Dorrien Of Cranston Vol.II

By

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Freeditorial

Chapter Twenty Six.

Two Meetings.

For three days Roland lay in his shabby lodgings, too ill to stir from his bed; and but for the consciousness that, if he would accomplish his purpose, he must rouse himself, and determine to rally, the probability is that he would never have risen from it at all.

The effort must be made. His vitality, sadly impaired by a long course of semi-starvation, must be restored by the contrary treatment. He was not going to die in any such squalid hole as this, among the dirty and repellant semblances of humanity, who, under the circumstances, grudgingly ministered to his wants. Not he. He would get up; try whether the air would set him on his legs again, and if so, would certainly carry out his plan the very next day. His funds, considerably replenished by the price of parting with his last, faithful friend, would enable him to do this, only it must be done at once, and then—afterwards! Well, he had a plan.

Rising with an effort from his bed, Roland proceeded to dress himself, with infinite difficulty, for he felt wretchedly weak and dazed. Then at the picture which his distorted and cracked mirror presented him with, he fairly started. His beard, which he had allowed to grow at will since his misfortunes, was now plentifully streaked with grey, and with such alarming suddenness had this come about that he stared at his reflected face in amazement. Then he remembered with sardonic bitterness that this circumstance would yet further aid his plans. Who would recognise him now?

It was afternoon when he sallied forth. With a pang he missed his attached companion, and his sense of loneliness seemed enhanced tenfold. The short winter day was already closing in, and a keen north-easter, wafting particles of sleet from the black and riftless sky, chilled him to the bone. Anything, though, rather than remain longer in the frightful depression of his dingy rooms.

The dark sky and the winter gloom struck him as an earnest of what life was to be henceforth. The pinched and sour expression on the countenance of the British public struggling in the teeth of the biting north-easter, reflected aptly the attitude of the world towards him who is irrevocably down. Nothing was above a certain value—not even life, for may not life itself be held on terms too hard?

His wanderings had brought him to Charing Cross, and walking a little way up the Strand he turned into a well-known tavern to dine. Then it occurred to him that he might as well look out a certain train.

But the A.B.C. time-table, requisite for this purpose, was not among the resources of the establishment.

“Where can I get one, then?” he asked.

“We can send out for one, sir,” said the waiter.

“Then do.”

Not till an hour had passed was the A.B.C. put into his hands.

“Why the devil have you been so long about it?” he asked, rendered irritable by the fatigue and excitement of the day, as he snatched it in eager haste, and his hands trembled as he turned over the leaves.

“What the devil are you staring at now?” he cried, looking up and meeting the glance of the waiter, who was watching him curiously. The man muttered a word of apology and hastened away.

At length he found the train he wanted, put a mark against it, and turned down the corner of the page. Then he fell into a profound reverie. Suddenly he started up, paid his bill and hurried away.

“Tom,” said the waiter who had attended on him, hailing a colleague. “See that cove just gone out?”

“Yes.”

“Should you know him again?”

“Swear to him anywhere,” was the laconic reply.

“’E’s a queer ’un. Look. ’E’s left his time-table that he kicked up such a blessed row about gettin’. Wonder where ’e’s a-goin’. Look ’ere, it’s turned down and marked.”

At that moment Roland had suddenly come to a standstill in the street, and like the proverbial Caledonian, was swearing "at large." For it had dawned upon him that he had forgotten his A.B.C. Should he go back for it? No; too far. He would get another.

But little he dreamed what gigantic importance to his weal or woe that trivial act of forgetfulness would one day assume.

The cold was cutting, and just now a gust of driving sleet swept down upon him, and in contrast he became aware of the glaring portico of a variety theatre just in front. There at any rate he would be warm. Once within, seated, with something to drink in front of him, and smoking a cigar—the first for several long months—he gave himself up to a sheer sense of warmth and physical comfort, which, combined with the effects of the stimulants, produced a state of dreamy placidity. To the performance he paid no attention whatever. Turn after turn was the same, dull, tawdry, idiotic—but each intensely respectable in its vulgar way.

Overcome by the stuffiness of the place, he went out for a little while. On his return the house was in a ferment of excitement. The star performer of the evening had just been on—and off; an athletic exhibition apparently, as the attendants were removing a net and tight rope, among other things; and a popular one, for some belated hand-clapping was still going on. But for him it had no more interest than had any of the others, nor did the overheard remarks made by those in the neighbourhood—to the effect that they wouldn't have missed it for anything—strike him with any overwhelming sense of loss. Then, as the performance drew to an end, he made his way into the street.

The sleet showers had ceased, the wind had gone down, and the night, clear and fine, was an agreeable contrast to the confined atmosphere and garish interior of the theatre. Roland, threading the hurrying crowds homeward-bound from the numerous places of entertainment, felt small inclination to follow their example. He preferred the open air. Strolling down Whitehall, unaware of a figure in a long ulster following at some little distance behind, he reached Westminster Bridge. It seemed very still and quiet here. The bridge was destitute of passers-by, and the double crescent of lights twinkled like eyes upon the dark waters. The tide was at ebb, and the black current swirled beneath the piers with many a hiss and hollow gurgle, and the solitary watcher felt chained to the spot by a weird and intangible fascination. Just then, with sepulchral boom, "Great Tom" began tolling the hour of midnight.

The pedestrian turned to retrace his steps. As he did so the figure in the ulster stopped suddenly, and faced him. The move had been well timed. Roland gave a great start, and stared in bewildered fashion upon the face confronting him in the full glare of the lamplight, for he was looking into the limpid blue eyes of Lizzie Devine.

“Well!” she said, and there was a flash of white teeth as the full lips parted into a very attractive smile, which broadened into a little laugh at the sudden and cold look of disapproval which had frozen up the expression of the other’s face. “That’s right, think the worst of me,” she went on. “Only, if you do, you happen to be wrong—though it’s little enough difference it would make to you, I should suppose, even if you weren’t.”

“What on earth are you doing up here, Lizzie?” he said, ignoring the “feeler.”

“Left Cranston for good, eh?”

“Don’t know. I left soon after you did, so can’t give you all the latest news, I’m afraid.”

“There never is any down there, so that’s no loss,” he said with affected carelessness. But not for a moment did it deceive the other, and a great wave of pitiful tenderness welled up within her heart. She had all the admiration of her class for “gameness,” and now, as she noted the ravages which ill-fortune and consequent ill-health had wrought upon the appearance of this man, she needed none to tell her to what depths of poverty he had dropped. Yet he carried it—for her benefit at any rate—with the same careless ease as he had done the enviable circumstances under which they had last met.

“Why did you go out just before my ‘turn,’ and come back just after?” she said. “Did you know it was me?”

“Your ‘turn’?” he repeated mystified. “Very sorry, but I don’t quite follow.”

“You were in the Abracadabra the whole evening, and the only turn you missed was mine.”

He began to see. This, then, was Lizzie’s line at present, yet how on earth, under the absurd and Italianised stage-name on the programme, even if it had attracted his attention at all, could he ever have dreamed of looking for Lizzie Devine?

“Why, of course, I had no idea it was you,” he said.

“Well, you see, you needn’t have looked so black and suspicious at me. I’m a first-rate draw there, I can tell you, and that’s worth something a week. And I’ve got other engagements sticking out that are better still.”

“I’m delighted to hear it, Lizzie. And—how well you’re looking!”

“That’s more than you are,” she said quickly, the glow of pride and pleasure evoked by the compliment from his lips giving way to a helpless feeling of compunction and concern as she looked at him, the while in a confused whirl her thoughts were chasing each other round and round. She had heard enough of Cranston gossip to know what had happened between General Dorrien and his eldest son, and now the appearance of the latter, accidentally encountered after all this time, had enabled her shrewdly to fill up the gap. What could she do? If only she could help him. She had gone up in the world materially, and was going up still more—not by reason of her performance, which was only average, but by her rare physical attractiveness—and was commanding large salaries. Yet withal, she had kept straight by reason of the memory of the man talking with her here to-night; but ah! what a wreck he was compared with his former self, and the reason thereof nobody was more capable of appreciating. Yet she knew she was as powerless to help him in the slightest degree as yon ragged tramp “singing” outside the public-house over the road just before closing time; and that apart from the certainty that now he only saw her as the daughter of a flagrantly drunken and disreputable village rowdy.

“Getting late, isn’t it?” he said, misinterpreting her silence. “We might drop in somewhere and get a ‘split’ or something before closing time.”

“We’ll drop in and get something—yes,” she answered decisively, “but nowhere else than in my own place. You’re not too proud, are you—remembering old times on the other side? No, you can’t be.”

He laughed wearily. “I don’t know. I’m not much up to conviviality these days. I think I’ll go and turn in. Fact is I’m beastly tired.”

“Great Scott, but that’s a fine girl!” said a voice behind, obviously not intended to be heard by its object or her escort. “Wonder if she’ll be as disappointing as to the face.”

“They generally are,” said another.

There was that in the tone to make Roland Dorrien start. Three young men in evening dress and crush hats overtook and passed them, and simultaneously three heads came round to look at his companion. But one head remained around a moment longer than the others, and it took in not only the face of the girl but that of himself, and in it he beheld once more the face of his brother Hubert. And it needed not the start the latter gave to show that the recognition was not one-sided.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Interim.

Christmas had come and gone, and Eustace Ingelow was at home again, but things were not going well with him, and he was in consequence proportionately gloomy. Never, since the day he surprised her in the midst of her grief, had he had the chance of speaking to Nellie Dorrien alone. Whether by accident or design, she had been invited to visit a relative at a distance for Christmas. She had left Cranston a few days before his arrival, and it seemed unlikely that her return would take place before his departure, and he had failed in his undertaking, for no trace could he discover of her missing brother. Venn had written stating that he feared they would see no more of Roland Dorrien until such time as that worthy chose to disclose his whereabouts. And Eustace's heart had sunk. If Venn, a London man, could not trace his friend, what chance had he himself, who could bring neither time nor experience to bear upon his quest? His failure and misgivings he had made known to Nellie, who had recognised the force of them. Poor Eustace, however, was very unhappy. He had been looking forward to the Christmas vacation with the bright, warm glow of first love fresh at his heart, and with all the sanguine buoyancy of youth. Things would come right somehow. But, now that his hopes were so cruelly disappointed, and that the meetings, all the sweeter if stolen, to which he had been looking forward, were not to be, the poor fellow hardly knew how to conceal his despondency. In Olive he found a ready sympathiser, but hers was a sympathy that was all on one side. Never since the receipt of that last letter from Roland Dorrien had the girl opened her lips on the subject of her griefs to any living soul. It was a strange reticence—yet one that she heroically and rigidly preserved, and now, though she entered lovingly into poor Eustace's troubles, of her own she breathed not one word. With such elements of despondency in their midst it was not to be wondered at that Christmas festivities this year had seemed to the rector's family to fall somewhat flat.

At Cranston Hall the chronic atmosphere of gloom and constraint in nowise tended to a clearance, and Time, so far from allaying General Dorrien's resentment towards his eldest son, rather tended to heighten it; as one or two incidents showed. Mr Curtis, the easy-going but good-hearted vicar of Cranston, happening to be aware of the complete ruin in which the exiled one had been involved through the bank failure, took an opportunity of cautiously approaching this vindictive parent on his behalf, but was met with such an angry rebuff as would have constituted a mortal insult to a less good-natured man, but which the easy-tempered vicar had suffered to pass over him unresented. It was only his duty, he argued to his wife, to try and set things smooth if possible; if not, well, he had done his best. The exile's other advocate was Colonel Neville, who had thought Christmas a capital time for putting in his word, but with like result; and the Colonel falling far short of the parson in the quality of forbearance,

something very like a quarrel had taken place between the old friends and companions-in-arms, and a coolness set in between their two houses.

Alone in this uncongenial home poor Nellie had a bad time of it. Her father seldom addressed a word to her, or indeed, to anybody—for as his moroseness increased he would shut himself up in his study for hours or wander about by himself, going nowhere nor entertaining anybody, and since he had discovered the meeting between herself and Eustace Ingelow he had treated her as though very little better than her banished brother. Between herself and her mother there had never been any sympathy, and now there seemed to be less than any. One bright spot was on her horizon—Christmas would come, and she would see Eustace again, and to that she looked forward as to a forlorn hope. And Christmas had come, and previously to it she had been sent away, as we have seen, a procedure which, at any other time and under other circumstances, would have met with her unbounded approval. But now?

The only one whose spirits were in nowise impaired was Hubert. Why, indeed, should they be, seeing that he was now the assured heir to the broad acres and splendid rent-roll of Cranston? So on the strength of his prospects he found means of launching out into unlimited dissipation. He was now leaving Oxford, and had already mapped out for himself a dazzlingly attractive programme for the enjoyment of "life" when he should take up his abode in London in a week or two to read for his "call." Meanwhile, even in Wandsborough, Master Hubert found scope for some very lively doings, and was only restrained just within the bounds of prudence by the fear of certain of his high jinks reaching the paternal ears, which possibility kept him in a state of periodical and wholesome terror. And there was always the apprehension that circumstances might combine to restore Roland to his rightful place, which would mean nothing less than ruin to himself.

That "no one is all bad" is a favourite cant—but only a cant. In common with not a few others Hubert Dorrien was "all bad"—emphatically so. There was not a single redeeming point in his character, not even the boldness which frequently attends utter want of scruple. The latter quality he possessed in affluent measure, but ever subordinate to the stronger passion of fear. His brother had helped him, very much to his own hindrance, in his dire need, and not only was he dead to all sense of gratitude, but felt only too glad that circumstances afforded him a colourable excuse for neglecting to refund the loan now that he wae in a position to do so.

And towards that brother he now felt all the bitter hatred, begotten of fear and a sense of obligation, of which his base and craven nature was capable, and, as fate would have it, the circumstance detailed in a former chapter placed an efficient weapon in his hand. Rumour began to circulate in Wandsborough, and with multifold winks and head-

shakings, and “I told you so,” and “What else could you expect?” the many-tongued assassin commented on the continued absence of Lizzie Devine. All Wandsborough became aware, or fancied itself so, that the girl was play acting, or worse, in London, but that whatever she was doing she was not alone, for had not young Squire Hubert—he had got rapid promotion, you see—met her, in company with his brother, at some theatre or other? That was enough. Everybody knew she was never any better than she should be. A fine girl—yes. A splendidly-handsome girl—yes—but—a bad ’un, come of a bad stock. And those young Dorriens. A wild set, and no mistake! Thus the gossips.

This rumour was quick to reach Gipsy Steve’s ears, with the result that the ex-poacher got furiously drunk, and went about vowing vengeance in forcible and blood-curdling terms, thereby narrowly escaping summary dismissal at the hands of Colonel Neville. It was not long, either, in becoming known to Turner, and that reverend person, coupling it with the upshot of his earlier observations, could not refrain from making capital—pious capital of course—out of the knowledge. But circumspectly as he had originated the rumour and disseminated it withal, common consent attributed it to Hubert, and men wondered how his brother could have been such a fool as to trust a fellow who couldn’t keep counsel in a delicate affair of this kind, but went blabbing it all over the place. Finally, it became known to the General, as Hubert had all along intended it should. From that moment he felt secure. The heavens might fall, but never again would Roland set foot in his father’s presence.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

The Ban.

“Yes, sir. Our town’s bigger nor Wandsbro’—more go-ahead like. It didn’t use to be so, you see, but when them works at Wandsbro’ were shut up, why, then it fell back and we went ahead, sir.”

So spake the loquacious waiter in the coffee-room of the “Silver Fleece Inn,” at Battisford, as he skipped, napkin in hand, round the only guest, who was dining early, for it was Sunday. A finely-proportioned man of, apparently, about sixty, and wearing a bushy iron-grey beard and dark-tinted spectacles, it would be difficult to guess at his rank in life. He might be a peer of the realm, or he might be a detective, and he was dressed with perfect simplicity, though well.

“Indeed?” he replied carelessly. “I just remember being at Wandsborough many years ago, when I was almost a boy. By the way, what’s that remarkably fine place I passed driving over here? It stood back in a park, where there were any amount of deer.”

“Was it against the hill, sir? ’Cos that’s Cranston ’All—Gen’ral Dorrien’s. Yes, that is a fine place, sir.”

“Dorrien did you say? Dorrien? Now that’s strange. Fact is, I used to know someone of that name, but I’m certain he hadn’t ever been in the army. Has this one any sons?”

“Oh, yes, sir. There’s—”

“Ah! The one I knew hadn’t. He was a bachelor.”

“That must ’ave been the old squire, sir—the Gen’ral’s brother. ’E was a bachelor. But this one—well, sir, I don’t mind tellin’ you, ’e’s a terribly cross-tempered gentleman, and they do say as how none of his fam’ly can live with him.”

“Indeed? How’s that?”

“Well, sir, I believe it’s this way,” went on the loquacious waiter, delighted at the prospect of whiling away a goodly portion of this dull Sunday afternoon at his favourite pastime. Here, too, was a stranger, one who seemed to listen to him with interest. So he plunged at once into his lecture, with the utter disregard of his class for sequence or order in narration, and the stranger was favoured among other incidents with a highly-

coloured version of the fracas which had taken place in the Dorrien family some months earlier.

“And then, you see, sir, the General was that savage with the poor young Squire, ’cos he not only wanted to marry the parson’s young lady, but it seemed he hadn’t been playing quite on the square with a gal in Cranston village—Steve Devine’s gal, that was—he as is now keeper at Colonel Neville’s. And now they say he’s took up with her in London. She’s a play-actress up there, they say.”

If the slightest possible change came over the listener’s countenance at this announcement, to have discovered it would have taken a very close observer indeed, which the waiter was not.

“H’m! A sort of Don Juan this young Dorrien seems to have been,” remarked the stranger more to himself than to the other, and pronouncing the name in the usual British and erroneous way.

“Yessir—I daresay, sir—King John—wasn’t ’e the party that ’ad eight wives and cut their ’eads off as fast as he got tired of them?”

“Well, what sort of a girl was this?”

“A fine gal, sir. A reelly fine, purty gal, and Gipsy Steve, he looked after her orlways and led her a life of it, if any young chap so much as looked at her. And now, sir, ’ere’s a bit of queer human natur’,” went on the gossip, sinking his voice and looking preternaturally wise. “There’s some wot sez they don’t believe the gal’s with Mr Roland at all, but that his brother started the story. Ah! he’s a bad lot, is young Mr Hubert.”

“Well, but why the deuce should he tell such an infernal lie as that?”

The loquacious one looked at him for a moment pityingly, and his voice grew even more confidential.

“Bless your ’art. Don’t you see, sir? The young one wants to stick to all the swag. If the other comes back, well, of course, it’ll make all the difference to this one. And so ’e says ’e sor his brother and Lizzie in London together, and the General’s more furious than ever about it.”

“And what do they think in Wandsborough?”

“Well, sir, there’s them as believes it and there’s them as doesn’t. For my part I dunno wot to think, though, of course, it’s no concern o’ mine.”

“H’m!” The stranger yawned and deliberately stretched himself, and began to show signs of moving, and the loquacious one perceived that his fill of gossip was over for the present.

“Beg pardon, sir,” he remarked, “but are you ’Igh Church?”

“What? Why?” answered the stranger, starting from a reverie.

“Because, sir, if you are, there’s a big ’Igh Church over at Wandsborough, and lots of folks go from here on a Sunday evening. I’ve been myself once or twice, but couldn’t make nothing out of it. But it’s very gorjus.”

“Well, it’d be something to do. How long does it take to walk over?”

“Nearly an hour, sir, if you walk very quick. But the walk’s jest lovely, and so’s the music.”

“All right. I may go over. Now I’m going upstairs,” and escaping from the running fire of enquiries by which he was pursued, the stranger made his way to his bed-room. Once there, and the door locked, a restless sigh escaped him. He threw open the window, and kept consulting his watch from time to time. Then he sat down and fell into deep thought, with knitted brows and fixed gaze. He was thinking over all he had just heard. The thoughtless chatter of busybodies, like this talkative waiter, often reflected public opinion with marvellous accuracy. After a while he rose, and pulling on a warm overcoat and taking a stout walking-stick in his hand, he went out.

About half a mile outside Wandsborough there is a certain stile leading from the high road into the footpath to Minchkil Bay. Anyone commanding a view of this stile might have witnessed a curious spectacle on this dark, wintry afternoon. They might have descried an elderly stranger, grey-bearded and spectacled, leaning over the stile, his gaze riveted on the cliff path; and our concealed witnesses would opine that the said stranger had one foot in the grave. Then through the gloom rang out a clash of bells upon the damp, chilly atmosphere; a joyous, musical peal, that seemed to tell of light and warmth and peaceful homes. And the lonely man standing there, with his eyes wandering over the darkening wold, heard it, and his face wore an expression such as might rest upon the countenances of the lost. Yes, he seemed dreadfully ill, hardly able to stand, in fact; for presently he sank down into the rimy grass in a half-faint.

For long he sat thus. Then, suddenly starting to his feet, he walked rapidly towards the town, and in a few minutes stood within the church porch. The change from darkness to the brilliantly-lighted interior was bewildering. Mechanically he slipped into the place shown him by the civil verger, heedless of the screwed-round heads and curious glances inseparable from the event. How familiar it all seemed! The stately altar lighted by its six tall tapers; the rows of white-clad choristers, and the celebrant in his rich cope; the solemn chanting and the fragrant fumes of the incense—what memories it seemed to bring back! And around him many a familiar face—yet none knew him.

Mechanically again he took the hymn-book which the good-natured verger put into his hands, and—held it upside down. After the singing, a priest in surplice and stole entered the pulpit and began his sermon, evoking in the stranger's face a momentary gleam of recognition. But his thoughts soon wandered. Our friend Turner, indeed, was a pulpit bore of the first water, but had he been a very Chrysostom he would have met with scant attention from this stranger, who had walked all the way from Battisford to attend the evening service.

The function over, the stranger hastened not to depart, but lingered, half-concealed, in the shadow of a pillar, apparently intent on studying the framed list of notices there hung up—in reality, his keen eyes narrowly scanned the dispersing congregation. One group stood chatting in a low voice just inside the west door, and, as his eye fell upon it, again that white, haggard look came into his face.

"Brown," said a low, sweet, woman's voice, addressing the verger, who was intent on putting out the lights. "Please tell Mr Mason that I shall be happy to take his organ duties to-morrow, and even the next day, if he wishes it. So that'll be a weight off his mind."

"Very good, Miss Olive. I know he'll be glad. I'll be sure to tell him. Good-night, ladies."

Then the unknown, with a nod and a "good-evening" to the friendly verger, passed out into the street, keeping within a dozen yards behind the first speaker. Immediately a dark figure passed him hurriedly, and gaining the side of her whom he was watching, a cordial greeting ensued, and the two dropped a little behind the rest. The cassock and cloak which he wore denoted one of the parish clergy, and as he passed under the light of a lamp, the watcher recognised the features of Turner, the curate.

An overpowering desire came over the stranger to learn the burden of their conversation. That a strong bond of mutual sympathy existed between them he had no difficulty in perceiving, and his mind leaped to its own conclusions. Then with noiseless step he overtook the pair and passed them slowly.

But what the sad, soft voice was saying, as well as the answer, was inaudible to the listener. A loud, harsh hammering was sounding in his brain, and he felt faint and dizzy. Fearful of betraying himself, he crossed the road, and leaned against the wall for a few moments to recover. When he looked up again the street was empty.

He wandered out of the town, and still lost in his reflections, hardly noticed where he was till he reached the stile where he had rested a short while previously. Then, instead of continuing his way along the high road, he turned off across the fields, and began to ascend the bleak heights which lay above the cliffs.

And it was a weird and desolate scene, that winter expanse of sea and land upon which the wanderer's glance was bent. On all sides to seaward the mist-wrack was rolling back like a curtain, and a red half-moon slowly rose in the heavens, pouring a pale, spectral light upon the silent waters and the great mysterious cliffs. A murmur of waves breaking on the beach was upborne to his ears, as he strode rapidly on through the rimy heather plants and the chill, bracing whiff of the salt sea. Minchkil Beacon is left behind, and the rugged brow overhanging Hadden's Slide, and still he keeps on his way, stopping now and again to gaze upon the solemn grandeur of the moonlit coastline.

It is cold, but the pedestrian is in a glow of warmth after his hard, uphill exercise, for he pauses occasionally to rest and wipe his heated brow. What then makes him start and shiver violently, as though chilled to the very marrow!

Cleaving the still and frosty air comes a deep-toned, lugubrious howl, long-drawn, and proceeding apparently from the sea itself—a dismal, unearthly baying, not loud, but with a carrying vibration that renders the sound no less felt than heard. The listener standing alone on the cliff feels an icy perspiration break out upon his forehead, and his dilated gaze is riveted upon two rock pinnacles rising out of the sea beneath. The crest of the highest is hidden in a dark cloud.

Stay! A strange phenomenon, that! There is not a vestige of cloud nearer than the horizon. Yet down yonder a dark wreath broods over the summit of one of those rock-turrets. And the highest of The Skegs is far below the brow of the cliff.

The contour of the coast is perfectly outlined in the clear and searching moonlight. The silver surface of the sea is deserted. But darker than ever, and seeming to take shape beneath the watcher's gaze, the cloud rests upon that turret-rock, and from its black folds again and again sounds forth upon the silent night the terrible Death Portent.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

The Tragedy of a Winter Night.

“Pooh! What a fool I am, and what fancies a course of starvation and mooning will put into a man’s head!” exclaimed the stranger impatiently. “A wreath of mist over the sea, and immediately one conjures up an apparition. But I never saw anything more diabolically real in my life.”

Yet he was not quite reassured as he turned to continue his walk. The cloud had completely disappeared from The Skegs, vanished as suddenly as it had gathered there, nor was there a trace of vapour round the turret-like head—and the moonlight seemed to fall clearer upon the face of the cliffs.

He felt weary. He threw himself on the springy turf, heedless of damp or wet. A great, black fissure yawned at his feet, a gaping rent in the ground seeming to straggle into unknown depths. A few boulders lay about the little hollow where he rested. The fissure in front of him was known to the neighbourhood as Smugglers’ Ladder. Bats arose from the dark cleft and circled in the night air. The tide was in, and the lapping of the waves in the chasm beneath came up with a tuneful monotony through this gigantic telephone—but all else was silent as the grave. Far above twinkled the solemn stars, and the red, pointed moon looked angrily down. Then the distant chime from Wandsborough steeple rang out the hour of nine.

Only nine! Yet it might be midnight, so still and lifeless was this out-of-the-world hush. A soothing lethargy crept over him. Stillness—silence—rest. After the warring turmoil of a great city, this was as another world. But it was winter, and soon a shiver from head to foot reminded him that the more prosaic side of life, i.e. bed, had its attractions. A few minutes more and he would be on his way to Battisford, but a low whistle, unmistakably human, recalled in a trice his wandering reflections. It was repeated, and simultaneously the figure of a man appeared on the skyline.

The stranger did not move. He felt no apprehension, whoever the other might be. He was without hope in this world and therefore absolutely without fear, and so he sat with the lower part of his face resting in his hands, perfectly motionless, while the other approached him, saying in a low whisper:

“Why didn’t you answer my signal, dear?”

Then the stranger arose, with a harsh laugh.

“Ha-ha-ha! I’m afraid you’re the victim of a trifling ‘sell’ to-night, Hubert Dorrien.”

To say that the new-comer was astonished would be to say next to nothing at all. He was thunderstruck—speechless; and his face was as white as a sheet, as he stood rooted to the earth—gazing at this unexpected apparition as one transfixed.

“G-Good God! Who are you, sir, and what do you want with me?” he stammered at last.

“Ha-ha-ha! Good boy, Hubert. Good boy! Mother’s darling and papa’s expectant and deserving heir,” went on the stranger in the same harsh, jeering tone. “And now, may I ask, who is the fair frail one with whom this most delightful moonlight tryst was to have come off?” Excess of courage was at no time one of Hubert Dorrien’s besetting faults, and now he simply shivered, and his lips trembled. All of which the stranger noted as the moonlight played upon the white, terrified face.

“I don’t know who the devil you are, sir—and I don’t care,” he found courage to bluster at last. “But anyhow, I shall wish you good-evening, for I must go,” and he made a movement.

“But you are not going, Hubert Dorrien, not yet at least. Not until you and I have had a little talk together,” said the stranger, laying a firm hand upon his shoulder.

“Well, what do you want with me?” said Hubert doggedly, but horribly uneasy in his mind, for to his ordinary “prudent” disposition was now added the incubus of a tolerably guilty conscience. The place was hideously lonely withal, and his strange questioner looked powerful enough to have eaten him.

“Good boy, Hubert—ha-ha-ha! Does papa know you’re over here to-night, I wonder? But now—who were you expecting to find here?”

“Be damned to you!” broke out the young fellow furiously. “I’m not going to stand your impudent catechising. Go to blazes and find out. Oh—by God!”

For the stranger had turned his face full to the light, and, hiding the lower half of it, had removed his glasses.

”—Roland!”

And the two stood looking into each other’s eyes in the moonlight, and both faces wore any other expression than that of mutual affection. Yet they were brothers.

“Now that you have stepped into my shoes, Hubert, I hope they fit you,” said the elder, drily.

“Oh yes, thanks. Fit—very well indeed. More comfortable, by the bye, after a little further wear,” was the reply, given with a cold, exasperating grin.

“Which wear you won’t get out of them, my friend, in all probability. So look out for speedy squalls.”

“Oh, shan’t I?” replied the younger, his former fears dispelled, now that the mysterious stranger’s identity lay disclosed. “Shan’t I? Who will, then?”

“Why, their rightful owner, of course. Myself, to wit.”

“Good dog, Brag,” jeered the other contemptuously, jerking a stone across the mouth of Smugglers’ Ladder. Better for him had he kept up his prudence a little longer. “And now, Roland, I don’t come blundering in on top of your little arrangements up in Town, and should be very glad if you would kindly not interfere with mine here. In other words, by remaining in this sequestered spot you are spoiling my fun—if you have not already done so, that is.”

“Ah—now we are coming to it. Just answer me one question. What the deuce made you follow me over half the town one night last week, and then pretend you didn’t recognise me?”

“By Jove! It was you, then! I wasn’t sure, you see, and I couldn’t well buttonhole another fellow on spec. Besides you were with someone,” answered Hubert readily. But the other laughed drily.

“Not bad for you, Hubert. Shouldn’t wonder if you got your ‘silk’ after all, one of these days, if you go on as you have begun. And now, isn’t it a singular thing that a certain rumour should have started here at my expense, coincidently with that merry meeting of ours just by Westminster Bridge?”

“Very odd,” was the sneering rejoinder. “But the world’s devilish small, you know, and it’s astonishing how these little things will leak out.”

He ought to have known better. One glance at his brother’s face, and he would have spoken in a very different tone. But he was talking half-turned away.

“Quite so. It is. And now, O brother of mine, may I ask what motive you had in originating such a gratuitously mischievous and infernally backbiting story?”

Hubert’s first alarm had given way to exasperation and venomous resentment. Over and above inspiring him with considerable fear, this inconvenient brother of his had quite spoiled his little programme for the evening.

“Go to blazes and find out,” he answered again with an impudent sneer. “Or better still—ask Olive Ingelow what she thinks on the subject—Ha-ha-ha!”

But his laughter died, for with a furious curse the other had seized him by the throat. They were perilously near the edge of the chasm to indulge in a wrestling bout. And like a whisper from hell there flashed through the exile’s brain a vivid picture of all he had undergone from that sad parting scene in Wandsborough street to this hour, and probably she for whose sake he had given up all and was now an outcast had allowed her mind to be poisoned against him by the lying reports emanating from the slanderous tongue of this ungrateful and heartless young villain, this serpent who was his brother.

“Whisper her name again, and I’ll choke the life out of you,” he ejaculated, almost inarticulate with fury. But Hubert, exasperated beyond measure, forgot all his prudence.

“Yes, I will,” he shrieked, wrenching himself free.

“You asked just now who I was expecting to-night. What if it was the lovely Olive herself?”

But again the speaker’s voice failed him. Again his face went livid with deadly fear. He recoiled and would fain have fled before the terrible effect of his words. Behind lay the dark, yawning mouth of the chasm. His wild scream for help was choked in his throat. There was a fall—a scuffle and a slide. A human figure rolled down the sloping rock, with fingers convulsively clutching the merciless, unyielding stone, and face upturned to the cold moon in a paroxysm of deadly terror, then disappeared into the black chasm. A metallic sound as of stones dislodged striking against the sides of the fissure, then a dull splash far below and—silence.

