

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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HALVES.

BY JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "A PERFECT TREASURE," "AT HER MERCY," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XXVIII. NEMESIS.

I ENTERED the Priory through the door that opened into the garden, and unobserved by any of its inmates. Indeed, of late months, no notice had been taken of any one's comings and goings below stairs, of which at one time Mrs. Raeburn's lynx eyes had been so observant. All her watching, all her solicitude, were now monopolised by her two patients; and as to the attorney and John, they had never given themselves any trouble about domestic affairs. What showed, among other things, the absence of supervision in the establishment was, that, though the dusk was now far advanced, the lamp in the hall was not lit. A light, however, streamed from the door of brother Alec's sitting-room, which stood ajar, doubtless that Mrs. Raeburn, who was sitting there, might hear the least summons from Gertrude's chamber. My darling was probably still asleep, and since Mr. Wildé had given directions that she should never be disturbed from slumber, this woman was waiting for her to awake, that she might administer her food—with the seeds of death in it. How terrible it all seemed! I almost wished that Mr. Wilde had adopted the alternative of which he had spoken, and sent the guardian of the law at once into that house of crime to purge it. But the wise doctor was, doubtless, right. As I stood in doubt whither to go, so that I might, unperceived, witness Mrs. Hopkins's

arrival, the far-off noise of wheels struck on my ear. That was then the fly which I had seen standing at the doctor's door as I came out, with the nurse's luggage in it. Someone else had heard it too, for the light above gave a broader gleam, and on the opposite wall was shown a woman's shadow. I drew aside into the library, whence, from the place where I had witnessed Mrs. Raeburn despoil the sofa of its contents, I could see through the hinges of the door into the hall. As the wheels came nearer I heard a footstep on the stairs, and presently Mrs. Raeburn came into view; she held a candle high in her hand, which showed her features very distinctly. They were harsh and hard as usual, but in her eyes there was an indefinable dread. Little could she guess what sort of guest was about to arrive; and yet it was plain she had her apprehensions. To the guilty, whatever is strange has danger in it. When the carriage stopped without, she anticipated the summons of the bell by opening the door itself. "What is it?" I heard her say in her cold, sharp tones. The flyman's reply I did not catch, but only Mrs. Raeburn's answer.

"There must be some mistake, man."

"I am the nurse, madam," said a cheery, quiet voice, "sent by Dr. Wilde."

I expected an outburst, but Mrs. Raeburn said nothing. She simply withdrew into an angle of the wall close beside me, as though to shield her flickering candle from the wind, while the man brought in the luggage. The contrast between the looks of these two women was most striking. Nurse Hopkins, wholesome and apple-cheeked, seemed wholly occupied with checking off her little articles of

property: box, bag, bundle, and umbrella; a pair of clogs, only one of which seemed to have arrived, gave her great disquietude. Mrs. Raeburn, on the other hand, never took her eyes off this unexpected guest, whom, to judge by her expression, she would not, if she could, have at once annihilated, but would have put to such slow and never-ending torments as theologians alone have imagined. A face like hers have I seen sculptured on a cathedral, as a gargoyle—malignant, impotent, damned. Impotent I said, yet something of power came into it when the driver, having been duly paid, turned, with a pull of the forelock to the lady of the house, to go.

"Stop!" said she. "Wait outside a minute; your fly may be wanted."

The man withdrew, and she closed the door on him.

"What is the meaning of your coming here, woman?" inquired she then of the new arrival. "It is not right that Mr. Wilde should have sent you without previous notice."

"He seemed afraid that he might be putting you out a bit," was the other's quiet reply; "but his letter, he said, would explain all. I was to give you this parcel with it."

The object in question was carefully wrapped up in brown paper, and had no distinguishable shape, but as Mrs. Raeburn took it in her hand it emitted a metallic sound. I saw she recognised it for what it was at once. If that sound had been her passing-bell she could not have looked more near to death than at that moment.

"Wait here," said she, in a low hoarse voice, "while I read the note."

She pushed open the library door, which swung against me as she did so, put the parcel down on the table, and opened the letter. I could no longer see her as she read it, but I heard her foot beating impatiently on the floor.

Then there was a long silence. I looked for some immediate catastrophe—that she should fall down dead on the spot, or turn upon the new arrival like a tigress; but presently her voice broke the silence, speaking with dry distinctness: "Mr. Wilde has explained matters, though I still think the intrusion unreasonable. He suggests that you should take your place at once in Miss Floyd's room; you may therefore as well do so."

What an effort it must have cost this

woman to speak like that! There was not a tremor in her tone from first to last, but I noticed that her hand fell heavily on the table, perhaps to support herself, yet quite as probably clenched in rage.

"Very good, ma'am," returned nurse Hopkins from the hall. "Would you be so kind as to show me the way?"

"True; I had forgotten that you did not know it."

She passed out close beside me as before. There was a change in her face now; always cold and chiselled, her features had become fixed and rigid like those of a corpse. Her eyes, too, stared straight before her. It was a sight that I was doomed to see again, in illness and in dreams, for many a year.

The two women went upstairs together to Gertrude's room. To remain alone, awaiting I knew not what, except that it must needs have shame and terror in it, was no longer possible for me, and I betook myself to the office. John had gone away on business, and though expected home to dinner, had not yet returned. The clerks had left, it being after five o'clock, and the attorney was at work alone.

"Here is Thomas Idle!" exclaimed the attorney, jocularly, as I made my appearance. The title had not been unearned, but, on the other hand, the master had never put work in the way of his apprentice. He had wanted the premium and the annual stipend paid for my maintenance, but not my services; and his only object had been to make matters as pleasant to me as he could. He had had no sense of doing his duty by me. This struck me now, not for the first time, but with more conviction than heretofore. But our business connection was about to cease, as our friendly relations had long done; and looking on the attorney's smiling face, and hearing his genial tones—which had some mellowness still in them—I had not the heart to judge him harshly. He had behaved ill to me with respect to Gertrude, but I utterly absolved him from having had part or lot in his wife's murderous design against her, or any knowledge of so base a crime; and now, since it must needs be that he should come to know it, I pitied him.

"You have seen Wilde, have you not, my lad?" he went on, in a more cheerful voice than I had heard from him for many a day, the two hundred and fifty pounds he had received from brother Alec that

morning (for the latter made his quarterly payments, as John told me, to Mark himself—not to his wife) having, doubtless, acted as a tonic.

"Yes, sir; I saw him when he had paid his visit."

"And what report does he give of the patient?"

"Gertrude is no better."

"That surprises me. Mrs. Raeburn thought there was a decided improvement; so much so that it left her free to attend on Alec, else John could scarcely have been spared to-day. I heard wheels at the front-door just now, and thought he had come back. Who was it?"

"It was a nurse that Mr. Wilde has sent for Gertrude."

"A nurse? Well, that is the best news I have heard this long time." He rose, went to the fire and rubbed his hands, as he was wont to do when pleased. "I have proposed it myself a dozen times, but my wife wouldn't hear of it. She thinks she can do everything herself, you know; but, of course, the doctor's recommendation is final. Has Mrs. Raeburn seen her?"

"She is with her now in Gertrude's room."

"Then there is nobody with Alec, eh? Well, I must go up myself."

It was idle to offer to be his deputy, I knew, and he went up.

I remained in the office alone, trying, very unsuccessfully, to fix my thoughts on my work, till after awhile John came in. He had been out Morecambe Bay way, drawing up an old man's will. He was cold, he said, and very sharp set. Why was not dinner served? Where was the governor? Having no appetite myself, I had not thought about dinner, but I now perceived that it was long past the hour for that meal.

"Your father is waiting in your uncle's room until your mother relieves guard, I believe," said I.

"I'll go and fetch him down," answered he. "All's well, I hope, Sheddon?" He said this carelessly just as he was about to leave the room, yet waited at the door, it seemed to me with some anxiety, for my reply. Had he any suspicion, I wondered, that things might not be well? Was it possible that this once light-hearted joker was cognisant of his mother's infamous scheme? He had altered strangely of late; "sobered down," as the neighbours termed it. Was that

because the weight of evil conscience was oppressing him, and had damped all merriment? No: to Gertrude he had always behaved with peculiar kindness, after his rough fashion; and if without much principle, was, I felt, incapable of a cruelty to anyone, far less to her.

"All is much as usual, John, except that Mr. Wilde has sent a nurse to attend on Gertrude."

"I am glad to hear it," said he. "She ought to have come long ago. It was only my mother's cheeseparing that put it off."

This in his old vehement tone, which he was wont to use when speaking of that subject. That alone would have convinced me, had I needed conviction, of his ignorance of what was going on.

Presently he returned with his father, and we sat down to table. For a wonder, there were two dishes, though not very luxurious ones: hashed bullock's heart and boiled rabbit; the latter looking very skinny and cat-like, by reason of its insufficient covering of onions.

Some people have a memory for the details of feasts, and I shall remember those two dishes as long as I live.

"Ugh!" said the attorney, turning the rabbit over with his fork. "I wonder which your mistress would prefer of these two dainties. Go up and ask her, Jane; she is with Miss Floyd."

I heard Jane's footsteps in the room above; then crossing the passage to brother Alec's room; then back again to that of Mrs. Raeburn.

I could not swallow a morsel: I seemed to be all ear—to have no other sense than that of hearing. Some catastrophe, I felt, was imminent. One thing only gave me comfort: the nurse, I knew, was with Gertrude.

"What can that girl be about? This infernal stuff is getting cold!" exclaimed the attorney. "What's that?"

It was a scream that reverberated through the house. All three of us rose to our feet. John and I were on the stairs in an instant, but he was ahead of me, and ran straight up to his uncle's sitting-room, the door of which stood open, doubtless left so by the maid. It did not seem to me that the scream had come from that direction, and I was right. It was now repeated from Mrs. Raeburn's own apartment.

"Heaven grant that the double doors will keep it from Gertrude's ears," was

my silent prayer, as I ran in. The servant-girl was kneeling on the floor, wringing her hands over the prostrate body of her mistress. She had had a hard life of it under her iron rule, but the present piteous spectacle had thrust every sentiment but compassion out of her simple nature.

"She is dying, Mr. Sheddon!" cried she passionately. "Run, run for Mr. Wilde!"

One glance at the prostrate woman convinced me that no help for her lay in any skill of man. I had seen Death in the cottages of the poor at Stanbrook, and I recognised him here; yet I obeyed the girl's suggestion nevertheless. I was glad enough to escape from the scene on which John had already arrived, with scared, remorseful face. Perhaps he remembered how he had spoken of his mother but a few minutes back, poor fellow. At the bottom of the stairs, with one trembling hand upon the banister, one trembling foot upon the lowest step, stood the attorney; his face was almost as livid and lifeless as that which I had just left on the floor of his own bed-room.

"What is the matter? Is it Alec?" inquired he, in a quavering voice.

