic, not subject to lucid intervals ; but atrocious in his inclinations, destitute of virtuous impulses, and not identified with any of the great humanitarian movements of the age. Euphony required us to station him at the head of the page.

I.

ON the other side of a certain ocean which escaped the notice of the illustrious navigator of Bagdad, who is supposed to have seen about as much as most people, lie the Regions of Darkness. At a great distance within these regions is the empire of the Grand Quadratic : an empire conquered *from* darkness, and to this day surrounded *by* darkness like a wall. Many thousand years ago, a few grand old seers, within whom the spirit of prophecy swelled mightily, went forth into the thick night, and laid the foundations of that empire, which is now grander than the domain of Nebuchadnezzar, Lord of Asia. Accursed is he among the children of men who refuses to do honor to these awful ghosts, as they sit crowned among the primitive generations, gigantic in the mists ! Wizards of Arabia, Hierarchs of Memphis, Magicians of Nineveh, brown Brahmins from the Ganges and Sublime Idumæan Astronomers—fathers of the Multiplication Table—to whom were revealed the rudiments of geometry while Nimrod's hunting horns were yet sounding through the jungles. The resources and general statistics of the realm under consideration are not set down in any of the Encyclopedias ; but in a loose way we may say, that there are oceans therein of unbounded extent ; mountains which roll off in huge waves till they

disappear in the outer blackness; caverns, sunk to the bottomless chasm, and mines which wander among the primary formations. Rail-roads branching off towards infinity, offer great conveniences to tramping philosophers and amateurs of a metaphysical turn, and balloon communication is kept up with those dim regions, where certain mathematicians lie in a kind of opium-dream, and sail around in whirlpools, century after century, wrapped in a gorgeous delirium.

The habitation of the Grand Quadratic is situated upon a mountain, which sinks to the sea on one side and to the plain on the other, by a series of precipices; and can be approached only by an avenue ascending with a regular grade from the lower country, over a kind of dike or embankment, which was thrown up by some subterranean contractor. The work, like most of the improvements done in the Pre-Adamite excitement, was very rough, for granite, trap, sandstone and ore were tossed up in a style rather startling to latter-day engineers. There were tunnels and fissures left, which could lodge all the cathedrals of Flanders; but these cracks are bridged with iron in a very substantial manner. The imperial building is a perfect Babylon of cubes, cylinders, pyramids and prisms, piled together with inconceivable grandeur, and is the achievement of antediluvian architects, who learned their craft of the passionate 'Sons of God,' before the human mind had shrunk to its present dimensions. There you may see it like a capitol among the clouds, sometimes buried under white vapors; then as the wind clears these away in slow immeasurable rifts, the massive centre with its surmounting pyramid, the spreading wings with their fantastic halls and galleries, the obelisks, the battle-towers, and all the strange architecture rise wonderfully into the blue sky. But when the setting sun has dropped behind it, and light streams from his full disc between the deep ranks of cylinders and prisms; and when the numberless cones and bastions, trapezoids and conchoids, spirals, bulbs and fringes, are all flooded with crimson; when the four enormous globes, the twenty hemispheres and the hundred golden orbs seem now to flame up, then to waver like masses about to melt; and when, towering above all, like Cotapaxi above the mountains, the great central pyramid is but one red block, the likeness of fire, then you might know the grandeur of the sublime potentate who ruled in that temple, the power of his empire, and the exceeding glory thereof.

## II.

BENEATH the great pyramid, upon a gorgeous throne cast in the furnaces of Tubal-Cain, sat the Grand Quadratic, surrounded by the Dukes, Marshals, Tetrarchs and Captains of the realm. The majesty of an hundred kings clothed him as a garment. The Lord High Coefficient, stood at his right hand, the First Fluxion of the Empire at his left, both in magnificent apparel, and holding certain singular emblems appertaining to the crown. Twelve ancient Mathematicians who assisted at the establishment of the Rule of Three, occupied high places of honor, and when they thought of things past, time present, and foresaw dimly increasing glories throughout ages to come,

their gray eyes glimmered within their heads like distant stars. A vast mob of principalities and powers owing allegiance to the Potentate Paramount, was congregated on the floor of the hall. There were the warlike Symbols, who had borne the royal flag through many perilous campaigns; tall people of fight, lordly with plumes and armor. There were the mysterious Surds, the princely Polynomials, and the uneasy Radicals, who were suspected of Red Republicanism: also all signs and expressions, homogeneous or heterogeneous, all tribes, all clans which hold estates, honors, dignities and franchises from the throne. The doors of the hall were open; a four-decker with the admiral of Britain could have sailed through. Behind, you looked down upon the ocean, but on the wide area in front, the standing army of the empire, the innumerable Logarithms, were drawn up in solid columns even to the edge of the precipices. Their venerable Radix, a weather-beaten, invulnerable, unterrified old hero, sat like cast-iron, in a conspicuous chariot above all the hosts. The heavy field and battering formulæ, were planted in battery at intervals among the deep masses, and the Sines and Cotangents spread in clouds on the flank; their squadrons seeming like the locusts for multitude.