He who was left upon the height above stood motionless for some minutes, his chest heaving and a perfect hell of fiendlike ferocity inflaming his countenance. Then he advanced to the edge of the fissure and peered fearlessly down. All was black as ink. Here and there the moonlight from without fell upon an angle of rock far beneath with a ghostly glint, but there was no sign of life—or death; nothing to tell that a human being had just been hurled down that terrific chasm to his last account. No accusing voice in

the air—to proclaim aloud over the placid sea, to thunder forth from the hard, frowning cliffs—or even to whisper into the survivor's ear the ghastly tale of this chill winter's night—Murder.

And they two were brothers.

The survivor roused himself and looked keenly around. Were there no traces on the smooth turf that would connect him with the disappearance of the other when he should come to be missed and a search was made; no marks of feet upon the slippery rock? No, there were none. The moon's cold eye alone had witnessed the deed—of which there remained absolutely no trace. Having assured himself of this, he readjusted his spectacles and walked rapidly away from the spot without once looking back.

Battisford was an old-fashioned place and "The Silver Fleece" was a snug and old-fashioned hostelry, where they kept early hours. Especially on Sundays was this the case, but on this particular Sunday our friend the loquacious waiter was deputed to sit up for the new guest—the gentleman who had gone over to church at Wandsborough. The service there would be over at any time after eight—say half-past, so that he should be back at a quarter-past nine or half-past at the latest. But it was slow work sitting up alone in the deserted coffee-room, and so it speedily came to pass that the talkative one followed the example of the five foolish virgins—slumbered and slept.

At length the stranger returned, and the first sound that greeted his ears as he let himself in and stood within the dimly lighted passage was a prolonged and unmistakable snore. Now in the said passage there stood a clock—a large timepiece of venerable aspect—and the hands of this clock were close upon a quarter-past ten. Whether it was a kind of instinct that prompted him to do so, or that he noticed that the glass was closed, but not shut—or both—cannot be here recorded, but in a moment he had opened the clock face, put the hands back forty minutes, and, having closed the glass again, proceeded carelessly in the direction of the snore.

"Hallo! Been sitting up for me?" he cried. "Early here, I suppose. Well, see if you can scare me up an S. and B., and that's all I shall want to-night."

Up jumped the drowsy one with a start.

"Yes, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but I must ha' dropped off," he said, rubbing his eyes and making for the door. "Ah well, sir, I h'aint been long in a doze; it was after nine when last I looked at this blessed clock, and now it ain't quite half-past yet, leastways it's just over it."

The other felt relieved. There was no fear of the man discovering the alteration of the hands if he had been asleep ever since nine, and it crossed his mind as just within the bounds of possibility that this circumstance might yet stand him in good stead.

"Just over half-past nine? So it is," he said carelessly, as the waiter re-appeared with the brandy and soda. "I must have come quick, for it seemed to me a precious long way from Wandsborough."

"You have come quick, sir. Did you come by the cliffs?"

"The cliffs! Is there a way by the cliffs, then?"

"Oh yes, sir, much shorter. But not over-safe at night, speshully to a gentleman as doesn't know the country well."

"H'm! I should think not. Likely to take a plunge over in the dark—eh? By the way, what's the name of the verger at Wandsborough church? He seems a nice, civil sort of fellow. I rather liked the look of him, and he quite took me under his wing and looked after me. The bald-headed man." This would show that he had been at Wandsborough.

"Brown, sir, it is. Oh yes, I know him well, he's been there a matter o' many years now. He's a downright good honest chap, is Brown," and then the loquacious one launched into a dissertation on the many good qualities and rare virtues of the official in question, which we shall spare the reader, even as he upon whom it was inflicted spared himself by promptly retiring to his room.

Next morning, while the grey-bearded stranger was leisurely discussing a late breakfast, the talkative waiter bustled in.

"Heard the news, sir? but of course you 'aven't—seeing you're only just up."

"Quite right, my friend. And now, what's the excitement?"

"Well, sir, they Bays as how young Mr Dorrien, he as we was talking about yesterday, he can't be found nowhere," said the man, hastening to discharge this last prime event with which his mind was burdened. "He went over to Cranston church by himself last night, and didn't come home all night."

“H’m! I don’t see anything very extraordinary in that. He may have had reasons of his own for being out all night, perhaps went somewhere by train, eh, don’t you see?—young men, you know, will be young men—and missed his train back.”

“No, sir, depend upon it there’s something wrong,” dissented the other, provoked at the stranger’s imperturbability. He had taken a great liking to him, “a pleasant-spoken, haffable gent as ever was, and yet a gent every hinch of him, as anybody might see” had been his verdict, in camera, with his colleagues below stairs. “Mistress Dorrien they say is that scared, and she’s going to have the country searched for him. He’s come to grief, ’e has. He carrier from Wandsbro’, he as brought the news—he says”—and here the man’s voice fell to what he intended to be a most impressive and mysterious whisper—“he says that one of them down at Minchkil Bay was coming home along the beach by moonlight and saw the Dorriens’ wraith on ‘The Skegs.’ The ghost always appears before the death of a Dorrien.”

The stranger looked quickly round as a violent shiver ran through him from head to foot.

“Just shut that door, will you? When the front door is open as well, the most infernal draught finds its way in here. It’s enough to give a man his death. Thanks. What were you saying? Something about a ghost?”

Only too delighted with the opportunity, our voluble friend proceeded redundantly to regale the stranger’s ears with the dour legend we heard narrated by very different lips nearly at the commencement of this narrative. But the listener proved sadly sceptical.

“Pooh!” he said, when the other had done. “That won’t wash at all, you know. It’s surprising how these humbugging old myths survive in the country, and the further away from Town you get, the more you find of them.”

“Beg pardon, sir, but shall you be leaving to-day?” asked the waiter, as the stranger rose from the table.

“No.”

“All right, sir. Glad to ’ear it, sir. Custom’s slack just now, sir.”

Chapter Thirty.

Search.

Great was the consternation which prevailed at Cranston Hall as the day wore on and Hubert did not return.

When first it was reported that his room was undisturbed and his bed had not been slept in, Mrs Dorrien's chief care was to keep the knowledge from her husband, but soon her fears got the better of her prudence on her son's behalf, and it became necessary to acquaint the General with the fact, with a view to a search being instituted.

Very sternly and concisely the latter at once proceeded to enquire into the circumstances of the case, but, beyond the fact that the missing one had left home with the expressed intention of attending evening service at Cranston Church, no one at the Hall could throw any light on the matter.

"I don't know what could possibly have happened to Hubert between this and the village," he said to his wife. "Why, it's barely twenty minutes' walk. I really don't know what to think about it, Eleanor. It is extremely painful to be obliged to say so, but it looks strangely as if Hubert had started on an unlawful errand, inventing a pretext for covering it. I have not found him invariably truthful, you know."

She burst into a storm of tears, her hard nature stirred to its very depths; her cold heart sorely wounded in its one vulnerable point.

"Oh, my boy, my boy?" she sobbed. "I shall never see you again, something tells me I shall not. And you"—turning fiercely upon her husband—"you were always so stern, so severe with him. He may have left his home, left it for good. Couldn't you remember that he was young, and make allowances—and in delicate health? Yes, it is you who have driven him away, even as you drove away the other. Oh, my boy, my darling boy! I shall never see him again!"

A deep frown came over the General's brow at this reproach.

"Pray calm yourself, Eleanor," he said sternly. "The reproaches you allow yourself to make are most ill-chosen, and, in fact, inexcusable. However, to confine ourselves strictly to the matter in hand, I shall ride down at once to the village and make enquiries, and, if necessary, shall institute a search without delay."

In less than an hour afterwards the General, aided by Mr Curtis, the vicar of Cranston, had elicited the following information. His son had been present at the village church the preceding evening, and had left with the congregation. Here testimony began to wax uncertain, some being ready to assert that they noticed Mr Hubert nearly at the park gates, while others were equally certain they had seen him going in the direction of Wandsborough. From this chaos of testimony it seemed impossible to evolve anything like order, and the General and his willing ally were nearly giving up all attempts at unravelling it, and starting in search of a fresh clue, when light came in upon the subject from an unexpected quarter.

A rustic couple was found who had been "sweet-hearting" in the lanes outside Cranston, according to the manner of rustic couples, after evening church. These were ready to swear that Mr Hubert had passed them, walking swiftly, and going in the direction of the cliffs. In fact, they had had the curiosity to turn and watch him. It was a cold, damp evening for any gentleman to be taking a walk on the cliffs all by himself, but why Mr Hubert should do so rather than return home was a speculation which aroused curiosity even in their thick, rustic pates. The pair, a stolid, bovine brace of bumpkins, were in great awe during the severe cross-questioning they underwent at the hands of the Squire and the Vicar, both magistrates to boot, but stuck tenaciously to the main point of their narrative. They were not mistaken, for not only had they seen Mr Hubert's face distinctly in the moonlight, but they had wished him "good-night," to which he had replied. As to time, well, about that they couldn't be quite certain, they supposed it must have been about nine—or, if anything, rather earlier; but anyhow, not long after church.

It was clear that these people were the last who had seen Hubert, and convinced that now they were on the right track, though with a direful sinking of heart, the two gentlemen agreed that their next move must be to betake themselves to Minchkil Bay, and enlist the services of the hardy seafarers there in a regular search. If the missing man had found his way to the cliffs, as both feared he had, he might have fallen over. Possibly he might yet be alive, but in a situation of peril or difficulty, from which he could not extricate himself, and in this case the aid of these bold fishers, experienced cragsmen all, would be indispensable.

As they rode up to the little fishing colony they descried a group of three seated against a boat, and a tall young man leaning over them. All had their backs towards them, and were talking with animation, unaware of the approach of strangers, for the sound of the horses' hoofs was deadened by the soft turf.

"But I say, Jem Pollock," the young man was saying. "What did this affair really look like? It may have been a cloud, you know."

“Well, you see, zur, it was a big black thing—yet not black so be it, but zumtimes you could see through it like. No, zur, it weren’t no cloud. Why, thur worn’t a cloud in the sky. And thur it was on top o’ The Skegs, and when I come ’ome I told Daddy here, and, ‘Jem,’ he says, ‘that what you’ve seen is the Dorrien wraith, and’—Oh, Lord, save us!”

All turned quickly. Not half a dozen yards off, the two gentlemen had reined in their horses. General Dorrien’s face was as white as a sheet, and the hand which held his bridle reins, though clenched and rigid, was trembling. That he had heard those last words was plain, but that one of his stern temperament should be so strangely moved by a mere bit of popular superstition seemed inexplicable.

“Your servant, gentlemen!” said old Mat Pollock, hobbling to his feet, assisted by his stalwart son, Jem, which worthy seafarer looked sorely abashed in the presence in which he so suddenly found himself, and which coming about, too, so soon upon his narrative of the apparition, disturbed his superstitious soul not a little.

Briefly, but clearly, Mr Curtis explained the situation, and how a search party was needed without delay, and the white-haired patriarch of the hamlet, though he had no love for the house of Dorrien, at once issued his mandates accordingly. Most of the hands were away in the boats, he said, but here were his two lads, Jem and David, who, by the way, had both well turned forty. Then they might turn out a couple of boys more—and there was—well, he didn’t know whether he might make so bold, but—And here he looked inquiringly at the young gentleman with whom the three had been conversing.

“I trust, Mr Curtis, that General Dorrien will allow me to take part in this search,” said Eustace Ingelow, stepping forward—“I know this coast thoroughly, and can keep my head at any height, as these good fellows here will tell you,” he added, eagerly looking from one to the other.

The General was about stiffly to decline, but Mr Curtis interrupted quickly.

“We shall be only too glad, Eustace. We want all the hands and eyes we can get, I’m afraid, and I know what a fellow you are for risking your neck. Are you ready?” he went on, looking around. “Then the sooner we start the better.”

It was between one and two o’clock, and the day was cloudy and lowering. Not many hours of daylight would remain to them, for the evenings closed in fast at this time of year. Considerable excitement was rife in the fishing village as the party moved off, women and children standing about the doors talking volubly in their rude dialect. It was arranged that Eustace Ingelow, with Jem Pollock and one of the boys, should

accompany General Dorrien along the top of the cliffs, while David Pollock and the other boy and the parson thoroughly searched the beach below, both divisions moving in concert. A couple of powerful telescopes, three coils of rope, of sufficient stoutness and length, with two strong crow-bars, constituted the equipment of the party; nor must we omit to mention a flask of brandy, which Jem Pollock privately hinted to Eustace, with a wink at the General, might be making the Squire a party to a bit of smuggling.

And Eustace himself was thinking, as they ascended the steep, turfy slopes, what a great piece of luck this was which had fallen in his way. What if he should be the fortunate finder of the missing man? In common decency the General could hardly give him the cold shoulder after rescuing his son; but, on the other hand, it might be—probably would be—only the poor fellow's dead body that they would find. For an opinion had gained ground among the party that Hubert Dorrien had either fallen over the cliffs, in which case there would be very little chance for him, or that he had gone down on the beach and had been cut off by the tide, a contingency equally fatal, the only hope being that in the former event he might have fallen on to a ledge—for the cliffs were broken and rugged, and such projections abounded; or that in the latter he had gained some refuge whence he was unable subsequently to escape.

"Look over, Jem, lad, and see if you see nowt. There, on the ledge just below the footway," bawled David Pollock from the beach, after intently scanning with his glass the most dangerous point of the face of Hadden's Slide. A thin mist had begun to drive along the cliff, but a black object, not unlike the body of a man, might be discerned at the point indicated.

Jem obeyed, and, lying down, peered long and anxiously from the dizzy brink.

"It's nowt!" he shouted in return. "Only a heap o' grass or suchlike," and the search went on.

"I fear we shall soon be overtaken by the darkness," observed the General, moodily looking round. They had passed a queer little cottage in the hollow, and a woman came out to answer their enquiries, but could add nothing whatever to their knowledge. Another false alarm, too, had been raised by those on the beach.

"I'm afraid so, sir," answered Eustace. "But we shall have time to get as far as Smugglers' Ladder," he added encouragingly, "and I don't think your son would have had time to get much further than that, if he intended coming back from his walk in fair time. See, it would be about in line with the point where he was last seen, and he was going in that direction."

They reached the little hollow. Before and around lay a few rocks and boulders half embedded in the springy turf. A couple of hooded crows flew up and winged their flight downward along the face of the cliffs, uttering a harsh croak, and before them yawned the black chasm with its jagged, slippery sides. Both Eustace and Jem Pollock fearlessly gazed down into its depths.

Suddenly the former uttered an exclamation and sprang to his feet. On the very brink of the fissure, hanging to a short tuft of rank, dry herbage, was a piece of thin, black silk cord—such as is used for securing an eyeglass. Closer inspection showed that the grass itself had been violently crushed.

"I think we are getting nearer, sir," he gently remarked, showing it to the General, who was visibly agitated, but made no reply. "Now, Jem, give us a light here, quick."

The man obeyed, and forthwith large pieces of burning paper were dropped into the chasm, bringing its rocky facets and roughly-hewn cells and recesses into view to those above. Nothing was visible, however.

"Now, Jem, bear a hand with that belaying-pin; sharp's the word," cried Eustace, waxing nautical again in his excitement, as he took the stoutest of the crow-bars from the other's hand, and looking around for a second, his quick eye lit upon a crevice in the rock, into which the iron bar was promptly driven. "Here! shake out that brace—that's it. Now. Is it long enough?" anxiously, as Jem Pollock dropped the coil of rope into the chasm to test its length, keeping the other end in his hand.

"Not quite, sir, but the two together will do it, easily. But better let me go down, sir; I understand it better nor you."

"I daresay you do, but I'm lighter, you see, and you'd make a better hand at working the apparatus up here than I should. Now heave it over!"

"What are you going to do?" asked General Dorrien, who had been a silent witness to these rapid preparations.

"I'm just going quietly down the Ladder, sir," answered Eustace. "The poor fellow may have got into some place where we can't see him, and not be able to call out."

"Really, Mr—a—Ingelow—I can't consent to your running this risk," answered the General, greatly moved. "Now, this man is accustomed to it. Therefore let him go down."

“No risk at all, sir, I assure you. Only an easy climb. I wish it might be successful,” answered Eustace, as he threw off his jacket, and, aided by the fisher lad, let himself carefully over.

“You’ll ha’ to be quick down there, ’cause of the tide,” warned Jem Pollock, who was devoting his energies to keeping the crow-bar steady. “You can’t come up again this way, I’m thinkin’. And jes’ tell them down there to hurry a bit, for she’s a rollin’ in fast and steady.”

“All right,” cried Eustace as he made his way down. The rope was a regular climbing rope, knotted at intervals; but the depth was considerable, and before he had got halfway, the athletic young fellow began to feel that he would need all his powers. Indeed, although he had made light of any idea of risk in the matter, he now realised that there was plenty of it. The perspiration streamed from every pore, and it was all he could do at times to avoid being hurled from his dizzy position by the swaying of the rope and the consequent friction of his knuckles against the hard surface of the rock.

Although dark enough from above, yet once in the fissure, sufficient light penetrated from the outside to render all its recesses plainly visible, and as the intrepid youth made his way down deeper and deeper, the more strongly did the conviction take hold of him that he would indeed find Hubert Dorrien at the bottom, but it would be in the form of a shattered, ghastly and unrecognisable corpse. Not an encouraging or nerve-steadying reflection for one in his perilous position, but Eustace Ingelow, with his brave heart and good conscience, felt that it would take more than this to cause his nerve to fail. And now all sounds were hushed, and save for the laboured breathing of the climber and the occasional rattle of dislodged stones, falling with a hollow echo to the bottom of the abyss, the silence was almost oppressive.

“Is he safe?” whispered the anxious father to Jem Pollock, as the sound of something heavy reaching the ground was borne upward.

“Ay, sir, he is,” replied the other gravely. The stout fisherman had never ceased to reproach himself for allowing a lad like that to venture upon such an errand while he himself remained safe at the top. What would he find down there, he wondered?

And Eustace was thinking the same, as, very much exhausted, he thankfully realised that his feet were once more on solid ground. His heart beat fast and irregularly as he peered about in the dim half light, expecting every moment to meet with a horrible sight. But the cave was empty. A big crab sidled away into a dark corner, with its formidable nippers extended, menacingly, and shoals of smaller ones ran spiderlike into the little pools of water left by the tide in the rocks and sand. The green, slimy walls were hung

with seaweed and studded with pointed limpets, but of anything human there was no trace.

No trace. Stay—what was that? A gleam of something caught his eye—something that lay half-buried in the sand. He picked it up, and his heart gave a great jump. It was a small and curiously-wrought silver matchbox.

A shout outside and Mr Curtis and his party joined him. In the flurry of his excitement and the exhaustion following upon his perilous and violent exertions, Eustace handed over his discovery to the vicar. The next moment he would have given anything to have kept it quietly to himself. Why, he could not for the life of him have told—one of those strange and most unerring instincts.

“I fancy there’s no doubt now as to the poor fellow’s fate,” said Mr Curtis. “He must have fallen from above, and even if he lived after it, must have been carried away by the tide. See, the high-water mark is a good many feet above our heads as we stand here.”

They looked up. It was as he said. Even at the highest point in the fissure, wherever they could stand, the wet slimy water-line was beyond their reach. A shout was heard above, and Jem Pollock’s face could be seen peering over the brink.

“The tide!” he shouted. “Get away out o’ that as fast as ever ye can. She’s a comin’ into the bight like a racer, and it’ll take ye all your time.”

No further warning was necessary, and they hastened to act upon this one. Hubert Dorrien’s sad fate was established beyond doubt, and unless his body was ultimately washed up on the beach, he would be no more seen until the day when the sea should give up her dead.

An hour later the party joined hands on the cliff. Further search was useless, for it was now quite dark. Next day it might be continued; and then it would be not for the living, but for the mangled remnants of the dead.

“I have greatly to thank you, Mr Ingelow,” said the General, his face very white and set and his speech forced. “Your help has been most valuable, and of the courage and energy you have displayed I cannot think too highly. And to you, too, my men, I must tender my thanks for your efforts towards the rescue or recovery of my unfortunate son. I cannot talk more about it at present, but you may be sure I shall not forget it. Good-night.”

He extended his hand to Eustace, who warmly grasped it.

“Believe me, General Dorrien, I would gladly have done more to have met with better success,” he said in a tone of sympathetic respect. And Eustace, in the midst of that sorrowful scene, could not feel so depressed as he told himself he ought, for athwart it there smiled upon him, though mournfully now, Nellie’s sweet face, and he felt she was nearer within his reach than he had of late so much as dared to dream.

The party separated on the dark cliff’s brow and the General and Mr Curtis rode sadly home.

And that night in the stately mansion a bitter cry went up, and the voice of great mourning—a mother sorrowing for her lost and passionately loved son, whose voice she was destined never again to hear on this side of the grave.

Chapter Thirty One.

"Death's Altar, by the Lone Shore."

A fortnight had slipped away since Hubert Dorrien's disappearance, and still the stranger stayed on at "The Silver Fleece," in Battisford. Those who had at first marvelled what attraction their dull little town had for one of his stamp had quite ceased speculating as to his pursuits and identity. As to the former, they had come to the conclusion that he was an antiquary of some sort—a professor most likely, and a member of some learned society—who was engaged on a work on the curiosities and antiquities of the neighbourhood, which he spent long days in exploring, asking many questions about it, and when not thus employed, he would shut himself up and sit for hours writing. As to the latter, well, it didn't signify. Anyone could see that he was a gentleman born, and sure enough, didn't he pay his way, and wasn't he pleasant-spoken and friendly with everybody? So "The Silver Fleece" was right glad of its guest, and would fain keep him as long as he chose to stay. He got his letters, too, quite regularly, addressed to Robert Durnford, Esq, and now and then a learned looking pamphlet. What more could Battisford desire in the way of vouchers for his respectability?

In Battisford, sooner than in Wandsborough, Hubert Dorrien's sad fate ceased to be a nine days' wonder. It was talked of occasionally on market days by farmers assembled at their one o'clock dinner in the coffee-room at "The Silver Fleece," and in the evening sometimes the loquacious waiter would entertain a batch of newly arrived "commercials," over their hot spirits and water, with a highly graphic narrative of the event, to which the accompaniment of the supernatural lent unusual spice. Sometimes in these conversations the stranger would join, putting in a careless remark or two, or asking a question, but never by any chance would he attempt avoidance of the subject.

And what was Roland Dorrien's real frame of mind, having committed a ruthless and what the world might call a cowardly murder! It is a strange thing to have to record, but the fact is he felt no great compunction. He had spent some of the most impressionable years of his life in the Far West, where human life was held at the lowest possible valuation, and he had known of at least a dozen instances where men had been shot dead upon far less provocation than he had received. Besides, he had not particularly meant to kill the other; unfortunately, the mouth of the fissure had been inconveniently close.

But he whom he had slain was his brother—his own mother's son. Well, what of that? Relationship was a mere accident, in his case an accident in no sense to his advantage, and all the twaddle written and talked about blood being thicker than water, and family affection and so on, but the "thinnest" of cant. And had not this precious brother of his,

not content with supplanting him in his inheritance, taken advantage of his downfall to blacken his name, so that she whom he loved and who had loved him as he felt persuaded she would never again love, even she had, in all probability, brought herself to regard his memory as a loathsome thing; something to be put far from her? Then, to crown all, those insulting words. Yes—whatever had occurred, the other had brought upon himself and had richly deserved, and now, as it happened, it was perhaps as well that the popular verdict should be one of accidental death.

And had this man no conscience? Since there was no chance of his being brought to the bar of human justice, had he no fear of the great Hereafter? He had none. He could meet it, whatever it was, without flinching. If he did not altogether disbelieve in a future existence, he was at any rate firmly convinced that for himself it could hold no worse state of things than did the present. That was impossible, for he was utterly without hope in the world.

And now he had made up his mind to leave Battisford. He had remained there long enough to avoid the suspicion that would inevitably have attached to a casual stranger coming and going coincidently with the fatality—now he would go. He had not seen Olive Ingelow since the brief glimpse he had obtained of her in the lamp-lit street that fateful evening, and it was better so. He was hard as adamant now, cold, stony—all his natural impulses petrified at their source. One glance into those sweet eyes: one pitiful, tender tone of the dear voice, and all might be undone. He would soften again, melt for the time, and his overthrow would be complete. No, he would not behold her face again, but he would once more, and for the last time, revisit Wandsborough, arriving towards nightfall, and then the next day he would leave the scene of his wrecked life for ever.

There are some men whom one is constrained to believe were sent into the world to enjoy prosperity, if only for the reason that they are so woefully and completely unfitted to sustain adversity. We must fall foul of another popular cant in asserting that adversity does not strengthen them, neither does it bring out sterling qualities which otherwise would never have seen the light. In no way does it benefit them; on the contrary, they succumb to it and sink down, down, lower and lower, till their ruin is complete. In some occult way this may be a Providential dispensation; we are told that everything is; but, if so, why then to the observer of human nature is it of all things the most marvellous?

Just such a man as this was Roland Dorrien. His rightful place in society he would have filled with credit—it is even probable that under favourable circumstances he would have adorned it; for he had plenty of good qualities, which, in their proper sphere, would have shone out to the advantage of himself and of those who came within his influence. But he was the last person in the world who should have been marked out for adversity,

and with his natural temperament and the fatal way in which he had been brought up, or rather left to grow, it was no wonder that he succumbed.

What man but one who had temporarily taken leave of his better judgment—not to say his senses—would have mapped out for himself such a plan as that which he now proposed? To revisit the scenes of his former prosperity; to wander morbidly over the paths consecrated to his memory by the tenderest associations of love and happiness and bright hopes, knowing perfectly well that the joys of past days must ever be to him as the turned-down page of a sealed book—could mania itself carry a man to greater, to more unreasoning lengths? Yet this is what he deliberately resolved to do.

He would walk along the beach to Wandsborough. The tide was low in the afternoon, and he would be less likely to meet anybody that way. So, arming himself with an overcoat and umbrella, for the day was cloudy and lowering, he sallied forth.

A group of men were standing round the door of the taproom as he passed. Of them he took no notice at first, till a voice arrested his attention—a voice saying in a strong Scotch accent:

"—And I tell ye what it is, Williams. Ye just won't see the young Squire back again. The General hates him wurrse than hell, and 'd sooner burrn the place down than see him in it, even nouw."

For the life of him Roland could not resist turning his head, and his eyes met those of Johnston, the Cranston gardener. Then he kept on his way. Had the other recognised him? he wondered. Their glances had met full. The Scot was a shrewd fellow, and his gaze might have penetrated even this inimitable disguise. If so, why, the sooner he disappeared from Battisford the better, for if it was in Johnston's power to work him mischief he would certainly do so—and it was. But it would not do to look round again, and, after all, why should he care?

He walked rapidly forward, and soon the town was left out of sight behind. A few sheep browsing the short grass on the turfy down scampered off a little distance and stood watching him as he made his way to the beach; but not a soul did he meet, and at length, as he reached the shore, it seemed to him that he stood in the world alone. He walked on, a great seething, tumbling plain on his left, the white, curling billows chasing each other obedient to the propulsion of a strong and freshening breeze, their foam-crests leaping to the misty sky. A flying scud partly hid the tall cliffs, and then passed, and the crescent-like bays and looming promontories of the iron coastline stood clear above the restless, leaden-hued waters. A scene of wild, solitary grandeur. The cold salt breeze played upon his face; the roll and hiss of the white waves breaking on the beach seemed

full of voices speaking from that happier Past as the exile wended his way along the lone shore; and in the tones of the rising gale he could hear in a far-off, dreamy way the voice as he had heard it when they walked together over this very ground.

All the deepest chords in the man's wretched, storm-tossed soul were harrowed and unstrung. This wild reach of roaring surf, and looming cliffs, and pebbly shingle, with the strong, chill winds resisting his advance, was to him as hallowed ground—to be trodden reverently, and to be lingered on as one is loth to leave the last haven. His head was bent low to resist the fury of the sudden gust which met him as he staggered round a projecting arm of the cliff, and his thoughts were given up to the free play of wildest fancy.

"God or demon—whoever you are that makes such a wretched muddle of the affairs of poor mortals," he murmured in his despair, "take my soul—my life—anything—and plunge it in torments untold for all the ages if you will. Only bring her to me—here—let me see her here for one short half-hour!"

He was hardly conscious of having spoken aloud. It seemed to him but one among many unuttered wishes; and now, as he looked up, his face became ashy and his eyes were fixed, staring and dilated, while he stood rooted to the spot, unable to stir a limb. For not twenty yards off, alone in this remote spot, in the misty twilight of the darkening afternoon, stood the figure of a woman. She was leaning lightly upon a low rock, with one small, shapely hand, gazing out to sea. Her delicate profile was towards him, but there was a mournfulness in the sweet, sad face, and the repose of the mouth was that of one who had well-nigh forgotten how to laugh. A tress or two of soft, dark hair had escaped, and with this the wind was playing wild havoc. Yet she was heedless of it and of all around, and stood there calm and undisturbed, like a beautiful goddess of the wild stormy coast.

His invocation had been answered.

"Olive?"

His voice came harsh and inarticulate. She turned, startled at the strange sound, though not catching the name, and her face paled. Who could this intruder be? She was alone with him and at his mercy, and he looked so wild and queer. She was very frightened, and for a moment all manner of horrid conjecture flashed through her brain. She felt sickly and faint. An escaped lunatic, was one of her first thoughts, having dismissed the tramp theory—and she noticed that he was tall and strong of build, and well-dressed, withal. And he was approaching her.

“Have you lost your way?” she began gently, striving hard to repress the apprehensive tremor in her voice.

“Olive! Don’t you know me?”

With a low cry she sank down on the rock, and sat gazing wildly at him with a white, scared face.

“It is his voice—Roland!”

The spell was broken. He was beside her, and his arms were round her while he poured into her ears passionate words of tender reassurance. And it would be difficult to determine which of the two was most startled by the unexpected meeting.

“My love—my love! Why did you leave me all this long time?” she murmured at last.

Not an intonation of reproach towards himself on her account, only on his own, as if she had said, “Why did you leave me—your haven of refuge when the storm came upon you? Why did you leave me, who would have cleaved to you in adversity—who would have clung to you through evil report a hundred times closer than through good?”

“Yes—why did I?”

He had removed his glasses, and stood before her his old self—but such a shadow of it! She was horrified.

“What have you been doing with yourself?” she said. “Have you been trying to die?”

Then he laughed—a harsh, bitter laugh. It rang back from the cliffs in weird, mocking echo.

“Oh, no. The Fates are not so kind. Why did I leave you, you say? Everything was against us. Your father would not listen to me, even when I had my head above water—how could I expect him to when it was below, with no prospect of ever rising to the surface again? You, yourself, would never have acted contrary to his wishes, even if I had been in a position to urge you to—and for this I should be the last to blame you, understand that, well. But for me, an utterly ruined man, to hold you bound to me for life, was just the one thing I could not do.”

“Go on.”

“Well, we never saw each other again after that informal parting in Wandsborough street,” he went on. “I hoped—I mean I tried to hope—you would forget me and be happy again. After all, why should you not? Only three or four short months—a summer dream.”

His voice was harsh and grating. At times it seemed that he would choke.

“A summer dream! My whole life was lived within that summer dream,” she whispered, more to herself than to him. “Roland, you will not leave me again!”

His haggard eyes devoured the sweet face which was bent down upon his hands, and he felt that if hell itself opened to receive him its torments would be rest compared with what he was undergoing at that moment. The pleading voice, the little hands imprisoning his own as she leant upon him, giving herself to him as it were in all the rich fulness of her love—this for which he had hungered and agonised, sleeping and waking, during the long weary period of his hopeless exile, and which, now that he had obtained it, he must deliberately forego. In one short hour, in fact, he would be apart from her, in bitter loneliness once more. No—there was no hope. His pride was a part of himself. Penniless and an outcast, how could he keep for himself and wear this priceless jewel? And now he was something more—he bore a burden that not all the untold wealth of ages could take from him. And yet at this moment he felt as if he could imbrue his hands in the most pitiless of crimes, to obtain the wealth which should save them both.

“My darling, you will not leave me again!”

Not the scud in the dark, lowering sky above—not the wild waves plunging and careering before the shrieking wind, to hurl themselves madly upon yonder sharp rocks—not the whirl of air and water and vaporous cloud, was more storm-tossed and chaotic than the thoughts which surged through the man’s soul, and flashed with well-nigh the fires of mania in his overwrought brain. His reply came—hoarse and labouring.