"It is not your brother, Mr. Raeburn; it is your wife that is taken ill," said I, as I flung the garden-door open and rushed away upon my urgent yet fruitless errand. As I neared Mr. Wilde's house, I saw the light in his parlour, that assured me of his presence, but my satisfaction was checked as soon as evoked, for at the same instant I remembered what he had enjoined on me. If Miss Floyd needed assistance, I was to fetch him, but if Mrs. Raeburn required medical aid—and how should he have guessed she would?—I was to call in other help than his. I hesitated, with my hand upon the bell; but calling to mind how sagacious a man he was, and had proved himself to be in this very instance, I resolved to obey his directions, and dashed away to Messrs. Bell and Doldrum's. The second member of the firm was at home, and to him, as well as my scarcity of breath permitted, I stated what had happened in a few words.

"I see, I see," said Dr. Doldrum, fingering his double eye-glasses; "it must be an urgent case."

"It is a matter of life and death, sir. For Heaven's sake, come at once!"

"I should be very glad, my dear young sir, very glad, you know," was his hesitat-

ing reply. "But this is one of Mr. Wilde's patients. The etiquette of our profession forbids my attendance; unless, indeed, Mr. Wilde were out."

"I was especially directed to send for you, sir," insisted I. "Mrs. Raeburn has never been professionally attended by Mr. Wilde, though Miss Floyd has been so."

"That alters the matter. Yes, yes, I'll come." Dr. Doldrum was very stout, and consumed a minute, even with my assistance, in the feat of getting into his great-coat. He had no more notion of hurry than a hippopotamus; he walked like a tortoise, and even at that moderate rate of movement panted like a grampus; yet with all that, he was full of talk.

"Poor Mrs. Raeburn! Dead, you think? Well, that is a matter for scientific inquiry. Yet I should not be surprised. My diagnosis of the lady—all guess work, of course; but then experience makes one guess so much—is that the sword has worn out the scabbard—scabbard I mean. A very active and masterful woman. The heart has gone wrong; you may take my word for it. It is a mistake to suppose that fat people only are subject to such things; a great mistake. You are sure it was not a fainting fit, by-the-by?"

"Quite certain," said I. "I have seen people faint."

"Just so; and, besides, she was not a woman to faint—if my diagnosis is correct—at anything. This will make the third sick person in your house (even if it be no worse), will it not, young gentleman?"

"Yes," said I. "Miss Floyd and Mr. Alexander Raeburn have been invalids this long time."

"Aye, aye, and Mr. Wilde attends on both of them?"

"No, not on Mr. Raeburn. He has declined to do so, on the ground that he can be of no use."

"You don't say so? Bless my soul!" Dr. Doldrum stopped short—his breath had been quite taken away by this, which was a fact altogether out of his professional experience. "Yet the resources of science are boundless," urged he.

"Let us get on."

If we had "got on" at railway speed it would have made no difference to the cause of our dispatch. In a few minutes after Dr. Doldrum went upstairs he returned again to the hall, where I awaited him; he was accompanied by John Raeburn, who looked very pale, but quite collected. "It is all over with my poor

mother, Harry," said he, sadly, as I held out my hand to him in token of sympathy.

"Indeed, I feared as much, John."

"Yes, yes," sighed the doctor. "My diagnosis, though founded on slight opportunities of observation, Mr. Sheddon, has unhappily proved correct. It was the heart, as I foretold it would be. A common case, yet not less deplorable on that account. Mr. Raeburn is in a sad state up yonder."

"It is misfortune on misfortune, Dr. Doldrum," observed John, thoughtfully. "This catastrophe is only the climax of my poor father's sufferings. My uncle Alec and cousin Gertrude are both on the sick-list, and a shock like this——"

"Just so," interposed the doctor. "Perhaps, before I go, it would be as well if I were to step up to Mr. Alexander and prescribe him something—I will not say consolatory, but that may tend to alleviate."

"No, no," John interrupted hastily; "he must not suspect—nor Gertrude either, for that matter—that this terrible event has happened; that is what I wished to have a few words with you about, doctor. A coroner's inquest in this house would not only be painful—I don't put it upon that ground at all—but perhaps fatal to one of those who are still left to us. You say very truly it is a common case. I hope, therefore, that no public inquiry will be necessary."

"That is a question for the coroner, Mr. John; but I will write a line to him on the matter. Yes, yes; I'll let you know at once. Perhaps I had better look in to-morrow, at all events, and see your father. We must take care of him all the more, you know, since you have now but one parent."

"By all means," answered John, in an absent tone. His mind seemed to be quite cured of its levity, and to be full of thought as well as sorrow.

THUNDERS OF APPLAUSE.

ADDISON devotes a number of the Spectator to a description of The Trunkmaker in the Upper Gallery—a certain person so called, who had been observed to frequent, during some years, that portion of the theatre, and to express his approval of the transactions of the stage by loud knocks upon the benches or the wainscot, audible over the whole house.

It was doubtful how he came to be called the Trunkmaker: whether from his blows, resembling those often given with a hammer in the shops of such artisans, or from a belief that he was a genuine trunkmaker, who, upon the conclusion of his day's work, repaired to unbend and refresh his mind at the theatre, carrying in his hand one of the implements of his craft. Some, it is alleged, were foolish enough to imagine him a perturbed spirit haunting the upper gallery, and noted that he made more noise than ordinary whenever the ghost in Hamlet appeared upon the scene; some reported that the trunkmaker was in truth dumb, and had chosen this method of expressing his content with all he saw or heard; while others maintained him to be "the playhouse thunderer," voluntarily employing himself in the gallery, when not required to discharge the duties of his office upon the roof of the building. The Spectator, holding that public shows and diversions lie well within his province, and that it is particularly incumbent upon him to notice everything remarkable touching the elegant entertainments of the theatre, makes it his business to obtain the best information he can in regard to this trunkmaker, and finds him to be "a large black man whom nobody knows;" who "generally leans forward on a huge oaken plant," attending closely to all that is occurring upon the stage; who is never seen to smile, but who, upon hearing anything that pleases him, takes up his staff with both hands, and lays it upon the next piece of timber that stands in his way, with exceeding vehemence; after which, he composes himself to his former posture, till such time as something new sets him again at work. Further, it was observed of him that his blows were so well timed as to satisfy the most judicious critics. Upon the expression of any shining thought of the poet, or the exhibition of any uncommon grace by the actor, the trunkmaker's blow falls upon bench or wainscot. If the audience fail to concur with him, he smites a second time, when, if the audience still remain unroused, he looks round him with great wrath, and administers a third blow, which never fails to produce the desired effect. Occasionally, however, he is said to permit the audience to begin the applause of their own motion, and at the conclusion of the proceeding ratifies their conduct by a single thwack.

It was admitted that the trunkmaker

had rendered important service to the theatre, insomuch that, upon his failing to attend at his post by reason of serious illness, the manager employed a substitute to officiate in his stead, until such time as his health was restored to him. The incompetence of the deputy, however, became too manifest; though he laid about him with incredible violence, he did it in such wrong places, that the audience soon discovered he was not their old friend the real trunkmaker. With the players, the trunkmaker was naturally a favourite; they not only connived at his obstreperous approbation, but cheerfully repaid such damage as his blows occasioned. That he had saved many a play from condemnation, and brought fame to many a performer, was agreed upon all hands. The audience are described as looking abashed if they find themselves betrayed into plaudits in which their friend in the upper gallery takes no part; and the actors are said to regard such favours as mere "brutum fulmen," or empty noise, when unaccompanied by "the sound of the oaken plant." Still, the trunkmaker had his enemies, who insinuated that he could be bribed in the interest of a bad poet, or a vicious player; such surmises, however, the Spectator averred to be wholly without foundation, upholding the justice of his strokes and the reasonableness of his admonitions. "He does not deal about his blows at random, but always hits the right nail upon the head. The inexpressible force wherewith he lays them on sufficiently shows the strength of his convictions. His zeal for a good author is indeed outrageous, and breaks down every fence and partition, every board and plank, that stands within the expression of his applause."

Moreover, the Spectator insists upon the value and importance to an audience of a functionary thus presiding over them like the director of a concert, in order to awaken their attention, and beat time to their applauses; or "to raise my simile," Addison continues, "I have sometimes fancied the trunkmaker in the upper gallery to be, like Virgil's ruler of the winds, seated upon the top of a mountain, who, when he struck his sceptre upon the side of it, 'roused a hurricane and set the whole cavern in an uproar.'"

In conclusion, the writer, not caring to confine himself to barren speculations or to reports of pure matter of fact, without deriving therefrom something of advantage to his countrymen, takes the liberty of pro-

posing that upon the demise of the trunkmaker, or upon his losing "the spring of his arm" by sickness, old age, infirmity, or the like, some able-bodied critic should be advanced to his post, with a competent salary, and a supply, at the public expense, of bamboos for operas, crab-tree cudgels for comedies, and oaken plants for tragedies. "And to the end that this place should be always disposed of according to merit, I would have none preferred to it who has not given convincing proofs both of a sound judgment and a strong arm, and who could not upon occasion either knock down an ox, or write a comment upon Horace's Art of Poetry. In short, I would have him a due composition of Hercules and Apollo, and so rightly qualified for this important office that the trunkmaker may not be missed by our posterity."

Addison's paper doubtless possessed an element of fact and truth, enriched by the fancifulness peculiar to the writer. It was his manner thus to embroider commonplace; to enhance the actual by large additions of the ideal. There probably existed such a personage as the Trunkmaker; some visitor to the upper gallery was in the habit of expressing approval by strokes of his cudgel upon the wainscot; and his frequent presence had obtained the recognition of the other patrons of the theatre. It was an easy and a pleasant task to Addison to invest this upper gallery visitor with special critical qualities, to attribute to his "oaken plant" almost supernatural powers. In any case, the trunkmaker was a sort of foreshadowing of the "claqueur." It was reserved for later times to organise applause and reduce success to a system. Of old, houses were sometimes "packed" by an author's friends to ensure a favourable result to the first representation of his play. When, for instance, Addison's *Cato* was first produced, Steele, as himself relates, undertook to pack an audience, and accordingly filled the pit with frequenters of the Whig coffee-houses, with students from the Inns of Court, and other zealous partisans. "This," says Pope, "had been tried for the first time in favour of the Distressed Mother (by Ambrose Phillips), and was now, with more efficacy, practised for *Cato*." But this was only an occasional "claque." The "band of applauders" dispersed after they had cheered their friend, and achieved their utmost to secure the triumph of his play. And they were unconnected with the manager of the theatre;

they were not his friends; still less were they his servants, receiving wages for their labours, and bound to raise their voices and clap their hands, in accordance with his directions. For such are the genuine "claqueurs" of to-day.

Dr. Véron, who has left upon record a sort of secret history of his management of the Paris Opera House, has revealed many curious particulars concerning "les claqueurs," adding a serious defence of the system of artificial applause. The artistic nature, the doctor maintains, submitting its merits to the judgment of the general public, has great need of the exhilaration afforded by evidence of hearty approval and sympathy; the singer and the dancer are thus inspired with the courage absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of their professional feats; and it is the doctor's experience that whenever a song or a dance has been redemanded by the audience, the dance has been better danced, and the song better sung, the second time of performance than the first. Hence there is nothing harmful, but rather something beneficial, in the proceedings of "les claqueurs." Every work produced at the theatre cannot be of the first class, and legitimately rouse the enthusiasm of the public; every dramatic or lyrical artist cannot invariably, by sheer force of talent, overcome the coldness, the languor, or the indifference of an audience; yet the general effect of the representation would suffer much if all applause, including that of a premeditated and, indeed, purchased kind, were entirely withheld; the timid would remain timid, talent would remain unrecognised, and, therefore, almost unrevealed, if no cheering was heard to reassure, to encourage, to kindle, and excite. The suggestion that the public would supply genuine applause if only the "claqueurs" were less liberal with the spurious article, Dr. Véron rather evades than discusses.