The Grand Quadratic arose, colossal of stature and magnificent as Olympian Jove, the crowds stood in silent awe, while the monarch proceeded as follows: 'Symbols, Powers, Magnitudes and Surds, Tetrarchs of our realm and valiant captains, Polynomials, Roots, Cubes and ancient Signs, and all ye tribes and tongues, and clans uncounted; now is our royal banner all inflamed with fiery glories and terrific lightnings. Now have our chariot wheels come rumbling back across yon iron bridge victorious; and those grim powers of night, which thought to stop our jarring cannon and our clanking cars, our wedged brigades and drag-formed cavalry, all chopped and shot, whittled and punched with holes, roll groaning in the dusky pits of night, and grind their bloody tusks with misery!' Our limits do not permit us to report the rest of this flourishing speech, but we have the assurance of the government organ, that it was characterized by 'maturity of thought, profoundness of insight and well-balanced views on subjects connected with our foreign policy; in all respects creditable to the head and heart of the illustrious orator.'

### III.

Among the Unknown Quantities assembled at Court, there was none of more brilliant promise than the hero of our tale. Young  $x$  was descended from a family of Symbols, which abstractly considered as the representatives of a mathematical truth, could have had no beginning: but without venturing on such dangerous metaphysics as speculations on this point would lead to, it is sufficient to know that our hero's ancestors had been people of consideration ever since the discovery of algebra; ever since the light of reason pierced the obscur-ing fog banks and touched the cliffs of that continent where the disciples of science will forever wander as in a paradise. His grandfather had been raised to the sixth power and enjoyed the confidence

of his sovereign in an especial degree. His father was for a long time in command of a Fundamental Equation, one of those castles of absolute Truth, bolted to the indestructible rock, and which if it fell, would leave bare the very vitals of the empire. The arch-enemy of Mathematics indeed once bribed an Earthquake to burrow under this fortress, but at the first lift the creature broke his back. Young  $x$ , being of very fair proportions, held a commission in the Cosines of the Guard, and had seen some service. He was employed in the intricate and masterly operations of the astronomer royal in the neighborhood of Sirius, and behaved with distinction in the brilliant flank movement on the Zodiac. In the disastrous reconnoissance of the astrological corps in the furious regions beyond the visible creation, where those worthy men, getting lost in huge abysses and floundering around in total darkness, became distracted, our hero preserved his presence of mind and succeeded in capturing one of the natives, who was compelled to pilot them out; for which services he had been commissioned by the Astronomer Royal to bear the Radius Vector and elements of an orbit, which lately surrendered to the Court of the Grand Quadratic. He also brought despatches announcing, that the cause of a perturbation of five barleycorns at every fourteenth revolution of one of the asteroids had been laid hold of; to the immense relief of five hundred learned men, who had been deprived of their natural rest during a term of years on that very account. So our hero became a lion; not one of those Nubian monsters that go around seeking whom they may devour, but a social lion, somewhat in danger of being devoured himself. For there was the most Sublime Prince, addressing him in such magnificent periods, that he was confounded. The Lord Coefficient condescended to unbend, and trotted out a forlorn old joke, which he picked up and adopted somewhere about the time of Ptolemy. No one ever succeeded in 'laying' the miserable thing, for on every state occasion it came forth like one from the dead, to the great annoyance of excitable nerves. Then after he was released from the dignitaries around the throne, young  $x$  was betrayed by his friends to three hundred and seventy-five old ladies, who had grandsons in the foreign service; some serving with the Cotangents near the Zodiacal Light; some ranging with the concave Reflectors on the trail of Encke's comet; some with the Trigonometers, running triangles off in unheard-of territories outside of the constellations. These good old ladies, who were quite moderate — only three hundred and seventy-four of them talked at a time — were assured that the nights in the Zodiacal country were not damp, that the reflectors never went off unexpectedly, and that the state of morals in the outside territories was by no means so bad as represented by John Milton. Our hero was getting frantic when he was rescued by some of the young cubs and presented to the most distinguished beauties of the Court; and his martial carriage, his stories of encampments in the Nebulæ, of perilous marches across the unbridged abysses, of captured planets, of wild lights noosed by the astrono-

mers, and of desperate excursions into the Void, completely turned the heads of these fair Quantities.