“I must.”

The sweet, sad face sank down upon his hands, which her own were grasping with an almost convulsive clutch, and a shiver like a great choking sob ran through her. She had found him—the wanderer whom everybody else had lost sight of. She had found him, as was her right, for he belonged to her. She had found him—how then could she let him wander from her again, away into the outer darkness of the cold, wide world! All too lightly had she valued those days in the by-gone past, until they had fled, never to return.

O fairest summer, with thy many-hued glories of rich verdure, and heathery-crimson and golden-tinted hills keeping watch above an azure sea! O halcyon time, of vows whispered amid the radiance of a passing glow from Heaven's bright plains, as the westering sun drove his great amber-wheeled chariot down to his rest, shedding back an ethereal lustre upon a love-dawn which should lend a hundredfold more of beauty to a beauteous world—where are you now? Gone. And you—leaden waves, tossing wildly to the misty wrack above—storm-blast howling o'er the watery waste—cliffs spectral and grey, throwing back with hollow echo the surges' tone—to you it is given, in mocking fitness, to behold the anguish of two breaking hearts, here on the lone seashore!

"It was never intended we should part again," she murmured without looking up. "Oh! why should you have been brought here to-day? I never visit this place now, and to-day it must have been something more than chance that made me do so."

"I don't believe in your Heaven, or why should it delight to torture any living creature as it is torturing us, here, to-day," broke jerkily from his set, dry lips. "Listen, Olive—darling, and you will understand why I must leave you again. I am destitute at this moment, utterly destitute; one who has gone down beneath the weight of what some might call a curse—but I don't believe in such things. And above and beside all this there is—there is—a barrier between us—a barrier of my own raising, and with its shadow I would never cloud your dear life."

"Oh, Roland. What is it?"

"Ah! If I were to tell you, you would shrink from me, now and for ever. You would even rush into yonder sea to escape from the horror wherewith my presence would inspire you. Why, even your love would turn to repugnance. Yet why should it?—except that the trammelled imagination of a canting world reads crime into what is no crime at all."

"You are quite wrong. I would do none of all this," she answered bravely. A horrid suspicion that the rumours she had heard about him might be true flashed through her mind. What if he had done in a moment of weak desperation that which nothing but death could undo?

"I had never expected to look upon your dear face again," he went on in the same tones of heart-wrung misery. "I set out this day to visit for the last time the scenes we had looked upon together, and to break my heart over the memories that they would evoke. Then, as I trod these stones which your feet had trodden, as on holy ground, I invoked the aid of the demon who rules the universe—offering my life and limitless future of eternity, if such there be—for one glimpse of you. And I was answered. I looked up and

there you stood. Now I care nothing for what may happen. I can face it without fear—for my prayer was answered."

Her tears were falling like rain, and for some time she could not speak—could only cling to him all the firmer.

"You shall not go," she said at length. "You belong to me. A hundred times more than when all things went well with you. Oh, my darling, do not leave me. I claim you now, for you belong to me!" she reiterated passionately.

It may be that to some lives comes a period such as that which these two had to undergo at this moment; it cannot be that it comes to many. But even while she spoke, another had claimed them both—ay, and had already made good his claim. With swift, remorseless subtlety the dark waves came sweeping in. The King of Terrors was about to exact the fulfilment of his awful bargain—and to exact it with interest.

"Olive, come. We must go, and go quickly."

She gazed at him in surprise. His tone had changed to one of calmness, almost indifference, except for a quick anxiety, which her ear detected.

"It will be all we can do to turn the corner over there before the water is even knee-deep."

She followed his glance, and her face paled slightly. Nearly a mile of beach lay between them and the jutting headland, whose base even now was all but hidden by the inflowing tide. As the waves receded, a few yards of ground were left visible, but the next roller or two swept over it completely, breaking into angry foam against the rock. Full well she knew—full well both of them knew—the perilous nature of the coast, for every year added its quota to the list of victims of the treacherous tides.

"We shall never do it, Roland."

"We must try. Come along."

He hurried her forward, and, with the aid of his strong right arm, she had no difficulty in keeping pace with him. But the beach was pebbly and yielding, and before they had gone a hundred yards the consciousness broke upon them that the desired point would be ten or twelve feet under water by the time they should reach it.

“Can’t be done. We must give it up,” he said anxiously, coming to a halt. “Our only chance is to try back. The beach is not so narrow on the Battisford side. We must look sharp, too, or the point behind us will be covered.”

The treacherous waves were creeping up to the promontory he had come round. To remain where they were was hopeless, for in less than an hour the whole of the bay would be completely swept by the sea, which would be breaking against the cliffs many feet higher than their heads as they then stood.

“Now, Olive! It is our only chance.”

Breathless and panting from the pace at which she had come over the heavy yielding ground, Olive resigned herself with a shiver to be half dragged, half carried through the belt of milky surf which barred their passage round the rocky promontory, and it was all her companion could do to support her and keep his own footing amid the powerful wash and swirl of the receding waves, for he had been obliged to watch his opportunity and make a dash through between the inflowing waves, and, being knee-deep in water, with the pebbly ground beneath his feet, uncertain and shifting in the treacherous “undertow,” the wonder is that both were not carried away there and then. Yet it was only putting off the evil hour. Two minutes later and they stood within the next bay.

A quick, despairing ejaculation escaped Roland’s lips. He had miscalculated his distance, and now the strip of beach by which he had reckoned they would be able to effect their escape was a mass of great rolling breakers. To retrace their steps was impossible, even were it of any use. There was no more means of exit from this bay than from the one they had just left. They had but exchanged one death-trap for another.

Then they stood still and stole a furtive look at each other, and all hope died away within their hearts. To the mind of each there came the same thought. The man’s wild prayer and desperate vow had been heard and answered. The King of Terrors was about to exact the fulfilment of the awful bargain—and to exact it with interest—and the great, cruel sea, which alone had witnessed and registered the reckless vow, was now lending itself and its rage a willing instrument for the pitiless fulfilment of that vow.

Chapter Thirty Two.

In the Valley of the Shadow.

"Olive, it is I who have brought you to your death!"

His face was ghastly with the horror of his self-reproach and desperation. The two were standing now, locked in each other's embrace, beneath the cliff, watching the narrow strip of beach rapidly disappear as the fierce tide came pouring in. Nothing could be seen immediately above, for the rock beetled overhead as though about to topple upon them, but running out on each side of the bay rose a crescent of frowning wall. And from thence no succour need be expected, for its summit was lost in the gathering mist. The winter twilight was fast descending, the chill blast howled and shrieked over the heaving, storm-lashed main, and a chaos of driving, leaping billows, whose great leaden backs and white rearing crests rose hideous and spectral in the gloaming as they dashed the one upon the other in their tumultuous rush, flinging themselves high against the adamantine walls and falling back with a roar and a hiss. The grim coastline was enveloped in wreathe of white spray, and the surf-lashed base of the heights rang again as it repelled the onset of each watery monster, while in showers of milky foam the sea ran from the black, slippery rocks. A scene of wild grandeur, unparalleled in its tremendous loneliness—a terrible scene, even when viewed from a point of safety. What must it then have been to the two who stood there awaiting an inevitable death!

"It is I who have brought you to this!" She looked up at him and nestled more closely in his embrace. In the midst of her bodily fear—the natural fear of a weak woman suddenly brought face to face with a horrible death—she was able to smile. And it was a smile of unselfish reassurance.

"No, dearest. It is not your doing," she said. "If it had not been for finding me here, you would have gone your way in safety. Roland—it is I who have destroyed you."

"By heaven—no!" he broke in passionately. "I would sooner die with you than live without you. But nothing can get rid of the fact that it is owing to me that you are here at all. You, for whom I would have given five hundred lives—would have lost the salvation of a thousand souls to see in safety now. Oh, my darling—my heart's sweet love—will not your God again take me at my word and work a miracle to save only you!" he added with a despairing, bitter cry, as he sank upon his knees at her feet, still clasping her with both his arms.

She bent her face down till it rested against his, and her soft, caressing hands were round his neck.

“Hush—my own!” she said. “Do not talk in that desperate way. A very little while, and we shall be united to part no more. We—you especially—have been terribly tried; now we are about to pass through the waters of death, but our sweet Saviour is very merciful. He will not part us again.”

Her calm courage and the solemn conviction of her tender tones seemed to breathe a halo of peace amid that jarring scene of storm and chaos. Their faces were wet with the showers of salt spray, and the girl’s soft hair, partially unfastened, was tossed rudely about by the cutting wind. The thunder of the surf upon the shore and the shrieking of the fierce gale drowned all other sound, yet in an interval in the turmoil, her voice could be heard fervently praying. She pleaded that if it was agreeable to the Divine Will they might be rescued from their imminent peril, but if not, and it was appointed to them now to pass through the awful waters of death, that grace might be given them both patiently to undergo whatever period of penance might be necessary to their purification, so that they might at last be united, never again to part, safe in the Heavenly Country. Then, with her head upon her lover’s shoulder, his arms around her, and her hands in his, it seemed to Olive Ingelow that the world was very far away, and she could await with perfect resignation the short but terrible struggle which should set them both free.

Rolling in, huge and awful in the dim gloaming, the mighty billows roared nearer and nearer, hurling great masses of milky foam at their very feet. They could hardly see each other’s face in the weird, sepulchral light.

“Roland, we are close to Smugglers’ Ladder, are we not?”

He started at the sound of her voice, in which there was a ring of hope.

“Quite close. Why?”

“Is there no chance of escape that way?”

He shook his head sadly.

“None whatever. I had thought of that, but it seemed better to—to face the worst here in the open than to be drowned like rats in a hole. Why, the tide runs up it like a mill-race.”

He had thought of it, and now her suggestion revived the ghastliness of the idea. What a terrible revenge of Fate! Come what might there could be no hope. Had the awful Shape been seen upon The Skegs again? Would not men be discussing the apparition with

bated breath the next morning as the chill dawn revealed to the eyes of the devoted searchers two drowned corpses? Could this legion of leaping, hungry billows be the same blue, smiling, peaceful sea, on whose shore they two had sat together, when from Olive's lips he first heard about the drear tale of violence and revenge which overshadowed the spot as with a curse. If he were to meet his end in that place of all others? Then another idea struck him. They might by singular good luck find some ledge that would place them above the reach of the waters. He himself had no such hope, but it was just barely possible.

"It is our only chance," he continued, "and the very poorest of poor ones. But come; we will try it."

On they sped, straining every nerve to reach the great jagged rent in the cliff, which they could see not far ahead. Farther than they thought, though, for as they stood within its dismal portals, the advance-guard of the tide already swirled knee-deep around them.

Gloomy and terrible in the extreme was the aspect of the chasm. The last faint light from without, straggling through, here and there fell upon the black, slippery rock, and the bellowing of the surf as it came dashing in, white and seething, was echoed in hollow clamour up the sides of the abyss. No light was visible above, and the atmosphere within this hideous cave hung cold and dank as the breaths of the grave. And upon the man who knew the grisly secret which these slimy walls had witnessed and had kept so well, the horrors of the place weighed an hundredfold. The outer darkness; the roaring and hissing of the great surges; the shriek of the gale and the flapping of the long wisps of seaweed against the face of the rock; all were as accusing voices—the exultant gibbering of demons come to claim their just due—and it seemed to his overtaxed brain that ghostly hands were stretched forth to drag him to his everlasting woe. A cold sweat was on his brow and his knees trembled under him. Were it not that a most precious life depended on his exertions, he would have yielded up the struggle then and there, and have plunged headlong into the boiling surf.

It was of no avail. They had immured themselves in their living tomb. A dozen great seas came sweeping in one after the other, and the chasm was a mass of white, churning water dashing backwards and forwards with resistless velocity. They had retreated as far as they could go, and now stood up to the waist in water. The very next wave would carry them off their feet—and then—

It came—crashing high against the cliff overhead, and whirling back with lightning speed. Then another and another, and Roland Dorrien was struggling in the surge—alone.

Oh, the agony of that moment! Even while battling wildly for a minute more of dear life, the awful, aching void of separation was the only consciousness he retained—that he was not to be allowed even to die with her hand clasped in his. We know that a man can dream the events of hours in as many seconds. In this fleeting moment this man endured an eternity of everlasting woe. He was separated from her in death—he would be separated from her in the future life—and his lot would be among the lost for ever.

Then his senses began to fail. He was hurled to and fro, there was a roaring in his ears; he was sinking—down, down, down—then up again into black space. Then he struck against hard rock—his footing was firm. Instinctively he threw out his hands and grasped something long and trailing; the waters fell back, and with a mighty effort he resisted their suction. He was on a ledge.

But Olive? Had the Eternal Vengeance spared him and taken her life? Was she drowned and dead in that hell-cave while he wae doomed to live? No—a thousand times no!

And then a cry, so awful and blood-curdling in its unspeakable agony, rang out above the thundrous turmoil in that grisly cave, as surely was never emitted from human breast before. It rose above the bellowing of the mighty surges, it rang upward through the black sides of the chasm, with many a weird echo—upward into the outer air—upward, till assuredly it must have mounted to the very throne of high Heaven.

“Great God! Great God! Spare her and take me!” But a grim spectre stood at his side—only a voice from the pit of the grave answered in his ear:

“Life for life. Blood for blood. Live on, accursed one, but her thou shalt never behold again in this world or in that which is to come. Never—never!”

The survivor stood for a moment on the edge of the black, slippery rock, straining his haggard eyes as he strove to pierce the gloom through which the white, seething foam was dimly rushing.

“Never—never!” he shouted, with a maniacal laugh, and poising himself he leaped headlong into the surf.

What was that? As he rose, something came in contact with him. It was a human body, limp, lifeless. A thrill of the most exquisite relief shot through his heart. He had found her. And now he felt that he had the strength of a hundred men. Half-a-dozen powerful, yet judicious strokes—for to be dashed against the rock would be fatal—and he was again grasping the ledge. A wave swept up, lifting them high in the air, but he clung to

his hold with the tenacity of despair, and then, before he knew how it was done, he was crouching on the ledge, holding the girl's insensible form in his arms.

Was she dead? Ah, no. He could hear her faint, regular breathing as he pressed his lips to hers. Wave after wave swept their precarious refuge, but now he was filled with a new hope. They had been spared for a purpose. Even if they were to die they would die together, and this reflection was sufficient to fill him with the keenest bliss after the awful agony of that moment of separation.

With one foot planted firmly against a projection in the rock, and grasping with both hands the slender and precarious hold which the seaweed and rock afforded above, Roland Dorrien crouched there for two long hours in the pitchy darkness, supporting the girl's unconscious form. Waves surged over them, and more than once it was all he could do to avoid being swept from the slanting ledge, and his muscles cracked as he strained every nerve to resist the potent suction of the receding seas. For two long hours he dared not move a finger or alter his position by a hair's breadth, and his laboured breathing was loud and stertorous in the intervals between the howling of the waves in the cavernous gloom and the hollow, metallic echoes, like the booming toll of a great bell, which thundered from the overhanging rocks. At length, when his exhausted strength threatened to bear no more, he suddenly realised that the onslaughts of the waves were becoming less frequent, and their force when they did come was weaker. Surely the tide had turned.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Cain.

“Are you here, Roland?”

The tone was the faintest of whispers, but the voice was as if the silvern echoes of heavenly harps had suddenly been wafted to the listener’s anxious ear. He could hardly murmur a reply.

“Where are we? How dark it is!” continued she, in an awed whisper.

“We are safe.”

“Safe?—Oh, I remember.”

“Don’t talk yet, my darling. Lie still and let yourself be perfectly at rest, as much so as you can, that is, in this uncomfortable attitude. We shall have to hold on here for some time longer.”

“But you?”

“Never mind me. Wait. That’s better now,” shifting his position. And, indeed, it was a real relief—so great had been the strain upon his powers.

“Now try to sleep,” he continued. “We shall have to stay here for some time; in fact, it will be difficult to get down in the dark. We were literally washed up here—and here we had better stay.”

Though the seas no longer reached their place of refuge they still surged angrily through the chasm. Olive shivered.

“How cold it is!” she said faintly.

“Yes. Take a ‘nip’ of this. It is absolutely necessary!” he said, unscrewing the top of a small brandy flask.

She obeyed, for she felt very faint and exhausted. The potent cordial restored her a little and sent the blood coursing through her veins with renewed life.

“There! Fortunate I had it with me,” he went on. “And now, darling, you must sleep if you can. You will be perfectly safe until they find us, for they will be sure to send out a strong search party.”

“Poor dear father will be so horribly frightened. Roland, how soon can we go to him?” she asked faintly.

He made no reply at first. The question had called back his thoughts to the hard world again, to such as he more pitiless than the billows from which they had miraculously escaped, colder than the chill wind which whistled through the great dark vault. The exile’s soul was bitter within him again. They two had gone down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death together, and had emerged thence, only to be parted once more.

“It will not be safe to go from here—until they find us,” he replied. “But only think of the relief your father will experience when he finds you are safe! Why, it’ll be worth while going through the suspense he is in at the present moment. While I—”

He checked himself. No words could depict the awful desperation which lay upon this man’s soul at that dark hour. All his hopes in this life were dead—his very life itself was forfeited, could be claimed at any moment—and in the next he had little, if any, belief—certainly no hope. Why had the sea spared him, why had it not taken them both together, or, at any rate, him? Why was he not lying at rest for ever far beneath the tossing billows—beyond the reach of the storms and whirlwinds of this wretched life? Was he spared to eke out an accursed existence? Could there be any truth in the old story of Cain? He remembered it as one of the sacred teachings which had been instilled into his infantile mind with all the accompaniments of rod and task-room and unbending severity, and which he had since scouted, in common with other like stories, as a mere childish legend. “A wanderer on the face of the earth.” Ah, but then his sentence had begun before he had earned it. The curse of Cain had been upon him before he had committed Cain’s crime. And why had the temptation and opportunity been so thrust upon him? He had gone out that fatal night perfectly devoid of harmful intent—not so much as a thought of it, indeed, had entered his head. He had returned a murderer.

Then a horrid thought came over him. What if the purpose for which he had been brought to this spot was not, after all, accomplished? What might not the terrible sea yield up? That face with its look of awful despair, upon which he had so pitilessly gazed in the wan moonlight, as it sank into the black abyss—how could he bear its unearthly look now, should it suddenly appear before him with glassy, upbraiding eyes, and features hideous from the effects of its long immersion? Even as this thought struck him he descried something floating in the water—something long and dark, like a human

form. Great God—it was terrible! A cold perspiration broke out all over him as, with a dilated stare, he watched the awful object. What could it be, swaying helplessly backwards and forwards on the ebbing surge? Then it disappeared.

The midnight gloom deepened, and the chill breaths of the mist-laden blast swept through the great fissure, playing about his face like the cold touch of shadowy, spectral hands. Every sound was re-echoed with a hollow clang from the chasm's overhanging walls, and in the noise of falling water as it ran in torrents from the rocks with each receding swell, and in the many-tongued raving of the imprisoned surges, he seemed to hear the voice of a brother's blood crying from the deep, and to feel the flap of demon wings in his ears. Had he been alone in this ghastly solitude his very reason might have given way.

But now a blessed ray of light and hope beamed in upon the outer darkness. If he had destroyed life, had he not also saved it? This horrible abyss which had been the scene of his crime had also witnessed his act of reparation—or what might well stand as such—for now he could not help realising that had he not appeared on the beach when he did, his companion would never have retraced her steps in time—even apart from the delay of which he had been the cause. And she would have perished miserably, for her own unaided exertions would never have availed her to reach this place of refuge, or to take advantage of it when there, had she reached it.

The soft, regular breathing of the sleeping girl betokened that her slumbers were peaceful. Her head rested on his shoulder as she reclined against him, a beautiful picture of the most perfect dependence and trust. This pure, sweet, innocent life which he had saved should be his own ark of refuge now. Passionately he kissed the slightly-parted lips.

"My beautiful—my pure guardian angel! I can defy all the demons of the nethermost shades while you are with me!"

She stirred in her sleep and murmured slightly. Then her hands tightened yet more clingingly upon his, and nestling closer to him she slumbered again. No supernatural terrors could appal him now, no fearful imaginings begotten of cold and darkness. Morbid temperament and crime-laden conscience counted for naught as he sat there in the heart of the wild cliffs at midnight, and the pure, lovely life of her who slumbered so peacefully and confidingly in his arms, was dependent on him for its preservation. Whatever grisly secret those grim waters held, they might keep or divulge; it was powerless to scare him while her presence was with him. And so the dark hours wore on, one by one, over the sleeper and over the watcher.

“This way, sir, and mind ’ow you walk. Better let me go fust—if you’ll wait ’ere!” said a rough seafaring voice, and then, in a lower tone, as if addressing another person, it went on, “Better keep him ’ere, sir. If we do find the poor young lady in ’ere—well you know, sir, there ain’t a ghost of a chance of her being alive.”

Lights began to flash in the chasm, feeble and glimmering in contrast with the gigantic ruggedness of its massive walls. Then Roland Dorrien started as if he had been shot. Their time of emancipation had come. She was about to be taken from him, and he must wander forth again. Rapidly he resumed his tinted glasses, which in the uncertain light would suffice to guard against recognition.

“This way?” he called out in a harsh, quavering voice which needed no disguise. “The young lady is perfectly safe, and you will find her here.”

Twice that night did these stern cliffs echo a great cry. First, the awful outpouring of a human soul in its last depths of anguish, now a shout of unparalleled joy and thankfulness. The searching party rushed in the direction of the sound, stumbling and nearly falling in their eagerness.

“Here we are. Now, careful,” cried Roland. And Olive’s half-fainting form was lowered from the ledge which had proved such an ark in the time of need, and placed in her father’s arms. The rough fishermen turned away their heads, and honest Jem Pollock’s manful attempts to clear his throat resulted in a series of dismal barks, which echoed hideously from the overhanging heights.

“Well, I’m darned!” he said, looking up at the ledge. “Who’d ha’ thought such a blessed bit o’ good luck? Well, I’m darned—ahum!—beg pardon, Muster Turner,” he interjected apologetically, becoming aware of the young curate’s presence, right at his elbow.

The first joy of success over, they began to eye the stranger with some curiosity. He stepped forward.

“I fancy the young lady will soon come round,” he said in his assumed voice, which grated with an anxious harshness upon the ears of the listeners. “She has been rather frightened, I fear, and is very wet. The sooner you get her between warm blankets the better.”

“You have earned for yourself the gratitude and blessing not only of a father but of an entire community, sir,” said Turner, extending his hand to him.

“Indeed! How?”

“Why, by saving this young lady’s life,” went on Turner in surprise. “Anyone can see with half an eye that she could never have reached that place of refuge but for you.”

The other smiled sadly.

“I fancy the young lady saved both our lives, since it was she who suggested falling back on this place at all,” he replied. “There was no other chance for us, and so I acted on the idea—happily, as it transpired. And now, if I might suggest—she should be taken home as soon as possible.”

Leaving reluctantly his recovered child, Dr Ingelow hurried up.

“God bless you, sir, whoever you may be!” he cried, seizing both the strangers hands. “Pray do me the favour of making my house your resting-place—you must be wet through and thoroughly tired out—and of allowing me to become further acquainted with one who has rescued my darling child from a terrible death.”

The exile’s heart thoroughly knew its own bitterness, as he heard once more the true, kindly tones. But it could not be. He would accompany them until they reached the high road, when he would make some excuse, and hasten to fly from the temptation to which he dared not yield. So he consented.

The waves were breaking with a hoarse, sullen boom, as though disappointed of their prey, as the party returned along the beach in the pitchy darkness of the small hours of the winter’s morning, and the light of the lanterns shone with a weird gleam upon the receding surf. Olive had been placed in an improvised litter of shawls and wraps slung on to two stout poles which they had brought with them, and was borne by two sturdy fishermen. Exhaustion and the terrors she had gone through had reduced her to a state of semi-unconsciousness, in which her mind was hardly sensible of what went on around her. Her father, still terribly anxious, walked at her side, and the stranger, who evinced no disposition to talk, had taken up his position on the other side—an arrangement not exactly to Turner’s taste, who, however, took comfort from the thought that the man was fifty or sixty at least, even though he was well-made and free of step still, and undeniably a gentleman. At last a stray light betokened the vicinity of Wandsborough.

“Now, let me see,” mused the stranger. “This is the Battisford road, I believe. Do not think me very rude, Mr—Ingelow—but on turning things over I find I must unavoidably be back in London to-day. I should have gone up by the night train but for this

unfortunate—this fortunate, rather should I call it—walk of mine. On some future occasion, perhaps, I may have the great pleasure of renewing our acquaintance."

"My dear sir, we really cannot allow such a thing," cried the rector, aghast. "You will surely reconsider this. At any rate, put off your flight for a few hours. It is a long way to Battisford, and we are just home now. You shall be driven over later if you wish it. Now do oblige me—"

All who witnessed it thought they had never seen such a curious look before, as that which came into the other's face. A sharp struggle was going on within him.

"Go back with them—tell them who you are," said the lonely heart of the exile. "You will have friends—a way will be found out of your difficulties somehow, and then what love and peace and happiness will be yours!"

"You—a beggar, penniless, ruined, destitute?" whispered Pride. "You, whose memory is under a cloud, and who are without the barest means of existence—will you go back to accept the charity of those with whom you moved as equal? Only reveal your identity and see how their grateful overtures will cool!"

Said Conscience, "Leave her—assassin. Can red blood-guiltiness and pure white innocence ever mate? Leave her, ere she comes to abhor your name." And Pride and Conscience triumphed over Heart. "I greatly fear I must excuse myself for being unable to accept your kind hospitality," he said at last. "But if you will do me one favour, I shall feel thankful to you."

"Certainly. What is it?" said the rector. "If you will drop me a line to this address once or twice, and let me know how the young lady gets on, it would be a satisfaction to me. I cannot but feel greatly interested in my companion in adversity," replied the stranger, rapidly scribbling on a card, which he handed to Dr Ingelow.

"Why, most certainly," said the rector, hardly glancing at it. "Most certainly. But—"

He stopped short, gazing blankly into the darkness. The stranger had disappeared.

Roland Dorrien returned to Battisford in the grey winter's morning, and having put together his few possessions at "The Silver Fleece," he left that ancient hostelry for the railway station, to the unfeigned regret of the garrulous waiter, whom even a liberal honorarium could hardly console for the loss of so congenial a recipient of local gossip. Yet, up to the last moment, he found himself inconsistently cherishing a wild hope that, his identity being cleared up, the rector might come over in post haste to insist upon his

return to Wandsborough. But no such summons came, and when he took his seat in a hard, cushionless third-class carriage, down whose rattling windows the pelting rain streamed in torrents, his case was about as hopeless and desperate as the lot of mortal man could well be.

Chapter Thirty Four.

After the Storm.

Hubert Dorrien's sad fate soon came to be recognised as an accepted fact by Wandsborough and its neighbourhood. He had fallen down Smugglers' Ladder in the dark, for had not young Mr Ingelow found a bit of the cord of his eyeglass hanging from the brink of that fateful chasm? And his body had been carried away by the tide, as to that there was no doubt. Why, only a fortnight afterwards, the rector's daughter would have lost her life at the same spot, to a dead certainty, had it not been for a stranger, who must have been sent there by Providence, specially for the purpose, said Wandsborough and its neighbourhood. And no sooner had the community arrived at this conclusion than its verdict was confirmed beyond a doubt. The body of the missing man was cast up on the shore a few miles from Wandsborough, and though in a dreadful state after its long immersion, the face was unrecognisable, the clothing, watch, and other possessions of the missing man were not, and the identity thus established, a coroner's jury returned a verdict of "Death by misadventure," and the remains were interred in Cranston churchyard. One juryman, burning with zeal, was anxious to append a rider, censuring the absence of fencing along the dangerous part of the cliffs, but was stifled by the remainder, who were alive to the fact that although part of such fencing would be at the cost of the deceased's father, by far the larger portion would fall upon the rates, i.e. themselves.

Then the gossips began to speculate as to the probable effect of the fatality upon domestic affairs at Cranston Hall. Would it result in a healing of the breach between General Dorrien and his eldest—now his only—son. In its heart of hearts the neighbourhood hoped it would. Him, at any rate, it knew, and if he was somewhat cold and reticent, he would none the less keep up his position as it should be kept up, an eventuality by no means so certain in the case of poor Hubert, had he been the one to inherit. But if the feud were to run on to the bitter end, the probability was that some stranger, wholly undesirable, would eventually reign at Cranston.

But as time went on, it brought with it no sign of reconciliation. No communication passed between Roland Dorrien and his father, indeed the General was in as complete a state of ignorance on the subject of his son's whereabouts as the most curious of the busybodies who interested themselves in his affairs. In truth, there were times when the old man realised his loneliness and would fain have had the prodigal return, but then it must be unreservedly as a prodigal and not as one with whom terms were to be made, that must be distinctly understood. To be sure, he forgot that his son had inherited his own unyielding nature, but that is just the very thing parents of his type invariably do forget.

Finally, as the prodigal made no sign, he grew more hardened than ever in his resentment. He would not have been unwilling to abandon his cherished idea—to wit, the Cranston-Ardleigh alliance; perhaps, in time, might have brought himself to waive his opposition to the Rectory one, had the exile only approached in an apologetic spirit. In fact, it was one of those rare cases where a judicious friend, having touch of both parties, might have been invaluable. But no advances did the erring one make, conciliatory or otherwise, and the stern old man, sonless and unloved in his old age, grew more morose and reserved every day.

On his wife, the bereavement told with terrible effect. All the love of her hard, yet strong, nature had been poured out upon her youngest-born. He was her Benjamin, and now that he had been taken from her, she felt that it would, indeed, bring down her grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. And what lent tenfold anguish to her bereavement was that she regarded it as an act of the direct vengeance of Heaven. Like all women of her hard, uncompromising opinions, she believed firmly in "judgments"; unlike most of them, however, she did not believe in these applying to her neighbours to the exclusion of herself, and now fully, yet unresignedly, did she admit to herself that her passive acquiescence in, if not indirect attempts at the robbing of her eldest son of his birthright in favour of her idolised younger, had been visited by the signal and direct curse of Heaven. And, perhaps, in one sense she was not altogether wrong, for partiality and favouritism in family life is dangerously likely to breed, at any rate, the spirit of Cain.

Though fully recognising the justice of the visitation, yet, none the less, was she furiously rebellious. She remembered Roland's last words to her as he went forth in anger from his father's roof, words spoken in bitter and wrathful satire. "Let me congratulate you upon having things at last exactly as you have long wished them to be." And now it seemed to her that there was menace in the words. And from that moment she hated her eldest son. Her former want of love now turned to something more positive, and she felt that she fiercely hated him, as in some mysterious degree the cause of his brother's death.

She had not even the poor consolation of once more gazing upon the beloved face, all cold and unresponsive as it would be. Even that was denied her. Ah, but how little had she grieved for that other son when he had gone down beneath the buffeting storms which had so fiercely swept the ocean of his life, how secretly exultant she had been that his birthright had passed to his brother, whom she loved!

All that a daughter could do had Nellie done for her mother at this terrible crisis. Her patience was unbounded, even when her hardest and most unselfish efforts were met with fierce reproaches and ironical taunts. What had she cared for poor Hubert when he

was alive, that she should feign grief for him now? Why, if she thought of anyone but herself, it was Roland, to whom everything must give way. At other times the grievance would be that she did not show feeling enough. No one would think that her brother had barely lain a month in his cold grave, to see the cheerful expression of her face. These and similar reproaches were her daily portion, till at last the poor girl had begun to think she really was without feelings, and if not, that the sooner she became so the better.

But there was an ever-brightening spot on her horizon. Although he had been unable to see her, Eustace Ingelow had made of the catastrophe an opportunity of renewing his vows by letter, and even this was as balm to the girl's empty, aching heart. The rector's son was no half-and-half lover, and in a trice the correspondence had become brisk. Of course his letters were supremely incoherent and foolish effusions, such indeed as would convulse a callous court were they produced in a breach of promise suit, but they were so thoroughly genuine, breathing throughout such a spirit of manly affection and real hopefulness, that poor Nellie took vast comfort, and found herself looking forward to the expiration of the few weeks which should bring the Oxford vacation and the writer in person with a degree of eagerness such as she had never before experienced about anything.