The chief of the "claqueurs" in Dr. Véron's time was a certain M. Auguste, of Herculean form and imposing address, well suited in every respect for the important post he filled. He was inclined to costume of very decisive colours—to coats of bright green or reddish-brown—presumably that, like a general officer, his forces might perceive his presence in their midst by the peculiarity, if not the brilliance, of his method of dress. Auguste was without education—did not know a note of music; but he understood the audience of the Opera House. For long years he had

attended every representation upon its stage, and experience had made him a most skilful tactician. Auguste enjoyed the complete confidence of Dr. Véron. "Claqueur" and manager attended together the rehearsals of every new work, and upon the eve of its first performance held a cabinet council upon the subject. They reviewed the whole production from the first line to the last. "I did not press upon him my opinions," says Dr. Véron; "I listened to his; he appraised, he judged all, both dance and song, according to his own personal impressions." The manager was surprised at the justice of the "claqueur's" criticism by anticipation; at his ingenious plans for apportioning and graduating the applause. It was Auguste's principle of action to begin modestly and discreetly, especially at the opera, dealing with a choice and critical public; to approve a first act but moderately, reserving all salvos of applause for the last act and the dénouement of the performance. Thus, in the last act he would bestow three rounds of applause upon a song, to which, had it occurred in the first act, he would have given but one. He held that towards the middle of a performance success should be quietly fostered, but never forced. For the "claqueurs" of other theatres Auguste entertained a sort of disdain. It was, as he averred, the easiest thing in the world to obtain success at the Opéra Comique, or the Vaudeville. The thing was managed there, not so much by applause as by laughter. There was the less need for careful management; the less risk of vexing the public by injudicious approbation. No one could take offence at a man for laughing immoderately; he was not chargeable with disingenuousness, as in the case of one applauding to excess. Occasionally, cries were raised of "À la porte les claqueurs;" but such a cry as "À la porte les rieurs," had never been heard. At the Opera House, however, there was no occupation for laughers; in the score of an opera, or in the plot of a ballet, appeal was never made to a sense of the mirthful. Then the opera public was of a susceptible, and even irritable nature; it might be led, but it could scarcely be driven; it could be influenced by polite and gentle means; it would resent active interference, and "a scene" might ensue—even something of a disturbance. But M. Auguste implored his manager to be easy on that score. Nothing

of the kind should happen; he would prove himself deserving, worthy of his employer's confidence. "Only," said M. Auguste, "those fools, the paying public, certainly give us a great deal of trouble!"

The "chef de la claque" was, of course, supplied with admission tickets by the management, and these were issued according to an established scale. If the success of a work, already represented many times, showed signs of flagging and needed to be sustained, Auguste received some forty or fifty pit tickets; but in the case of a work highly approved by the public, and still attracting good houses, twenty, or even ten, tickets were held to be sufficient. But on the first production of an entirely new entertainment, at least a hundred tickets were handed to Auguste. There was then a meeting of the "claqueurs" at some appointed place—usually a wine-shop in the neighbourhood of the theatre—and the plan of action was arranged, the army of applauders organised and marshalled. Intelligent lieutenants, about ten in number, each in command of a detachment of the forces, were instructed how to deal with opponents, and to keep watchful eyes upon the proceedings of their chief. In addition to a money payment and their own entrance tickets, they were accorded other tickets, to be given only to friends upon whose fidelity they could rely. Certain of the "claqueurs" accepted outpost duty, as it were, and acted in isolated positions; others, and these the majority, took close order, and fought, so to speak, in column. In addition to his regular forces, Auguste engaged supernumerary and irregular troops, known to him as "sous-claqueurs," upon whose discipline and docility he could not wholly rely, though he could make them useful by enclosing them in the ranks of his seasoned soldiers. The "sous-claqueurs" were usually well-clothed frequenters and well-wishers of the Opera House, anxious to attend the first representation of the new work to be produced, and willing to pay half-price for their tickets, upon the condition that they placed their applause at the disposal of M. Auguste.

The "claqueurs" were admitted to the theatre and took their seats some time before the entrance of the paying public. M. Auguste had thus ample opportunity of deciding upon his strategic operations, of placing his advance guard, of securing the position of his main army, and of defending its flanks and rear. The paying

public thus found itself curiously intermixed and imprisoned by these hosts of "claqueurs," and victory usually crowned the efforts of M. Auguste, who was careful to arrogate to himself the results of the evening's proceedings. "What a splendid success I achieved!" he would say; completely ignoring the efforts of composer, the artists of the theatre, and the manager, who were, perhaps, entitled to some share of the glories of the performance.

Auguste, as Dr. Véron relates, made his fortune at the opera. He was in receipt of annuities from several artists of established fame. Success could hardly be achieved without his aid. The friends, patrons, and family of a new artist, to ensure his or her success, invariably paid court and money to Auguste, the price of his services corresponding with the pretensions of the débutant. And then he undertook engagements of an exceptional kind, sometimes even to the prejudice of his manager. Artists required of him sometimes a sudden increase of their success—that, for a few nights only, an extraordinary measure of applause should reward their exertions. Their engagements were expiring or were about to be renewed; it was desirable to deceive both the public and the manager; the vital question of salary was under consideration; an increase of their emoluments was most desirable. So, for a while, the mediocre singer or dancer obtained from Auguste and his auxiliaries unusual favour, and the manager was induced to form very erroneous opinions upon the subject. Rumours, too, were artfully circulated to the effect that the performer in question had received liberal offers from England or Prussia; that his or her merits had roused the attention of rival impresarios; the Parisian manager was cautioned at all costs to retain in his theatre ability and promise so remarkable. But with the signing of a new engagement, at an advance of salary, came disenchantment. M. Auguste's services were now withdrawn, for the performer's object was attained; and the management for some time to come was saddled with mediocrity, purchased at a high price.

But little difficulties and deceptions of this kind notwithstanding, Dr. Véron approved the "claque" system, and constituted himself the friend and defender of Auguste. It was not only that Auguste was himself a very worthy person—an excellent father of a family, leading a

steady and creditable kind of life, putting by for the benefit of his children a considerable portion of his large annual earnings as "chef de la claque" — but the advantages of artificial applause and simulated success seemed to Dr. Véron to be quite beyond question, while wholly justifiable by their results. The manager detected the "claque" system as a pervading influence in almost all conditions of life. To influence large bodies or assemblies, dexterity and stratagem he declared to be indispensably necessary. The applause exacted by Nero, when he recited his verses or played upon the lute, or Tiberius, posing himself as an orator before the senate, was the work of a "claque," moved thereto rather by terror, however, than by pecuniary considerations. Parliamentary applause he found also to be of an artificial kind, produced by the spirit of friendship or the ties of party; and he relates how, when the Constitutionnel newspaper was under his direction, certain leading members attended at the printing-office to correct the proofs of their speeches, and never failed to enliven them at intervals by the addition of such terms as "Cheers," "Loud cheers," "Great cheering," "Sensation," "Excitement," &c. These factitious plaudits, tricks and manœuvres of players, singers, dancers, and orators, in truth, deceive no one, he maintained; while they make very happy, nevertheless, all those who have recourse to them.

As a manager, therefore, Dr. Véron invariably opposed the efforts made to suppress the "claqueurs" in the pay of the theatre. He admits that some times excess of zeal on the part of these hirelings brought about public discontent and complaint; but, upon the whole, he judged that they exercised a beneficial influence, especially in their prevention of cabals or conspiracies against particular artists, and of certain scandals attaching to the rivalry and jealousy of performers. And to M. Auguste he thus addressed himself: "You have a fine part to play; great duties to perform; put an end to quarrels; help the weak against the strong; never oppose the public; give over applauding at their bidding; present an example of politeness and decorum; conciliate and pacify; above all, prevent all hostile combinations, all unjust coalitions, against the artists on the stage, or the works represented."

Dr. Véron has said, perhaps, all that

could be said for the "claque" system; but his plausible arguments and apologies will not carry conviction to every mind. There can be no doubt of the value, the necessity almost, of applause to the player, but one would much rather that the enthusiasm of an audience was wholly genuine, and not provided at so much a cheer, let us say, by the manager, or the player himself. "Players, after all," writes Hazlitt, "have little reason to complain of their hard-earned, short-lived popularity. One thunder of applause from pit, boxes, and gallery is equal to a whole immortality of posthumous fame." But if the thunder is but stage-thunder? If the applause is supplied to order, through the agency of a M. Auguste? Upon another occasion Hazlitt expresses more tenderness for the ephemeral glories of the actor's art. "When an author dies it is no matter, for his works remain. When a great actor dies, there is a void produced in society, a gap which requires to be filled up. The literary amateur may find employment for his time in reading old authors only, and exhaust his entire spleen in scouting new ones; but the lover of the stage cannot amuse himself, in his solitary fastidiousness, by sitting to witness a play got up by the departed ghosts of first-rate actors, or be contented with the perusal of a collection of old playbills; he may extol Garrick, but he must go to see Kean, and, in his own defence, must admire, or at least tolerate, what he sees, or stay away against his will." And Cibber, in his apology, has placed on record an elaborate lament, "that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record; that the animated graces of the actor can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that presents them; or, at least, can but faintly glimmer through the memory or imperfect attestations of a few surviving spectators."

The complete suspension of applause, genuine or factitious, must result in the exceeding depression of the player. He must feel himself deprived of his proper sustenance; and something of dismay must possess him, when he finds that all his efforts move his audience in no way; that they are not "en rapport" with him; that while he labours they are listless. Henderson committed himself to the exaggeration that no actor could perform well, unless he was systematically flattered both on and off the stage. Liston, the comedian,

found applause, of whatever kind, so absolutely necessary to him, that he declared he liked to see even a small dog wag his tail in approbation of his exertions. Mrs. Siddons complained of the inferior measure of applause that she obtained in the theatres of the provinces. At Drury-lane her grand bursts of passion were received with prolonged cheering and excitement, that gave her rest and breathing-time, and prepared her for increased efforts. The playgoers of York were at one time so lukewarm in their reception of popular players, that, at the instance of Woodward, Tate Wilkinson, the manager, called on the chief patrons of the theatre, and informed them that the actor was so mortified by their coolness, that he could not play nearly so well in York as in London, Dublin, and Edinburgh. The York audience benefited by the remonstrance, and on Woodward's next appearance, greatly to his delight, awarded him extraordinary applause.