But after all was our hero happy? Alas! Concealment like a worm, budded in his jaws — or something like that; it's in Shakspeare. Why did his eye wander through the brilliantly lighted halls, for it was now about midnight, and why did he start when beneath the gorgeous cone that surmounted an amphitheatre in the north wing, he beheld the ethereal, the incomparable, the inexpressibly beautiful *y*? He paused for a moment in one of the hundred lofty naves which radiate from that amphitheatre, and saw her standing alone in a flood of soft light, pouring from the immense tunnel above, like the angel of a flaming planet. A mob of promenaders headed by a brass-band, debouched into the vast apartment from another hall, and our hero turned away, revolving in his mind whether to seek employment in the equinoctial survey, or to ask for a post in some frontier equation beyond Artophylax, on the brink of the illimitable deep, or to go down in a diving-bell with a transcendental geometer into those frightful pits where so many devoted philosophers have descended and never been heard of more.

#### IV.

It is always painful to dwell upon the infirmities which are too often ingrafted upon the moral constitution of the human family. It is especially painful, when any individual has transgressed those statutes, or ruthlessly trampled upon those precepts which are written in indestructible lines upon the tablets of the heart, to hold up that individual in his true colors for the reprobation of the virtuous and good. But however painful to the historian it may be, however repugnant to the promptings of those feelings which throb in the recesses of his own private bosom, his duty to the dead, his duty to the living, his duty to posterity, demands, in imperious tones, that this service should be performed calmly, fearlessly, inflexibly.

At a considerable distance within the darkness which bounded the great empire on all sides, dwelt an atrocious old rebel, named Z, leagued with the Princes of Darkness to retard the conquests of the Grand Quadratic, and to work him annoyance in whatever manner he could. His visage was of the most malignant cast; his habits were disreputable, and the society he kept would have disgraced a loafer of Gomorrah. He lived in an equation of astonishing strength, composed of cubes, roots, binomials, conic sections and other such bad things, all piled together with art truly amazing. Moreover two of those long black, curved concerns, which we used to encounter in integral calculus were planted at each end, vincula stretched across like the triple walls of Jerusalem, and bomb-proof parentheses encircled each bastion. Furthermore the ground beyond the horn works was sown with prickly expressions which would have daunted a good many New-Hampshire schoolmasters. A smart sprinkle of infinitesimals were disposed at advantageous points; logarithms bristled at every angle, and crowds of those diminutive figures which have so often carried distraction to the very cerebellum of a freshman, were scattered through the whole fortifications.

Altogether it was a miracle of mystery. In this strong hold that utterly depraved old rebel defied the great algebraical potentate and all his hosts. Every process was tried to rout him out; the royal sheriffs he caught and sent home, stuck through and through with asymptotes; the royal mathematicians all came back with a brain fever. Finally, the sublime Quadrate himself and all his engineers and hosts, went forth and enveloped the equation with some sort of powerful analysis; but a chemist might as well try to decompose a bank-safe with buttermilk; they were all glad to get back to day-light again considerably shattered. To this den, flocked every bad character of the whole region round about. Decayed theories, exposed humbugs, sophisms that had been set up in the pillory, radicals persecuted for political offences, and all kinds of dissatisfied Surds and Symbols, who had emigrated from the great empire, made up the regular population; but they had a constant run of visitors from the Court of 'Chaos and sable-vested Night,' young Princes of Darkness, roaring Tetrarchs of Tartarus, dissolute naval officers from Acheron, and brawling captains from the garrison of Domdaniel, who, you may well imagine, made the country echo with their orgies. The annoyance which this nest of vagabonds caused to their civilized neighbors is not easily expressed. Not only was it impossible for any friend of decency to stay within a good many leagues of such an unintermittent riot, but the conquests of science could not be pushed beyond it: there the dingy old castle barred all progress, unyielding as a rock.

It was now, as we before gave notice, about midnight. Darkness covered the land; a soft and silent darkness, not like that harsh blackness which enveloped the territories without, but a refreshing darkness which flowed from the sluices of heaven, and covered the empire like a sea of fluid shadows. The innumerable, stars like luminous bugs, crawled up the dome of night, but the moon, like a gorgeous shining beetle, had crept with a good deal of briskness out of sight. At this moment that abominable old settler, whose character we took occasion to discuss in the last chapter, emerged from the regions which he usually adorned with his presence, into the gentle starlight. More of him and his doings in a concluding number.

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#### PREACHING AND WORK.

SPARE, reverend friend, thine idle rage  
Against the vices of the age;  
Thou shouldst not with the bellows blow,  
Sitting astern, and think to go;  
Thou'rt in the boat; thy utmost force  
Only reacts and yields no course;  
Take thou the oar, or spread the sail,  
And then implore the God-sent gale.