

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

Whether I am I, is a question which most of us can answer with tolerable confidence; and yet it has puzzled physicians and metaphysicians very considerably. We are told that all the material particles, all the carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and so forth composing the human body, change in the course of a certain number of years; they enter into new combinations. Materially or corporeally speaking, I am not the same man that I was ten years ago. My bodily weight is made up of wholly different particles, and I am not I; the I of 1870 is not the same as the I of 1860; I am another man altogether. As to the metaphysicians, they have so mystified the world with the synthesis of the I with the non-I, the I with the non-I, the ego with the non-ego, that nobody can make anything of the matter. There was a very good plan adopted, according to lyric authority, by the little old woman who fell asleep on the king's highway. Being bewildered with a truck which had been played by a peddler, named Stent, she resolved to make use of her little dog as a test-proof of her personal identity, an honest witness to show whether she was really herself or not. She stated the case thus:—

If I be I, I do hope I be, I have a little dog at home, And he knows me. And then proceeds to argue:— If I be I, I wag my little tail; but if I be not I, He'll bark and wall.

The question of personal identity often resolves itself into a mere case of imposture, the case of pretending to be what we are not, for the attainment of certain ends by indirect means. This is a famous instrument in the hands of the dramatist. Many and many a plot, good, bad, and indifferent, turns upon some machination of this kind. Upon some audience are sometimes kept in the dark until the very last scene; whereas in other instances the dramatist prefers to let them into the secret at once. In Scribner's opera of the Crown Diamonds, so pleasantly jewelled with sparkling music by Auber, the veritable Queen of Spain pretends to be a brigand's daughter; and her lover, innocent fellow, has not the slightest suspicion of the real truth until the dazzling scene of the throne-room in the last act. Again, in Lord Lytton's Lady of Lyons, was (the audience) know all about the circumstances which drove the gardener's son to the personation of an Italian prince, and the agony which Pauline Deschappelles suffered when she discovered the cheat; but as Claudio Melnotte, much to the satisfaction of everybody, is a good fellow at heart, everything turns out well in the end.

The records of courts of justice present multiplied instances more or less allied to this in character. Bamfylde Moore Carew (if in history be trustworthy, which is doubtful) was a famous example of a bold, unscrupulous personator. He could so change the expression of his features, the arrangement of his hair, the apparent bulk of his person, the bend or curve of his shoulders, the shape of his legs, his mien or gait, and his general appearance, as to deceive everybody. On one occasion he so pricked his hands and face, and so effectually rubbed in gunpowder and bay-salt, as to appear exactly like a man suffering severely from smallpox; thereby averting imprisonment as a seaman. When in America, and dressed as a Quaker, he deceived all the real Quakers in Philadelphia. On one occasion, as a gentleman unknown in the neighborhood, he visited Colonel Strangeways. The conversation turned upon the notorious Bamfylde Moore Carew. The colonel said he knew him well, and would never allow himself to be deceived as other persons had been. The real Bamfylde, an hour or two afterwards, betook himself to a gipsy haunt known to him in the neighborhood, and underwent a most thorough personal transformation. He appeared at the colonel's house as a wretched object, all rags and tatters, leaning on crutches, displaying a counterfeit wound on the leg, and uttering piteous moans. He received charity from the colonel, who did not suspect the trick. Bamfylde again appeared as a gentleman guest at the colonel's table that evening, and announced what he had done. Bamfylde, who was well-known at Mr. Portman's, near Blandford, appeared there one day as a rat-catcher, and after creating great amusement by his cleverness, was addressed by a Mr. Pleydell, who expressed pleasure at meeting the celebrated rat-catcher, whom he had never seen before. "Yes, you have," says Bamfylde; who announced that he was a certain wretched beggar to whom Mr. Pleydell had given charity a few days before. Upon a declaration that such a deception would not pass undetected a second time, Bamfylde accepted the challenge. Next day, Mr. Pleydell's servants were called out to an old woman, who was leaning on a crutch, and dragging along three miserable children; she was so importunate, and the children were so noisy, that the master came out, spoke to her, gave her money, and sent her away. It was not known that Bamfylde and the old woman were one person until he announced the fact at Mr. Pleydell's table that same evening. So it was everywhere; whether as a shipwrecked mariner, a Kentish farmer impoverished by floods, or a clergyman brought to distress by unavoidable calamities, this strange man's disguise is described as all but impenetrable.