Macready, in his Memoirs, relates that the practice of "calling on" the principal actor was introduced, at Covent Garden Theatre, on the occasion of his first performance of the character of Richard the Third, on the 19th October, 1819. It was the custom then for a subordinate actor to appear at the conclusion of the play and announce the representation to be given on the following night. But on this occasion Macready, at the suggestion of the stage-manager, undertook the duty, and his appearance had the effect of a "call." "In obedience," he writes, "to the impatient and persevering summons, I was desired by Fawcett to go before the curtain; and, accordingly, I announced the tragedy for repetition, amidst the gratulatory shouts that carried the assurance of complete success to my agitated and grateful heart." But while loving applause, as an actor needs must, Macready had little liking for such idle compliments as calls and recalls; heartily disapproved of them, indeed, when they seemed to him in any degree to disturb the illusion of scenic representation. Thus of his performance of Werner in 1845, he writes: "Acted very fairly. Called for. Trash!" Under date of December, 1844, he records: "Acted *Virginus*"—this was in Paris—"with much energy and power, to a very excited audience. I was loudly called for at the end of the fourth act, but could not or would not make so absurd and empirical a sacrifice of the dignity of my poor art." Three years later he enters in his diary: "Acted

King Lear with much care and power, and was received by a most kind and sympathetic and enthusiastic audience I was called on, the audience trying to make me come on after the first act, but, of course, I could not think of such a thing." But these complimentary calls relate to the conclusion of an act when, at any rate, the drop-scene has fallen, hiding the stage from view, and when, for a while, there is a pause in the performance, a suspension of theatrical illusion. What would Macready have said to calls while the dramatist still holds possession of the stage; while some necessary question of the play is in course of consideration—calls to the interruption of all dramatic interest, and the reduction of the characters in the drama to the merest lay-figures? Yet, in modern times, Charles Surface retiring, after the fall of the screen, and his futile effort to obtain an explanation of that catastrophe, has returned to bow to the pit, greatly to the embarrassment of his play-fellows. Ophelia, after tripping off insane to find a watery grave, has been summoned back to the stage, to acknowledge, sanely enough, by smiles and courtesies, the redundant applause of the spectators, greatly to the perplexity of King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, and Laertes, and seriously to the injury of the poet's work. And these are but samples of the follies of the modern theatre in this respect.

The calling for the dramatist of the evening is of foreign origin, as indeed are the majority of theatrical honours and compliments. The first dramatist called before the curtain in France was Voltaire, after the production of *Merope*; the second was Marmontel, after the performance of his tragedy of *Dionysius*. For some time our English playwrights were content to acknowledge from their private boxes the salutations and congratulations of their audience. What author first stepped from his box to the stage? If his name cannot now be ascertained, at least we have information concerning a dramatist perfectly willing to adopt such a course. To Talfourd, the representation of his dramatic works always afforded intense delight. He would travel almost any distance to see one of his plays upon the boards, no matter how humble the theatre. Macready has left on record curious particulars touching the first representation of *Ion*. "Was called for very enthusiastically by the audience, and

cheered on my appearance most heartily. . . Miss Ellen Tree was afterwards called forward. Talfourd came into my room and heartily shook hands with me, and thanked me. He said something about Mr. Wallack, the stage-manager, wishing him to go on the stage, as they were calling; but it would not be right. I said, 'On no account in the world.' He shortly left me, and as I heard, was made to go forward to the front of his box, and receive the enthusiastic tribute of the house's grateful delight. How happy he must have been!" In 1838, concerning the first night of Sheridan Knowles's play of *Woman's Wit*, Macready writes: "Acted Walsingham in a very crude, nervous, unsatisfactory way. Avoided a call, by going before the curtain to give out the play; there was very great enthusiasm. Led on Knowles, in obedience to the call of the audience." But Knowles was not an author only; he was an actor also—he had trod the boards as his own Master Walter, and in other parts, although he was not included in the cast of *Woman's Wit*. No doubt, from Macready's point of view, this consideration rendered his case very different from that of Talfourd.

THE RAJAH'S DIAMOND.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

HERE was romance indeed! The tale of this poor rajah's persecution did not come fresh to Bate, for he had heard of it vaguely in Sarawak. By such means other great native houses have been forced to a "voluntary sale" of their old jewels; but this, the grandest of all, the largest and finest diamond in the world, as repute affirms, has lain safe in one family for ages beyond man's reckoning. It is said to be a secret tradition of Dutch governments in Borneo to get possession of it by any means, and there are merchants' houses which have had their eye on it from generation to generation. But Bate would of course have ridiculed the idea of any violent attempt to take it, on the part of civilised and Christian gentlemen in this nineteenth century. He never thought of such a thing, not even when the rajah lost his smile, and the ragged retainers brought out each his ancient gun, and snapped it off in the verandah, and reloaded carefully.

But there were other signs of anxiety in the house that night. Women servants

whom Bate had not yet seen, save in a momentary glimpse of giggling mouth and flying petticoat, brought mats and curtains to the living room, and arranged them on the floor. The daughter, Gilumbai, never left her father's side, and he sat with his big hand upon her neck. Hurry and bustle reigned over all the house, but those two sat quietly, waiting as it seemed.

After the evening meal, which bore token of the confusion ruling—for the capsicums were not half boiled, and but one sambal was served with the curry—half the retainers went out, armed to the teeth. One by one, at intervals, they entered the dim forest. "What child's play this is," said Bate to the interpreter.

"Wait!" he answered. "You will see! There are wild Dyaks all round us, but white men lead them on." Bate again said "Bosh!" and went to bed peevishly. He looked on all this melodramatic business as foil to the diamond. Use had knocked out of him all feeling of romance upon the subject of precious stones, and manoeuvres which he regarded as "sellers' tricks" caused him only irritation. "I'd seen such a lot of that sort of thing," says Bate.

But I can avouch my own experience that it startles a man to be awoke at midnight, in an unknown jungle, by the sudden, sharp ring of a match-lock. Bate sprang from his mattress, forgetting his contempt for tricks. The verandah was all astir with women, hurrying to and fro with low wails and whispers. Through holes in the roof the moonlight streamed, whitening here a mosquito-net, there throwing one into ghastly shade; it gleamed on bare shoulders moving rapidly, and struck into sudden, frosty sparks the brazen ornaments that tinkled as the slaves hurried across the moonbeams and the shadow. No noise they made save that low whisper, and a rustle of their feet upon the mats. Even these sounds stilled as the rajah came out, his daughter with him, and hurriedly moved across. Bate and two or three Malays followed him to the outside verandah. They threw themselves down, and crept beneath the overhanging eave. Looking on the whole affair as melodramatic art, Bate gave it admiration unwilling but complete.

For the mounting was superb. On this side, the house looked out above the clearing towards the forest. So bright and still was the air, that every petal of each flower on the shrubs was clearly outlined. Dim and

misty ran the belt of trees beyond, their tops silvered by the moonlight, but their roots hid in grey fog. Half up the vales hung swathes of vapour, twined amongst the shining branches. A thousand dim, faint sounds arose, joining to make a stilly murmur; but the retainers lying in that watery shadow gave no sign of life. The rajah talked with his men in whispers, and presently they all crept back, and vanished.

Bate also returned to bed, but he could not sleep. In vain he jeered at all this nonsense, and made epigrams and laughed at them. The mystery and romance of his position worked their spell. Some hours after, whilst he lay in a troubled doze, a soft voice called him. He sprang up at once. The room was pitchy dark, and no beam entered through the unglazed window overhead. "Take gun and pistol," whispered the voice in clear English; but it belonged not to the interpreter. Bate found his arms in the dark. Then a little hand seized his, and led him silently out, along a passage unknown to Bate's explorations. Reaching the outer door a chill wind struck him. All round and below was blackness; the moon had set; clouds held the sky and fog the earth. Following his guide, Bate climbed down the ladder. She took his hand again, and led him across the clearing, slowly, but without a moment's hesitation. Then a gentle rush of water sounded in his ears, and presently the girl whispered, "Stop! I find boat." It was found—a slender dug-out—and Bate got in at his guide's direction. She pushed off, and then a swirl of the canoe, a gentle splash and tinkling of the water, told that the girl also was embarked. They slipped into the mist that crept and slowly twined above the river. "This is a dream!" said Bate to himself.

Silently and steadily they dropped down the stream—a soft ripple only betraying their passage. Bate himself could not hear the paddle-stroke against the side of the canoe, so carefully was it muffled. He said nothing, nor did the girl. They glided down like souls afloat on Acheron—so Bate declares.

As they went on, the mists grew thicker, but the girl was never at a loss. It turned bitterly cold as dawn drew near. The noises of the forest ceased, and the sudden splash of unseen beast or fish. Bate began to note dark smears of shadow in mid-air—the tops of trees whose base was lost in fog. Then the smear became continuous, and a blurred cloud showed on either

hand, creeping always downward, as the wreathes of water-fog grew thinner. Suddenly, after two hours' journeying, a chill blast swept the stream, lifting the vapours, rolling them up, and scattering them. It roused Bate from a sleepy trance. All the brown river came into sight, hurrying on its track between two walls of foliage. And it showed him his guide.

Bate tells me that his feelings at this moment lie quite beyond my description. I am inclined to think him in the right. Sufficient to say that the rajah's daughter, whom he had seen hitherto in silk and cloth of gold, now wore the simple costume of a Dyak girl—thick petticoat of woven stuff, cuirass of brazen wire, and armlets of the same from elbow to knuckle. Her shoulders and bosom were uncovered, and no gemmed sandals hid the perfect symmetry of her feet. Somewhat confused she seemed under Bate's gaze, but a visible anxiety distracted her attention. "We go too slow!" muttered the rajah's daughter; "daylight here!" and then, throwing off the mufflers from her paddle, she hurried on with greater speed.

Presently they reached an old dead tapong tree, fallen half across the stream. The floods of years had lodged against its upper side a bank of sticks, and earth, and rubbish, on which the nipa palm sprang thickly. Cleverly the girl took her canoe round and under the tree, amongst plaited twigs and rotten branches, through which it passed with difficulty, though Bate assisted to break them down. Slowly they worked inshore, beneath the monstrous trunk. "I not been here since that high!" whispered the girl, smiling and motioning with her hand. "Let see!" She stood up, leaning on her paddle, and looked round. Beams of the rising sun flecked her round limbs and bosom as with gold.

Another foot or two they advanced; it grew dark beneath that shadowy arch.

"Now!" she said. "See that stick? Take and lift up!"

Bate saw a peg driven in the trunk above, as high as one could reach. He dutifully stretched out his hand, and raised himself. The peg was slimy with dew and wet; but it held firm. Raising himself to that level, he saw another peg within reach, and another. Thus mounting, he gained a foothold on the trunk, and found himself hidden in a little grove of ferns. Simultaneously did he discover that the most enterprising and ferocious inhabitants of the country had made this

one of their strongholds. Ants attacked him savagely, so that he could scarce find time to grasp his rifle, which the girl handed up; then she herself gained a place beside him, and they walked along the tree.

