

**THE EAVESDROPPER:
AN UNPARALLELED
EXPERIENCE**

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The Eavesdropper: An Unparalleled Experience by James Payn

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JAMES PAYN

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EXPERIENCE**

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THE EAVESDROPPER

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AN UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE

OF THE

BY

JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF MURBRIDGE" "THE CANON'S WARD" "BY PROXY"
"THE HEIR OF THE AGES" "THICKER THAN WATER" ETC.

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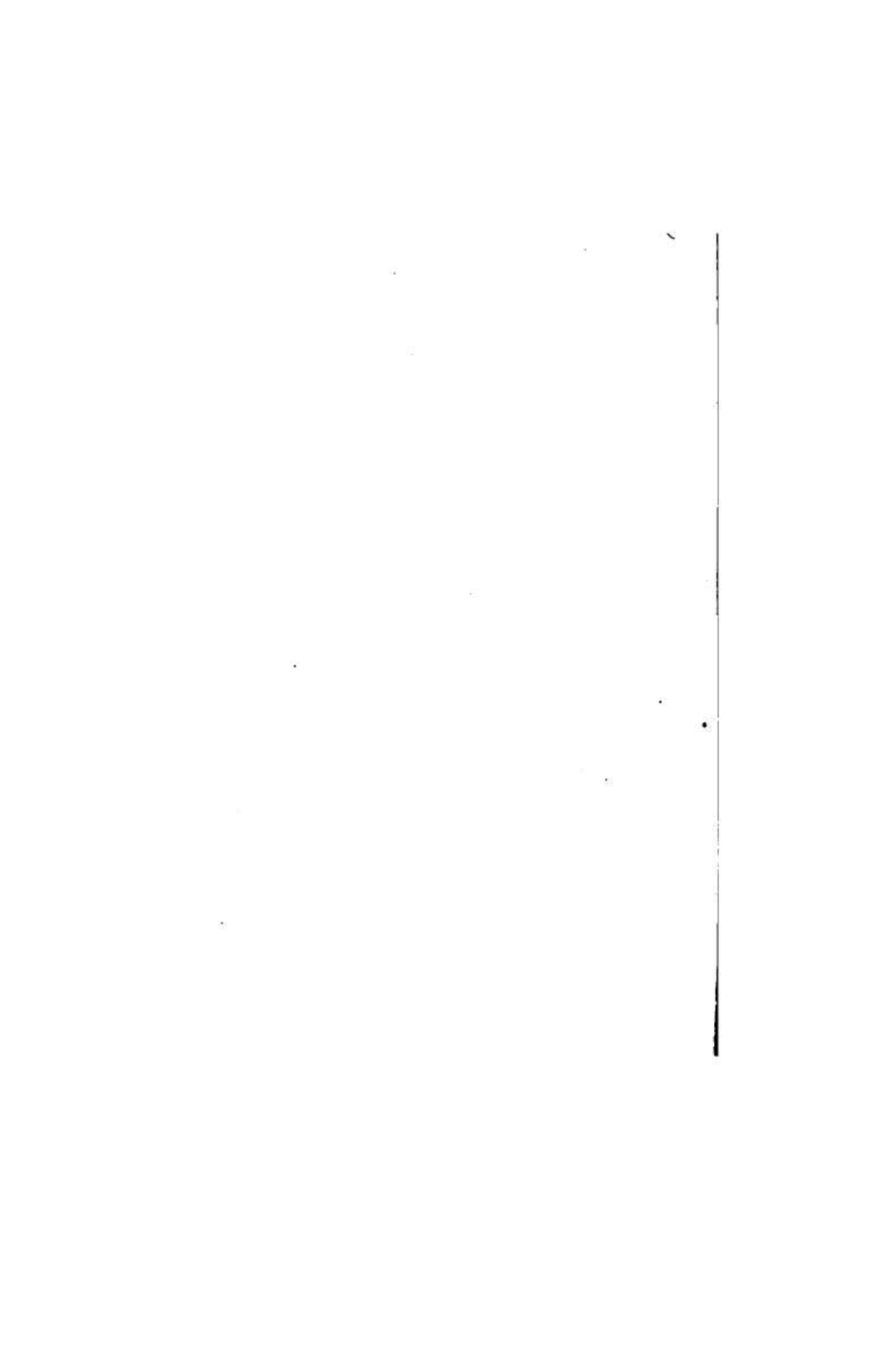
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THE EAVESDROPPER.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN BED.

I HAD been very ill—some people, I know, had said “dying”—for many days. Upon the whole, I had been inclined to agree with them. It had neither pleased nor displeased me to do so; a pretty sure sign that my case was serious.

“For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing ling'ring look behind?”

inquires the poet; to which I answer, “A good many people, and especially those who are half dead already.” When we are very ill, it does not seem worth while to prolong

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the unequal contest which Nature herself seems to be waging against us. "What must be, must be; and please, nurse, give me some more barley-water." There is no subject upon which more rubbish has been written than on the thoughts of sick men. When the Destroyer seizes us in health and strength, and, like a policeman addressing a criminal, exclaims, "You come along with me," the case is quite different. We resent his brutality exceedingly, and, above all, his obstinacy in refusing bail. There *must* be, we think, some mistake somewhere; he is confusing us with Jones, our senior by ten years, or with Brown, who is a chronic invalid with a temper to match, and who really *ought* to be sent for. But after lying here for weeks, between asleep and awake, "to cease upon the midnight with no pain," seemed no such very hard fate; or, at all events, I had learned to face it with tolerable indifference. I had no dear ones to leave behind me, wherein, as all medical testimony is agreed, lies the rub. "In an immense experience," writes a great physician, "I have never seen a patient distressed at dying, though often at the prospect of part-

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ing with those dear to him." For, indeed, men are not so sure as they would have us believe of meeting with them again.

Well, that has been spared me. I cannot say I have neither kith nor kin, but such as I have are very distant relatives, and they have always maintained their distance with fine judgment and excellent taste. One may love one's cousin as well as anybody else, but to love him because he *is* my cousin—because my uncle (whom I never liked) married my aunt (whom I positively *dis*-liked)—is a most illogical deduction. For my part, I am indebted to nobody save for my existence—a thing, as I have reason to believe, about to slip away from me, and one, moreover, which I don't think was even so much as in the mind of the donors. In times like these one must be excused for taking a practical view of matters. My parents would doubtless have provided for me if they could, but it was out of their power. If it be true that God helps them that help themselves, Providence befriended me. I could say of myself, indeed, if I were going to stay in it, that I am well-to-do in the world. If it be asked how I made my mon-

ey—but nobody does ask when one has got it; it is only when one has lost it, or never had any, that folks are curious and sympathetic. (“How *could* you be such a fool? How the deuce do you manage to get along?” and so on.) I say if you ask, however, I must tell the truth; with men in my condition there are few reserves, little false pride, and no delicacy whatever. I made my money by literature.

Many will say, “Impossible!” and I admit that the operation is difficult—very different from an operation in the city, though so much smaller—but, nevertheless, I accomplished it. I had not, indeed, made what is somewhat pompously called “an honored name” for myself, but I had made a name that was honored by, after all, the most important person in any civilized community—one’s banker. The circumstances of my case—I am not speaking of my physical condition, which is unhappily straightforward enough, but of my literary fortunes—are rather curious, and seem indirectly to bear out Sir Francis Galton’s views upon heredity. I had an uncle (the one I never liked) devoted to literature, and whose