The touching story of the Beauty of Buttermere presents an example of personation for fraudulent purposes. In 1792 a volume was published under title of "A Fortnight's Ramble," giving an account of a visit to the Lake district of Cumberland. The tourist at the little inn at Buttermere, was waited upon by a young girl of exquisite beauty, fourteen or fifteen years of age; and he wrote as he felt, about finding such a girl under so humble a roof. When he went again, a few years afterwards, he found her a full-grown woman, more lovely than ever. He also saw evidences that his book had attracted visitors to the spot; for there were scribbled verses on the walls of the inn, not only in English, but in French, Latin, and Greek, all in praise of the reigning beauty of the Lakes. In 1802 the inn was visited by the (so-called) Honorable Colonel Hope, brother of the Earl of Hopetoun; a handsome man, with a very winning address. He proposed to Mary and was accepted. Not long after the marriage, he fell into the meshes of the law, and proved to be a man named Hatfield, who had committed forgery, bigamy, and a long list of other crimes, which brought him to the scaffold.

Real similarity of form and features, without any attempt at fraud or deception, is a different thing from the kind of personation above adverted to. Shakespeare made excellent use of it in his ever-fresh Comedy of Errors. But concerning remarkable likenesses, it should always be borne in mind that two people who seem wonderfully

alike apart, will usually be found, when they are brought together, to be very little alike, or very much less so than was honestly supposed.

Medical men are aware of the co-existence of persons bearing a marvellous resemblance one to another; and so are judges and barristers. Disputed cases of the kind are by no means uncommon. Early in the present century there were two men, Hoag and Parker, so exactly or so nearly alike that it was no easy matter to know which was which. One of them, a rogue, benefited by this resemblance. Being apprehended for some criminal offense, and placed at the bar, some of the witnesses swore that the man before them was Hoag; others swore that he was Parker; as the benefit of the doubt generally goes with the accused in such cases, the man was acquitted.

Very considerable embarrassment sometimes arises at coroners' inquests, owing to the difficulty of settling the identity of the deceased person. Three cases out of several may be selected to show how honest persons may be self-deceived.

There was an instance in 1817, in which the dead body of a woman was found tied to a boat, drawn up near Greenwich. At an inquest consequently held, an old man came forward and swore that the deceased was his daughter, the wife of an out-pensioner. He described a fierce quarrel which had taken place between the married couple, and in which he had interfered to avert serious consequences; they left his house together, and he had not since seen the woman. Other persons also swore that the deceased was the old man's daughter. The police were set upon the track of the husband, who was away; but they suddenly lighted upon the wife herself, alive and well! The old man and his neighbors were all surprised at this fact; the Coroner severely reprimanded them for the blunder they had made; but it was admitted that the personal resemblance between the two women was considerable, even to the existence of a mark on one arm. The deceased body was not identified; nor was it known whether the death was by murder or by suicide.

In 1866, the coroner of Burton-on-Trent held an inquest on the body of a man found in the river near the town. Two respectable men, who came to view the body, at once announced it to be that of a brother of theirs, who had been for a short time missing from home. Their statement was believed, their claim allowed; and they were permitted to bury the body in Burton-on-Trent churchyard. The inquest was adjourned, in the hope of obtaining additional evidence as to the cause of death. When the jury reassembled, they were surprised to see the real brother enter the room, alive and well. There seems to have been no collusion here; the relatives had been deceived by a great likeness; and the parish repaid them the cost of the funeral. In this, and the other mentioned instances, failures attended all the attempts made to identify the dead body, or to ascertain the cause of death.

Perhaps the Hackney Wick case, which riveted public attention in 1868, was one of the most remarkable on record in regard to the persistency with which several persons asserted an identity, under circumstances which would have necessitated a particular man being three or four different men at one time. There were some half-finished houses near the Hackney Wick, or Victoria Park, station of the North London Railway. The builder, having determined to finish them, went to one of the houses in April of the above-named year, opened it, and perceived a very offensive odor in the passages and kitchen. A little search brought to light a dead body in a large cupboard under the stairs. The state of the body denoted that death must have occurred two or three months before. There was a scar over one eyebrow, such as might have been occasioned by a fall or a bruise. The clothes were good, but a little blood-stained; and an additional odd bit was found near the body. An empty phial, labelled "Laudanum poison," was on a shelf in the cupboard, with only just sufficient liquid in it to permit of chemical analysis. The person appeared to have been about thirty-five years old, and five feet six inches high. At an inquest, shortly afterwards held, a carpenter deposed that, in the preceding month of February, he had seen a gentlemanly-looking man sitting on a heap of building materials near the unfinished houses, cutting up little bits of wood, as a boy might do who was making a boat. He gave strange and incoherent answers to some questions put to him; but, as he was quiet and inoffensive in manner, and was not seen again, the incident went out of recollection.