Reaching firm ground they went on and on in the forest. The sun mounted higher in the sky, and grew hotter. No landmarks showed perceptible to European eyes; but the rajah's daughter made no pause. Now and again she muttered, "These trees grow big!" but she didn't stop. After walking an hour or two straight across the forest, Bate began to get weary. So did the girl, as well she might; but her courage did not fail, though the perspiration poured down her smooth neck and pretty shoulders. She only smiled at Bate's inquiries, and said, gently, "We soon get home—very soon!" He was lost in admiration of her courage, and a sort of patriotic thrill passed over him when, on his asking if she had no fear, the quiet answer came, "You orang Inggris! Tid' ada takut!"—"I am not afraid with you!" She told him how her father had sent her to learn English at Pontianak, and only laughed with glee when he reproached her for deceiving him so long about her knowledge of the language. "Iya!" she laughed. "Mana ada takut!"—"About that I was shy!" I am told to mention that the rajah's daughter had one of the sweetest smiles that human lips ever framed.

They came to a lofty cliff, rising sheer above the jungle, so straight that a man might hit it with his head, amongst that dense vegetation, before perceiving the obstacle. She worked along it a few yards, then entered a huge cavern, such as are frequent over all Borneo. Under the low roof twilight reigned, which soon deepened into midnight blackness as they passed through a narrow opening. From the box of bamboo slung at her waist the girl produced a taper, a bit of broken crockery, and touchwood fungus. Striking the bamboo with her chip of earthenware, she soon got a light, much to the astonishment of Bate, who had not learnt the many strange tricks by which these people at one and the same time make fire for themselves, and bewilderment for European savants.

Her taper lit, the girl went on through gallery after gallery, sometimes in twilight, sometimes in dark. Now and again she paused, and in a narrow part of the cavern

stooped to arrange something under foot. After such stoppages she allowed Bate to precede her, whilst she refixed the sort of trap behind them, the feeble light just outlining her perfect figure. After half a dozen pauses of the sort, they reached the darkest, dampest part of the grotto. "No one been here!" she muttered, and gave him the taper. There were two or three crevices in the rock. The rajah's daughter raked them well out with her knife—for fear of scorpions, she whispered; then began to climb like a kitten with hands and toes. Bate held the light up, but she vanished in the obscurity above. He only heard her laboured breath, and saw the slender outline of her limbs. In a few seconds something rattled down at his feet—something that gleamed and shone as never yet did diamond of the Cape. He picked it up, wildly excited, but with no astonishment, for his doubts had vanished long ago. He knocked the earth from it, and he saw the king of all gems extant in the world.

A perfect octohedron it must have been, half as large as one's fist, and weighing probably a thousand carats. No attempt had been made to cut it, but the angles were smoothed down, and the whole surface polished. Bate estimates the stone, after this loss, at nine hundred and fifty carats, flawless, of the purest water, and worth, intrinsically, about one million sterling. Whilst he gazed, in a bewilderment of professional delight, the girl slipped down from above, and put her hand upon his shoulder with exclamations of rapturous astonishment. "I never saw it before," she murmured, her eyes shining brighter than the diamond. "I only knew where it was!"

"And what is to prevent my running away with it and you?" asked Bate, hysterically.

"Oh," she laughed, "you Inggris man! And you would be struck through and through with iron spears before you reached the air. Now, what you give for it?"

The formula brought Bate to reason. He examined and weighed the stone, making even a little sketch of it, and then unwillingly gave it back. "I'll give your father all he asks, but I must have time. It is a large sum."

"Of course," she said, "we daren't take away the diamond now. Perhaps the Dyaks attack my father at this moment." Gravely she sent him a few

yards off into the darkness, and climbed the rock again and disappeared with the stone. Then they threaded the cavern once more, stopping at each place as before, and resetting the arrangements with extra care. Bate asked what they were, and she answered: "Dyak deer-traps. The spear strike you through the stomach. They all of Inggris steel and never rust, you see! Inggris steel and Inggris men true and stout. Holland men false and murderers!"

On the threshold of the cave the girl stopped suddenly, raising her hand. Faint and dull through the wood came a sound of musketry. "They fight there, they kill my father!" she cried, wringing her hands. And she ran off through the sunny forest with such practised speed that Bate had pain to follow her. A dozen times he fell headlong, but she slipped through every obstruction. Breathless, covered with ants and leeches, he reached the tapong tree in half the time it had taken them to walk the distance an hour before. At every enforced pause he heard that same dull sound of musketry, now slackening, now swelling to a roar. The girl had taken her place in her canoe long before he even reached the tree, and she beat her paddle with impatience, calling him. Bate lumbered in, almost upsetting the tiny craft. With feverish force she paddled out and up the stream. Her wild course through the jungle had disarranged the scanty Dyak dress, but the rajah's daughter heeded not such trifles in this dreadful danger. Her loose hair fell to her very feet, twisting in the golden fringe of an under garment, hidden previously by the petticoat. She paddled with frenzy, muttering to herself a sort of chant, which Bate conceived to be the war-song of her people. Full of anger and pity for the good old rajah thus persecuted, he longed to join in his defence. But in these canoes a European is helpless. Bate could do nothing to forward their approach. And the fire grew slack, then ceased. The girl stopped the paddling a moment to listen. No sound came to them save the murmuring of the river, and the dull buzz of tree-crickets from the bank. "Malay man all dead," she muttered. "Father taken! Look! I must swim. They not hurt Inggris man. I save myself; what can I do with you? I put you on bank at path here—walk up! Holland man take care of you and send you to Kuching. Me they ill-use and kill perhaps. Will you go?"

"I'll go," said Bate, though the poor fellow was sure he went to certain death, "if you can save yourself. But your father?"

"He is safe. They not hurt the rajah; for he got diamond," she added, with a bitter laugh. "And he too well known in Sambas and Pontianak. Here is the path! Come back to Sarawak in twelve months, and we send the diamond to you. Good-bye, orang Inggris!"

They had come abreast of a path opening on the river. With two strokes of the paddle she pushed the canoe into shallow water, and Bate jumped over. "Good-bye!" she cried again, and swept the head of her craft round. Bate, standing to his knees in water, caught the girl as she went past and kissed her. She scarcely seemed to notice; kissing, indeed, is a practice unknown to orientals. Righting the boat again with a lithe movement of her body, she gained mid-stream and hurried down. Bate watched her out of sight, then went up the path with rifle cocked and ready, determined to have a fight at least before he died.

No one he saw, nothing heard. But, half a mile from the river, he felt there were eyes watching him. The bush moved strangely, the voices of the jungle had a peculiar significance. His flesh crept. He stood and looked, but all was still and silent. Bate longed for something to happen. And presently, at a turn of the road, two Dyak chiefs stood before him. They had no arms, except the sheathed parang by their sides. Naked they were, but for chowats of silk and ornaments of gold innumerable. By these was Bate's suspicions roused, for he knew that Dyaks on the war-path superstitiously discard their golden trinkets. But the chiefs came forward graciously, with hands outstretched. "The English gentleman has lost his way," they said in Dutch, which Bate's Cape experience enabled him to understand. "Our young men will set him right." And, at a signal, the path was crammed with Dyaks, all armed with sumpitan and spear, who thronged round Bate with boisterous laughter. Before he could defend himself, a stalwart fellow stood within arm's length of his rifle-butt, ready to seize it on the first suspicious movement. The false Dyaks, who were evidently Malays of high position, looked on smilingly awhile; then said, still in Dutch, "The English gentleman wants to go home. We will show him the way!"

And so they did. At a place where the two roads met, Bate found his luggage all piled up. The Dyaks lifted it, and carried him back the way he had come. Before evening he found himself at the "house," where he had slept five days before. Just as on that occasion, Dyaks of the village relieved the former bearers, and his guides prepared to depart with much gaiety. Bate tried to learn from them something of the rajah's fate, but they only laughed. That the old man's dwelling had been stormed there was visible proof in the appearance of Bate's baggage. His Sarawak boy, however, did not turn up throughout their journey.

In due time his guides took Bate to the frontier, and passed him on. He slept at the same "houses," and found the same bearers at every stage. And so at length he reached the canoe lying caché on the Sarawak river, and got back to civilisation.

In Kuching the adventure made great noise, but Bate's story was so vague and so improbable that the Government could not interfere. He does not even know where the adventure took place. After waiting at the Sarawak capital for two months without any news, he came back to England. But my friend does not for an instant doubt that the rajah's daughter will keep her promise, and at the year's end he means to await her message in Kuching.

REMARKABLE ADVENTURERS.

COUNT DE BONNEVAL.

It might be thought that between the years 1675 and 1747 Christendom afforded ample scope for adventurous spirits. There was enough, and perhaps more than enough, of fighting, fiddling, financiering, dancing, and duelling. There were wars and rumours of wars; treaties and alliances; schemes for the colonisation of Darien and Mississippi; Banks of England and Banks of France duly established—not without difficulty; there was the South Sea Bubble, and the regency of Philip of Orleans; the speculations of John Law; the struggle over the English, and the war over the Spanish, succession; there was buccaneering in the Western and piracy in the Eastern seas. All of these "institutions" might have been enjoyed in more or less Christian company, but the world which sailed under the Cross was not big enough for one remarkable

man—a Frenchman of the French, if ever there were one. Claude Alexandre de Bonneval, the younger son of a noble family—one of the most ancient of the Limousin—sprang from childhood into youth, at that precise period when the young French nobles were beginning to get tired of Louis the Fourteenth, and the discipline introduced by his ministers. It is more than doubtful whether the French nobility ever cordially acquiesced in the régime of the great Louis. The cheery traditions of the League and the Fronde were yet fresh and green, and French gentlemen, smothered under the asceticism of the last days of a libertine king, sighed for the good old times when they fought freely, and fought "for their own hand." The loathing with which they regarded the reign of Madame de Maintenon is abundantly proved by the greedy haste with which they plunged into the dissipation of the regency. Young de Bonneval was an admirable representative of the race famous, or rather notorious, for producing the roués of the Temple. As a boy he received, at the hands of the Jesuits, a fair education for that period; that is to say, he acquired some knowledge of Latin and history, afterwards extended by his passion for reading; but his studies could not have been very far advanced at the age of eleven, when he entered the French navy, under the auspices of his relative, the illustrious Tourville. War having broken out in 1688, he figured in the naval battles of Dieppe, La Hogue, and Cadiz; but just as he was becoming a valuable naval officer, his peculiarity made itself apparent for the first time. In 1697 it occurred to the Count de Beaumont to treat Bonneval slightly, on account of his youth. The result of this venture was three sword-wounds for Beaumont, and for Bonneval the necessity of leaving the navy. Hereupon he bought a commission in the regiment of Gardes Françaises, and, so far as can be ascertained, dwelt in peace with his brother officers until the War of Succession broke out in 1701, when he purchased, for thirty-three thousand livres—about two thousand pounds of our money—the command of a regiment of infantry, and marched into Italy, under the command of the Marshal de Catinat. In the opinion of Sainte-Beuve, the conduct of Bonneval is, throughout his life, consistent in its inconsistency. He always began well. His wit and bravery, his dash and