Yes. Eustace was hopeful. That mournful search in which he had borne so active and intrepid a part had, he felt, rendered him yeoman's service. Not only had Nellie's father spoken gratefully to him on that occasion, but he had since received a—for him—very kind letter from the General, expressing appreciation of his energetic aid and true sympathy, and trusting that when he returned to Wandsborough he would do him the favour of calling at Cranston, in order that he might adequately thank him in person, he, the General, having given up visiting for the present.

So Eustace saw light ahead, and being very young and proportionately sanguine, his hopes flew off at a tangent and took in the interests of others besides himself. Who knew but that he might be instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation all round? Perhaps the old General was not such a bad sort at bottom, he reasoned, and if only the "padre" could be got at him, why, he was sure things would come right. Then the next thing would be to find poor, dear old Roland. They could advertise for him, or set some of those private-inquiry fellows on his track, and find him somehow, and then Olive and himself could have a double-barrelled wedding, and henceforth they would all be as jolly together as jolly could be, more so in fact by contrast with all these wretched rows which had gone before. So reasoned glowing youth, leaving out of account such considerations as that rancorous feud—bitter, burning words, which, once spoken, cannot be forgotten, no, not in a hundred life-times—black misfortune, and hope turned to the gall of despair do not pass over those concerned without leaving terrible traces of their deadly blight, even if the fruit which they have borne be that of ruin and of crime.

But if Eustace left out of sight these reflections, his father did not. The rector smiled sadly to himself as he read his son's sanguine outpourings—sadly, for he speculated how soon and to what extent contact with the hard world would rub off the boy's fresh, wholesome warmheartedness. Yet one suggestion had fixed his attention, for it bore upon the very plan which he had himself been meditating for some days. It was that he should pay a call of condolence at Cranston. He did not pretend to himself that it was otherwise than distasteful, but it seemed his duty. The Dorriens were not his parishioners, but they were neighbours. They had always treated him with hostility, and on one or two occasions with studied insult; yet they were now sorely afflicted, and for him to allow resentment because of his trifling wrongs to stand in the way at such a time, would be more than unworthy. It was not to be thought of.

So, actuated by these considerations, Dr Ingelow found himself one afternoon ringing at the great door of Cranston Hall. He noted the stare of surprise which came over the stolid visage of the domestic who opened it, and who in a minute returned to inform him that General and Mrs Dorrien did not see visitors at present, but that they desired that their compliments should be conveyed to him. A few days later the rector received a note stamped with the Dorrien arms, which he opened with considerable curiosity. Though stiff and formal, it was not uncivil, as in curt phraseology General Dorrien expressed his appreciation of the Rector of Wandsborough's kindly attention, and indeed that of all other sympathetic inquirers, etc, etc. And the good priest felt that he had done his duty.

But he still had plenty of anxieties, the first and chiefest of which was on Olive's behalf. She had never quite recovered from the effects of that terrible night, and the Wandsborough M.D., together with a great London luminary whom the rector had privily got down to see her, had confessed themselves baffled. At any rate they were clear upon one point. She must have a change; that was imperatively needed, and it must be a thorough one. For a long time she resisted. She did not want to leave Wandsborough, she protested, and why not wait until the summer, when it would be so much pleasanter abroad? But Margaret's diplomacy overruled all these objections, and it was decided they should leave for the south of Spain almost immediately.

On one point Olive's lips were sealed. No word passed them as to the identity of the mysterious stranger. Her lover had more than hinted at some terrible shadow overhanging him, apart from his ruined prospects. Her quick intellect put two and two together. His disguise must have been assumed with no light object, and with no living soul, not even her own father, would she share the key to the mystery. But she lost no time in despatching to the address which he had left, such a letter as should ensure her against losing sight of him again, repeating, as it did, all—and more than all—her

assurances to him during that last meeting on the lone seashore; breathing a world of comfort and hopefulness and love.

Chapter Thirty Five.

Redivivus.

Again we must ask the reader to stand with us in the cheerful dining-room within which he obtained his first introduction to Cranston Hall. Now, as then, the breakfast table looks bright and inviting, as its owner sits at it, opening his letters with a grave, serious face; but now, unlike then, no warm summer sunshine searches out every corner of the floor, for the sky is thickly overcast, and tossing eddies of snowflakes are whirling past, and powdering with a sugary carpet the half-frozen lawn. Nor do the clustering roses softly beat their bruised fragrance against the window panes; in their stead only bare branches, tossing in the wintry wind which, dismally whistling round the corners of the house, enhances the snugness of the cosy room, with its blazing fire, whence reflects a sparkling glow upon the breakfast-things and the snowy cloth.

And he who now sits at the table is not him whom we first saw there, for this is a much younger man. Time, which brought its rude buffets, has at length brought its compensations, and Roland Dorrien now reigns in the halls of his ancestors. Let us look at him as he sits there. A little thinner perhaps, certainly graver, and with a brow never quite free from an expression of anxious care; there is an occasional thread of grey in his dark hair, and in the deep blue eyes may be descried a tinge of sadness which is seldom absent. He has aged, too, in appearance, and that greatly; yet barely two years have gone over his head since the night the mysterious stranger altered the hands of the old clock standing in the hall of “The Silver Fleece Inn” at Battisford.

General Dorrien is dead—has lain in Cranston churchyard a year and a half—and his son reigns in his stead.

But whatever our opinion of the deceased Squire of Cranston, the important part he has played in our story entitles him to something more than the above brief obituary. One evening at the period named, the General failed to return home, whereas it was his wont to appear punctually at the dressing bell. His wife, astonished at this deviation from his rigidly unchanging habits, grew alarmed. The dinner-bell rang—still the General did not appear. Then inquiry elicited that he had been last seen by one of the under-gardeners strolling near the ornamental water, it might have been an hour ago. No, the man noticed nothing strange about his master, who seemed quite well, if anything, rather cheerful. Thoroughly alarmed now, Mrs Dorrien collected the gardeners and proceeded to the spot where her husband had last been seen. It was, as the man had stated, close to the lake—being, in fact, barely thirty yards distant therefrom. While directing the men to scatter and proceed through the shrubbery in search of their master, Mrs Dorrien’s eye fell upon an object floating in the water, and the sight well-nigh deprived her of speech

and power. In response to her signs as she sank down half-fainting, the men pushed off the boat and quickly returned with the General's cane. That was enough. All hope was at an end. But a few minutes more and the body of the missing Squire was found, lying in barely four feet of water. Suicide? No. The medical examination proved that the deceased had been suddenly seized with a fit while standing on the brink of the pool, and had fallen in.

Those who knew the family legend were now more awestruck than they chose to admit. Within a few months of each other, two more Dorriens had miserably perished—alone, unseen, and by the agency of water. Of a truth there was something in the prophecy. When the exile, in response to an urgent advertisement for the late Squire of Cranston's missing son, presented himself at the offices of Messrs Swan and Simcox, solicitors, Furnival's Inn, and having duly satisfied those gentlemen as to his identity, was informed that General Dorrien had died suddenly, and that every search having been made for his will without avail, he, the applicant—who, as he stood there, could not have put down two shillings and a sixpence if his life depended on it—was heir-at-law to the splendid estate of Cranston with its dependency, Minchkil Down, etc, etc, and all personal property besides, the deceased having died intestate, it struck those respected practitioners, Messrs Swan and Simcox, that this new client was a very extraordinary sort of man indeed. For he had sunk into a chair muttering something about "too late," and turning ghastly white, till they became quite alarmed on his account. However, good news does not kill, and the first shock over, Roland Dorrien, without any fuss, quietly, and as if he had never left it, entered upon his own.

Yet when this happened his affairs were in a very desperate condition indeed. For months after his terrible experience with Olive Ingelow on the tide-swept coast he had supported himself by sheer physical labour, more by way of forcing his mind to forget, than with the desire of prolonging his wretched existence, for he had now no longer the means of leaving the country. This could not last long. To a man of his temperament there was but one end—mental prostration, with its dire result, the lunatic asylum or the suicide's grave. And from this his father's death had befallen just—but only just—in time to save him.

How it was that General Dorrien should not only have allowed his unforgiven son to succeed him, but also, by dying intestate, have left his wife and Nellie almost entirely dependent upon that son's bounty, is one of those mysteries that will never be solved in this world. His wife had a small income of her own, but out of the estate she could not touch a penny otherwise than as a free gift from Roland. And this she positively refused to do—and persevered in her refusal.

Greatly did the family solicitors puzzle over the non-transpiration of any will. They were aware of the quarrel between the General and his son, and that the former should die without testamentary instructions was not quite satisfactory. At first they suspected that there was a will, but that it had somehow got lost, but when after a most careful search it was not forthcoming, then their suspicions took the direction of foul play, in which, however, they acquitted the heir-at-law of any complicity.

And the said heir-at-law shared their suspicions, though he breathed no word of it to them or to any other living ear. But no precaution would he neglect to render secure to himself that which he regarded as rightfully his own, and which had come to him, if by chance, yet at the most fortunate of times. If it should transpire that others had the legal right, at any rate he had the moral right, and it should not be his fault if he did not keep it. So the first thing he did upon entering on possession was to institute a most thorough and exhaustive search for the missing document on his own account. He would ensure the safety of his position once and for all, and leave nothing to chance. So for several nights, when no living eye could behold him, did he remain up till early dawn, carrying on his search. Not a desk or a drawer was left unrifled, not an article of furniture unmoved. Even the very wails he carefully sounded for hollow places and sliding panels, and more than one escritoire suspected of secret drawers did he hew in pieces with his own hand, alone and with locked doors. Once, indeed, his breath came thick and his heart stood still as he lit upon a bundle of legal-looking parchments in one of these forgotten recesses. But they were only records of a private and delicate transaction of his father's early life, and with a sigh of relief he burnt them to ashes. Had one of them been the genuine document, which was to dispossess him, it would have shared the fate of the rest. No scruples would have stayed his hand. He had drained the cup of poverty and destitution to the very dregs; but the tide had turned at last. What he had got he meant to keep, at all and every hazard.

But that was a year and a half ago, and now here he sits opening his letters. A frown comes over his face as his eye falls upon the address of one of them, and with a couple of impatient tugs at his moustache he chucks the obnoxious missive aside. Then a light step is heard in the passage and his brow clears. There is a place laid opposite his, and behind the urn, evidently awaiting its occupant. Surely that is she outside. Who is it? His sister, Nellie?

Then the door opens, and enter—not Nellie, but Olive. No longer Olive Ingelow, however, for it is rather over a year ago that she changed it, and never in all his priestly experience had the rector of Wandsborough pronounced the blessing of his Church upon a happier union than these the nuptials of his best-loved child have up till now proved.

Olive's happiness suits her well, for she is looking lovelier than ever, and seems to bring a ray of sunshine in with her this biting, tempestuous winter morning. She seems, too, to have recovered a large portion of her old irresistible spirits, though the sparkling piquancy of the beautiful girl whom we first saw in Wandsborough church has given way to the more thoughtful sweetness of the woman who has passed to her happiness through the dark days of trial and affliction. Her husband is wont sportively to tell her that she is fast acquiring the staidness of the conventional British matron—an imputation which she makes believe greatly to resent. But Roland Dorrien's love and adoration of his beautiful wife is as warm to-day as it was when they stood together two years ago beneath the cliffs, in the dim gloaming, with the spray dashing in their faces as they watched the huge waves thundering in, and knew that in another hour they would be lying dead in each other's embrace.

She goes across to him now and puts her arm round his neck and lays her cheek against his.

"What is it, dear? Any bad news? No. Only those stupid old business letters," she says, looking over his shoulder. "Put them away till later and don't let them bore you. But just look how it's snowing. You won't be able to shoot to-day."

"No, I shan't. But it doesn't really matter—Marsland won't care—and I asked the Colonel, but I believe the good old chap will be only too glad of the excuse to sit quietly at home. Tom Barnes will be rather sold, I'm afraid—but we can give him a shoot at any time."

"Of course. And now we'll have a snug day together, all to ourselves—won't we?"

"Olive, darling, I can't help thinking sometimes you must be dull here, shut up all the year round with such a cross-grained animal as this," he says, after a minute's pause. "It must be such a contrast as compared with the jolly days at the old Rectory. Now confess."

"I'll confess this much—that if you don't get that idea out of your wise old head, I shall begin to have a bad opinion of you," she replies affectionately. "Why, I can run over at any moment and look them up, or get them up here, as in fact I'm always doing. What more can you think I want? Now let's see what the arbiter of Fate has brought forth," continues she, going round to her place. "Two bills—that's your department. Letters—only one, and that from Eusty. His regiment has been ordered to India—wonder how Nellie will like that—and he is coming down here the week after next. He will be here in time for the festival."

“That’s a goodish bit of news. Will he come to us or to the Rectory first?”

“Don’t know. That’ll have to be decided.”

“By the way, where’s Roy?” he asks suddenly. “He hasn’t been in this morning. Ah, there he is.”

For the servant entering with a tray has also admitted our woolly friend, who makes for his master and thrusts his nose into his hand with an affectionate whine, his brush wagging like a flail.

Roy, too, is restored to his rightful place in society, as his master puts it. One of the first things Roland did when the tide of his misfortunes turned, was to take steps for the recovery of his faithful follower, and Roy’s new owner, who was a good-hearted fellow, had refused the somewhat extravagant sum which was offered him for his purchase, and had handed him back at the same price. Roy’s exuberant glee on his restoration to his old master was something indescribable. But now he has long been an institution in the Cranston household and is a favourite with everyone, except Johnston, the head-gardener, of whom more anon.

The airy mood of the new Squire of Cranston fades as suddenly as it arose. He eyes for a moment the unwelcome missive which he has cast aside, then, as if with an effort, he tears it open. It is only a letter from his mother.

“Oh! What is it, darling?” cries Olive anxiously, half starting up. For with a furious imprecation Roland has dashed down the open sheet upon the table, and sits back in his chair, his face ashy white.

Only a couple of lines does this letter contain, and they are in his mother’s handwriting.

“Since you force me to speak plainly, I will—I can hold no communication with a murderer—a fratricide.”

“Roland, tell me what it is. Tell me, darling, and let me share it with you,” urges Olive pleadingly. “What cruel thing does she say?”

His hand is trembling as it heavily lies upon the open paper, as if to blot out the accusing words.

“Nothing but what is evil and ill-conditioned,” he answers hoarsely. “See what comes of doing the right thing. It’s only her reply to that letter of mine offering to make a

settlement upon her. This is the fifth time I've done it, and each time I get more abused than before. One's mother!"

Oh, the biting satire in the last two words. Roland Dorrien has never seen his mother since the day he passed her in anger on the stairs. There had been no affection between them at any time, and now he would not pretend to any. But he had his code of honour, and under this he would willingly have made a liberal settlement upon her out of the estate. Mrs Dorrien, however, refused to touch a penny—and went further. She rejected his overtures with scorn and even reproach. An idea had rooted itself in her mind that he was responsible for his younger brother's death—that he had made away with him, in short, for his own advantage. It was the merest fancy, wholly destitute of the slightest clue, but it took firmer and firmer hold upon her till she was convinced of its truth, as though she had beheld with her own eyes that terrible scene on the cliff. But she had never gone so far as to put her suspicion into words until now, when, in an access of fierce grief for the lost, and fury against those who had benefited by her bereavement, she had penned those fearful words.

"I won't let you leave me while you are like this," pleads Olive tenderly, with her arm on his shoulder. He had been gathering up his letters to go, a move which she was determined to circumvent. "Whatever it is, remember nothing can separate us now."

He almost shudders at her words. Can it not? he thinks. Yes, but it can—and in a manner so grisly and awful as she would never dream of suspecting. His brain is in a whirl. What could have set his mother's suspicions to work? Even though they could have no foundation to go upon, a fixed idea like that, in such a mind as hers, might be in the highest degree dangerous.

"I must go," he answers. "But, my darling, I promise to come back to you here in half an hour. Will that do?"

She is satisfied. A clinging kiss, and then she stands gazing after the tall, fine figure in its shooting-suit of light homespun. She sees him enter the study—his father's study that was—and hears the snap of the key in the lock, then, turning to the window, she stands looking thoughtfully and with a troubled expression out upon the whirling snowflakes and the white, cold earth, in contrast whereto the dark trunks and gaunt limbs of the trees in the park show out like starved spectres, and the dismal howling of the wintry blast is as the warning voice of impending woe.

Amid the joys which encompass Olive Dorrien's married life there is yet room for one great sorrow. Over her husband's peace there hangs some dark and terrible secret, the weight of which he must bear alone.

Chapter Thirty Six.

The Sword.

Although the neighbourhood had by this time got thoroughly accustomed to the new state of things at Cranston, and had voted it a great improvement on the old, yet the said vicinity was unanimous in its opinion that the General's successor was decidedly queer.

True, a man in his position should be popular and not eccentric, but then, there were extenuating circumstances. If the county was not so much entertained at Cranston Hall as it deemed it had a right to expect, at any rate open house was kept periodically; and, as all things are relative, the contrast between even this and the inhospitality which characterised the late General's tenure, told to tenfold advantage. Another claim had Roland Dorrien upon the indulgence of the neighbourhood. He had taken his wife from among the daughters of the land. No stranger to them and theirs had he brought into their midst, but one whom they had seen grow up among them, and right nobly did she grace her far from unimportant, and at first rather trying, position. So, taking all things into account, the neighbourhood was inclined to congratulate itself on the acquisition of a new lord for Cranston, and to look with indulgent eyes upon his moods and vagaries.

And these were multifold. Though not of a hilarious disposition, yet there were times when he would yield himself up to the excitement of the hour with an unthinking abandon which made even the youngest and liveliest of his guests stare, and then, while they were wondering with an agreeable surprise how it was that they had never suspected Dorrien of having so much in him, the mercury would fall with alarming suddenness, and he would relapse into a moody taciturnity, for which there was no accounting. Sometimes, too, those staying at Cranston never saw their host for days at a time, except at meals, and these he seemed to get through in a half-absent kind of way, answering in monosyllables if appealed to, but never originating a remark. In his normal frame of mind, however, Roland Dorrien struck his acquaintance as somewhat cold and uncomfortably reticent, but as a peculiarly keen-witted and observant man.

For a long time he had steadfastly refused to be placed on the Commission of the Peace, and his old friend, Colonel Neville, had waxed very sore and disappointed thereat. For Dorrien of Cranston not to have his place among the judicial luminaries adorning the Wandsborough Bench was, in the gallant veteran's eyes, a thing simply unheard of in the annals of the county. Why, it was tantamount to a prediction of the family downfall. But Roland had stood firm, and the Colonel had taken the matter quite seriously to heart. Then all of a sudden, just as his friends had given up trying to persuade him, he had, of his own accord, expressed his willingness to serve, and the Colonel was overjoyed. But from the day of his appointment up till now he had only taken his seat on the bench

three times, and then, either by accident or design, when there was a peculiarly light list of cases for adjudication. Moreover, his voice had been strenuously raised on the side of mercy, to the no small astonishment of those who had ever been wont to look upon his name as a convertible term for unbending severity. “A hard Dorrien” was how inferiors and dependents had been wont to speak of the heads of the family.

“I don’t think it exactly my line in life,” he observed to Mr Curtis, the vicar of Cranston, in reply to that worthy’s expostulation with him for his scant attendance at Petty Sessions, “to sit in judgment on a lot of poor devils who knock over a rabbit when they’re half-starving. It doesn’t seem a very ennobling kind of office to fill, does it?”

“That’s all very well, Mr Dorrien,” had replied the vicar, who was a zealous attendant at the Wandsborough Bench, and not a little proud of his connection therewith. “But birth and station have their duties, you must remember, and if those who by virtue of these advantages are appointed to ‘execute justice and maintain truth’ shrink from their responsibilities, why, it will soon be a bad thing for the country. For what is the country to do?”

“Pay some fellow—one of the Great Unbriefed, for instance—to perform these onerous duties,” was the reply, with a careless laugh, not wholly free from satire. “Plenty of sharp fellows in these hard times would jump at the billet, any one of whom would be quite as competent as we are collectively to fine Bill Gubbins ten shillings and costs for driving a horse and cart down the street when drunk and incapable, or to decide whether John Hodge or Tom Podge shall be adjudged to contribute towards the maintenance of Sarah Timms’ latest hopeful. At any rate it doesn’t strike me that the discharge of these elevating duties should be monopolised by ‘birth and station.’”

To which the vicar, a fine, hard-headed Tory of the old school, had replied severely, that he feared his friend had become imbued with some of the Radical tendencies of the day.

Roland’s eccentricities, too, had their religious side. For weeks he would never go near a church, then he would rise in the dark, three or four times a week, mount his horse and ride over to the morning office at Wandsborough church, and the little congregation assembled in the side chapel, whose gloom was hardly dispersed by the altar tapers’ soft glow, while the rain poured down upon the roof, would be astonished by a tall figure, gaitered and mud-besplashed, suddenly arriving in its midst, perhaps, just as Dr Ingelow and his acolyte were reciting the Nicene Creed. On the subject of these pilgrimages he let drop no word to anybody, not even to his wife, turning the conversation if she alluded to them; and this, with ready tact, after the first time, she never did, in having recorded which fact, by the way, we have testified volumes to Olive’s advantage. Nevertheless, she rejoiced with a great secret joy. But Wandsborough

regarded these proceedings on the part of the Squire of Cranston with undivided curiosity, but diverse feelings, and the advanced Anglicans congratulated themselves mightily on the acquisition of so influential and important a convert.

Various theories, too, were advanced to account for Roland Dorrien's eccentricities. Some went so far as darkly to whisper that there was madness in the family. There was the late General, for instance. Look how he shut himself up and never entertained, and was always gloomy and morose, and quarrelled with everybody, his own flesh and blood included. Then, to go further back, there was the General's brother, the former Squire, an old bachelor and most queer in his ways. And now this one—at his age, and in his fortunate circumstances, a man ought not to look and act as if life was one great and protracted mistake. A few, more charitably disposed and more superstitious withal, scouted the mania theory, but declared that the present race of Dorriens must be under a curse. At any rate, it was not a little singular that two out of the three sons had met with an untimely and tragical death, and now, no doubt, the thought of it preyed upon the mind of the surviving one. But whatever it was, it must be a very serious thing, for there could be few more enviable positions and calculated to produce happiness, as the world understands it, than that of Dorrien of Cranston. On this point the neighbourhood was thoroughly agreed.

And the neighbourhood, looking at things from its own light, argued rightly. In the full health and vigour of his manhood, possessed of one of the most beautiful seats in England, its splendid domain absolutely unencumbered, a lovely wife, who adored him—if there is such a thing as happiness in the world, assuredly Roland Dorrien should have been a happy man. Yet he was not.

As we have seen, no compunction followed upon his crime—no remorse—no fear of detection and of the awful penalty which, in the event of detection, he would be called upon to pay. He was then so overwhelmed beneath the blows of Fate, that one more or less could make no difference in the wretched hopelessness of his lot. His conscience was seared past all feeling.

Then had come the change, and from a living death a single day had sufficed to restore him to the joys of life in more than all their fulness—their sweetness, beyond measure, enhanced by the black period which had gone before. He had stretched forth his hand and grasped them, he had hastened to pluck for his own this fair flower which had languished and grown beyond his reach, and in gathering it he had filled, as he thought, his cup of bliss to the very brim. Secure in the love of his beautiful wife, prosperous in his splendid possessions, what could this one crime of a troublous past avail against him?

But with prosperity his heart grew soft again, and with it the voice of compunction made itself heard—at first, but faintly, and only at long intervals. Then, little by little, the haunting vision of a face in its agony of death-terror stole across the unclouded brightness of his life, and Time, which in its course blurs over all recollections as it rolls on, only served to bring out this one more vividly. In the dead of night would that face be staring at him, in the golden hours of the bright and peaceful day, that awful, agonised gasp would sound in his ears as he heard it on the brink of the abyss; and as the horror of this ever-brooding cloud across his sunshine swept full upon him with a weird and supernatural, yet none the less real a consciousness, a dejection settled down upon his mind, which, if allowed to grow apace, might end in the most disastrous of results.

And Olive—did she ever regret the step which had linked her lot to his, burdened as it was with a secret grief in which she had no share? Never, for the fraction of a moment. Always brave, loving, and patient, she strove to lighten his load. Even when suffering from a temporary depression of spirits herself, she would brace herself with an effort and cast care away in order that she might cheer him. She studied his moods, and when in her clear-sightedness she saw the dark hour about to come upon him, any sacrifice of her own comfort and convenience did she deem of small account if only she could keep up his spirits and lift him out of himself. And she had her reward. Never was he so happy as when alone with her—and as amid the night horrors of the fatal cave, with the wild waters surging around them, he had found refuge in her slumbering innocence and purity from the supernatural terrors which came crowding in, thick and fast, upon his soul, so now, in his dark and conscience-stricken moods, hers was the image that caused the evil spirit to fly; her tones, the music that rendered his ears deaf to the accusing voice; hers the protecting presence, beneath the weight of the ever-threatening cloud which he felt would sooner or later descend upon him and overwhelm him in his doom.

Yet why should it? No human eye witnessed that moonlight tragedy. Already the circumstances had faded into past history; nor at the time had any suspicion of violence arisen to fix people's memory. But for all that, Roland was as firmly convinced that sooner or later the reckoning would overtake him, as that he himself was a living man, and when it did, he had little enough doubt as to the issue. And now, as we see him once more after two years, that crisis seems to him within measurable distance.

Chapter Thirty Seven.

Eustace Outflanked.

General Dorrien's widow occupied a semi-detached villa in Maida Vale. She had, as we have seen, persistently and even fiercely refused her son's repeated offers of a settlement, liberal and freely made as they were, preferring to live on her own not very ample means to accepting a penny from him whom, without a shred of evidence to justify her in the idea, she persisted in regarding as responsible for his brother's death. The difference in her mode of living was a trifle, she declared. At Cranston, they had always lived very quietly, so it was in no sense a "come-down." Poor Nellie, however, had felt the change acutely, and although she tried dutifully to make the best of it, the exclusive society of a gloomy parent told upon her spirits, and the smoke-defiled air of suburban London was a poor substitute for the strong ozone of the sea. Consequently, the girl became seriously ailing, and there was nothing for it but to send her away for a change.

It was some time, however, before the widow would allow her to accept Roland's invitation, and it was not until he threatened to go in person and bring her away by force that her mother, whom misfortune had not rendered one whit less selfish and exacting, reluctantly gave way. So Nellie returned for a long stay at her old home, and was made much of by her brother and his wife, under which bright auspices her spirits came back like magic, and day after day she wondered the more how they could all find themselves so thoroughly happy where, before, gloom and restraint, jars and wrangles, had been the order of the day. Why, she could hardly believe it was Cranston, and Olive's warning had weight—that she must not get well and strong too quickly, or her mother would be wanting her back again.

And this warning was very urgently seconded by a certain recently-gazetted subaltern, who seemed to divide the time of his leave exclusively between the Rectory and Cranston Hall, the latter receiving by far the lion's share. In short, Eustace made the most of his opportunities, to the satisfaction of both parties. There was a third party to be reckoned with, though, and one into whose scheme satisfaction did not enter. This was Nellie's mother.

The widow was furious when the subject was broached to her. Never as long as she lived would she listen to any such preposterous idea. The very name of Ingelow was repulsive to her; had not that detestable family wrought mischief—not to say crime—enough? Poor Nellie was ordered home at once; and, not content with giving Roland a most unambiguous bit of her mind, Mrs Dorrien, senior, extended the attention to Dr Ingelow, who for his part consigned the vituperative document to the flames, mostly

unread. But Roland, chucking his jobation across the table to Olive, laughed sneeringly at the pious quotations, alternating line by line with vehement abuse.

"Ha-ha! Honour our parents, indeed! No, no. That string's played through, Mrs General Dorrien."

He was for keeping Nellie at Cranston altogether, but apart from the objections of the girl herself—who, in spite of everything, refused to leave her mother, now that the latter was all alone—the rector strongly objected to his son being a party to such desertion. They must wait and have patience. It was only a question of time, and both were young. A little self-denial and consideration, even for one bitterly hostile, would do them no harm—in fact, they could not but be the gainers by it in the long run. Thus the good old man. But his son-in-law was not of this way of thinking; however, he yielded the point.

Then Eustace, deserted by his supports, resolved upon a bold venture—nothing less than an advance upon the enemy's camp under cover of a flag of truce. The widow received him, but to the end of his life the youthful warrior was sure he would retain a very lively recollection of the interview, though a confused idea of what was said in the course thereof. As he remarked to his sister, Sophie, when reporting progress—"Sweet relative—future mamma-in-law? Blackguarded a fellow without a break for twenty-five minutes by the clock, and then, before he could get in a word edgeways, turfed him out into the street. Take my word for it, Sophonisba, my jewel, I wouldn't tackle that same ancient and formidable party again—no, not for all the V.C.s ever struck."

Left to her retirement, the General's widow did two things, neither of which tended to her own peace of mind nor to the happiness of her daughter. She went in strongly for the Gospel according to Calvin, and she cherished and fed her grief for the loss of her idolised son. Her crapes were as heavy as in the first month of her widowhood, and no little awe did the stern and gloomy countenance, and the tall figure swathed in deepest black, inspire among the elect of the flock shepherded by the noted evangelical luminary whom Mrs Dorrien had elected to "sit under." She lived alone with her daughter, visiting, and being visited by, nobody, in order that she might more freely brood and indulge her grief. She suffered terrible anguish at times, yet looked upon her loss in the light of a judgment, and while admitting the justice of it as concerning herself, yet none the less luridly did her resentment burn against him whom, rightly or wrongly, she regarded as its instrument.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

"Give me your Confidence."

It was Monday morning, and a bright and beautiful day. Three people sat at breakfast at Cranston Hall, the third being Frank Marsland, Roy's quondam purchaser. The wintry sun shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky, though without power, for the hard frost lay in silvery patches, wholly unaffected by his searching beams.

"Do you feel like skating to-day, Marsland?" said Roland, breaking off from the discussion of a grand festival service they had attended at Wandsborough Church the night before, and as to the detail of which the guest had been seeking information from Olive.

"I should think so. Ice good, eh, Dorrien?"

"First-rate. I had it flooded last night, and it'll be like glass."

A sound of voices in the hall, then the door opened without ceremony, and there entered Eustace and his youngest sister, each armed with a pair of skates.

"Salve! All hail, Macbeth! Glorificamus, all round!" cried the former. "Roland, old chap, you don't seem quite the thing. In the words of the poet, you look decidedly 'chippy.'"

"Enough to make one, you ruffian, to have a cyclone like yourself bursting upon one's quiet breakfast-room without any warning."

"Haw! haw! Coffee, yes, decidedly. Breakfast? no—emphatically," cried Eustace, running two replies into one. "And, Olive, I must say, it's disgraceful of you, reared in the sweet seclusion of a virtuous rectory, only just sitting down to breakfast at ten o'clock. Disgraceful, I repeat."

"Oh, Eusty, in the words of the poet—shut up!" laughed Olive. "Mr Marsland, I don't think you've met my sister?" And she introduced them. Sophie had grown up a very pretty girl. Her vivacity, however, was dashed with a tinge of shyness in the company of strangers, which was rather "fetching." Now she looked very engaging in her furry winter costume, her bright face sparkling with animation, and crowned by a becoming arrangement of golden hair. Marsland's somewhat susceptible heart was impressed.

"No. But I think we should have broken the ice, anyhow, Mrs Dorrien," he answered with a laugh.

“Break the ice? No you don’t,” cried the irrepressible Eustace. “At least not till this evening, when we flood it. And now, look sharp and finish the oats, good people, for we’ve come to pick you up, and Spelder Fields is over two miles off.”

“All right. I’ll send and order the waggonette,” said Roland, getting up.

“Waggonette be hanged!” was the ceremonious rejoinder. “We are going to ride Shanks His Mare. And I tell you what, Roland, you lazy dog, you had better do ditto. Some leg work, this gorgeous morning, will do you all the good in the world. Quite set you up again,” he grinned, with a wink at Marsland.

“Set me up, eh? But I turned in before you did!”

“Did he, Olive? No, I won’t bet. I’ll have no chance against your combined perjuries. But Roland, why didn’t you turn up at our place last night and feed, instead of sneaking off home. The dad was expecting you. He wanted to run you against that great gun, Hurrell, the padre who held forth. Wasn’t he lively, eh?”

“Eusty, you irreverent boy, don’t talk shop,” said Olive impatiently.

“All serene. We had a regular sacerdotal feed though, with the dad in the chair and Margaret in the vice-chair. Concerning whom, old Crustibore, the ex-archdeacon of Seringapatam, who’s stone deaf and takes snuff, remarked to his neighbour in a strident stage-whisper what a young-looking woman ‘Mrs Ingelow’ was, to be the mother of that dashing fellow opposite. I thought the dad would have choked. As for me I roared outright, but I took care to look in another direction, so it didn’t matter.”