But now ensued the extraordinary episode of conflicting identification. The carpenter, on seeing the dead body, at once declared it to be that of the poor demented gentleman whom he had seen two months earlier. A lady came forward, and described a brother of hers who had been missing from his home for some months. He had another sister, who lived at Hackney Wick, though his own residence was elsewhere. On seeing the dead body, she pronounced it to be either verily her brother, or very much like him. This lady's testimony was not incompatible with that of the carpenter; but the complication was now to come. A lady and gentleman came forward to state that a man had deserted his wife and family about eighteen months previously, taking away two thousand pounds' worth of property with him; they produced a photograph, which struck those who saw it as possessing much resemblance to the features of the deceased person. But while this incident was under consideration, the friends of an emigrant appeared, stating that he had returned from New Zealand and then disappeared. Nothing was done however, towards identifying the body in this quarter. Dr. Ellis, physician to St. Luke's Hospital, stated in evidence that on the night of the 1st of February a lunatic named Heasman had escaped from the hospital in Old Street, in a most extraordinary way, seeing that he must have passed through six locked doorways, climbed up a wall fifteen feet high, and jumped or dropped on the pavement outside. Heasman, however, was a strong active man, of thirty or forty years of age, and might possibly have accomplished what would be beyond the muscular powers of most men. Dr. Ellis, when he saw the dead body, at once pronounced it to be that of Heasman, wearing the same clothes as he had worn at the hospital. On examining an old book found near the body, the name of Harnett was seen written on the lining. Dr. Ellis said that there was a man named Harnett lodged in one of the six rooms through which the lunatic must have passed in effecting his escape. Strong as this testimony was, a lady, who had heard Dr. Ellis give his evidence, nevertheless insisted that the deceased was her husband, who had been missing for some time; she especially identified a peculiar mark on one of the fingers.

Next came a witness who supported the view taken by Dr. Ellis. A brother of Heas-

man stated that the unfortunate man, though sane on most subjects, had for many years been under an hallucination that he had been poisoned, and was now dead—speaking of himself in the past tense. He was married, and had a family of eight children. He had been an inmate of St. Luke's about eighteen months. Like Dr. Ellis, this brother believed the deceased to have been the lunatic Heasman. In spite of all this, however, a new witness, Mrs. Mary Anne Banks, distinctly swore that the deceased was her husband. He was a commercial traveller, who had been for some time missing. She stated that there was a general resemblance both in form and features. She described (before seeing the body) a very peculiar mark which her husband had on one of his fingers; and the deceased had exactly such a mark. Her sisters, two married women, corroborated her assertion that the deceased was her husband Banks—also comparing the fingers, the features, the general contour of face, the beard, the moustache, the chest, the shoulders, all tallied. While the jury, utterly bewildered, were considering this evidence, another lady came forward, and showed a photograph of a missing gentleman, much more resembling the deceased than that which had been produced from St. Luke's. Mrs. Banks, and Mr. Heasman's brother, both appeared on a subsequent occasion, and each insisted on the truth of the respective stories told. Cumulative testimony, however, was forthcoming in support of the St. Luke's incident. Mrs. Heasman, wife of the unfortunate man, not only corroborated the identity, but stated that the name of Heasman, found on some of the deceased man's under-clothing, was written by herself, and that the dark-blue trousers were the same which she had stitched with the aid of a sewing-machine. Dr. Ellis, once more, found that the deceased had lost a tooth, exactly corresponding in position with one lost by Heasman. The coroner could not discern that any of the witnesses would benefit by the death of the deceased; he gave them all credit for being sincere; however certain it was that some of them must have been mistaken. The jury, after a patient investigation, agreed with the coroner, that the deceased was the lunatic Heasman; but they could not find how he had come by his death, although they believed he had poisoned himself.—All the Year Round.

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