good-humour, his brilliant conversation, and his thorough good-fellowship, made him successful and popular, until, in an evil hour, some indiscretion, some ill-advised joke, or some excessive tenacity on the point of honour, left him friendless and alone to repair his broken fortunes—a task, by-the-way, to which he proved thoroughly equal on every occasion. Employed in Italy by turns under Catinat, Villeroy, and Vendôme, he became the especial favourite of the latter, whose good and bad qualities he shared to a singular degree. He was evidently not over-particular as to what he said or what he did, so long as it was in good company. The gloomy Saint-Simon judged him severely: “A younger son of good family, with great talent for war, and plenty of wit, adorned by copious reading, of good address, eloquent, stylish, and graceful—a scamp, a spendthrift, a debauchee, and a plunderer.” In the midst of success and popularity came a difficulty like poor Theodore Hook’s—“an affection of the chest.” There was something wrong in his accounts, in consequence of a difference of opinion respecting the capitulation of Ivrea, between him and the commissary-general of the army. Vendôme, who had approved his conduct in the matter, backed out when it came to the pinch, as boon companions generally do, and, instead of taking the affair in his own hands, recommended him to write to the Secretary of State for War—Chamillart—one of the bourgeois ministers of Louis, upon whom the example of Louvois, in snubbing the military, had not been lost. Bonneval wrote a letter explaining the irregularity—concerning some three thousand livres—at length, but took it into his head to conclude with the following remarkable paragraph: “I was not aware that an expense incurred with the consent and approbation of Monseigneur the Duc de Vendôme was subject to the revision of a pack of clerks, and rather than submit to it I would pay the money myself.” Bonneval forgot the régime under which he was living. He imagined himself still in the full enjoyment of the rights exercised by his ancestors, under the League and the Fronde. He forgot that Louvois had already ruled the War Department, and that exalted rank and daring bravery were no longer excuses for disobedience and inaccuracy. Brought up in the school of Vendôme, he was slow in accepting the new doctrine of

discipline, and marred his career by his inability to read the signs of the times.

Chamillart, stung by the scornful reference to men of the pen, and “having a true bourgeois feeling for honesty,” replied in a style which is the best possible proof that the feudal nobles had had their day: “Sir,—I have received the letter you took the trouble to write me on the subject of the Biella accounts. If the sum in question had been truly employed, you would not offer to reimburse it at your own cost; and as you are not a sufficiently great lord to make presents to the king, it seems to me that you wish to avoid reckoning with clerks, because they know too well how to reckon.” As the Prince de Ligne remarks, “This was more than was wanted to make an impetuous man like Bonneval spring off the hinges.” Without a moment’s reflection, he sat down and wrote the following fatal epistle: “Sir,—I have received the letter you took the trouble to write me, in which you inform me that I fear clerks because they know too well how to reckon. It is my duty to inform you that the great nobles of the kingdom sacrifice willingly their lives and their property in the king’s service, but that we owe him nothing so far as our honour is concerned. Thus, if within three months I do not receive reasonable satisfaction for the affront you have put upon me, I shall enter the service of the emperor, wherein all the ministers are people of quality, and know how to treat their equals.” This letter, threatening nothing short of desertion to the enemy, was no sooner gone than Bonneval, fearing arrest, asked the Duc de Vendôme for leave, and travelled in Italy for several months in 1705-6. He remained for some time at Venice, in the hope that some loophole would be made for him to return to his duty, but was bitterly disappointed at finding no pretext for repentance. At last poverty and mortification induced him to put his threat into execution. He went over to the enemy, then commanded by Prince Eugène in March, 1706—shortly after the desertion of the French flag by the Marquis de Langallerie, who, being a French lieutenant-general, passed with the same grade into the service of the emperor. This Langallerie is the same who became so well known by his project of reuniting the scattered fragments of the Jewish people into a nation—a curious specimen of a premier baron of Saintonge, successively a soldier of France, the Empire, Poland, Hesse-Cassel, and, it is said, of

Turkey, by turns a Catholic and a fervent Lutheran—and who was arrested on the brink of a great enterprise, whether to take the Jews back to Jerusalem or to help the Grand Turk to capture Italy is not clearly known. Whatever the project may have been, it was crushed by the emperor, who had Langallerie arrested and immured in the castle of Raab, where he soon died of grief and a fever. The Prince de Ligne makes light of the crime of desertion in the days of Bonneval, and points out that not long before Condé and Turenne had done the same thing; but Saint-Simon speaks of it with truly modern horror. Prince Eugène, however, welcomed the deserter warmly, employed him in several campaigns, and at once obtained for him the rank of major-general. In this capacity he served in the attack on the lines of Turin, and made a brilliant success, the French army being routed and forced to repress the Alps. In the battle the Marquis de Bonneval, the elder brother of the count, was taken prisoner, and would have been sabred at once by the Hungarian "heyducks" who had taken him, had not Bonneval arrived just in time to save him. Serving brilliantly at Tortona and elsewhere, Bonneval was high in favour at the conclusion of the war by the treaty of Utrecht. Pending the negotiations he contrived to distinguish himself in another way. He dispelled the dulness of existence by insisting to Lord Stafford that Louis the Fourteenth aspired to universal monarchy, and by fighting a Frenchman who felt aggrieved at that statement, and a Prussian who repeated it, coupled with improper expressions regarding the great king. Rash and inconsiderate as he was, Bonneval seems yet to have retained the favour of his chiefs, as, on the accession of Charles the Sixth to the empire, he obtained the grade of lieutenant-general, and one of the most ancient regiments in the Imperial army; and two years later became a member of the Aulic Council of War at Vienna. War now broke out between Austria and Turkey, the latter power having attacked the Morea, ceded to the republic of Venice by the treaty of Carlowitz. The Venetians called upon the emperor to carry out the terms of the alliance between the two powers, and, after a few fruitless attempts to preserve peace, Charles declared war against the Sublime Porte. It was in this war that Prince Eugène acquired his brightest renown. Under his command Bonneval distinguished himself at the battle of

Peterwaradein by his desperate bravery, and received a wound which compelled him to wear an iron bandage for the rest of his life. His renown reached France, no longer the France of Louis the Fourteenth. The old king was dead, and the regent Orleans ruled in his stead. Nothing was so much à la mode as to undo anything done during the late gloomy times, and therefore, as Bonneval had been disgraced by the old priest-ridden king, nothing could be in better taste than to welcome the prodigal back to a country where all were prodigals for a while. The regent made no difficulty about according letters of remission to Bonneval, who, having obtained leave from the emperor, reappeared in Paris, not as a pardoned deserter, but as a hero, whom everyone but the grim Saint-Simon was delighted to honour. The formal confirmation of his letters of pardon by the parliament of Paris was rather a triumph than a penance, as, instead of being, like other criminals, seated on the stool of repentance, he was accorded by the First President, on account of his wound, a velvet cushion. Tall, handsome, with a gay and martial air, with hair cut in a fashion of his own—odd enough then, but closely resembling the style of to-day—Bonneval had grace, style, and an excessively free and outspoken manner; in fact, he was a perfect cavalier, well fitted by nature and art to become the fashion at Paris in the year 1717. He became the fashion accordingly, and the happy instant—as it seemed to them—was seized upon by his family to marry him. He was forty-two years old, and at the height of his reputation. "Why should he not marry?" said his mother, the excellent dowager Marchioness de Bonneval, and it speaks well for De Bonneval, and for the filial instinct of Frenchmen generally, that his ungovernable soul bent at his mother's wish. Personally he abhorred wedlock, and told his brother and his sister-in-law, "My mother is mad to make me take a wife; if she persists, I will not promise not to save all leave-taking by starting for Germany the day after the wedding." But the marchioness was obstinate, and as persistent as old ladies are apt to be when they happen to be mothers and Frenchwomen. She had not only made up her mind that her son should marry, but had decided upon the young lady. Mademoiselle Judith de Biron was one of the twenty-six children of the Marquis de Biron, then grand equerry, and afterwards duke, and peer, and mar-

shal of France, who enjoyed the particular favour of the regent—and indeed must have needed it sorely, with such an extensive family to provide for. All was arranged for the marriage, when, at the last moment, the Marchioness de Bonneval showed herself to be truly the mother of her eccentric son by “bolting” from the Hôtel de Biron, and taking refuge with the Duc de Bethune, who had a terrible time of it, before he could bring the old lady back to a sense of duty and the Hôtel de Biron. The marriage turned out badly, as might have been expected. On the day after the ill-omened union, the Marchioness de Biron and her new son held a noteworthy conversation. The mother-in-law caught Bonneval looking gloomy and listless, and attacked him with various and sundry of the pleasantries proper, no doubt, to the occasion, and suitable to the taste of the time. The reply was disconcerting in the extreme. “The fact is,” quoth Bonneval, seriously, “I am devilish sorry I got married.” This was a nice speech to make to a mother-in-law, and shows the fearless nature of the man. “You should have said so yesterday,” replied the old lady, drily, and the scene ended. Bonneval, however, if easy to catch, was hard to hold. Even the golden chains of wedlock were as green withes to this Gallo-Imperial-Tartar. No man was ever less married than he. Ten days after the ceremony he returned to Hungary, abandoning his wife, whom he never saw again. She was worthy of a better fate. In the odd society of two mad old marchionesses and a feather-headed soldier, stands out clear and bright against the dark background of regency manners and regency morals, the figure of this pure and affectionate woman—a widowed bride. She was emphatically what the French call a “beautiful soul.” She was unfortunate enough to love her husband, and to be proud of him. Nothing can be more affecting than the perusal of her letters to that agreeable scapegrace, who, by-the-way, rarely answered them. In every line of these beautiful epistles appear her abiding love for Bonneval; her pride and sympathy in his, just then, glorious career; her tender solicitude and anxiety for his safety. During the campaign of 1717 she writes: “My anxiety increases every day, like your inexactitude, and I am as persistent in tormenting myself as you are in neglecting me. Although I have reason to believe that no misfortune

has happened to you—as nobody has told me of anything of the kind—I cannot refrain from adding to my grief a thousand alarms, which throw me into a state you will not understand, since you can remain two months without giving me the least sign of life. From this I ought to conclude that the marks of my affection touch you but little; it is, however, of a nature to hope for a happier fate. Thus, being unable to change my heart, I must conform to your maxims, which are, perhaps, to love in silence.” Addressing him at first as “My dear Master,” she at length, discouraged by his neglect, and fearing to weary him by her tender letters, falls back upon their relationship, and calls him “My dear Cousin,” as if a nearer and dearer name were forbidden her. After a year of separation she writes: “I cannot wish you the power of knowing what your absence makes me suffer; and if I could show you what passes in my heart, I would not do so, for fear that pity would excite a tenderness which I desire for myself alone. I must confess that the heart which outlives indifference is sorely tried. I bear the burden, but yet I cannot complain. My own tenderness for you compensates me in some degree for the condition in which I exist, and which would be insupportable if I were not sustained by the remembrance of my past happiness—the cause of my present misery. No, I will not complain, for although I am utterly and frightfully wretched, I cannot regret the tranquillity of my former life. I care for nothing on earth but your love. “I fear always that glory is a redoubtable rival to me. However, it seems to me that we ought to balance your heart, and that when glory calls upon you to expose your life, I ought to make you take all permissible precautions for its preservation. Reflect upon this, my dear master, that my sole ambition is to preserve you, as you alone can make me happy. To-day I can only talk to you of myself, for I think only of you, and all else becomes insupportable. I kiss you with all my heart, and would buy with the half of my life the happiness of this letter.” The effect of these charming letters upon Bonneval was a profound esteem for his wife—of whom he always spoke in the highest terms—an indisposition to answer her, and a resolution to keep at a distance. The rather one-sided correspondence continued till he took the turban, when his wife all at once left off writing; and it is