“It wasn’t ‘dashing fellow’ at all, Olive,” struck in Sophie. “What Dr Crustibore really said was ‘that lanky rascal.’”

All shouted, except Eustace, who affected to regard the interruption as unworthy of notice.

“Yes,” he went on. “It’s a pity you weren’t there to keep Sophie in order. She behaved disgracefully, the more so that ‘great was the company of the preachers.’”

“Ah! I’ve been waiting for that quotation,” cried Sophie, sharp as a needle. “Olive, he made use of it about twenty times last night—went all round the room planting it everywhere. I heard it myself at least ten times, and knowing Eusty as we do, it’s safe to

put the total figure at twenty. And now he's transplanted it here. I knew he would. Dragged it in by the head and shoulders, too—literally."

"Twenty times! Say a hundred while you're about it."

"It was twenty at least. Why, Margaret heard him three times, and scowled at him for a profane person."

"Who hadn't got any 'birthright' to sell," cut in Eustace. "But you should have heard that child. She got in among a knot of those doleful chaps, all neck and spectacles, regular gargoyles, you know, and played the very mischief. You know that lank chap, Berriman, who brought out those asinine articles on celibacy. Well, she soon worked round to that topic, and made of it a peg whereon to hang such a jobation, that they stared at her in horrified amaze, and scattered as if a shell had dropped in among them. You see, she spoke feelingly. That sort of doctrine tends to spoil trade."

"Pooh! None of your gargoyles for me," laughed Sophie.

"No. Nothing less than a gay Hussar will suit her," rejoined Eustace. "There are two in the regiment that'll be just the thing—both much of a muchness. I'm going to bring them over next time I get leave, and then, O Sophonisba, my child, you can smile on the survivor."

"No," retorted the girl mischievously. "I don't like soldiers—cavalrymen least of all. Civilians are much nicer. Look at Roland, for instance. He doesn't tire one with a lot of third-hand chaff."

"Oh, come! I say, Olive, do you allow that?" cried the irrepressible subaltern. "In view of the approximate passing of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill, I call upon you to quell such sentiments, and to repudiate their enunciator—trix, rather."

The ice at Spelder Fields was in fine order. It was a large, flooded meadow on one of the Cranston farms, and although the Squire could have kept it closed to the public, that course would have roused such an amount of ill-feeling as to render the experiment not worth while, for it had been used from time immemorial. It was the rule, however, that anything tending to spoil the ice should be rigorously excluded, and elides were strictly taboo, while any approach to yahooism was promptly nipped in the bud. As the townspeople could not turn out till evening, during the daytime the privileged few had things all their own way.

We shall not, however, follow our party throughout the day. Be it briefly recorded, however, that Marsland surrendered at discretion to Sophie's blue eyes and golden hair, and fresh, bewitching ways, and constituted himself her guide, philosopher and friend, and fetch-and-carry generally, through the uncertain and mazy evolutions of the ice—and how Eustace poured out the vials of his exuberant chaff upon them and upon everybody, and notably upon a brace of shaven and spectacled young clerics, who rather fancied themselves on skates, and, with singular unanimity of intent, were bent on imbuing Sophie with the same idea, but that our friend Marsland sailed in and cut out the prize from under their guns, apparently with the full approval of the prize itself.

"Time to knock off and give King Mob his innings," cried Roland, whirling up to the bank and casting himself thereon.

"Oh, hang it, old man! Isn't it rather soon?" objected Marsland, who, hand-in-hand with a certain blue-eyed young lady, glided by just in time to catch the suggestion.

"Rather soon! I should think it was!" echoed Sophie.

"I think Mr Dorrien's right," said Clara Neville, who had just been taking a turn or two round the ice with the first speaker. "It's disagreeable being here when the place is full of rough people. Besides, it's getting late."

Ill-natured friends were wont to whisper that the fair Clara was getting somewhat passée and soured, and that the qualifications of the future aspirant to Ardleigh Court would not be so narrowly scrutinised now as of yore. But the answer to this libel was that she had refused two very good offers and one indifferent one. Her sister, Maud, was married, and Clara was left alone in the ancestral halls. And now she had made up her mind to smile favourably on Frank Marsland, who had on a former occasion or two begun to show her attention, when again that detestable Rectory furnished a thorn for her side. That chit of a girl had upset the plan, even as her sister had done years before. Poor Clara had not enjoyed her day.

"Er—Dorrien—if you don't mind, I think we—er—I—will have half an hour more of it," stammered Marsland. "Miss Sophie says she'd rather walk back—er—and I'll see her safe home."

"All right, Marsland," replied his host. "Olive dear, do you mind driving back without me? You can take Margaret in the waggonette." He had taken off his skates, and was standing with one foot on the step of the vehicle, wherein sat his wife, wrapped in furs, and looking very sweet in the crisp, frosty air. "Your father and I are going to walk. Oh,

and by the way, he says they all can go straight back with us to dinner, so you'd better go on ahead and arrange accordingly."

"Very well, dear. But I quite envy you your lovely walk."

"Not a few quite envy me my lovely something else," he replied meaningly.

"What? Oh, you dear old goose!" she laughed, blushing at the delicate compliment, her dark eyes flashing at him a bright glance of affection. "Now go and find Margaret—there she is, just coming off the ice—and then we'll go."

"Well, Roland, my boy, this sort of thing makes a man feel young again," said the rector, as they began to step cut briskly on their homeward way. The sun had gone down, and the bare trees stood against the cloudless sky in delicate tracery, as in a steel engraving. The dead leaves crackled underfoot, and behind them the ring of the skates on the ice, and the voices and laughter of the skaters grew fainter and fainter.

"I suppose it does," answered the other shortly, with a glance around as if to make sure that no one was within earshot. Then after a pause—

"Look. From where we now stand, it will take us the best part of an hour to walk home—I can call it home now—and the Hall is nearly in the centre of the estate. Well, all this I gave up of my own free will—flung it away with both hands. For what? For love. But even that which I had bought at the price of my birthright, was snatched from me not many hours after its purchase, for the very day after I had done this I learned that I was a ruined man."

"My dear boy, I can never blame myself enough for my short-sightedness in that wretched business," cried the old man in a distressed voice, letting his hand fall affectionately on the other's shoulder.

"There is no question of blame in the matter," went on Roland, speaking quickly and decisively. "And now, do you ever regret that things turned out as they did? Have you ever had during this year and a half which has passed since you gave Olive to me—any reason for misgivings as to her future?"

"Never, Roland—never! Not for a moment! You have been as a dear son to me, and my other children look upon you as a brother, indeed."

Again there was a pause. The rector, understanding well that these questions were leading to something, refrained from interposing.

“Well—now I ask—could anything that might happen—that might come to light, rather—cause you to entertain such misgivings now?”

It was the rector’s turn to hesitate. Whither was the conversation drifting? His mind reverted to the rumours current in Wandsborough shortly after Roland’s disappearance, and his brow slightly clouded. Before he could reply Roland struck in.

“I know what you are thinking of. I solemnly assure you again, that those rumours were absolutely false. Whatever might happen would affect myself alone. On Olive’s account you need feel no anxiety whatever.”

“That is all I was hesitating about, Roland. And now, my dear boy, if you feel that you can give me your confidence, it may be that you will have no cause to regret it.”

The younger man made no immediate reply. If ever there were time and place for confidence, it was here, in the sweet and peaceful quiet of the evening, the moonlight sleeping upon the hill and the bare, leafless woods lying still and ghostly against the slopes. That confidence he was resolved to make at all costs. No longer could he bear his terrible burden unaided, for a desperate idea had occurred to him. Who could he more certainly trust than his old and revered friend, the rector himself? No man living. But what he shrank from was the possible—nay, probable—loss of intimacy that would result from the avowal. Dr Ingelow was an Anglican priest, but then he was also a father. No word would pass his lips—but would it not hasten his steps to the grave once the old man learned that his daughter’s husband was a murderer, a man whose life would be forfeit for the rest of his days? And how should he meet a murderer on terms of friendship from day to day? To Roland, circumstanced as he was, there seemed a strange, subtle, protecting influence in the cordial intimacy existing between himself and the old priest, and he dreaded to cut away this sheet-anchor with his own hand. So this idea had slipped from him in despair, and he seemed as one hopelessly drifting.

And then again a new hope leaped into existence. Dr Ingelow had been a great traveller in his younger days. He knew what it was to carry his life in his hand. He had seen men shot down on very slight provocation in wild, lawless regions where a man must be ready to answer for his acts, and even his words, with his life, if not quick enough to defend it. Surely no man living was more qualified to judge of a case by its own merits. He would take a broader view than the cut-and-dried rules of a high-pressure, artificial state of society, recognising that England is not the world, nor yet its law-giver.

And now, walking beside his friend in the gathering gloom, Roland thought the moment had come. The remembrance of his resolution was strong in his mind, and he could

imagine the rector once more the cool, wary traveller in wild countries, where friends stood by each other to the death.

“My confidence!” he echoed huskily. “I greatly fear I may regret giving it, but—” and again he paused, his features working strangely.

What a wonderful thing is life with its contrasts! Only two friends returning home this lovely evening from a day of healthful exercise, the cheerful voices of those they had left behind scarcely out of earshot. No more than this would the casual saunterer along that unfrequented footpath through the plantations meet or see. Yet, what could be of more awful moment than the subject of their discussion! If the supernatural powers to which one of these two lays claim exist, such powers are bounded by no considerations of time or locality; are dependent on no such matters of detail as official insignia. They exist or they do not, and if the former, can neither be qualified nor limited. Can it be that these silent woods—these glittering stars looking down through the leafless boughs, are about to witness a solemn act of absolution, and that from one of these men will be lifted a terrible weight of blood-guilt—even the curse of Cain! Surely it seems that those peaceful stars reflect the light of angelic eyes, and that even the voice of God might be heard in this secluded place.

But it is Earth after all. Whatever confidence might have been imminent, an interruption befalls, a diversion is created—and by what? Only a dog.

Ranging at will, forgotten of his master, Roy’s quick ear has detected a stealthy footfall among the dry crisp leaves, and there he stands, with hair erect and fangs bared, snarling savagely at a dark, thickset form, whose efforts to pacify him only seem to augment his hostility.

“Come away, Roy, you rascal—come away, sir, d’you hear?” cried Roland. The dog obeyed, and retreated reluctantly to his master’s side, keeping up a running fire of most threatening growls. “Down, sir. And now, who are you?”

“It’s only me, sir,” answered a gruff voice.

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Devine? By the way, have you been over at the Hall?”

“Well, sir,” answered the man in rather hang-dog fashion, “I’ve a bin over to see Mister Lucas about them dawgs the Kurnel was to have, and took a short cut back.”

“I see. Is that shoot to come off the day after to-morrow, do you know?”

“Well, sir, the Kurnel don’t seem to have made up his mind. But he’ll be sure to let you know. There’s lots o’ rabbits in the cliff jest above Smugglers’ Ladder, sir,” added the keeper, in a different tone, looking Roland keenly in the face. “Such lots are there, that they pitches each other over, sometimes. I see’d one wunst, one moonlight night.”

Although feeling as if suddenly shot through the heart, Roland made no sign. With a short nod, he turned away. Roy, still growling deeply, walked close at his side, as if his instinct told him that his beloved master might come to need more than all the watchfulness of the most faithful of friends in the impending peril. It was the third time of late that Stephen Devine had let fall a sinister hint.

This interruption had given the rector time to reflect, and with a foresight which, when he came to look back upon it in the days that were coming, seemed to him little short of inspired, he now saw that the interruption was an opportune one. He was the first to break the silence, and his tones were very grave and solemn.

“Roland, my dear son, I will gladly receive your confidence, but not here. There must be no possibility of interruption, and no half measures—and—there may be other reasons. I can see you are overwrought and tired now, therefore rest and place yourself in a calm and composed disposition. Then we will talk, and more freely.”

Not another word passed between them. The confidential strain in which they had been interrupted seemed to preclude lighter topics. And they were nearly home now.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

The Web Weaves.

The bright, frosty weather lasted nearly a month, and was followed by a whole month of rain and squalls, culminating in a truly furious March. The trees in the park bent and groaned beneath the lashing wind; and night and day driving showers hurled themselves against the window panes with a crash as of volleys of gravel. At such times, even from Cranston, the thunder of the surf upon the cliff-girt coast could be plainly heard, and safe in her comfortable, luxurious home Olive would shudder at the dull booming of the billows and at the recollections conjured up by the sound. But it was with feelings of deepest thankfulness that she dwelt on that dark and terrible time, while realising her present lot of joyfulness and peace.

And, during this period of conflicting elements, a great and singular change had come over Roland Dorrien. He seemed like a man from whom a great weight of care had been suddenly lifted, an impending danger miraculously averted. His brooding despondency had completely left him, and though he was grave at times, it was with a seriousness far removed from that moodiness and settled gloom which had caused the charitable to whisper hints about hereditary insanity. His cheerfulness, too, became free and unaffected, displacing those wild, excitable fits of hilarity, followed by their corresponding periods of reaction and gloom. The neighbourhood marvelled, but it could do no more, for the cause of this metamorphosis in the Squire of Cranston was known only to one living person and guessed at by another—Dr Ingelow and Olive.

And the latter rejoiced with an exceeding great joy, and her cup of happiness was now, indeed, full. Never by word, or hint, or look had she sought to arrive at that which had caused her husband to return home in the small hours of a certain dark winter morning with such an expression of relief, yes, and of peace upon his face as she had never dared hope to behold there again. Never, even to herself, had she ventured to conjecture, except with the most reverential awe and thankfulness, as to the instrument of this miraculously restored peace; the power which had exorcised the evil spirit and restored to her this man in whom her life was wrapped up—restful, free from care, happy. If she dimly guessed at the nature of that power, she was content to stop there.

This afternoon the rain crashed and volleyed on the panes in such wise as to render the snug morning-room doubly snug. Suddenly Olive broke into a peal of laughter.

“Roland, dear, that seems a desperately engrossing book you have got hold of.”

“Hullo! And why?”

“Because you haven’t turned a page for eighteen minutes. Eighteen minutes! I timed you by the clock.”

“By Jove! no more I have! No. Fact is, I’ve been thinking out an idea.”

“Let’s have it then.”

“Well, then—how should you like to go away for a time? To travel, in fact?”

“Oh, immensely,” she cried gleefully. “Where shall we go. Italy? It would be delightful to get out of this hideous weather for a couple of months. No, I should like to go to a new country this time. What about Spain? Or better still, Algiers? There—I’ve set my heart on Algiers.”

“All right. We can’t go too far, I think, nor yet too soon. So see if we can’t manage to get away at once. I feel as if my life depended on it.”

Hardly had he spoken the words than they struck him with a prophetic import. The fact was, he had been revolving this plan for some time past. It would be good for them both, in every way, besides which he felt an irresistible longing to leave the neighbourhood for a considerable period. It seemed to him in some instinctive way that such a course would do away with the last lingering possibility of danger. His apprehensions on the score of certain hints which Devine had from time to time let fall, were lulling. The fellow could have had nothing tangible to go upon. He was a shrewd rogue, merely talking at random in the hope of hitting the right nail on the head, but he, Roland, was too old a bird to hop upon any such palpably limed twig. Yet, on the whole, it might be safe to take a long change. Time blunts the edge of every weapon, even that dangerous one Suspicion.

They discussed the new scheme eagerly for half an hour, and then Olive got up, declaring she should go into the conservatory to get a little air. He laughed.

“Glad to get rid of you, dear. Only you won’t get much air there, I should think, unless it’s hot air. Wait—I’ve just got to dash off a couple of notes to a couple of tiresome fellows, and then I’ll come after you.”

Ten minutes later he had finished his writing.

“What an infernal day,” he muttered, as he took his way down the covered passage leading to the conservatory. Suddenly he stopped short, arrested by the sound of a voice. In the harsh, northern tones he recognised that of Johnston, the Scotch gardener.

Strange as it may seem, this worthy was still in the Cranston service. That it was so may be due to various reasons. The canny Scot, on the sudden and unlooked-for accession of the General’s exiled son, had hastened, with many plausible yet abject apologies, to make his peace with the reigning lord, for the berth was an uncommonly good one, and one to be kept at all costs. Roland, who knew the fellow to be a great rascal and felt towards him a hearty contempt, had kept him on, and his reasons for doing so were various. In the first place, it would save trouble, for the man was good at his work; then he had an idea that he might ascertain whether Johnston really had recognised him that day at Battisford, but as time went on and the man made no sign, his suspicions were lulled. However, the arrogance of so presuming a knave must be kept within bounds, and Johnston no longer dared tyrannise over his betters, by virtue of his office, as he had been wont to do in the old times. On one or two occasions, Roland had come up in time to overhear him rebuking in his old bumptious strain a guest who had ventured to pick a flower, and the trouncing he had got had made the worthy Scot squirm.

He hated his master with a bitter, rancorous hatred, but still he stayed on, for he foresaw the day when he might be revenged on him upon whom he now fawned, saw it dimly still, but opening wide possibilities. So patiently and warily the crafty Gael had watched and waited until the weapon should be ready to his hand, and then how he would strike! But to resume.

A frown of terrible import came over Roland’s face as he paused for a moment. The rain was volleying against the glass sides of the conservatory, but above its rattle, he could hear his wife’s voice, speaking in what seemed to him a tone of scared expostulation, and then the Scot replied:

”—A don’t want to hurrt yere guidman, but after these yeers of surrvice a’ think ye might promise me that place for my bairn, Davy. Ye wouldn’t be wanting to leave this bonny hoose yeerself, awm thinking.”

“Johnston! How dare you talk to me like that!” came the startled and indignant rejoinder.

Roland waited to hear no more. The blaring insolence of the fellow’s tone set his blood surging. There was a half-scream from Olive as he entered suddenly, confronting the astonished speaker.

“Go,” he said. “You are discharged this instant. Go out of my sight, before I forget myself.”

But Johnston had been drinking; yet, even though backed by a certain amount of “Dutch courage,” he deemed it advisable to withdraw a few paces.

“Would ye murrder me—too?” he yelled.

Roland still controlled himself with an effort little short of superhuman, but his face was white and icy.

“Go,” he said. “You are discharged.”

“Dischairged!” echoed Johnston sneeringly, for he had backed away to a safe distance. “Dischairged, am I? I’ll have the law on ye if ye assault me, but it’s a noose ye’ll come to for this day’s wurrk.”

And with this parting shot, he took himself off.

Olive was terribly alarmed and disturbed. The violence of the incident, and the dark and mysterious threats had upset her not a little. Tenderly, Roland set to work to soothe her.

“My darling, tell me all about it.”

She told him—how Johnston had accosted her directly she entered the place, asking her to use her influence to get his wages raised and also to procure a place for his son, who, by the way, was an out-and-out young rascal. She could see that the man had been drinking, and so had answered him quietly at first. Then his manner had become insolent and threatening, and he had hinted at terrible mischief which it was in his power to work his employer in the event of refusal.

“It was only talk, Roland, wasn’t it?” she urged, clinging to him. “Darling, tell me that he has no power to harm you. He has not—has he?”

As a matter of fact the threat had momentarily struck him with a pang of the old alarm. Momentarily, because, invoking reason to his aid, he decided that the rascally Scot had got his suspicions at second-hand from Gipsy Steve when the precious pair were in their cups. The suspicions of these two scoundrels were harmless. Only if he flinched might they become dangerous. So he had acted with decision, as we have seen.

“Not the slightest?” he answered reassuringly. “If he has I’ll give him every opportunity of putting it to the test. Off he goes this very evening, bag and baggage.”

Chapter Forty.

The Ban Again.

The Cranston party had organised a picnic to Durnley Castle.

It was May—bright, flowery, laughing May—neither spring nor summer, but something of both. The sun's rays were not too powerful this glorious afternoon, as with a delicious warmth they poured down upon the fields studded with golden buttercups and delicate bluebells, and distilled the sweet scent from blossoming hawthorn hedges, where the linnet and grey-backed shrike sat patiently upon their eggs, secure in the recesses of their thorny covert. Fair to the eye were the velvety coppices, with their newly-donned mantles of bright green, whence issued the soft coo of the turtle-dove, and the flap of the cushat's wing among the branches. Then, too, how light-hearted the joyous, oft-repeated note of the cuckoo, sounding over the pleasant landscape!

Durnley Castle was a fine ruin, with massive ivy-grown walls still rising to a considerable height; and standing as it did on a lofty headland, the views of the coast obtained from it were superb. Otherwise it was much like other ruins of the kind, its scarp being literally strewn with bits of sandwich paper, ancient and modern, broken bottles, and similar relics of generations of picnic parties. It was under the care of a clan of cottagers, whose thatch might be detected among the trees hard by, which care mainly consisted in taking precious good care to collect sixpences, but stopped short at clearing away the abominable rubbish aforesaid.

"Eva," cried Ned Medlicott, the curate's twelve-year-old, running up to his sister, a pretty girl of eighteen, to exhibit some kestrel's eggs. "Look at these. Did you ever see such stunners!"

"'Stunners,' indeed," was the laughing reply. "Why, how did you get them, Ned?"

"I didn't take them," explained the boy; "Mr Dorrien climbed the tree—but—"

"But the great thing is, here they are, eh, Ned?" cried Roland. "And it's my private opinion you'll break them before you get home."

He was thinking how thoroughly happy the boy looked, and how easily he had been made so, and the thought seemed to please him.

"Hullo, Eustace! Late as usual," he went on, as some new arrivals hove in sight, toiling up the steep escarpment. "Thought you had wrecked your party."

For Eustace had brought round the rest of the party by sea, in a sailing craft, chartered at Minchkil.

“Oh, did you? Now look here. Do you know what Thought did? No? Well, I’ll tell you—Thought we had had a precious dry walk up from the boat, and lost no time in beheading one of those jolly long-necked bottles over there. Aren’t I right, Mr Medlicott?” turning to his companion.

“Oh, of course, you always are,” answered the latter with a laugh. He was the senior curate of Wandsborough, a middle-aged, scholarly man—owning a vast family, two representatives of which were with the party, as we have seen.

“Worse and worse!” said Roland, with a shake of the head, and mischievously barring the way. “Eustace, I wash my hands of you—‘fizz’ before tiffin isn’t good for little boys like you.”

“Hallo—Sophonisba!” sang out Eustace. “Cut out one of those long-necked bottles, and sail round here with it, sharp! Your dear brother-in-law’s getting mean in his old age. Marsland, tell her to. She’ll do it if you tell her,” added the mischievous dog, grinning all over his face, while his youngest sister looked viciously at him without complying.

“There, there. Go and do for yourself, Eustace,” said Roland, letting him pass. “And now that we are all here, we can gather round the festive—table-cloth. Assort yourselves, good people, and do it well; if you don’t it’s your own faults. Stewart, keep an eye on that subaltern of yours, and don’t let him have too much champagne, or my wife says you will be held responsible as his superior officer.”

Captain Stewart—in whose troop Eustace was—and who had run down with him for the occasion—vehemently declined responsibility, and set to work devoting himself to Eva Medlicott, to the no small satisfaction of that young lady.

“‘Shop!’ Bear witness all!” cried Eustace, tossing off his glass with the air of a man who had walked a mile up a steep hill at mid-day. “He’s talking arrant ‘shop.’ Roland, old chap, consider yourself fined a case of this same ‘gooseberry.’ Stewart and I will take it up to Town with us to-night.”

“Nonsense, you’re not going to-night,” said Olive.

“Am. With deep grief I say it—but—‘painful necessities,’ as the schoolmaster says upon certain occasions! If we miss that train I’m broke. Chief desperately glum—vows I’ve had four times too much leave already. Isn’t that so, Stewart?”

“For once, Ingelow, truth and the exigencies of the Service compel me to support your statement,” gravely replied the captain, whose attention was divided between his fair companion and the dispensing of a pigeon-pie to many hungry applicants.

There was a laugh at this, and then, the contagion spreading, the fun grew apace, and never a merrier party made the grey old ruins ring. It wae a model picnic party, not too large, all fairly well known to each other, or, in the case of an exception or two, acquisitions to any circle, and all young, except perhaps the curate, who was such a thoroughly good-natured man that his quietness—“slowness” we are afraid they called it—was quite forgiven him. Then there were no elderly chaperons to spoil sport with their whisperings and confounded sharp-sightedness, and not even a botanically-minded old maid to drag off some wretched youth to grub up fern-roots for her, when he would fain be wandering perdu in another direction with a very different sample of charmer.

The Dorriens had been obliged to defer their foreign trip. Business of all sorts, connected more or less with the property, which could not well be left to others, had kept cropping up in the most vexatious manner since we heard them making their plans nearly two months ago. To Roland these delays had been irritating in the extreme, but now he thought he saw the end of them, and had made up his mind to start early next month. There was one bright side to it all. He had heard no more mysterious hints. These seemed to have ceased since the departure of Johnston, who had left the neighbourhood altogether when summarily dismissed from Cranston.

Luncheon over, the party dispersed themselves abroad according to taste—in pairs or in squads. Others preferred taking things easy where they were. Besides those named, there were half a dozen other people who are not specially concerned with this history.

“Hallo! Who are these chaps, I wonder?” suddenly exclaimed Eustace, who was having a quiet weed with his brother-in-law, in a snug, sunny corner of the ruin. Two men were strolling leisurely towards them, stopping every now and then, as if admiring the view to seaward. The foremost had a telescope slung round him, while the other carried a butterfly-net and specimen box. They might have been a brace of well-to-do tradesmen.

“Where? Oh! The advance-guard of a cheap trip, most likely. Two waggonettes of hooraying yahoos to follow,” was the somewhat dissatisfied reply.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said the foremost of the new arrivals. “Excuse my asking, but is there any objection to me and my friend going over the castle.”

“None whatever, as far as I know,” answered Roland good-naturedly. “By the way, is there a trip behind you?”

The men looked mystified for a moment, then the naturalist replied.

“Oh, no, gentlemen, only we two. We walked over from Wandsbro’, we two did, just to look at the view from here, and catch a few butterflies.”

“Caught any?”

“Not to speak of, sir. Just these two or three,” opening his green box. A tortoiseshell of dissipated aspect, and a couple of orange tips stood displayed.

“H’m! Well, as far as I know you’ll find nothing to prevent you going where you like. Only I should advise you to be careful in walking about the walls, because they’re unsafe in parte.”

The men thanked him and walked away. Eustace and Roland, grateful that the invasion took so mild a form, puffed their cigars lazily, and straightway forgot all about it. Had they been aware of it, what matter to them that the strangers, exploring round the ruins, should light upon the Cranston footman, lunching on the relics of the spread, and that the said strangers, being of an engaging manner after their kind, should, in a trice, find themselves on the best of terms with James, resulting in much friendly consumption of Cranston ale, all round.

“That your governor, up there?” said he of the telescope presently, jerking a thumb in the direction he had just left.

“Which?” asked James laconically.

“Tall gent—light clothes—talks like God Almighty.”

“Yes, that’s him.”

“Good governor?” said the butterfly-catcher.

“So, so. Too much shirt, though—rather.”

“Hey?”

“Too shirty, for them as doesn’t like it,” explained James.

Then, with tongue loosened by a liberal allowance of ale, indiscriminately poured upon the absorption of the residue of unfinished champagne bottles, the faithful James proceeded to give his new friends a full, true, and above all, humorous account of his master’s idiosyncrasies, whereat the strangers laughed till they could no longer sit upright. But even the graphic James missed the real humour of the thing, as conveyed from one to the other of his listeners in a swift and irresistibly comic glance.

The afternoon had reached the debatable ground lying between itself and evening, and the diverse and errant members of the party had found their way back to the rendezvous. And last of all arrived Marsland and Sophie, trying to look as if they had been there all the time; and the latter, catching her brother’s eye, read therein a mute and satirical assurance that she had not heard the last of her tardy arrival and eke of its circumstances.

“Don’t wait for me, anybody who wants to stroll on,” said Olive, who was superintending the putting away of the things. “I’ll come on afterwards.”

“And, by the way, Stewart, do you mind taking the ribbons going back?” said Roland. “I’m going home by way of the angry deep.”

The Captain declared himself delighted, as in fact he was. A smart whip, he flattered himself he would show those four slashing bays of Dorrien’s at their best.

“Ta-ta, Stewart. Good people, I hope all your lives are insured! I know what Stewart on the box means,” sung out the irrepressible Eustace, with a fiendish chuckle over the misgiving which he had flung in among the driving party. “And now for the rolling deep?”

We will follow the party in the boat. Besides Eustace and Roland there were two young ladies from Wandsborough and Mr Medlicott and Ned. Item, an amphibious youth from Minchkil, who represented the “crew.”

It was a lovely evening. There was just enough breeze to propel them gently and without rocking, and a fragrant whiff of sweet hawthorn reached them even there. As they stood out to sea, the moon shone out brighter and brighter in the clear sky, glancing upon the tiny ripples as though its light were touching the moving spear points of a host. Then, as

they presently rounded the headland, a hollow and tuneful echo seemed wafted back to them as the waves plashed against the semi-circle of cliff with the inflowing tide.

Eustace and the two Wandsborough girls were deep in a wordy war of banter and laughter, the former steering villainously in consequence. Roland and the curate were puffing at their cigars and lazily conversing in the fore part of the boat, and young Ned was playfully pulling Roy's ears. Suddenly through the stillness of the night, above the musical ripple as the bow of the boat cleft the water, above the bell-like plash of the waves upon the shore, a strange, mysterious sound came wafting over the moonlit sea, a sound as of the deep-toned howling of a dog.

The sky, studded with stars, is without a cloud. Yonder, shadowed by the lofty headland, the grey rock-turrets of The Skegs stand forth spectral under the clear moon. Again that most dismal sound floats out upon the night air, but no one seems to hear or notice it. No one? One—that is. One who has heard it before. The curate, glancing at his host, is surprised and alarmed at the latter's face, for it is ashy white; and following the set and rigid gaze, behold! a dark shadow is resting blackly upon the summit of the haunted rock. And Roy, with his hackles erect and gums drawn back, is snarling aggressively in response.

The terrible and grisly Ban once more. What does it portend?

Chapter Forty One.

The Sword Falls.

Olive was rather unwell on the morning after the picnic. It was nothing to worry about, she declared. She supposed she had overdone it, and was a little tired. Any way, she would stay in bed till the afternoon. So Roland and Sophie sat down to a late breakfast alone, Marsland having left earlier to spend a few days at Ardleigh.

“What a jolly day we had yesterday!” the girl was saying. “Olive didn’t catch cold, did she, Roland?”

“No. She’ll be all right after a good sleep. Roy, you vagabond, shut up. That melodious voice of yours is matter in the wrong place just now.”

But Roy, who had been lying curled up on the rug, refused to be silenced. His threatening growl became a deep-toned bay, and his ruff began to rise, as with fangs bared he sprang towards the door, which was yet shut. There were voices in the hall. Then the door opened.

“Come here, Roy, d’you hear, sir?” cried Roland, seizing him by the neck and dragging him by main force towards the rug. “Now. Lie down, sir.”

The dog would hardly obey, but half rose again, keeping up a running note of growls.

“Please, sir,” said the butler, entering, “there are two gentlemen want to see you very particular.”

“Who are they?”

“They won’t give their names, sir, and I never saw them before.”

Roland frowned. “Suppose I must send the fellows about their business. Back in a minute, Sophie.”

It may be that an ugly misgiving shot through his mind at that moment, but if so he showed no sign of it. As Jervis said afterwards, with awe and admiration in his voice: “Master was out-and-out the very coolest party he’d ever seen.”

The strangers were standing in the hall. With astonishment he recognised the men who had accosted him at Durnley Castle the day before.

“Your name is Roland Dorrien, I believe, sir?” began one of them, before he had time to ask a question.

“It is. Kindly walk in here and state your business with me.”

He held open the study door. The others, with a moment’s hesitation, accompanied him within. Then they turned.

“I have a most unpleasant duty to perform, sir,” said the spokesman of the pair.

“And that?” said Roland coolly, though conscious that his face was becoming white.

“Is to arrest you on the charge of murder. Here is the warrant,” said the other very gravely. “I must, as a matter of form, caution you against making any statement, though as a magistrate yourself, sir, you will be aware of this formality.”

“Yes, the warrant is all right,” he said, running his eye over it and noting idly that it was signed by a man with whom he had next to no personal acquaintance.