curiously characteristic of him that he then complained bitterly of her neglect, and wanted to know what he had done that she should leave off writing to him. On Madame de Bonneval being informed of this, she wrote him one more letter, which is unfortunately lost. While this pure and gentle woman was wearing out her heart of gold, in vain regrets for the dashing soldier who loved and rode away, that hero was rapidly ascending the ladder of fame. Promoted on his arrival at Vienna to the grade of general of infantry, he set off at once to serve in the army of Prince Eugène, who opened the campaign with the siege of Belgrade, celebrated in story and in song. Bonneval exhibited wondrous valour, and military talent of that instantaneous kind which resembles inspiration. He was again wounded, but the town was taken and the Porte sued for peace, which was concluded in 1718 at Passarowitz. Shortly afterwards he took Messina, and when tranquillity reigned in Europe it seemed that he had nothing more left to do, except to enjoy his brilliant position, to wait for the command of the imperial armies—which could hardly fail to be his one day—and, perhaps one may think, to send for his wife. None of these ideas occurred to Bonneval, who, at the age of forty-four, appears to have been that supremely ridiculous personage—a middle-aged young man, encouraging around him a knot of wild dogs, who made Vienna unsafe for peaceable citizens after dark. German fun has never seemed very funny to other nations, and at the period in question it took the form of upsetting sedan-chairs, cutting the cables of the vessels moored in the Danube, and other horse-play equally humorous. Bonneval, whose general habits fitted him better for a camp than a city, fell in with the mad humour of these wags, and being of a frank, easy, and lovable nature, made many dangerous friends. He consorted with poets rather than with priests; went oftener to the cabaret than to mass; had songs written about him; and at last, such is the influence of evil communications, took to writing verses himself. This was his ruin. For a long while there had been a coolness between him and his old patron and commander, Prince Eugène. In fact, the prince, who had been a wild wassailer in his day, was growing old, and—bowed down by the weight of honours, was disposed to forget that he had once been conveyed to the guardhouse with the insignia

of the Golden Fleece upon him. A species of gloomy fanaticism of the Spanish kind was in vogue at Vienna, against which the life led by Bonneval was an extravagant protest. The Frenchman now made a decided blunder. Being a member of the Aulic Council of War, of which Prince Eugène was president, he took it upon himself to remonstrate with him touching the influence which the Countess Baththyany exercised over him in disposing of patronage. Bonneval was naturally irritated at seeing the creatures of the countess promoted over the heads of gallant but scampish officers of his acquaintance, but the prince never forgave him. More than this, he told the countess, who determined that he should not forget. Enraged at further slights, Bonneval produced a copy of verses satirising the venal followers of the prince, to whom it was at once pointed out that to attack his creatures was only to attack himself indirectly. Bonneval's faithful wife heard of his danger, and wrote: "I have been much pained by the reports circulated here touching your quarrel with Prince Eugène When our friends become our enemies they are, I think, most dangerous." Feminine instinct proved unerring. Bonneval was obliged to leave Vienna, and to take his regiment into garrison at Brussels, where we find him in 1724, rather gouty, but leading a joyous life at suppers and concerts, until he got into a fatal scrape with the governor, the Marquis de Prié. It is almost incredible, unless we take Bonneval's peculiar character into consideration, that a nobleman, a distinguished commander, and a man of the world, should, on the verge of his fiftieth birthday, have been absurd enough to get into serious trouble anent a silly piece of gossip about the young Queen of Spain. The Marchioness de Prié and her daughter had been talking scandal about this little Queen Elizabeth, the daughter of the late regent Orleans, when Bonneval (who hated the governor as a creature of Prince Eugène) suddenly discovered that he was allied to the royal family of France through the houses of Foix and Albret; that the Queen of Spain was, therefore, a kind of cousin of his; and that he was bound to espouse her quarrel. Hereupon he defied De Prié, whose sole answer was to send him under a guard of fifty dragoons to Antwerp, and to lock him up in the citadel. Hence he wrote to everybody and appealed to everybody; declared the ques-

tion of discipline insignificant; and once more delivered himself of that creed of persons of quality with which he had whilome favoured Chamillart—"Persons of my birth have three masters: God, their honour, and their sovereign. We owe to the last no service which could offend the two first." In other words, this is an appeal to what is called, even to this day, a "higher law," and means, in plain language, that the writer intends to do exactly what pleases himself. To improve matters, he sent a species of cartel to Prince Eugène, and after intriguing for awhile at the Hague, whither he betook himself after leaving the citadel of Antwerp, he went on to Vienna, to meet the charges against him. Here he was arrested again, and being brought before the Council of War at the instance of Prince Eugène, was imprisoned for a year in a fortified town, after which he went to Venice, the fatal theatre of his first desertion.

There can be hardly two opinions as to the treatment experienced by Bonneval at the hands of the emperor. A distinguished general officer, the hero of many daring exploits, he found himself, in his declining years, exiled and disgraced for a crime which injured nobody. His letters to the Marquis de Prié and to Prince Eugène were offensive beyond doubt, but the crime of constructive insubordination could barely justify the Empire in casting off a faithful servant—so poor in circumstances that, after a short stay in Venice, he had scarcely the means of subsistence.

At the end of his resources, without cash, credit, or any character (except for courage) to speak of, our elderly viveur found himself absolutely under the necessity of again taking service under some flag or other. Commencing to intrigue with Spain, he received friendly notice from the Imperial ambassador—at a masquerade, of all places in the world—to be careful what he wrote and said, as it would be easy for the emperor to have him kidnapped from a town like Venice; and moreover, that if he could only keep himself quiet, his quarrel with Prince Eugène could be easily made up, and his return to Vienna assured. It was the misfortune of Bonneval, who ordinarily exhibited an open trustful nature, to doubt the sincerity of this intimation. He, generally so brave, saw only a threat, and cast about for a place of safety. Switzerland was hardly safe, nor Holland either; he was not rich

enough to live in London, according to his rank; and at last pitched upon Constantinople as the safest refuge. At Bosnia Serai, a frontier fortress belonging to the Turks, he was recognised by a major in the Austrian service, who had come over from Essek on some business connected with his regiment. This major lost no time in denouncing him to the commandant of the place, and protested formally against his being allowed to enter Turkey or the Turkish service. Bonneval was at once put under arrest, but treated otherwise civilly enough, by the pacha in command, who, however, persisted in detaining him, the thrashings that he had helped Prince Eugène to give the Turks having made them unusually subservient to the wishes of the Imperial Court. At last Austria formally demanded, through its ambassador at Constantinople, the extradition of Bonneval, and laid schemes for carrying him off from Bosnia Serai, "dead or alive." After fourteen months of detention on the frontier, where he endeared himself to the Corps of Janissaries, Bonneval received the fatal news that the Porte had decided upon his extradition. This meant—at least Bonneval thought so—death, or, worse still, a life in prison, and determined him to play his last card. He took the turban, to the delight of the pacha, who embraced him "with effusion." Two days later arrived the formal order of extradition, which it was then impossible to obey. Bonneval was a Turk, duly proclaimed and recognised, was backed by several thousand janissaries, and, as a convert, could not be given up to his enemies. Probably the Turks were very glad to get so excellent a soldier on such easy terms, and Bonneval does not appear to have regretted a decision which, in his own opinion, was forced upon him by the virulence of the Viennese, and the apathy of the French ambassador. Elevated to the rank of pacha, he lived as a Turk for seventeen years in great honour and consideration. He said, indeed, that it was only in Turkey that he received Christian treatment. Oddly consoling himself with the reflection that he was now as good a Turk as ever he had been a Christian, he accommodated himself well enough to his new mode of life, but there are yet indications that, from time to time, he felt strange yearnings for civilised life. His contempt for the Turks, who were deaf to his projects for remodelling their army, was immense. At last his good-

humoured toleration of them turned to disgust, and he opened negotiations with his brother the marquis to make his peace with Rome, and assist his escape from Islam. These plans were cut short by his death—of gout—on the 23rd March, 1747, the anniversary of the birth of Mohammed, as is set forth in the epitaph of Achmet Pacha, sometime Count de Bonneval.

A CHARMING FELLOW.

BY FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE.

AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "MABEL'S PROGRESS," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XLIV.

It was no more possible to do anything unusual in Whitford without arresting attention, and being subjected to animadversion, than it was possible for atmospheric conditions to change without affecting the barometer.

Who could tell how it got abroad in the town, that young Mrs. Errington was in the habit of following her husband about; of watching him, spying on his actions, and examining his private correspondence? Mr. Obadiah Gibbs, who could have told more than anyone on the latter head, was not given to talking. Yet the fact oozed out.

It assumed, of course, a great variety of forms and colours, according to the more or less distorting mediums through which it passed. The fact, as uttered by Miss Chubb, for example, was a very different-looking fact from that which was narrated with bated breath, and nods, and winks, by Mrs. Smith, the surgeon's wife. And her version, again, varied considerably from those of Mr. Gladwish, the Methodist shoemaker; Mr. Barker, the Church of England chemist; and the bosom friends of the servants at Ivy Lodge. Still, under one shape and another, Mrs. Algernon Errington's jealousy of her husband, and her consequent behaviour, were within the cognisance of Whitford, and were discussed in all circles there.

The predominant feeling ran strongly against Castalia. There were persons, indeed, who, exercising an exemplary impartiality (on which they much prided themselves), refused to take sides in the matter, but considered it most probable that both parties were to blame. Mrs. Smith was among these. She had, she declared, that rare gift in woman—a

judicial mind, although her conception of the judicial functions appeared to be limited to putting on the black cap, and passing sentence. But in the main, public sympathy was with Algernon. He had offended many old acquaintances by his aristocratic marriage; but at least he was now making the only amends in his power by being extremely unhappy in it! A great many wiseacres, male and female, were now able to shake their heads, and say they had known all along how it would turn out. This came of flying too high; for, if Mrs. Errington, senior, was an Ancram by birth, her husband had been only a country surgeon—not even M.D., though she called him "doctor." And this justifying of their predictions was, in a vague way, imputed to Algernon as a merit; or, at the least, it softened disapproval. Then, too, in justice to Whitfordians, it must be said that all their knowledge of Castalia showed them an insolent, supercilious, uninteresting woman, who made no secret of her contempt for them and their town, and who, "although but a poor postmaster's wife, when you came to look at it," as Mrs. Smith the judicial truly observed, gave herself more airs than a duchess. What good, or capacities for good, there might be in her, was hidden from Whitford, whilst her unpleasant qualities were abundantly manifested to all beholders.