The sword had fallen at last. Was he dazed—was he dreaming—or was he really stunned? Was he, Roland Dorrien—one of the most influential men in the county, and lord of this noble patrimony whose limits he could not see from his highest window—was he, indeed, a prisoner, henceforth no longer master of the simplest of his own actions? Horror incredible!

Something of this must have appeared in his aspect as he turned away, for the detective watched him keenly.

“Let me see. I don’t know whether you will prevent my just saying a word to Mrs Dorrien before I go with you. She is rather unwell this morning, and this in addition will try her dreadfully.”

The officer shook his head.

“I’m extremely sorry, sir, but it can’t be done. You see I’m bound not to lose sight of you, and if I were to go with you it would frighten the lady still more.”

Roland faced round upon him.

“Listen. What if I were to pledge you my word of honour to return to you here in ten minutes?”

For half a moment the detective wavered. Then he shook his head very gravely.

“Can’t do it, sir!”

“No! Hang it! I suppose it wasn’t fair of me to put you into such a position. And you’ve been very good in managing so quietly. Of course—one would have time to do all manner of queer things in ten minutes. I’ll order the brougham at once. It’ll be thought I’ve gone gaol-visiting, ha-ha?”

Again the officer eyed him very curiously. That strange laugh, teeming with a subtle irony, the queer carelessness of his tone, put the detectives thoroughly upon their guard, and caused them to determine that there was something about this case that was decidedly “fishy.” They were fully alive, too, to the importance of their errand. It was not every day that their duty required them to arrest a gentleman, a squire and a J.P., for murder.

Roland rang the bell and gave the necessary orders. In a few minutes the brougham came round. The officers had declined all offers of refreshment, and became very impatient to start. Sophie was passing through the hall as they came out.

“Why, where are you going, Roland?” she asked in astonishment.

“Got to go to Battisford on business. Take care of yourselves till I come back. Bye-bye?”

The girl looked puzzled, but there was no time for further explanations, and the three men, getting into the brougham, were driven off. And Barnby, the principal detective, still continued to watch his prisoner closely, and drew his own conclusions. In his heart of hearts he was thoroughly convinced of the other’s guilt; but the pluck and coolness displayed by Roland under the circumstances of his arrest filled him with admiration, for it was unparalleled, even in that astute officer’s experience.

But oh, the torture of the breaking heart which could smile, and even half jest, at that awful moment! Even at the time when life was at its very sweetest to him, had the sword fallen—and yet not; for had he not been torn away at a moment’s notice, nor allowed even a glance of farewell at the sweet face of her who constituted all his world? But for that horrible, jarring calm which he had assumed as a mask, his self-control would have been nowhere.

They reached Battisford, and drew up at the gaol. As a magistrate it had frequently been Roland's duty to visit it; consequently his entrance into the gloomy building caused no comment among those who witnessed it now. Even the stolid turnkey was awed on receiving into his keeping one so high among the great ones of the land. To the last the prisoner's coolness did not desert him. He scribbled off a short note.

"Watts. Drive round by Wandsborough on your way back and give this to Dr Ingelow; and if he isn't in wait till he is. You needn't call for me, as I shall be engaged here for some hours." And again that mocking laugh lurked in his face.

The coachman touched his hat and drove off. Roland Dorrien followed the turnkey to the cell appointed to him. He needed nothing for the present, he said, and so that vigilant guardian, closing the door on him, retired, having respectfully hoped and trusted that he would soon be able to clear himself, as, of course, he easily could.

Clear himself? Not he. This was the fate awaiting him, and from it there would be no escape. The wraith on The Skegs had never been known to appear in vain.

Here for the first time he dared to think—here, where no eye was upon him. Yesterday, love, happiness, peace—to-day, this! Yesterday, powerful, wealthy, free—the envied of all; to-day, not the meanest loafer in Battisford market-place would change with him. Ah, good God! why had he escaped by a hairsbreadth, as it were, from the deadliest of perils that night on the seashore! Was it for this? Better a thousand times that the wild waves had been his grave—both their graves then. And the cold walls of his stone cell echoed such an anguished and despairing groan as is seldom wrung from the breast of mortal man.

It was not until late in the day that Olive awoke. Quickwitted Sophie had not been deceived by her brother-in-law's assumed coolness, and though absolutely in the dark as to the real facts, she could not help fearing that something had gone very wrong. As the day wore on, and he did not come, this feeling increased, and when at length the brougham returned, it was with a feeling of vast relief that she ran to the door. But it contained only her father.

It happened that when, in pursuance of his orders, Watts called at the Rectory, the old priest had just started on his rounds, and was not to be found anywhere. There was a great deal of sickness in Wandsborough at the time, and no one could say exactly where he was. As a matter of fact he had been called over to Minchkil Bay to attend the dying bed of one of the old seafarers. But the coachman's orders were positive. He was to wait for him, and wait he did, and so it was not until late in the afternoon that the brougham started to return to Cranston.

All used as he was to strange and startling revelations, the rector could not repress a start of astonishment as he rapidly scanned the contents of the note which old Watts handed to him. But his normal calm soon returned, and, entering the carriage there and then, he was driven rapidly away to Cranston.

There was time in the interval to think over the situation, but he was grateful for every moment of it. His unfortunate friend was called upon to satisfy human justice after all, and he, Dr Ingelow, was required to break the terrible news to his daughter. Yet it might be the barest suspicion—two years and a half was a long time. It would be difficult to convict. But then the prosecution must be in possession of very strong evidence indeed to move it to such a step as the arrest of a man of Roland Dorrien's status.

In all his experience—large as it was—the rector could not call to mind a more painful case. What frightful ruin the conviction of this man would entail! How much better, for every reason, that the terrible secret should remain buried—a turned-down page of the past! Thus musing, he arrived at Cranston.

"Oh, father. What has gone wrong?" cried Sophie affrightedly, reading the worst in his grave face.

Enjoining silence, her father took her apart, and in a few words communicated the fact of the arrest. The whole countryside would be ringing with it by then, and it was just as well that those most concerned should learn it at first-hand. The girl, though very shocked and awed, was quite self-possessed. Her first thought was for her sister.

"Can we not keep it from her a little longer?" she asked.

"Impossible. She will hear it by chance from others, and then think of the result. You had better leave us alone together, dear, but remain within call."

It was well for Olive that her father was the one upon whom it devolved to soften the terrible weight of the blow. But though she listened with livid face and ashy lips, she was calmer than he had dared to hope. Roland was alive and unharmed—that was relief. But in prison—in a cold, hard cell—and on a charge of murder! It was frightful. He a murderer! No, she would never believe that. Some absurd mistake had been made, and he would soon be released. Why, it was too ridiculous, and she almost laughed aloud at the bare idea.

Then Memory, like a mocking fiend, started up to dash even that consolation from her grasp. For it suddenly carried her back over the lapse of years to the chance meeting

with her lover on the beach, that lowering afternoon when the tide overtook them. His words, spoken then, now darted in characters of fire before her mental gaze.

“The trammelled imagination of a canting world reads crime into what is no crime at all.”

He had been urging a secret barrier existing between them—one that she, in common with society at large, would recognise as irrefragable. And she, mistaking the drift of the plea, had answered bravely that nothing would cause her to shrink from him.

They had talked at cross-purposes. Now—the whole mystery stood explained. By the light of this dénouement the scales fell from her eyes—even the intervening events were clear as daylight to her now. But could she now answer as bravely as then upon the lone seashore?

Every whit.

Looking up, she met her father’s eyes steadily and without speaking. And the flash of meaning in that glance revealed to him that she was no longer a blind believer in her husband’s innocence. Looking back in after years to this moment, the old priest was conscious of a distinct satisfaction at the time in making the discovery. It would save all danger of cross-purposes, though no word on the certainty could be exchanged between them.

“Oh, father! you don’t believe in—in this accusation!”

“I don’t believe that Roland is a murderer,” was the answer; straight, unhesitating, and in tones of conviction. “Men have been arrested on suspicion before to-day and honourably acquitted. Keep your wholesome, loving belief in him firm and unshaken, Olive my pet, and be strong for his sake.”

The old man’s voice shook as he strove to comfort this his best-loved child, but he mastered himself. Her faith in the accused man must be kept up at all hazards, nothing must dim that bright, pure flame. It had been his safeguard hitherto; it must not fail him now.

“I will indeed be strong. And now—I must go to him at once.”

“Not to-night, darling. Indeed, it will be impossible. To-morrow, we can procure the necessary order, the first thing. His first thought was of you—and—again I say it—you must be brave and strong for his sake.”

It was indeed well for Olive that her father's loving and clear-sighted wisdom was with her in the dark hour of her affliction. Already she felt soothed and hopeful. Yet there flashed across her mind the similarity between this parting and that other one in Wandsborough street, nearly three years ago. Then they had expected to meet again in a few hours, and lo! a very lifetime of separation had been theirs ere they met again. This time he had merely left her by the breadth of a few rooms, and now the gloomy walls of a prison separated them. The parallel was ominous.

In due course, the preliminary examination was held, and the magistrates had no alternative but to commit Roland Dorrien for trial at the ensuing Battisford assizes on the capital charge. Further, the Bench intimated, with infinite regret, that no question of bail could by any possibility be entertained.

Chapter Forty Two.

"Guilty or Not Guilty?"

To describe the state of excitement into which Wandsborough was thrown, when the tidings of Roland Dorrien's arrest were bruited about—as they very soon were—would battle the most graphic pen. Why, nothing approaching to this had ever befallen in their midst. The Squire of Cranston, the most influential of local magnates, greater even in point of possessions than Colonel Neville, the chairman of Petty Sessions, to be arrested on a criminal charge—one, too, for which, if convicted, he would inevitably suffer the death of a common malefactor. No, Wandsborough had, assuredly, never experienced the like of this.

To most of the accused's brother magistrates, the case was a painful affair. There was sufficient prima facie evidence to send it for trial, so for trial it went, and their responsibility ended. But the police court was crammed during the examinations, and all Wandsborough was making up its mind as to whether the accused was guilty or not, the balance of opinion leaning, if anything, to the former.

Needless to say, no expense was spared to secure the very best legal talent. That done, there was nothing left for all concerned, but to possess their souls in patience. The accused, in the bitter solitude of his prison cell, set his teeth grimly, and muttered twenty times a day, "Let them fight it out." But his legal advisers found him anything but a satisfactory client.

The time between the committal and the opening of the assizes was not unduly long, and during it Olive had visited him once. But the galling restrictions imposed upon the visit by gaol regulations, and the immense strain upon the self-control of both, had rendered the interview too trying altogether. Outwardly Olive was calmness itself, cheerful too, and making plans for the future, affecting to treat the whole thing as an absurd mistake; yet her demeanour did not deceive him, although he was willing she should believe it did.

At length the momentous day dawned. The Battisford assizes had been duly opened, and the grand jury had returned a true bill against Roland Dorrien for the wilful murder of his brother Hubert.

The Court-house at Battisford was large and spacious, but not large enough for one half of those who would fain have gained admission. As the accused entered the dock, the sea of faces craned forward, white with excitement and eagerness, was bewildering at first, but only at first. There was a slight frown and contraction of the brows, and a pallor

which might have been the result of an anxious period of close confinement; otherwise the prisoner's face was cold, impassive, almost haughty, as he swept one glance around the Court. The wooden-faced judge, in crimson and ermine, the rows of wigged and gowned counsel—these he felt were scrutinising him keenly. The High Sheriff, too—why, he had narrowly escaped being pricked for that office himself, this very year. Then he became aware that he was being called upon to listen to an indictment couched in rolling legal phraseology, and to plead accordingly.

"Not Guilty!"

The tone, firm, indifferent, might have been ventriloquised out of an ice-block. He was not there to waste emotion, thought the prisoner grimly.

Then the prosecuting counsel proceeded to open his case on behalf of the Crown. Concisely he went over the facts connected with Hubert Dorrien's disappearance two years and a half previously, with the subsequent search and its result, or rather, want of result; upon the subsequent finding of a body upon the seashore, which, although the face was unrecognisable, the clothing, and its marks, watch, etc, were amply sufficient to identify as that of the missing man, and the inquest immediately held upon it had decided accordingly. But circumstances had come to light, which went to show that what had been regarded as a lamentable accident there was reason to believe was nothing less than a deliberate, vindictive and cold-blooded murder, committed by the prisoner who stood before them to take his trial, and the very fact that he stood there showed that there was sufficient evidence to justify that belief. Whether that belief were turned into a certainty would rest with the twelve honourable and intelligent gentlemen who were there to try the case.

The jury liked this opening. They had always heard of Benham, Q.C., as a very big gun indeed, now they were going to have a chance of hearing his oratorical gifts. Outwardly he was a tall, pleasant-voiced man, in the prime of life, and he had a persuasive way with him.

He should show, he went on, how prisoner had come to Battisford disguised, how he had put up at "The Silver Fleece Inn" in that town, under the pseudonym of Robert Durnford, and had laid his plans and watched his opportunity, and having lured his brother to a lonely spot upon the cliffs between that town and Wandsborough, had there done him to death in the darkness of night, as he thought, unseen by human eye.

Then counsel proceeded to call his first evidence. This was given, in succession, by those who had found the body, two or three fishermen from Minchkil. These were examined by Benham's junior, and their evidence being purely technical, they were soon disposed

of. They were followed by the medical man who had testified at the inquest, and who declared now, as he had declared then, and unhesitatingly, that death was due to drowning. There were marks of bruises on the body, but not such as would cause death, or even contribute to that result.

There was a stir of sensation among the densely-packed crowd as Mr Benham called for his next witness, for this was no other than Mrs Dorrien, the General's widow. A tall figure in deep black made its way to the witness-box with rapid, but firm, steps. A chair was placed for her by direction of the judge.

Then, as Mrs Dorrien slowly removed her heavy veil, her glance fell upon her surviving son; that son, whom she had never seen since he left his father's house those years ago. Then they had parted in coldness, if not in anger. Now they met again thus, the mother and the son.

Roland met her eyes firmly, and there was no sign of shrinking in his mien. Her face was pale as death, but stern, impassive and determined as his own. In it there appeared not a trace of pity.

"Pray be seated, Mrs Dorrien," said Mr Benham in his suavest tone, when the witness had been sworn. "We shall endeavour to spare you unnecessary pain. All we want you to tell us are the circumstances under which your son Hubert was first missed."

Concisely, in a low, set tone, the widow complied. Aided now and again by a question from the judge, she stated how Hubert had left home to attend evening service at Cranston, how he had not returned, and how, on the following morning, being alarmed, she had told her husband, who had at once instituted a search, heading it in person—but without effect.

"One thing more, Mrs Dorrien," said Mr Benham, "and we shall have done. Had you any reason to suspect your eldest son, the accused, was anywhere in the neighbourhood?"

"None whatever."

"Any questions, Mr Windgate?" asked the judge sharply.

"N-no, m'lord," replied the prisoner's advocate. "At least, yes," jumping up. "Just one. Will you kindly tell us, Mrs Dorrien, were your two sons, Roland and Hubert, on good terms?"

"They had never quarrelled."

“They had never quarrelled,” making a note. “That is to say, they were on good terms.”

“They were not very cordial,” said the witness in the same slow, monotonous voice in which her evidence had been given.

“Ah! They were not very cordial. Different temperaments, no doubt. Thank you, Mrs Dorrien. That will do,” said Mr Windgate blandly, making another note.

As different as possible from his opponent was Mr Windgate, Q.C., the prisoner’s advocate. A little man, with bushy black whiskers, round in person, brisk and smiling in manner—he was sharp as a needle. Yet the way in which he extracted admissions from an unwilling witness left an impression on that uncomfortable personage that was soothing, not to say flattering. Mr Benham, on the other hand, was apt to wax stern and slightly supercilious when on his mettle.

The next witness called was the Rev. Charles Curtis, the vicar of Cranston. He gave a more or less succinct account of the search in which he had taken part, up to the time of meeting with Eustace Ingelow at the bottom of Smugglers’ Ladder.

“This article was handed to you by young Mr Ingelow?” asked Mr Benham, holding up the silver matchbox which Eustace had picked up.

“It was.”

“Had you ever seen it before?”

“Never.”

“Nothing else was found at the time?”

“Not down below. I believe something was found above.”

“Ah, we shall come to that presently. Thank you, Mr Curtis. That will do.”

Mr Windgate, having no question to ask beyond that concerning the terms on which the two young gentlemen stood with each other, the vicar was soon released.

Then was taken the evidence of Thomas Platt, labourer, and afterwards, that of his wife—the pair who had last seen Hubert Dorrien alive on the fatal Sunday evening. The honest couple, who resided on the Cranston estate and looked up to the accused as their

feudal lord, were mightily overcome by the awe of the situation, and the woeful perplexity with which they made their statements convulsed the audience, vastly tickled the Bar, and enraged the judge to the last degree.

But the evidence of the rustic pair was straightforward enough, and tallied exactly, nor was it to be shaken by all the silky cross-questionings of the prisoner's counsel. Might they not have been mistaken about the direction the deceased was taking, or about the time? No—on all these points they were sure. They were of the soil born and bred, and on matters local like this were sharp enough. They had no feeling against the accused, quite the reverse. He was a kind master, although some folks were a bit afraid of him.

"We are not taking evidence as to the character of the prisoner, Mr Windgate," reminded the judge crustily, drawing a suave apology from that eminent counsel, and the prompt bundling out of the box of the latter of the two rustic witnesses.

"I shall call Eustace Ingelow," said the Crown Counsel on the return of the Court after a short adjournment for lunch.

Poor Eustace was in a woeful state of nervousness and genuine grief on behalf of his relative, as he took the oath. Indeed, it seemed as if he would hardly be able to deliver his evidence coherently.

"Take time, Mr Ingelow," said Mr Benham kindly. "There's no hurry—none whatever. You are, I believe, the prisoner's brother-in-law?"

"Yes."

"In a double sense?"

"I—I don't quite understand."

"What do you mean by 'a double sense,' Mr Benham?" snapped the judge.

"We mean, m'lord, that they married each others' sisters." Here it became necessary to explain that the learned counsel was forging ahead too fast, and that at least half of his statement dealt with future contingencies instead of with actual facts. Which explanation tickled the audience and reduced the witness to a red-hot degree of nervousness. "And now, Mr Ingelow," he went on, when the joke had subsided, "just tell the gentlemen of the jury what happened during the search you took part in. Were you asked to join in that search?"

“No. I did not even know what had happened until I saw Mr Curtis and General Dorrien arrive on the beach. I was there at the time talking with Matt and Jem Pollock.”

“And then you learned that Hubert Dorrien was missing?”

“Yes. I volunteered at once to join in the search.”

“Were you acquainted with the deceased?”

“Very slightly. In fact, hardly at all.”

“But you were acquainted with General Dorrien?”

A flush rose to Eustace’s face, and he hesitated.

“I can’t exactly say that. But—but—of course I knew him well by sight—and—”

“I can’t hear a word the witness says,” snapped the judge, “and I’m sure the jury can’t.”

“A little louder please, Mr Ingelow. Did you find anything anywhere near the Smugglers’ Ladder?”

“Yes. A piece of silk cord, such as might be used for an eyeglass.”

“The deceased wore an eyeglass?”

“Yes.”

“What did you do with this cord?”

“I took it to General Dorrien. He seemed to recognise it—but said nothing.”

“Is this the cord?” handing it to the witness.

“I think so.”

“How did you find it?”

“It was hanging on a tuft of grass on the brink.”

“Now, what was your idea when you found this cord?”

“I thought it a very important trace. It seemed to point to the poor fellow having fallen in.”

“Quite so. Were there any other traces?”

“The grass around the brink was crushed.”

“Crushed and trampled?”

“M’lord, the witness said ‘crushed,’” objected Mr

Windgate. “I must really object—”

“Well, ‘crushed’ then,” went on Mr Benham suavely. “My learned friend shall have no reason to complain of undue pressure on our part. Well, and what did you think then, Mr Ingelow?”

“I thought there was no doubt about his having fallen into the chasm.”

“Fallen in?”

“Yes.”

“You had no suspicion then of foul play?”

“Not the slightest. I never heard that anyone had.”

“Oh, you never heard that anyone had!” said Mr Benham quickly, catching up the statement in just the way to embarrass and disconcert a nervous witness. And Eustace, remembering sundry cautions he had received in private about volunteering evidence, felt disconcerted accordingly.

His narrative of the descent of Smugglers’ Ladder evoked considerable applause, for the ill-omened chasm was well known by reputation. He stated how he had found nothing on reaching the bottom.

“Nothing, Mr Ingelow? Come, just cast your memory back.”

“Well, I mean I found nothing of importance, only a little matchbox,” “Ah-h! Two years and a half is a long time to look back across at your age,” said Mr Benham kindly,

hitching his thumbs into the shoulders of his gown and looking smilingly superior. “Now, what did you do with this little matchbox?”

“I handed it to Mr Curtis.”

“Is this it?”

“Yes.”

There was a visible cloud on Eustace’s face as he held the silver matchbox in his hand, as if it would burn him. Heads craned forward to catch a glimpse of the article.

“Had you ever seen that matchbox before you found it at the bottom of—er—Smugglers’ Ladder,” asked Mr Benham impressively.

“I think so.”

“Where did you see it?”

“I had seen it—er—I had seen Roland use it.”

“You had see Roland Dorrien use it. How many times? Once—twice—perhaps?”

“I can’t remember exactly how many times.”

“No? You used often to—well—to have a pipe together, no doubt?”

“Yes.”

“And Roland Dorrien was in the habit of using that matchbox?”

“Yes.”

“In fact, you are under the impression it belonged to him?”

“Yes.”

“Now, Mr Ingelow—you are on your oath, mind. Is this, or is it not, the same matchbox which you saw in the prisoner’s possession?”

“I can’t positively swear to it. It is like it, certainly.”

“Yet it is of very peculiar make.”

“The witness says he can’t swear to it, Mr Benham,” interposed the judge. “Don’t you think we might drop the matchbox now?”

“Certainly, my lord. I have nothing further to ask.”

“Nor I, my lord,” said Windgate. And Eustace, to his unspeakable relief, was told to stand down, which relief was dashed by a miserable misgiving that he had somehow or other materially damaged his relative’s chances.

Chapter Forty Three.

Darker and Darker.

To Eustace succeeded his father, and the appearance of Dr Ingelow in the witness-box gave rise to not a little expectation on the part of many. They wondered what card the prosecution held up its sleeve, and although outwardly calmness and composure, so did he.

Beginning at his earliest acquaintance with Roland Dorrien, Mr Benham put the rector through a long, minute, and tiresome examination, repeatedly challenged as irrelevant by the opposing counsel, as to his relations with the Dorrien family at that time. On these points the judge supported Mr Windgate, and the queries were waived or put less pointedly.

“You recollect Hubert Dorrien’s disappearance, Dr Ingelow?” continued the prosecution, having brought the examination down to that stage. “Perfectly.”

“That was nearly five months after the prisoner had left Wandsborough, was it not?”

“About that time.”

“And you had seen nothing of him since?”

“Nothing whatever.”

“Did you know his whereabouts at that time?”

“I had not an idea of it.”

“Will you swear to that?”

“Emphatically.”

“When did you see him next?”

“Not till the following June.”

“That is to say, from August of the previous year till June of the actual year in which the deceased met his death, you did not set eyes on Roland Dorrien?”

“You have my exact meaning.”

“Did any of your family?”

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Will you repeat that statement?”

“Not to my knowledge.” Here Mr Windgate made a careful note. Then followed a great deal of questioning as to the prisoner’s marriage and the terms upon which he and the witness had always stood.

“Now, Dr Ingelow,” went on the Crown counsel, waxing impressive. “Kindly give me your closest attention. You have always been on the most intimate terms with the prisoner.”

“Always.”

“Should you call him a man of a cheerful disposition!”

“Well—no.”

“Ah! Now did not that ever strike you as a little strange in a man of his age and position in life?”

“I really can’t say that it ever did.” Mr Benham’s face and attitude formed a study. He threw himself back and, with half-closed eyes, looking now at the ceiling, now at the witness, shook his head gently with the blandest of deprecatory smiles.

“Will you kindly tell the Court how long you have been in Holy Orders?”

“Thirty-three years.”

“You have had great experience during that time?”

“I think I may say I have.”

“Varied experience?”

“Decidedly varied experience.”

“At Wandsborough and elsewhere?”

“Yes.”

“Experience of character, human nature, and so forth?”

“Yes.”

“Is it not a fact, Dr Ingelow, that one of your daughters met with a narrow escape from drowning some time ago? Was cut off by the tide?”

“That is so.”

“When did this occur?”

“About two years and a half ago.”

“Was it anywhere near the time of Hubert Dorrien’s disappearance?”

“It was.”

“Before or after?”

“Just after.”

“Just after. How long after?”

“As far as I can remember, about a fortnight after.”

“The lady who met with that adventure is your second daughter, is she not?”

“Yes.”

“And is now Mrs Dorrien, the wife of the prisoner?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! And now will you kindly tell the Court the circumstances of that—er—adventure?”

This the witness did, as briefly as possible. The tale was not new to the audience, few of whom, however, had heard it at first-hand. It was listened to with vivid interest,

particularly the facts relating to the rescue by the mysterious stranger. Him—being asked to do so—the witness described to the best of his ability.

“This stranger—this Mr Robert Durnford—gave you an address, you say—a London address? Did you ever apply at that address?”

“It was only a post-office address. I lost no time in writing to him at it.”

“What was the address?”

“It was some London post office. The name of the post office has clean escaped my memory.”

“You wrote to him. And you received no reply?”

“Pardon me. I did receive one.”

“May I ask to what effect?”

“To the effect that the writer was on the eve of departure to New South Wales, and regretting that therefore our further acquaintance must remain in abeyance perhaps for years—also expressing gratification at having been instrumental in my daughter’s escape. It was a courteous and kindly letter. I have heard nothing of him since.”

“Quite so, Dr Ingelow—quite so. Have you still that letter in your possession?”

“No. I have destroyed it, among other old papers.”

“Lately?”

“N-no. It must be quite a year ago.”

“Now, you are on your oath, Dr Ingelow. You have not destroyed that letter since your son-in-law’s arrest?”

“Your reminder is needless, sir. Nevertheless, for your greater satisfaction I will reiterate that the letter was destroyed quite a year ago.”

“Well, well. Now did it strike you at the time that any similarity existed between that stranger and the prisoner, Roland Dorrien?”

“It did not.”

“No resemblance whatever? Voice—walk—manner? Come. Think again, my dear sir.”

“Unnecessary. I saw no such resemblance.”

“Has it ever struck you since?”

“It has not.”

“You have never had reason to suspect that Robert Durnford, the rescuer of your daughter on that occasion, might have been Roland Dorrien in disguise?”

“I never have.”

“You distinctly swear to that?”

“Distinctly.”

“Don’t you think, Mr Benham, you’ve got out of this witness all you’re likely to get?” said the judge snappishly.

“I have just put my last question, m’lord,” was the suave reply. “Thank you, Dr Ingelow.” And Mr Benham sat down, more nonplussed than he cared to show.

Mr Windgate rose.

“I should be glad, my lord, if you would kindly make a note of the fact that this witness has three times distinctly sworn that no identity existed between the stranger, Robert Durnford, and my client, Roland Dorrien.”

“Er—twice I think, Mr Windgate,” said the judge.

“Pardon me, my lord. Three times. If your lordship will glance back a few folios. This gentleman stated earlier in his evidence that from August till the following June he had not set eyes on the prisoner. Now, the young lady’s adventure befel in February, between those months. Therefore the statement amounts to a denial of the identity.”

“Very well, Mr Windgate.”

“Thank you, m’lord. I do not require to cross-examine.”

So the rector stood down. Mr Windgate was jubilant. The evidence just heard was all in his client's favour.

Considerable disappointment prevailed among the audience at the conclusion to which Dr Ingelow's examination had been so abruptly brought. They looked for something far more exciting. Meanwhile, another witness was being sworn.

"Your name is George Newton?" queried Mr Benham, "and you are a waiter at Welbrook's Tavern, in the Strand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been long in that situation?"

"About nine years."

"Now, look at the prisoner. Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes," replied the witness unhesitatingly.

"When?"

"Well, that I can't exactly say, sir. It might be a year or two ago. He came in one night to have some dinner—and seemed a bit flurried like. The first thing he did was to ask for an A.B.C. time-table. We 'adn't got one in the 'ouse, and the gentleman seemed rather put out about it."

"And then?"

"Well then, sir, we sent out and got him one."

"Now, just cast your memory back and see if you can tell us what day it was."

But this the witness could not do. He could swear most decidedly to the accused's identity, but for dates he had no recollection. The month on the A.B.C. was January.

"The gentleman seemed a bit queer," he went on. "He seemed to make a great point about getting the A.B.C., and then when he goes out what does he do but leave it behind!"

“Did you examine it?”

“Yes, sir. One of the pages had a corner turned down, and it was marked at Wandsborough Road station.”

“You have it with you?”

“Yes, sir. Here it is.” And the witness, fumbling in his pocket, produced the time-table which Roland Dorrien had forgotten and left behind him at the tavern in the Strand, on the night of his chance meeting with his brother.

It was even as the man had said—turned down and marked at Wandsborough Road station.

“Did you draw anyone else’s attention to this circumstance?”

“Yes, sir. One of the other waiters, Tom Short.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s been dead these six or eight months.”

“And you are ready to swear that the prisoner is the gentleman who left this with you?”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr Benham sat down, and Mr Windgate rose to cross-examine. He seemed determined to make up for having hitherto been debarred his privilege in that line, for he assailed the witness in the most pitiless manner. But it was of no use. The man’s evidence was straightforward enough, and he stuck to it, especially the identity—as to which he was calm certainty itself. All present felt that its burden was of damning import.

The next to enter the box was Johnston, the ex-Cranston gardener. His testimony went to show that the prisoner was identical with Robert Durnford, so-called, the mysterious guest at “The Silver Fleece Inn.” He swore positively to having recognised his late master in the disguised stranger, when the latter had passed him in the street at Battisford. He further deposed to having taken subsequent opportunities of observing the pseudo-Durnford unknown to the subject of his observation, and was quite satisfied on the point of the identity between the two. Things began to look dark for the prisoner, but they were destined to look darker still.

When he had satisfied himself as to the identity of the accused with the stranger staying at “The Silver Fleece” in Battisford—he said—suspicion first entered his mind, and it grew stronger and stronger. Nor was it difficult to account for the fact that the one should be in the neighbourhood disguised at the very time the other met his death; the more so as the prisoner would be the gainer by his brother’s death, and in fact was the gainer. From that time, he had laid himself out to watch the prisoner—and once had overheard some fragments of the tatter’s conversation with Dr Ingelow, which had more than ever convinced him of the truth of his suspicions. Then Devine had begun to let fall hints as if he knew something about the matter, and, finally, the two of them had concluded to wait upon Mr Forsyth, one of the county justices, and get his advice. In the result each made a statement.

That of Johnston was now put in, and read nut. He had nothing to withdraw or add to it, he said; and then Mr Benham eat down.

But the revengeful half-grin on the face of the witness turned to rather a blank look as the defence began upon him in cross-examination.

Beginning with the subject of identity, Mr Windgate tried all he knew to make Johnston own to a possibility of mistake. Then he went on the “bewilderment” plan, but the long-headed Scot was not to be floored in that way, nor could he be made to contradict himself. The vindictive rascal was precision personified. But when it came to the eavesdropping story, Mr Windgate’s tone was magnificent in its scathing contempt.

“Kindly tell the Court the date of your going to Mr—er—Forsyth—the magistrate?”

“It was last month. About the 15th.”

“About the 15th of last month.”

“Yes.”

“You had then left Mr Dorrien’s service?”

“I had.”

“How long had you left it?”

“About six weeks.”

“Why did you leave it?”

“Mr Roland turned me off.”

“Oh! Mr Roland turned you off, did he? Now have the goodness to tell us why?”

“Well, it was just this way. He thocht I wasn’t speaking respectfully to Madam. So he turned me off.”

“Now, be very careful. You are on your oath, mind. Penal servitude is among the consequences of perjury.” Mr Benham to the rescue.

“Really, this is a most unwarrantable aspersion of the witness’ veracity, which my learned friend is hardly justified in making.”

“We shall see,” uncompromisingly retorted the other. “Now, Mr Johnston, let me assist your memory. Did you not on the day you were dismissed accost Mrs Dorrien in the conservatory, and ask for a certain situation for your son?”

“Yes.”

“And hint that it was in your power to injure your mister, if it was refused?”