Poor Castalia, in her quite unaffected nonchalance and disregard of "all those people," was totally ignorant how much resentment and dislike she was creating, and in what a hostile atmosphere she was living. Her husband's popularity, dimmed by his alliance with her, began to revive, when it was perceived that she persecuted and harassed him, and (as was shrewdly suspected) involved him in money difficulties by her extravagance. Some of the men thought it served him right; why did he marry such a woman? But the ladies, as a rule, were on Algernon's side.

There were exceptions, of course. Miss McDougall stood up for her friend, as she said, albeit with some admixture of Mrs. Smith's judicial tendency to blame everybody all round, and a personal disposition towards spitefulness. Minnie Bodkin said very little, when the subject was mentioned in her presence; but when an opinion was forced from her, she did not deliver it entirely in favour of Algernon. She was sorry for his wife, she said. And nine-tenths of her hearers would retort with

raised hands and eyes, that they, for their part, were sorry for the young man, and that they could not understand what dear Minnie found to pity in Mrs. Algernon Errington. "A woman who spies on her husband, my dear! Who condescends to open his letters—how a woman can so degrade herself, is a mystery to me! And they say she actually follows him about the streets at night—skulks after him! Oh! it is almost too bad to repeat!"

"I don't know that all that is true. But if it be so, it seems to me that there is great cause for pity," Minnie would reply. And the answer was set down to poor dear Miss Bodkin's eccentricity.

There had been, for some time back, a talk of carelessness and mismanagement at the Whitford Post-office. Then Roger Heath made no secret of his loss, and was not soft-hearted or mild in his manner of speaking of it. He complained aloud, and spared nobody. And there were plenty of voices ready to carry his denunciations through all classes of Whitford society. It was very strange! Such a thing as the loss of a money-letter had been almost unknown, during the reign of the late postmaster; and now there was, not one case, but two—three—a dozen! The number increased, as it passed from mouth to mouth, at a wonderful rate. There must be great negligence (to say the least of it) somewhere in the Whitford Post-office. If the present postmaster was too much above his business to look after it properly, it was a pity his high friends didn't remove him to some situation better suited to such a fine gentleman!

To be sure he was worried out of his wits by that woman. It really was true that she haunted the office at all hours. She had been seen slipping out of the private door in the entry. She was even said to have a pass-key, which enabled her to go in and out at her will. Was it not rumoured on very good authority that she had actually gone to the office alone, in the dead of night? What could she want to be always prowling about there for? It was all very well to say she went to spy on her husband, but if things went wrong in the office in consequence of her spyings, it became a public evil. Anyway, it was most extraordinary and unheard-of behaviour, and somebody ought to take the matter up! This latter somewhat vague suggestion was a favourite climax to the gossip on the subject of the Algernon Erringtons.

With respect to their private affairs, things did not mend. Tradesmen dunned, and grumbled, and could not get their money, and some declined to execute further orders from Ivy Lodge until their accounts were settled. Among the angriest had been Mr. Ravell, the principal draper of the town, whom Castalia had honoured with a good deal of her custom. But one day, not long after Algernon's conversation with his clerk mentioned in the last chapter, he was met in the High-street by Mr. Ravell, who bowed very deferentially, and stopped, hesitatingly. "Could I say a word to you, sir?" said Mr. Ravell.

"Certainly," replied Algernon. They were close to the post-office, and he took the draper into his private room, and bade him be seated.

"I suppose, Mr. Ravell," said Algernon, with a shrug and a smile, "that you have come about your bill! Mrs. Errington mentioned to me a short time ago that you had been rather importunate. Upon my word, Mr. Ravell, I think you need not have been in such a deuce of a hurry! I know Mrs. Errington does not understand making bargains, and I suppose you don't neglect to arrange your prices so as not to lose by giving her a little credit, eh?"

This was said lightly, but either the words or the tone made Mr. Ravell colour and look a little confused. He was seated, and Algernon was standing near him with his back to the fire, expressing a sense of his own superiority to the draper, in every turn of his well-built figure, and every line of his half-smiling, half-bored countenance.

"Why, you see, Mr. Errington, we are not in the habit of giving long credit, unless to a few old-established customers who deal largely with us. It would not suit our style of doing business. And it was reported that you were not settled permanently here. And—and—one or two unpleasant things had been said. But I hope you will not continue to feel so greatly offended with us for sending in the account. It was merely in the regular way of our transactions, I assure you."

"Oh, I'm not offended at all, Mr. Ravell! And I hope by the end of this month to clear off all scores between us entirely. Mrs. Errington has not furnished me with any details, but——"

Ravell looked up quickly. "Clear off all scores between us, sir?" he said.

"I presume you will have no objection to that, Mr. Ravell?"

"Oh, of course, sir, you will have your joke! I am glad you are not offended. You see, ladies don't always understand these matters. Mrs. Errington was a little severe on us when she paid the account yesterday. At least so my cashier said."

"My wife paid your account yesterday?" cried Algernon, with a blank look.

"Yes, sir, in full. We should have been quite satisfied if settlement had been made up to the end of last quarter. But it was paid in full. Oh, I thought you had been aware of it! Mrs. Errington said—my people understood her to say, that it was by your wish, as you were so greatly annoyed at the bill being sent in so often."

"Oh! Yes. Quite right, Mr. Ravell."

He spoke slowly, and as if he were thinking of something other than the words he uttered. Ravell looked at him curiously. Algernon suddenly caught the man's eye, and broke into a little careless laugh. "The fact is," said he, with a frank toss of his head, "that I did not know Mrs. Errington had paid you. I suppose she had received some remittances, or—but in short," checking himself, and laughing once more, "I daresay you won't trouble yourself as to where the money comes from so long as it comes to you!"

Mr. Ravell laughed back again, but rather in a forced manner. "Not at all, sir! Not at all," he said, bowing and smiling. And, seeing Algernon look significantly at his watch, he bowed and smiled himself out of the office.

Then Mr. Ravell went away to report to his wife the details of his interview with the postmaster, and before noon the next day it was reported throughout Whitford that Mrs. Algernon Errington had the command of mysterious stores of money whereof her husband knew nothing; and that, nevertheless, she ran him into debt right and left, and refused to pay a farthing until she was absolutely forced to do so.

This report was not calculated to make those tradesmen who had not been paid more patient and forbearing. If Mrs. Algernon Errington could find money for one she could for another, they argued, and a shower of bills descended on Ivy Lodge within the next week or two. Algernon said they came like a swarm of

locusts, and threatened to devour all before them. He acknowledged to himself that the payment of Ravell's bill had been a fatal precedent. "And, perhaps," he thought, "there was no need for getting rid of the notes after all! However, the thing is done, and can't be undone."

The necessity for another appeal to Lord Seely grew more and more imminent. Castalia had displayed an unexpected obstinacy about the matter. She had held to her refusal to ask for more money from her uncle, but Algernon had not yet urged her very strongly to do so. The moment had now come, he thought, when an appeal absolutely must be made, and he doubted not his own power to cause Castalia to make it. Her manner, to be sure, had been very singular of late; alternately sullen and excited, passing from cold silence to passionate tenderness, without any intermediate phases. He had surprised her occasionally crying convulsively, and at other times, on coming home, he had found her sitting absolutely unoccupied, with a blank, fixed face. The few persons who saw Castalia frequently, observed the change in her, and commented on it. Miss Chubb once dropped a word to Algernon, indicating a vague suspicion that his wife's intellect was disordered. He did not choose to appear to perceive the drift of her words, but the hint dwelt in his mind.

"You must write to Lord Seely this evening, Cassy," he said one day on returning home to dinner. He had found his wife at her desk, and, on seeing him, she had huddled away a confused heap of papers into a drawer, and hastily shut it.

"Must I?" she answered gloomily.

"Well, I don't wish to use an offensive phrase. You will write to oblige me. It has been put off long enough."

"Why should I oblige you?" said Castalia, looking up at him with her sunken eyes. She looked so ill and haggard, as to arrest Algernon's attention—not too lavishly bestowed on her in general.

"Cassy," said he, "I'm afraid you are not well!"

The tears came into her eyes. She turned her head away. "Do you really care whether I am ill or well?" she asked.

"Do I really care? What a question! Of course I care. Are you suffering?"

"N—no; not now. I believe I should not feel any suffering if you only loved me, Ancram."

"Castalia! How can you be so absurd?"

He rose from his seat beside her, and walked impatiently up and down the room. Nothing irritated him so much as to be called on for sentiment or tenderness.

"There!" she exclaimed, with a little despondent gesture of the head, "you were speaking and looking kindly, and I have driven you away! I wish I was dead."

Algernon stopped in his walk, and cast a singular look at his wife. Then after a moment he said, in his usual light manner, "My dear Cassy, you are low and nervous. It really is not good for you to mope by yourself as you do. Come, rouse yourself to write this letter to my lord, then, after dinner, you can have the fly to drive to my mother's. She complains that she sees you very seldom."

"Will you come too, Ancram?"

"I—well, yes; if it is possible, I will come too."

"I think," said Castalia, putting her hands on his shoulders and gazing wistfully into his face, "that if you and I could go away to some quiet strange place—far away from all these odious people—across the seas somewhere—I think we might be happy even now."

"Upon my honour, there's nothing I should like so much as to get away across the seas! And you might as well hint to my lord, in the course of your letter, that I should be very well contented with a berth in the Colonies. A good climate, of course! One wouldn't care to be shipped off to Sierra Leone!"

"I will write that to Uncle Val, willingly. But—don't ask me to beg money of him again."

Algernon made a rapid calculation in his mind, and answered without appreciable pause, "Well, Cassy, it shall be as you will. But as to begging—that, I think, is scarcely the word between us and Lord Seely."

"I'll run upstairs and bathe my eyes, and I shall still have time to write before dinner," said Castalia, and left the room.

When he was alone, Algernon opened the writing-table drawer, and glanced at

the papers in it. Castalia's hurried manner of concealing them had suggested to his mind the suspicion, that she might have been writing secretly to her uncle. He found no letter addressed to Lord Seely, but he did find an unfinished fragment of writing addressed to himself. It consisted of a few incoherent phrases of despondency and reproach—the expression of confidence betrayed, and affection unrequited. There was a word or two in it about the writer's weariness of life, and desire to quit it. Castalia had written many such fragments of late; sometimes as a mere outlet for suppressed feeling, sometimes under the impression that she really could not long support an existence uncheered by sympathy or counsel, embittered by jealousy and chilled by neglect. She had written such fragments, and then torn them up in many a lonely hour, but she had never thought of complaining of Algernon to Lord Seely. She would complain of him to no human being. But all Algernon's insight into his wife's character did not enable him to feel sure of this. Indeed, he had often said to himself, that no rational being could be expected to follow the vagaries of Castalia's sickly fancies, and impracticable temper. He would not have been surprised to find her pouring out a long string of lamentations about her lot to Lord Seely. He was not much surprised at what he did find her to have written, although the state of feeling it displayed seemed to him as unreasonable and unaccountable as ever. He gave himself no account of the motive which made him take the fragment of writing, fold it, and place it carefully inside a little pocket-book which he carried.

"I wonder," he thought to himself, "if Castalia is likely to die!"

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