“No.”

“What?”

“No. I did no such thing,” replied Johnston composedly.

Mr Windgate was nonplussed. He stared at the witness in amazement.

“You did no such thing? Kindly repeat that?”

“I did no such thing.”

“Very good. Remember you were warned what a false statement involved,” said Mr Windgate severely, making a voluminous note to conceal his chagrin. For the astute Q.C. had been completely foiled by the canny Scot. That worthy knew that his master’s lips were sealed, and that even if his mistress could give evidence against himself it would merely be oath against oath. So having decided that he could commit perjury with impunity, he at least had the merit of doing it thoroughly.

“Well, the fact remains that Mr Dorrien discharged you summarily. Now, did you threaten him on that occasion?”

“I may have.”

“Answer my question. Did you?”

“Well, yes, I did.”

“What did you say to him?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Again let me refresh your memory. Did you say—‘You will come to a noose for this day’s work’?”

“I may have said so.”

“That won’t do. Did you say that? Be careful now.”

“M’lord, the witness says he can’t remember,” objected Mr Benham. “He was angry at the time—under the circumstances, naturally so. We can’t always remember words uttered in anger.”

“It’s of no consequence, m’lord. We can prove that he used the words. It would save time—and, perhaps, be better for himself—if he admitted it, though,” said Mr Windgate significantly.

“Well, I did say that,” said Johnston sullenly.

“We know you did. Now, to what did you refer when you said that? Was it to this charge of murder?”

“It may have been.”

“Answer the learned counsel properly, sir,” blazed forth the judge. “You are an impertinent fellow, to come here and play the fool in Court. Just be careful what you are about.”

“I mean it was,” answered Johnston, overawed.

“Quite so. In a word, you suspected that there had been foul play, and that your master was at the bottom of it?”

“Yes.”

“Only a suspicion, of course?”

“Yes.”

“Now, what gave rise to that suspicion?”

“Well, it seemed strange that Mr Roland should be down at Battisford in disguise just at the time Mr Hubert disappeared.”

“Ah! How long were you in the service of the accused?”

“Nearly two years.”

“Nearly two years in the service of a man you suspected of murder. I should say you had a most elastic conscience, Mr Johnston, were it not that your conduct looks very like an attempt to extract hush money. Now, has your master ever had occasion to find fault with you previously?”

“He has once or twice said I must be more ceevil. He was a mighty partecklar gentleman.”

“Quite so. And did you not, on a former occasion, attempt to take legal proceedings against the accused, because his dog bit you?”

“I did. But that was in the late General Dorrien’s time.”

“And you were not a favourite with the accused at any time?”

“Well—no.”

“That I can easily understand,” rejoined Mr Windgate, with bitter significance. “The marvel is that he kept you for a single day.”

“My learned friend is not justified in making such reflections on the witness,” objected Mr Benham.

“My learned friend need not mind. I have now done with this witness, and I devoutly thank Heaven for it,” retorted Mr Windgate.

“One moment, Johnston,” said the Crown counsel.

“Have you ever in any way traded upon your suspicions to obtain money or favours from your employer?”

“Never. I solemnly swear.”

There was a low hiss at the back of the room as Johnston left the box, which even the judge pretended not to hear.

Chapter Forty Four.

A Scrap of Paper.

In answer to a call for Mrs Eliza Clack, a hatchet-faced harpy entered the box, and, the first diffidence over, tried all she knew to justify her patronymic. From this propensity, however, Mr Benham managed to pick out the facts that she knew the prisoner, could swear to him anywhere, that he had lodged with her a couple of months two and a half years ago, and had left at a date which would be but the day before the deceased's disappearance. He owned a large red and white dog then, which he had disposed of while in her house. She had always thought him a strangely-mannered gentleman, and was not altogether sorry to see the last of him. He looked somewhat different then to what he did now, he wore a beard—and yes, now it was put to her, she thought he was getting a little grey at that time.

How could she remember the date? insisted Mr Windgate, when his turn came. Well, she did remember it. Could swear to it, in fact. But two and a half years was a long time. Well, yes it was, but she remembered it by several things. It was the same night that the boy next door had blinded her tortoiseshell cat with a catapult. And it was the day before her daughter was turned away from her situation, well, never mind why—it wasn't true; an answer which sent a ripple of mirth through the room. However, the woman could swear to the prisoner, and swore tenaciously to the date, which was all the prosecution wanted.

Two maid-servants from "The Silver Fleece Inn" were the next witnesses. These testified to the time when Robert Durnford had gone out on the Sunday night, but were unable to state the hour of his return. One of them declared she had heard the stranger talking to the waiter in the hall at a quarter-past ten, and that she thought she had heard the front door close just before. Upon her Mr Windgate pounced.

"Your bed-room is at the top of the house?"

"Yes, sir. But the 'ouse isn't an 'igh one."

"I didn't ask you that. Now, how do you know it was a quarter-past ten? Had you a watch?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you looked at it?"

“Yes, sir.”

“Was it keeping the right time?”

“Yes, sir. That is, I set it by the large clock in the passage.”

“When?”

“The day before.”

“Oh! You did, did you?”—making a note. “Now, had you been asleep at the time?”

“No, sir. I was just goin’ to drop off when I heard gentlemen’s voices in the passage.”

“And who were the ‘gentlemen’?”

“They was Mr Durnford and Grainger, the waiter.”

“Now you are on your oath,” said Mr Windgate impressively, fixing the witness with a stern look that nearly drove the luckless young woman wild with terror and apprehension. “Are you ready to swear that the voice you heard talking to—a—Grainger was that of Mr Durnford?”

“Well, sir, I don’t know about swearing, but I’m positive it was.”

“Indeed. You are singularly confident, young woman,” sarcastically. “But no matter. We shall soon show that, like most positive people, this witness is quite at fault. You are quite right not to swear. You may go.”

“Stephen Devine.”

There was a stir among the audience, and interest, which had begun to flag, now revived, as the hulking form of the ex-poacher appeared in the box. There was a decidedly hang-dog look on his swarthy face, not unmixed with fear, and he took the Book as if it would burn him. But his evidence was straightforward enough. In the examination he stated how, while returning home from Wandsborough on the night in question, he had unexpectedly caught sight of Hubert Dorrien hurrying in a direction which could have led him nowhere in particular. This, added to the fact that it was a Sunday evening, rendered the young man’s movements not a little suspicious, and the witness determined to watch him. Accordingly he followed him at a distance to the brow of the cliff above Smugglers’ Ladder. It must have been a little after nine, for he

distinctly heard the hour strike from Wandsborough steeple—to that he could positively swear. To his surprise he heard another man's voice, and on stealing a little nearer he recognised it as that of the prisoner, Roland Dorrien. So he hid behind a stone and waited. He was not quite near enough to catch what they said, but the deceased seemed rather frightened. But what puzzled the witness most was that although he could swear to the voice, no less than to the figure, the face was strange to him. It was bright moonlight at the time. At last the prisoner turned to the light, and his brother, recognising him, at once exclaimed "Roland!" and then the witness was able to see that he seemed in a manner disguised. He, Devine, afterwards saw him twice in Battisford—once from the window of a public-house and once from a shop door, and easily recognised him.

When the deceased had identified his brother he seemed less frightened, and soon they got to high words. Then there was a struggle, and in a moment the prisoner had thrown the deceased into the chasm. The witness lay quite still, and saw the prisoner go and look down into the chasm for a moment, after which he went away in the direction of Battisford. Then his statement before the magistrate, Mr Forsyth, was put in as in Johnston's case.

Great sensation prevailed during this narrative. Those who had been consulting their watches with an eye to dinner—for it was getting late—elected to stay. The case might be finished to-night.

Then came Mr Windgate's turn. His cross-examination was perfect. Every point in the witness' past life, which he could colourably touch upon—and several which he could not—was raised. He made him admit—notwithstanding continued objections from the prosecution—that his own daughter would not live with him, even if the unfortunate girl had not been fairly driven from her home. He brought up against him former convictions for acts of ruffianism, and for poaching; and on the score of character, and by way of proving animus, he forced the witness to own that he had more than once expressed hatred of the accused, thus making him prove himself guilty of the blackest ingratitude, in that his situation with Colonel Neville had been procured through the prisoner's good offices. But clever as he was, Mr Windgate could not get him to contradict himself or to swerve by a word from the main details of his story.

"Well, now," he continued. "This took place two years and a half ago. That is to say, Mr Stephen Devine, that by witnessing this deed and not preventing it you made yourself an accessory after the fact? An accomplice—in short."

The man looked rather scared.

“Please, sir, it was all done too quickly.”

“But why did you keep silence all this time?”

“Well, sir, you see, it was no affair of mine, and I was afraid I might get into trouble.”

“Indeed! Suspicious, to say the least of it. And how is it that, having held your tongue for so long, you should at last see fit to let it wag?”

“Well, sir, you see Johnston, he knew about it too, and he kep’ on a lettin’ me know that he did. At last he said that we should both get into trouble if we kep’ it dark any longer.”

“Quite so. When was this?”

“About five weeks ago.”

“And what did you do then?”

“Why, we went to Mr Forsyth and asked his advice, and he said we’d better make sure of our fax, and then we must make a—a—a—aspersion.”

“A what?”

“No, sir, that wasn’t it—it was a disposition.”

“Oh! A deposition?”

“Yes, sir, and we made it. And the next thing we heard was that Squire Dorrien was in gaol.”

“Where I trust those who richly deserve it will soon be in his place,” rejoined Mr Windgate significantly. “And I hope I shall be instrumental in bringing about this pleasant little change. And now, do we understand you to say you would have kept silence about this if Johnston had not known it too?”

“Well, sir, yes. It warn’t no business of mine.”

“Well!” said Mr Windgate in a tone which said, “Alter that—anything.”

“A very natural fear, my lord,” explained Mr Benham. “A poor man like the witness would naturally think a good many times before bringing a grave charge of this sort against a gentleman in the prisoner’s position.”

“Many more witnesses on your side, Mr Benham?” asked the judge. “It’s getting very late.”

“Only one, my lord. But I am willing to adjourn.”

But Mr Windgate was not. He argued that it was important to his client’s interest that this witness should be heard to-night. The judge ordered lights to be brought in—for it was becoming dark—and then Jem Pollock was recalled.

There was a seriousness and a gravity upon the seafarer’s weatherbeaten face which gave one the impression of a man there much against his will. Re-examined, he stated that he was returning home from Battisford on the night of the supposed murder, and took the short way over the cliffs to Minchkil Bay. As he approached Smugglers’ Ladder a man passed him walking rapidly in the direction of Battisford. There was something familiar about the stranger’s figure and gait, and when he, the witness, wished him good-evening, he seemed to recognise the voice as he replied.

A few days after the search for the deceased, the witness had taken the trouble to go and examine the chasm again, and not many yards from it he found a fragment of an old envelope. Nearly the whole name was still on it—“Roland Dor— —don, W.,” but the address was almost entirely gone. The date of the postmark was January 19th. There was great excitement in Court as the envelope was produced and handed to the jury, and all eyes were bent on the prisoner to see how he would take it. But disappointment awaited. The accused seemed to manifest not the smallest interest in the proceedings.

This envelope Pollock had kept, waiting to be guided by events. But the stir attendant on Hubert Dorrien’s disappearance soon quieted down, and he decided to keep his own counsel. Then had come another exciting event—the rector’s daughter being cut off by the tide and narrowly escaping drowning. Witness had also taken part in the search for the young lady, and in her rescuer he recognised the man who had passed him on the cliff. At the same time he recognised him for Roland Dorrien.

This bit of romance turned the tide of public opinion quite in favour of the accused, for the story of Olive Ingelow’s narrow escape was well known. Surely, never was a criminal trial so redundant with romantic episode. Sympathetic murmurs began to arise in Court. But counsel’s inexorable voice recalled to prose again.

“Could you swear to the prisoner being the man who rescued Miss Ingelow?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the witness firmly, but very reluctantly.

“You saw his face distinctly?”

“Yes, sir. The lanterns was full upon it.”

“And you knew his voice?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, how is it you kept silence about your suspicions?”

“Well, sir, I’m not one o’ them as talks a lot. And then, I had no suspicions until the idea cropped up that Mr Hubert had met wi’ foul play. And I didn’t want to injure Mr Roland, and especially Madam,” he added with feeling; “but that there detective chap he seemed to get it all out o’ me like a blessed babby,” concluded he resentfully.

“Quite so. Very natural. That will do,” and Mr Benham sat down.

But the prisoner’s counsel realised that this witness was the most dangerous one of all. Any attempt to browbeat a man of Pollock’s known respectability could not but damage his cause in the eyes of the jury. So he assumed a tone at once conciliatory and deprecatory, as though he would convey the idea that Pollock, though incapable of a false statement, might be mistaken in his inferences throughout.

“Of course, Pollock, you know Mr Dorrien well now, but at that time you didn’t know him very well, did you?”

“Well, I’d often seen him, sir, and I knew him well enough by sight. There was something about his walk, too, that I couldn’t mistake.”

“Indeed? But that is not a very sure point to go upon, is it?”

“That’s as may be, sir.”

“Now, Pollock, you are on good terms with Mr Dorrien, are you not? You would not wish to injure him?”

“No, indeed, sir,” answered the witness earnestly. “He’s a kind landlord to us, is the Squire—and as for Madam, I’ve known her since she was a little maid not much higher nor my knee—bless her sweet face.”

Great applause. Mr Windgate began to look more and more confident.

“Quite so. Now, don’t you think you may be mistaken in identifying the man who saved Miss Ingelow with the one you met on the cliff on the night of the disappearance of Hubert Dorrien?”

“M’lord, I must take exception most strongly to my learned brother’s mode of cross-examination,” said Mr Benham. “He appeals most powerfully to the feelings of the witness, and then does what is tantamount to begging him to unsay what he has already stated on oath.”

“Hardly that, I submit,” rejoined the other. “My unfortunate client is placed in a very grave position. Surely then it behoves us to make certain as to our facts.”

“But the witness had already stated on oath his certitude as to the identity of the men.”

“A man may excusably think twice when such grave issues are at stake, Mr Benham,” said the judge.

“With the greatest respect I would submit that your lordship is laying down a somewhat dangerous precedent,” answered Mr Benham, undaunted.

Then the judge retorted, and after some triangular sparring between his lordship and the two counsel, Mr Windgate went on.

“What time would it have been when you met the stranger on the cliff that evening?”

“It was after nine, sir. Indeed, it was nearly half-past—for very soon after I heard the clock strike.”

“What clock?”

“The Wandsborough clock.”

“How far from—er—Smugglers’ Ladder was the stranger when you met him?”

“Maybe half a mile, sir.”

“How long would it take to walk from Smugglers’ Ladder to Battisford? Walking at one’s fastest?”

“About thirty-five minutes. It might be done in thirty minutes—not in less.”

“Then this man whom you met on the cliff, within half a mile of Smugglers’ Ladder, at nearly half-past nine, could not by any possibility have reached Battisford by five-and-twenty minutes to ten?”

“Not possible, sir—even if he ran all the way,” repeated the witness firmly.

“Quite so, thank you,” said Mr Windgate. “A—one more question. Did you ever mention to anyone—any of your neighbours, for instance—having recognised, as you thought, Mr Dorrien in this stranger?”

“Not a word of it, sir.”

“That’s the case for the Crown, my lord,” said Mr Benham, rising as the witness left the box.

With a sigh of relief, the judge rose and left the bench. It was past nine, and his lordship was very hungry and proportionately irritable, for judges are mortal—very much so too.

The Court room emptied fast, many turning to take a parting look at the prisoner as they went out, speculating and laying odds for or against his chances of acquittal. It was ominous, however, that public opinion leaned considerably towards a conviction. But then, the defence had yet to be heard.

And the wretched man himself? He was conducted back to his cell, another night of suspense before him. Outwardly, his proud self-possession remained unshaken, but once within those cold, gloomy walls, alone and unseen by any human eye, a groan of the bitterest anguish escaped him as he sank despondently upon his bed. The web of Fate was closing in about him; to battle with it further was useless.

Throughout that night, a dismal sound smote upon the ears of the dwellers in the neighbourhood of the gaol, a sound of weird and mournful howling, where, upright upon his haunches, in the open space before the frowning portcullis of the prison, sat a large dog—his head in the air and his eyes lifted to the pale, cold moon, pouring forth his piteous lamentations. The prisoner heard it too.

“Dear old dog,” he murmured to himself. “Dear, faithful old Roy!”

Chapter Forty Five.

"Is he Robert Durnford?"

When the Court met again next morning there was no abatement in the attendance of the public; if anything, it was increased, for it was pretty well known that the verdict would be given to-day.

Mr Windgate was in his place, smiling, cheerful, and cracking small jokes with the juniors, as if he would convince everybody—judge, jury, audience, and prisoner—that he considered his case already won and the remainder of the proceedings a mere formality, unhappily necessary to ensure his client an honourable acquittal.

As for the case for the Crown, he said, it was fortunate they had come to an end of it at last—but fortunate in this sense only, that from beginning to end it had been a sheer wasting of the time of the Court, and specially of the valuable time of the twelve intelligent gentlemen before him. That being so, he proposed, himself, to be as brief as possible. His defence would be very short, so short indeed as at first blush to appear inadequate. But what could be more inadequate than the case for the prosecution! He would simply remind the jury of two things. One was that his unfortunate client, actuated by the most considerate of motives—the delicacy of character of a true gentleman—had chosen rather to impair his defence than to drag into this Court friends or relatives to whom such an attendance must necessarily be most painful. The other was that the whole case turned simply upon a question of identity. He would hardly so much as mention such trumpery points, which were not even circumstantial, though they might seem to be. What are they? A matchbox, a time-table, and a bit of paper. However, to put such trivialities out of the account, we have left only this question of identity, and that I shall have no difficulty in disposing of, entirely to your satisfaction. I shall call—

"Joseph Grainger."

The public, unaccustomed to the persuasive powers and self-confidence of forensic eloquence, began to think at the conclusion of Mr Windgate's speech that the result of the trial was not such a foregone thing after all, and there was yet more exciting uncertainty in store for it. It, therefore, prepared itself to listen eagerly.

"You are head waiter at 'The Silver Fleece Inn,' at Battisford?"

"Yes, sir."

“How long have you held that position?”

“Nigh upon seven year, sir.”

“Look at the prisoner. Do you know him?”

“Yes, sir. It’s Squire Dorrien.”

“When did you first see him?”

“Well, sir, I can’t exactly remember that. It was shortly after the General’s death. Lawyer Barnes, he comes to our place, and he says to my guv’nor, says he—”

“Tut-tut-tut. Not so fast, my good friend,” interrupted Mr Windgate smilingly, while a ripple of mirth ran through the public. “Never mind about Lawyer Barnes, but just tell us when you first saw Mr Dorrien?”

“Well, sir, as far as I can remember, it was soon after he was married—just about Christmas-time.”

“Ah!” said, Mr Windgate triumphantly, making a rapid note. “And you never saw him before he was married?”

“No, sir.”

“Will you swear to that?”

“To the best of my belief, sir.”

“Very good. And have you seen him often since?”

“Not very often, sir. You see, he don’t come much over to Battisford, and I don’t go much over to Cranston—”

“Quite so. Now, do you remember a Mr Robert Durnford coming to stay at ‘The Silver Fleece’?”

“Yes, sir—well.”

“When did he come?”

“He came—let me see—it was on a Saturday evening. I remember it, because it was the day before Mr Hubert Dorrien was lost.”

“Now what sort of person was this Mr Durnford? Just describe him.”

“A very nice, pleasant-spoken gentleman, and quite the gentleman,” and then the loquacious one launched into a voluminous description of the stranger, which made the audience laugh and the judge knit his brows and mutter impatiently.

“How long did he stay at ‘The Silver Fleece’?”

“Rather over a fortnight, sir.”

“Have you ever seen him since?”

“No, sir.”

“But if you did you would know him again—in a moment?”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Now look at the accused.”

Grainger complied. The eyes of the witness and the prisoner met. In those of the latter there was indifference—in those of the former there was no recognition.

“Is he the same man as the man you knew as Robert Durnford?”

The loquacious one’s homely features expanded into a broad grin.

“Law bless you, no, sir. He ain’t in the least like him.”

Mr Windgate could have danced with relief.

“He isn’t in the least like him,” he repeated emphatically, for the benefit of the jury. As for Roland himself, the first gleam of light since his arrest a month ago now darted in upon the rayless gloom of his soul. “Except—” The witness checked himself suddenly and with an effort. He could have bitten his tongue out. For Mr Benham had looked up quickly and was now making a note. Mr Windgate thought it better to let him go on.

“Except what?” he said playfully.

“I was goin’ to say, sir, leastways I was only thinking, sir,” answered the witness, stammering with confusion, “except it might be the way in which he stands.”

Mr Benham went on making his notes. His opponent’s feeling of relief was dashed, and the prisoner could have groaned aloud in the revulsion.

Then the witness in his roundabout way gave a voluble account of how the stranger had gone over to attend Wandsborough church, and had returned earlier than he was expected; and how he had come in while he—Grainger—was dozing.

“What time did he return?”

“It was after half-past nine.”

“How much after?”

“Five minutes.”

“You are positive as to this?”

“Oh, yes, sir—I said to the gentleman as how he’d come back very quick, ’cos they don’t come out o’ church till after half-past eight, and it’s over an hour’s walk at least. I asked him if he’d come by the way of the cliffs, and he didn’t seem to know there was a way by the cliffs as was shorter.”

Mr Windgate frowned slightly, and internally anathematised the witness’ garrulity.

“Anyhow, you are ready to swear it was five-and-twenty minutes to ten when this Mr Durnford came in?”

“Yes, sir—quite certain. We both looked at the clock and remarked it.”

“But one of the servants, a”—consulting his notes—“a Jane Flinders, says it was later.”

The loquacious one shook his head with a smile of pitying superiority.

“Law bless you, sir! Them gals is always a-fancyin’ things. They ought to have bin a-bed and asleep. No, no, sir. It wasn’t any more than five-and-twenty to ten.”

“This gentleman stayed at ‘The Silver Fleece’ a fortnight, you say. Now, during all that time did you notice anything strange about him?”

“Well, sir, he used to go about with a little hammer, chippin’ off bits o’ stone from the cliffs and suchlike, and in the evenin’ he’d sit in his room and write a good deal.”

“Did you talk with him at all on the subject of Mr Hubert Dorrien’s disappearance?”

“Yes, sir. I was the first to tell him of it.”

“Oh! And how did he seem to take it?”

“Cool as a blessed cucumber, sir. And when I told him that the ghost had been seen on The Skegs, he laughed in my face outright and said it was all humbug.”

“Ha-ha! Of course. Thank you, Grainger. That’ll do. Er—one more question. Do you know the place called Smugglers’ Ladder?”

“Well, sir, I’ve been there.”

“How long does it take to walk there from Battisford?”

“Three-quarters of an hour.”

“Ah! Now, you mentioned a cliff path leading from Wandsborough. Would that lead one past Smugglers’ Ladder?”

“Oh, no, sir. Nowhere near it. Why, it turns inland before you come within half a mile of Smugglers’ Ladder.”

“Thank you.”

“Wait a moment, please,” said Mr Benham suavely, as Grainger was about to leave the box. “You say this Robert Durnford came to stay at ‘The Silver Fleece’ the day before Hubert Dorrien was lost. That was on a Saturday evening. Did you at any time between that and Sunday evening have any conversation with him about the Dorrien family?”

The prisoner’s head sank lower and lower. That devil of a counsel!

“Well sir, we did.”

“Kindly repeat it.”

“Well, sir, as far as I can remember, the gentleman said he’d known the old Squire, the General’s brother. First he asked whose the house was, an’ then we got talkin’, and I told him a little about the General—just quietly and between ourselves, like.”

“Quite so. And what else did you tell him?”

“Well, sir, I told him a little about the young Squire being in difficulties with his father—not meanin’ any ’arm to anybody,” went on the man piteously, and with a penitent glance towards the dock.

“No, no. Of course not. People do talk of these things,” said Mr Benham encouragingly—then waxing impressive. “Now, did you mention a girl named Lizzie Devine?”

“Oh Lord, sir,” cried poor Grainger, horror-stricken, staring open-mouthed at the placid face of the inquisitorial counsel and wondering how the deuce he had ferreted out all this. “I didn’t mean no harm, but we was just a-talkin’ quietly like.” Then little by little Mr Benham inexorably elicited from the unwilling and terrified witness, the whole of the conversation that had passed between himself and Robert Durnford on the subject, and how he had told the stranger that Hubert Dorrien had blackened his brother’s name for his own advantage.

“Now, when Mr Durnford returned from Wandsborough that evening, you were asleep?”

“Yes, sir. I had just dropped off.”

“Where?”

“In the coffee-room.”

“And where was Durnford standing when you woke up?”

“In the door.”

“The door of the coffee-room?”

“Yes.”

“You mention a clock in the passage. Where does it stand?”

“It stands—you’ve seen it, sir.”

“No matter, my friend. The jury haven’t.”

“Well, sir, it stands about half way between the front door and the door of the coffee-room.”

“So that Durnford, to reach the coffee-room door, would have to pass that clock?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you did not wake till he was standing in the coffee-room door?”

“No, sir.”

“How high is the face of that clock from the ground? Can you reach it without standing on anything?”

“Oh, yes. Quite easily.”

“Was Durnford a taller man than yourself?”

“Yes, sir. At least a head taller.”

“Does the face of that clock open easily?”

“Quite easily. I open it every few days to wind it.”

“Did that clock keep good time after that evening?”

“I don’t remember, sir,” answered the witness, after a moment of earnest thought.

“No matter. Jane Flinders swears it was a quarter-past ten by her watch, when she heard Durnford come in. You swear it was five-and-twenty minutes to ten. How do you reconcile the difference?”

“I don’t know. She must be mistaken.”

“But so may you be.” The witness was silent.

“Now, has it never occurred to you that that clock may have been tampered with? The hands put back half an hour or so, while you were asleep?” asked Mr Benham, bending forward and fixing a piercing glance on the witness’ face.

“Oh Lord! sir. No, it never did.”

“But still the thing might have been done—while you were asleep?”

“It’s not impossible, sir.”

“It’s not impossible. And now—look at the prisoner.”

The light was full upon Roland’s face, and again his eyes met those of the witness. Grainger started and stared. His face was a study. He looked like a man upon whom a new and unexpected light had irresistibly dawned.

“Oh Lord?” he ejaculated dazedly.

“Now,” went on Mr Benham, in his most inquisitorial tone, “will you stand there and swear that the prisoner is not the man who was staying at ‘The Silver Fleece,’ under the name of Robert Durnford.”

“M’lord!” cried Mr Windgate, “I have made a special note of the fact that the witness has already distinctly sworn to that very thing. I must protest emphatically against my learned brother trying to intimidate the witness into making a most unwarrantable contradiction of his former statement.”

“And I must equally protest against these repeated imputations,” retorted Mr Benham.

“The prosecution is quite in order, Mr Windgate,” ruled the judge. “Let us continue.”

“There is—there is a look of Durnford about him,” blunderingly admitted the witness.

“A very similar look? On your oath, mind.”

“Well—he stands like him, and—and—his head—is like him,” stammered the unfortunate man.

“Will you swear that he is not the men that you knew as Robert Durnford? Yes or no?”

“No, sir.”

“Thank you. By the bye, when did this Durnford leave ‘The Silver Fleece’?”

“It was the day after he and Miss Ingelow were cut off by the tide.”

“Did he leave suddenly?”

“Yes, quite suddenly. He just came in—packed up his things and caught the morning train for London.”

“Didn’t that strike you as rather strange?”

“Oh, no, sir. We didn’t know he had been out all night. It was only after he’d gone that we heard what happened. Dr Ingelow—that’s the rector o’ Wandsborough—he came over to ‘The Silver Fleece’ in the afternoon, and was in a great state because the gentleman had gone.”

“That’ll do, Grainger. You may stand down.”

Very black for the prisoner were things looking now. The jury wore an unusually grave expression of countenance, and even among the audience all levity was hushed in the intense anxiety attendant on the dread issue.

“Unless Windgate can prove an alibi, he’s done,” whispered a sporting junior to another. “Take you two to one on it in sovs if you like, Rogers.”

“Dunno. Think I won’t. Isn’t it rather queer form to bet on a fellow’s life,” was the reply.

Although the remark was unheard by him, it exactly rendered Mr Windgate’s reflections. That damning recognition—or half-recognition—of Grainger’s had simply lost the case, and he would have given much had it never been made. For he was on his mettle now. The case was a highly sensational one—just the thing to put a crowning point on his reputation if he had come out of it successfully, but now ‘that infernal Benham’ had been too sharp for him. Just one of his ferrety ideas, that about the clock being tampered with—and in this instance Windgate was shrewd enough to see that it had told with fatal effect. He wished again and again he had not been fool enough to undertake the defence of a man who would give him simply nothing to go upon. And he could not even prove an alibi.

The next witness was Brown, the verger of Wandsborough church. His evidence was short and straightforward. He had a recollection of a stranger coming into church on the

evening in question, towards the middle of the service. He certainly never thought of recognising Mr Dorrien in him, nor had he since. He knew Mr Dorrien well, too—he often attended Wandsborough church. It must have been considerably earlier than half-past eight when the stranger came in, because the service on ordinary Sunday evenings was nearly always over by that time. As to distances and times, he, Brown, could not speak. He was an old man now, and never had been much of a walker. The only thing he could be positive about was that the stranger had left the church a little before half-past eight, and he certainly had no suspicion that it was Mr Dorrien, either at the time, or since.

Him the prosecution declined to cross-examine.

"I shall call the Rev. Laurence Turner," said Mr Windgate.

The curate had not been at first subpoenaed. But so urgent had become the need of more testimony that the defence had decided at the last moment to put Turner into the box. The latter looked not a little nervous. Truth to tell, the situation was one of horror to his immaculate soul. He did not fancy being mixed up in criminal trials, as he subsequently put it.

"Now, Mr Turner," went on Mr Windgate, after a few preliminary questions. "I believe you took part in the search for Miss Olive Ingelow, who was cut off by the tide on this coast some two-and-a-half years ago?"

"Yes, I did."

"And you found her?"

"We were so fortunate."

"Kindly tell the Court how and where you found her."

Turner complied in as few words as possible.

"Now, did it strike you that this stranger you mention—this person who rescued the young lady, might have been Mr Roland Dorrien disguised?"

"Never."

"Never? Then or since?"

“Neither then nor since,” answered Turner decidedly.

“Did you ever hear that it struck anybody?”

“Never.”

“Yet you knew Roland Dorrien well?”

“Fairly well.”

“Dr Ingelow, the lady’s father, took part in the search, did he not?”

“Yes.”

“And he remarked no likeness?”

“Not that I am aware of.”

“You saw a great deal of Dr Ingelow at that time?”

“Yes.”

“And he never mentioned any such suspicion?”

“Never.”

“One moment, Mr Turner,” said the Crown counsel, rising to cross-examine. “This lady is now the prisoner’s wife, is she not?”

“She is.”

“Didn’t it strike you as rather—well, queer—the stranger Durnford suddenly leaving you all in the way he did?”

“A little perhaps. But we supposed he knew his own business best. And some people are queer.”

“A—quite so—Mr Turner, I quite agree with you—they are,” said Mr Benham waggishly. “That will do, thank you.”

“That’s my defence, my lord,” said Mr Windgate.

Chapter Forty Six.

Life or Doom?

The prisoner, re-entering after the adjournment for lunch, found himself idly wondering whether, when next he should pass through the dock gate, it would be as a free man or as one whose days were numbered. Then, amid the intense hush that followed on his appearance, he heard his counsel opening his address to the jury, which, put into a good humour by a few deft if stereotyped compliments, began to think that after all there might be a good deal to be said on the side of the defence.

Before brushing aside the flimsy testimony which seemed to tell against the accused, for the prosecution had relied upon quantity to counterbalance an utter absence of quality, began Mr Windgate, he would show what manner of man it was whom they were asked to convict of the gravest crime known to the law. It was all very well for the prosecution to contend that a gentleman in his client's position was as liable to commit crime as—say the historic Mr William Sikes. His own experience—perhaps fully equal to that of his learned brother opposite—was wholly against any such theory.

Then Mr Windgate launched forth into a brilliant panegyric of the accused, extolling his virtues in every capacity, public and private. Then he proceeded to deal with the evidence bit by bit, and as this involved a long repetition of all that has gone before, we shall not follow him through it. Suffice it to say that he handled his points with consummate skill.

When he came to Johnston his scorn was beautiful to behold. This fellow, who had eaten the bread of the accused and of his father before him for a number of years, had gone into the box with the most bare-faced and unblushing effrontery, and confessed to having played the part of a crawling serpent, a part whose loathsomeness, he, Mr Windgate, could find no terms adequately to stigmatise. What could the evidence of such a creature be worth? Why, nothing—less than nothing. But it was abundantly shown that the fellow harboured the greatest ill-will towards his master, who had frequently found fault with him for incivility, which, judging from his impudent demeanour in Court, was little to be wondered at. Then when he had grossly insulted his master's wife, Mr Dorrien, very rightly in the speaker's opinion, had discharged him summarily. So he swore to be revenged on his master—threatened him, as they had heard. A pretty witness this, to swear away a man's life! Justice in England must be coming very low if such instruments as this could be capable of swaying her course. But, as a matter of fact, such was not the case. He could tell them that it was intended to institute proceedings against Johnston for wilful perjury, but that was by the way.

As for Devine, here, too, was a tainted witness, a corrupt witness, in fact. He, too, was known to bear a strong grudge against the accused, which, considering that he owed his comfortable place to Mr Dorrien's influence—which his employer, it was to be hoped, would not suffer him to retain—was quite sufficient to show what sort of person he was. This precious rascal, then, had come into Court with a cock-and-bull story about witnessing a crime at Smugglers' Ladder. Why, it was the most bare-faced, as well as clumsy, attempt at a diabolical conspiracy ever known—diabolical, because without motive, unless the motive were to shield himself, for if he, Devine, was there at all at that hour, his own presence needed explaining. It sickened him, Mr Windgate, to think that it was even necessary to defend such a case—a case bolstered up mainly by two witnesses of infamous character, whose evidence, even if true, was that of midnight spies. Who saw Devine at Smugglers' Ladder at all that night, and what is the bare statement of a man of Devine's record worth? Not the millionth fraction of a farthing.

After heaping up a good deal more denunciatory scorn upon these two and their testimony, he came to Pollock's evidence. He had no wish to impute mala fides to a man of known honesty. Still, honest men were mistaken sometimes. This matter of identity rested upon evidence very shadowy. As to recognising the accused when he saw Durnford by lamplight on the beach, he, the speaker, prayed them to receive this statement with the greatest possible reserve. Here was the rector of Wandsborough and his curate, Mr Turner, both of whom were far better acquainted with the accused's appearance than the witness Pollock, yet both these gentlemen had unhesitatingly sworn not only that they utterly failed to identify the prisoner in Robert Durnford, but that the barest suspicion as to such identity had never crossed their minds—and had not done so from that day to this. And further—here he begged the jury to give him all their attention—the lady rescued by Durnford was Dr Ingelow's daughter. She was at that time, to her credit be it said, something more than interested in his client, whose wife she subsequently became, a fact which precluded her from giving valuable evidence on Mr Dorrien's behalf. Was it likely then, he asked, that this estimable lady would have kept silence these two years and a half as to who her rescuer really was—that she should never have mentioned the fact to her own father, with whom she had ever been on the most dutiful and affectionate terms? Why, of course it was not. He put it to them as sensible men—fathers themselves, most probably—and so on.

"By Jove! Windgate's scored a point there, Rogers," whispered the sporting junior. "If only he can squash the envelope business!"

But this was just what he could not—and Mr Windgate knew it himself. He tried his best though, as also with the other damning points. At last his speech came near its close.

The evidence, he continued, consisted of a series of mere coincidences—one or two of them, it might be, a little remarkable, but—coincidences. The time had gone by in this country, he thanked Heaven, when men were convicted on purely circumstantial evidence. As for the motive which the prosecution had evolved, it was, he made bold to say, the veriest mare's nest. Why, several of the most reliable witnesses had stated on oath that there wae no ill-will between the two brothers, and that on the whole they were on good terms. He wae not there to defend the absent Durnford, since it was abundantly proved that with that mysterious personage his client had nothing whatever to do, but he would just remark that in the conflicting evidence in the matter of the hall clock and the maid-servant's watch, it was merely oath against oath—and that nothing was more confusing than differences in time. The witness Grainger had utterly failed to identify the accused. Under the prosecution's very bewildering cross-examination he had, it was true, been afflicted with a temporary misgiving, but that was perfectly natural under the circumstances. So against two rogues, and one honest man, who could not be quite sure as to his statements, they had the positive evidence of Dr Ingelow and Mr Turner against the identity. That was to say, the two witnesses in this case to whom the accused had always been best known. And all the side evidence made for his client.

"Gentlemen," he concluded, in his most impressive manner, "I now call upon you honourably to acquit my client. Remember, with you rests the most awful responsibility which can be laid upon the shoulders of mortal men—the life or death of a fellow creature. You must either honourably acquit him or doom him to an ignominious death. There is no middle course—absolutely none."

"Good old phrase that," muttered the sporting junior, chuckling inwardly over the scared look on the wooden faces of the twelve intelligent Englishmen.

"—Therefore, I call upon you to record your true sentiments, the sentiments of upright and true Englishmen, and to acquit with honour my client, to restore a wronged but high-minded gentleman to his family—to a fond wife, whose affliction during these terrible weeks I dare not imagine—to that neighbourhood which is anxiously waiting to receive him back with acclamation—to a long, benevolent, and useful life, which he has already begun most signally to adorn.

"Gentlemen, I leave my client in your hands with perfect confidence as to the result."

A few moments of silence, and then the Crown counsel, who had been, to all outward appearance, intently studying his brief, rose.

The prisoner in the dock, he proceeded to say, was of a class whose members, happily, in this country, seldom filled that unfortunate position. He was a gentleman of affluence,

more or less known to them all, and holding a high and influential station. They might reason that on that account, if any man was free from all temptation to such a crime as the one under their consideration, that man would be the prisoner before them. But this was precisely what they must not do. He, the learned counsel, could assure them that human nature in this respect was marvellously similar. All his experience—and it had not been inconsiderable—went to confirm him in that opinion.—And so on.

Then he proceeded to draw a graphic and rather harrowing picture of the disappearance of the deceased and the terrible blow to the feelings of his relatives which this re-opening of their grief must prove, going on to dissect the evidence bit by bit.

"The identity of the prisoner with the stranger known as Robert Durnford is as clear as daylight," proceeded Mr Benham. "You will notice that the persons who saw through this disguise were those to whom he was or had been best known. Andrew Johnston, an old family servant, recognised him at once. Stephen Devine, formerly a labourer on the Cranston estate, and since gamekeeper to Colonel Neville—both these men had had abundant opportunities of being acquainted with the prisoner's appearance. Their suspicions aroused, they took further occasion to observe the so-called Durnford, with the result that those suspicions were fully confirmed. To this they had sworn—again and again. Then there is James Pollock, a man of the greatest respectability—to him Roland Dorrien was not so well known as to the other witnesses mentioned, yet, being a man of keen perceptions, he had recognised him. Not the first time, indeed—though even then the voice had struck upon his ears as familiar. But on the second occasion of their being brought together, meeting with the so-called Durnford on the occasion of Miss Olive Ingelow's rescue from drowning, he saw through his disguise at a glance, and in the man he had met coming away from Smugglers' Ladder, between nine and half-past on the evening of the murder, he recognised the prisoner, Roland Dorrien. Now here are three persons who distinctly swear to the identity between these two. Nor is that all. There is Joseph Grainger, the waiter at 'The Silver Fleece,' at the time of Durnford's stay at that inn. He comes here. He sees the prisoner in his normal costume and wearing his ordinary aspect, and he does not recognise him—at first. Indeed, he even goes so far as to emphasise the statement. But memory will not be cheated. As he stands there, the striking similarity of the accused to the pseudo-Durnford recalls itself to his mind, and he is dumbfounded. Gentlemen, you saw him—his air of utter astonishment, almost of awe, as he looked at the prisoner. You witnessed his refusal to swear to the two men being different. That is enough. Sensible men like yourselves can draw but one inference.

"Now as to the time at which Durnford returned to 'The Silver Fleece,' there is a conflict of testimony, but a perfectly reconcilable one. The waiter swears to the guest's return at five-and-twenty minutes to ten. The maid-servant, Jane Flinders, swears with equal

certitude to hearing Durnford come in at a quarter-past ten, and more than half the issue turns on this point. But, gentlemen, bear this in mind. The waiter Grainger was asleep. When he awoke, Durnford had already passed the hall clock, which then marked the hour of nine thirty-five. Durnford could reach the clock, be it remembered. But he could not reach Jane Flinders' watch. Gentlemen, you will draw your own conclusions. One more point in connection with this. Pollock's evidence proves that he met the stranger on the cliff, close to Smugglers' Ladder, at half-past nine. But the stranger is back in his hotel at Battisford by five-and-twenty minutes to ten. That is to say, he covers in five or ten minutes a distance which it has been proved by the most competent testimony could hardly be covered in five-and-thirty. And then, when Grainger asks him if he returned by way of the cliffs, he appears surprised, and would have the other believe him unaware of there being any way by the cliffs.

"My learned friend here has seen fit to make merry over the articles which infallibly connect the prisoner with this mournful tragedy, but these articles, small, trivial though they may be in themselves, are of the very last importance. First, there is the A.B.C. time-table. Roland Dorrien goes into a tavern in the Strand, looking very strange and excited, and asks for an A.B.C. It is purchased for him. He searches it, marks the Wandsborough train, turns down a corner of the page and—leaves the book behind him when he goes out. This is about a week before the murder—the waiter, Newton, cannot be sure of the date. But—and observe this—the very train marked in that time-table is the one by which Robert Durnford arrives at Battisford. On the 21st January Roland Dorrien gives up his lodgings at Mrs Clack's. He leaves London early in the morning. Late in the afternoon of that day Robert Durnford arrives at Battisford. From that time until he leaves Wandsborough church on the night of the 22nd, Durnford's movements are accounted for. Then, passing over for the moment Devine's evidence, he is met by James Pollock coming away from Smugglers' Ladder, not many minutes after Hubert Dorrien is—well 'falls' into that chasm. And on the very scene of the tragedy James Pollock picks up this envelope which has been handed to you, directed—not to Robert Durnford but undoubtedly to Roland Dorrien. And where? At a London address incontestably. And the address subsequently given to Dr Ingelow by the pseudo-Durnford is a London postal address. Now for the matchbox. The day after the deceased's disappearance, Eustace Ingelow, the prisoner's brother-in-law, a young gentleman who by common knowledge is devoted to his relative, and not likely knowingly to injure him in any way, picks up this matchbox, which is of peculiar make, and to which he can swear as being the prisoner's property. Where does he find this article! Why, at the bottom of this chasm, at the very spot where the deceased met his death.

"And now you will ask what motive could have been strong enough to lead this man to the black and abhorrent crime of fratricide. Well, even here the network of evidence is as

complete as elsewhere. That motive, gentlemen, the prosecution has been able to supply. It has been shown that the prisoner had quarrelled with his father, and was in fact disinherited. Herein," continued the learned counsel, putting on his most sad and sorrowful expression, "came the passion of jealousy. Furthermore, he had found reason to suppose, from some most deplorable and unguarded statements on the part of Grainger, that his brother had dealt him a blow which, if true, amounted to a stab in the dark—in that he had set to work to damage his reputation in Wandsborough and the neighbourhood. This being so, what more likely than that a man of the prisoner's temper and character should at once seek to be revenged? How he and his brother had come together was just one of those unimportant links in the dark chain which it was beyond their power to connect. The important fact was that they had come together—the evidence of Stephen Devine and others was amply sufficient to establish that."

Then Mr Benham proceeded to comment on the evidence of Devine, who with his own eyes had seen the deed done. He explained away the witness' reluctance to divulge it during these years as a perfectly natural thing; laid stress on the straightforwardness and ring of truth which characterised the man's statement, and how his tale in its plain, unvarnished simplicity had more than triumphantly stood the test of his learned brother's most skilful cross-examination. In short, he drew the web of damning circumstances closer and closer around the accused, till there was not a flaw in the enthralling network. Then, with some conventional rhetoric about "terrible charge," "man in prisoner's position," "truly painful duty which, painful as it was, he dared not shirk," the heart-broken Mr Benham resumed his seat, complacently conscious of having earned his not unhandsome fee.

Then the judge began to sum up.

The learned counsel for the prosecution, he said, had very properly impressed upon the jury that they must lose sight of any such side issue as class-distinction, and form their opinion of the case by the light of hard, cold reason and the dry facts of the evidence. That evidence they had had put before them in the most careful and patient manner, and it was his own especial function, said his lordship, to explain the law on the subject of such of it as appeared conflicting.

For upwards of an hour the judge continued, weighing the arguments of both counsel in calm, dispassionate and masterly fashion. But whether his lordship was against the prisoner or not, it puzzled the public to discern. His charge was a pattern of impartiality no less than of lucidity. But the substance of it was now adverse, now favourable.

One of the most regrettable features of the trial, continued his lordship, was that there had been next to no defence whatever. No attempt had been made to prove an alibi. If

the prisoner had not been near the neighbourhood at the time of his brother's disappearance, surely there should be no great difficulty in obtaining evidence to that effect. But no such evidence had been put forward. The question of identity played a very important part indeed in this case. If the jury believed the evidence of Johnston, Devine and Pollock, they would consider the identity proved. But Johnston was a discharged servant, and the evidence of such against a former employer was always to be received with extreme caution, and in his case the greatest animus was shown to have been entertained by him against the prisoner. Devine was a man of notoriously bad character, but he appears to have had no real motive for injuring the accused. But James Pollock was altogether different from both of these witnesses. He was a man of the highest respectability; a man of keen intelligence, resource and courage, in short, a type of that most admirable body of men, the seafaring toilers of our coasts. This man then had seen through the disguise of the pseudo-Durnford, and under it had seen the identity of the prisoner, Roland Dorrien. The piece of envelope put forward, bearing as it did nearly the complete name of the prisoner, and part of a London address, was to his lordship's mind the completing link in the chain of identity.

Down went the hopes of the prisoner's friends, down to zero. The judge was summing up dead against him.

"To turn again to Stephen Devine," went on his lordship. "Here is a man who testifies to witnessing with his own eyes the perpetration of a deliberate act of murder. Alone, and in the dead of night, he stands as a spectator of this terrible deed—then calmly walks away, and for upwards of two years keeps silent on the subject. As the learned counsel for the defence has aptly pointed out, before you can convict a man of a murder you must be quite sure that a murder has been committed. The question is, are you quite sure on this point? That the dead man, Hubert Dorrien, met his end in the place known as Smugglers' Ladder, has been established beyond a doubt. But how did he get in there? Did he fall in, or was he pushed in? If there is any doubt in your minds upon that head, why then, gentlemen, you are not merely entitled, but are bound to give the accused the benefit of it. You have evidence in plenty that the prisoner was near the spot—that is, to my mind, clear beyond dispute. But that he pushed his brother into this cleft you have the evidence of but a single eye-witness, and that witness, to my mind, a tainted one."

Now the hope of an acquittal ran high. The judge was again favourable to the accused all along the line, it seemed. As for the prisoner himself, for the second time a ray of hope dawned within his soul, only to be dashed as before.

If then, continued his lordship, they believed the evidence of Devine, they would convict the prisoner; if they disbelieved that evidence they would acquit him. There was no

middle course. What had been a long and elaborate trial had, after all, winnowed itself down to a very simple issue, and that was the trustworthiness, or the reverse, of one witness, because upon that, and that alone, depended whether any murder had been committed at all.

So now, being in possession of all the facts of the case, his lordship trusted that they would most carefully confer among themselves and return their verdict according to the solemn oath they had taken—without fear, favour or affection.

The jury retired to their private room to deliberate, and once more the murmur of voices arose among the audience, but it was a very subdued one. The expectation—the awe of the moment—was upon that densely-packed throng, and for a while light and careless talk was hushed. Such conversation as there was bore upon the probable verdict, and it was the opinion of the audience that it would be an adverse one. Meanwhile the prisoner had been removed, pending the return of those who should decide his fate.

Half an hour went by, and at length the door opened. Ah—now for it! But no. One of the intelligent jurymen wished to ask his lordship whether in the event of them not being satisfied as to the identity, they could convict Durnford and acquit the prisoner. He was answered with exemplary patience, and the door closed again. The Bar lifted its eyebrows—such of it as was able to keep from sniggering, that is.

The light of the setting sun streamed in at the windows, throwing its soft gleam upon the serried rows of anxious faces. And the accused—of what was he thinking? Was it of his beautiful home, which it was only too probable he would never enter again? Or was it of her whose first vows just such a golden sunbeam as this had fallen on and hallowed and witnessed?

At length the door opened a second time, and the jury came forth. It was noticeable that the prisoner, who had been hurriedly put back into the dock, did not even glance in their direction, but continued to look straight in front of him.

“Gentlemen, are you all agreed upon your verdict?”

“We are.”

The official’s voice had a vague, far-away ring in Roland’s ears as it continued:

“How find you the prisoner? Guilty or Not Guilty?”

“We find him—Guilty.”

Chapter Forty Seven.

"I have Something to Say."

"Guilty."

The fateful word rang through the room, producing something like a shuddering gasp among the close-packed audience. It rang in the brain of the prisoner, "Guilty! Dorrien of Cranston to be hanged—to be hanged by the neck until dead. Guilty!" Thus the hideous refrain danced through the wretched man's brain in clanging rhythm. And what he had gone through during the trial alone—apart from the period which had elapsed since his arrest—was sufficient expiation for a score of murders far more cold-blooded and deliberate than this, for it was as a thousand years of hell.

The most astonished person in the room, perhaps, as this verdict was given, was the judge himself; and forthwith his opinion of the intelligence of juries, at no time high, underwent a stride of improvement. This was an intelligent jury. For his lordship was as morally certain of the prisoner's guilt as though he had seen him perpetrate the homicide, yet how any jury could convict on the face of his summing up was a marvel. His trained mind had recognised that the evidence legally was not sufficient to hang a dog, and he had summed up accordingly, yet the jury had convicted. It now remained to pass the dread and only sentence of the law. Already his lordship was nervously fumbling with the black cap.

The prisoner felt as though shot through the head, as though a numbing, sledge-hammer blow had descended upon his faculties. Was this real, this sea of ghastly faces in the deathlike gloom of the ill-lighted hall, the grim, red-robed pronouncer of doom, now turning to face him? Was it real, or some terrible nightmare from which he would awaken directly with a thrill of horror combined with intense relief and thankfulness? Then he became dimly aware of an official voice asking if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. So dim did the voice sound to his wrought-up fancy that the question had to be repeated.

"No. Nothing," he answered, and the judge drew on the black cap.

"But I have. I have everything to say."

The voice rang out upon the dead silence, full, clear and feminine. From the back of the hall it came. Every head went round in that direction as though turned with the same wire.

“Let that woman be removed instantly,” said the judge, whose experience was not devoid of similar cases of interruption on the part of some hysterically disposed female, worked up to exaltation pitch.

“You cannot remove me until you have heard me,” went on the voice, calm, firm, and without a quaver; its owner doubtless strengthened by the certainty that in the densely-packed crowd it would be impossible for the Court officers to reach her before she had said her say. “My lord, you cannot condemn this man for the murder of Hubert Dorrien, since Hubert Dorrien is alive and well at this moment. I saw him and talked with him as lately as this very morning. Then I hurried on here, and, thank God, I am in time.”

A thrill of indescribable emotion went up from that wrought-up audience, a gasp—that took the form of a deeply-breathed—

“Oh-h!”

“Let her come forward,” said the judge, his mind by no means free from suspicion that this was a carefully planned theatrical coup.

Way was made for a tall female figure, which, advancing from the back of the room, was ushered forward, and for the sake of convenience was marshalled into the witness-box, though not sworn. And the light of the candles, clearer here in the vicinity of the Bench and Bar, revealed an exceedingly attractive face, a face, moreover, well known to many there, but to none better than the prisoner awaiting sentence of death. For it was the face of Lizzie Devine.

“Hubert Dorrien is alive, my lord,” she began, without waiting to be interrogated, “alive and well. He is at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, at Plymouth, with a broken leg.”

At this definition of “alive and well” there was a laugh, a strange, nervous, staccato laugh, with but little merriment in it, however. Rather did it express the collective tension momentarily relaxed.

Then the girl went on to tell her story, how she and Hubert Dorrien had been fellow-passengers on board the homeward-bound Australian liner which had arrived in the small hours of that morning. She was with a troupe of variety artistes, who had been touring in the Antipodes, and had not been aware of the missing man’s presence on board until they had been some time at sea. Then they had recognised each other, and had become acquainted, in fact, friendly. He had told her how he had fallen over the cliffs near Wandsborough, and been picked up while still unconscious by a coasting schooner, and pretty badly treated, too, he said, for they took everything he had away

from him. But the ship was run into by an unknown steamer and sank, only he and another man being saved, and they, after floating about on some wreckage for hours, were picked up by a sailing vessel bound for Perth, Western Australia. She believed that he had done well over there, for he seemed to have plenty of money, and looked twice the man he was as she remembered him at Cranston, prior to his disappearance.

The first that either of them had heard of the trial just concluded, was on landing that morning at Plymouth, where Hubert Dorrien had taken up his quarters at the "Duke of Cornwall." They first saw it in the papers, and as she herself was from Cranston, Hubert had begged her to travel down there with him in order to give evidence as to his identity. He was in a great state of excitement about it all, and in crossing the road, close to his hotel, had been knocked down by a post-office van, and now he was laid up there with a broken leg, but had escaped other injuries. As he was all alone she had remained to look after him, and see that he had proper medical and other attendance. Then he had hurried her off to Battisford to put a stop to the trial, and save all concerned a moment of further and unnecessary anxiety. This she had done, and was here, it appeared, only just in the nick of time.

She had told her story well and concisely, and it had been listened to in breathless silence. The judge, keenly watching her, was convinced of its truth, so too was the Bar. As she herself had said, there could be no possible advantage to anybody in her coming forward with such a statement unless it could be substantiated. Steps had already been taken to break the news to old Mrs Dorrien, the injured man's mother, who was probably on her way to Plymouth by that time. All Cranston, moreover, would recognise him at a glance. There was no difficulty whatever about that. But his lordship, while believing her statement, swerved not a hairsbreadth from his original and private opinion. He was as certain that the prisoner had, in actual fact, pushed his brother over the cliff, as he now was that the latter had been rescued, in a most astonishing and well-nigh miraculous manner. But meanwhile the jury had returned a verdict of "Guilty."

During this narrative, for the first time throughout the trial, the prisoner had shown sign of outward emotion. His face had gone ghastly white as he listened, and his hand was clutching the dock rail, as he leaned forward, drinking in every word. Great Heaven! What did it all mean? he thought. Were they never going to get it over? Why had Lizzie come forward with this tale, which nobody would for a single moment believe! It could only serve to prolong his agony. And yet—! Then he became conscious of the judge's voice. Sentencing him to death—of course!

"I cannot reopen the case, and call fresh evidence at this stage, Mr Windgate," his lordship was saying. "You see, the jury have already given their verdict. But I can postpone sentence. Meanwhile you had better have this young lady's statement reduced

to writing and duly sworn as an affidavit, and if you can produce the supposed murdered man alive, and incontestably establish his identity, why, there is necessarily an end of the case."

Chapter Forty Eight.

"A Health! Dorrien of Cranston?"

"What an awful young brute I must have been in those days, Roland! By Jove! any kicks that may have travelled my way I jolly well deserved." And Hubert Dorrien puffed out a great cloud of smoke upon the sweet evening air.

"I think we all wanted a good shaking up," answered his brother meditatively. "We are a rum lot, you know. At any rate we seem to have got it—all round."

At the further end of the beautiful avenue of feathery elms rose the tall chimney stacks and long windows of Cranston Hall. The air was fragrant with the multifold scents of evening, distilled dewy from flower and herb, and the dappled deer moved like antlered ghosts in the gathering twilight. From the lake, embowered in overhanging leafage, came the craking cry of a waterhen or the plash of a rising fish, and in the boskiness of the home coverts a very chorus of song, as innumerable thrushes and blackbirds poured forth a final evening warble.

"Well, if I got some kicks, at any rate I captured plenty of halfpence," went on Hubert. "Tell you what it is, old chap: that was the best day's work that ever happened when you launched me out into the world to fish for myself."

"It's rum how things do come about," said the other queerly.

"Rather. If I hadn't got on board the Atlanta, or if she had transhipped me on to some homeward-bound craft, I shouldn't have got to Australia, and if I hadn't got to Australia I shouldn't have struck that reef, and made my pile. Not but what I didn't have some real rough ups and downs in between."

"To continue the 'ifs,'" said Roland, "what if you hadn't turned up when you did, this time last year? What if your boat had been wrecked, and you had taken another outward-bound trip on some rescuing craft? What then?"

"Don't speak of it, old chap. It's enough to give one the cold shivers even to think of. But that sweep who had boned my clothes and things had something to answer for, or rather those who were 'thick' enough not to know the difference between him and me, when they held the inquest on him."

"At any rate he sneaked certain elaborate obsequies under false pretences," said Roland drily, whereat the other exploded.

The change which had taken place in Hubert Dorrien had been thorough and complete. Outwardly, there was hardly a trace of the weedy, loose-hung, shifty-mannered youth in the sun-browned, well-set-up man walking here now. Mentally, too, was he no less improved, and the process by which that desirable state of things had come about was, in his own words, that his ups and downs had knocked all the nonsense out of him, and prepared him to appreciate and turn to good account his luck when it came. And this he himself heartily recognised. Roland, on the other hand, had changed but little, save that the awful tension of those terrible weeks had turned his hair nearly grey. At the conclusion of the affair he had suffered no fuss to be made, but had driven quietly back to Cranston, and resumed life there as if nothing had happened. And that had been a year ago.

"Fancy Lizzie Devine being fool enough to marry that long-legged cad she was touring with, after all," said Hubert presently.

"Yes. Not good enough for her. By Jove! but that girl is sterling and plucky. That was one of the finest things I ever saw, the way she came forward. Well, if they don't hit it off, I'll back her to come out best."

Incidentally, both brothers had marked the event alluded to with a substantiality that bordered on the munificent. To one, the recollection of her would always be as that of the life-saver to the drowning man.

"And our rascally friend, Gipsy Steve? Does he still keep straight?" went on Hubert.

"Yes. A savage is capable of gratitude, and this one is so grateful to me for prevailing on Neville not to sack him by reason of his giving that evidence, that I believe he'd cut anyone's throat if I told him to. But I only told him to keep straight, and I believe he'll do it.

"Do you know, Roland, you're no end of a popular chap round here now—among the sovereign people, I mean. Why, only the other day, when I was biking, I turned into a pub out beyond Clatton to get a whisky and soda, and the place was full of yokels and a small farmer or two, and they were booming you no end."

"That was for your benefit."

"Not a bit of it. They didn't know me from Adam."

"Then it was on Olive's account. They recognise her as the good genius here."

“That’s all right,” assented the other heartily. “But I don’t think it was altogether on Olive’s account, all the same. Besides, I’ve come across other instances of it. I say, though. Fancy a Dorrien popular! Eh?”

“Yes. Seems odd, doesn’t it?”

“I’ve got some good news to break to you, Roland, so prepare for the shock. I’m going back to Australia, now at once, the day after to-morrow.”

“The deuce you are! Tired of us already?”

“Tired of you! My dear old chap, how long have I been over here? Just a year. And about ten months out of the twelve has been spent here. Tired of you! Why, the shoe’s on the other hoof, I think.”

“That’s bosh, Hubert. We’ve had very jolly times here together. But why are you off? Business?”

“That’s it. As part proprietor and director of the Kulgurra and Dawkins Reef Company I’ve made my pile, and can go on making it. But, the fact is, this sort of life is turning me too soft again. Besides, I have a hankering after a certain amount of Bush life from time to time. They say every fellow gets it once he has known it. I must get back there and hustle around again.”

“I daresay you’re right after all. Olive will be sorry. But, Hubert, when you are back in the old country again, you know where your home is?”

“Rather, old chap. How things come round, eh? The last place I should ever have thought of in that connection would have been this jolly old place. But now.”

“There’s an unwelcome sort of song to you, Hubert,” said Roland drily, as an unmistakable infantile squall sounded from an upper room, for they had regained the house now. “One more between you and this. And he’s sound in wind and limb; extra so, in fact.”

“Oh, skittles, old man,” laughed the other. “And as to that, I’ll be more of a millionaire than you are, if things go on as they’ve begun. No, no. You’re the man for this place, and I hope you’ll live another hundred years—you and Olive—to run it, and my six-month-old godson, now equalling up there, after you.”

“What’s that? What are you finding fault with your godson about, Hubert?” laughed Olive, who was crossing the hall as they entered, and caught the last words.

“I’m not abusing him. I’m giving him my benediction. Ask Roland.”

“Fact, Olive,” supported the latter. “But Hubert is leaving us to-morrow. He’s off to Australia the day after.”

“No. But where’s the hurry. Short notice, isn’t it?”

And then she tried to prevail upon him to put off his departure.

“Can’t do it, dear,” he answered, greatly pleased. “As I said just now, I’m getting soft here. And I’ve been accustomed of late to make all my moves at short notice.”

“Where’s Roy?” said Roland suddenly. “The rascal seems to have deserted me in these days.”

“Roy, indeed? You haven’t asked after your son and heir, I notice,” said Olive, in feigned indignation.

“H’m! Seniores priores. Roy is a much older friend,” returned Roland. “Moreover, he is an intelligent animal, whereas the other is not—as yet.”

“You hard-hearted, unnatural parent. But—here he is.”

“Who? Roy, I hope.”

“I scorn to reply.”

“Ha-ha! You’re spared the trouble. Come here, Roy, you scamp. What do you mean by deserting me in this fashion? Eh, sir?”

The woolly rascal rushed at his master, squirming and whining with delight, as he made playful snaps at the hand wherewith his said master was pulling his ears, and only flailing a couple of knick-knacks off a low table with his wagging brush.

“Go now and dress, you people, or you’ll be late, as usual,” laughed Olive.

It was essentially a family party, that which gathered round the dinner-table at Cranston that evening, and it was the anniversary of the sudden rolling away of that last and

terrible cloud, which had lain so heavily on all concerned since last we saw them together. Dr Ingelow was there, genial, sunny-hearted, as of yore, and Margaret. Sophie, too, tyrannising over and teasing her fiancé—none other than Frank Marsland, there at her side. Nellie Dorrien, however, is missing, and, in fact, is far enough away, for she is making her début in an Indian station as a bride of a month, Eustace Ingelow being there quartered. But they are all uncommonly lively, except that every now and then the recollection of Hubert's impending departure creates a momentary silence, for he has long been one of this circle, and they will miss him.

From the repartee and laughter of the general conversation, Olive, sitting there, bright and winning as of old, at times drops out. The anniversary of this night rests in her memory still; so, too, does that other terrible night, when they went down into the Valley of the Shadow together—when they stood beneath the iron cliffs in the dim gloaming, and Death stared them in the face, and his grisly hand was over them, reached forth from the on-rushing thunder of raving surges. Both these ordeals had left their mark upon her, moulding her character, and bringing out the best of her nature, shining and durable. No cloud remained now.

But—the Ban! More than a year had passed and gone since its last and grisly manifestation, but none had fallen victim. It was as though cheated. But further literary research on the legendary terror overshadowing his house had carried a reassuring conviction to the mind of Roland Dorrien, strange in the light of his utter and scoffing scepticism on the subject in former times. This was nothing less than a prophecy appended to the prophecy, and done out of the quaintly-spelt and worded phraseology of its period, this is how it ran:

"All events befall in cycles. One woman consigned these two to the bloodless Death. Generations seven shall pass, and he of that time two women shall save from it. Then the Ban shall be removed and the bloodless Death shall depart from Craunston."

The cryptic utterance revealed itself to Roland's mind as clear as daylight. He, himself, was of the seventh generation from the original event, and sure, indeed, was it that two women had saved him—one upon the lone sea coast, and one, indeed, from a still more hideous form of the bloodless Death. And so deciding, he was conscious of a relief that was hardly in keeping with his former scepticism.

Such thoughts, not for the first time, are underlying his mind as he sits at the head of his bright and sparkling dinner-table here this evening. Then Marsland's voice breaks in upon his meditations.

“Before we separate, I want to propose a health, one specially appropriate this evening. Are you all charged? Well then—A health! Dorrien of Cranston?”

Hearty, spontaneous, and sharp is the response.

“A health! Dorrien of Cranston!”

The End.