

CHEQUE No. 9031. A FASCINATING ROMANCE OF A LONDON SUBURB.

By the Author of "By Crooked Paths," "Sheathed in Velvet," Etc.

"I shall go down by the mail to-night, to Plymouth," I said resolutely, standing up, and pulling myself together. "I may go on as far as Naples by the boat; but in any case I shall have the satisfaction of bidding her good-by. See to the warehousing of all these things, Jen, or send Levens up from the city to see to it, and find out if there are any outstanding bills, and settle them. Send me up a small bag to Waterloo at half past 8 to-morrow, mother."

The next night Cynthia and I sat in her cabin together. By the use of my name Horace had secured her a cabin to herself—not a very difficult matter at that time of the year—so we had these last few minutes free from interruption. "I was afraid you would do this, Gerald," she said, with her sad eyes fixed on my face. "I told Horace not to put the luggage on the luggage until he got it to the railway station, but I suppose he forgot. It was not wise to come, dear—it is only prolonging our sorrow to its utmost limits."

"I came in the hope that even now I should persuade you to change your mind and come back with me, Cynthia," I said. "Gerald," she said solemnly, laying her cold hand on my arm, "I will try to convince you that in the present circumstances nothing in the world would induce me to marry you, and I shall not be sorry you have come. Though your loyal love blinds you to the horror of this crime now, it would not be so early as you imagine anything—any earthly torment—exceeding that which I should suffer when your present blindness cleared away, and you saw me and my sin as they really are. Can you understand what my anguish would be a day after day, when I saw—or fancied I saw—your manner to me growing cooler and more reserved? How should I be able to help thinking the change was due to your memory of that shameful act? The thought would be an intolerable torture; I could not live under it; I should go mad or kill myself. The bare idea is so terrible that, if you would tell me no, I must either go back and marry you or throw myself over the side of the ship this instant. I would a thousand times rather drown myself."

She spoke without excitement, but with a calm solemnity which carried conviction to my sorrowful heart. I had nothing to say. What answer could I give to such a declaration as she had just made? She, too, sat quiet for a few minutes, with that vacant look in her eyes of which Jen had spoken; and then she began to speak in a low, dreamy voice that made me fancy she hardly knew she was speaking.

"If heaven, in infinite mercy, would let me wake up and find it all a dream—a bad, cruel dream—if I could come to you and say, 'Gerald, I have been laboring under hallucinations; I did not do what I said I did; I am as innocent of the crime as you are, I should resign myself to you with a joy you cannot realize. I would come to you and strive, by a lifelong gratitude, to show you the thankfulness for your goodness to me and mine. But that is all fanciful nonsense, isn't it?' she said gently, as she roused herself from her languor. "Only I should like you always to remember, dear, that my love is as much as and as entirely yours in this moment of our earthly separation as it has ever been in the days of our brightest hope!"

The warning bell for passengers going ashore began to ring. There was a minute of keenest agony, and I was out and up on deck, with my traveling cap pulled well down over my eyes and my fur collar up to my ears. "Good-by, Quinton," said the captain; "I'll try to make the voyage as pleasant as possible to your friends."

CHAPTER VII.

Cynthia had gone from me, and still I lived. I cannot say it was a very happy, or even cheerful life—but I lived. I neither took to gambling, drinking, nor bad company, but I became very fond of my own society, had a set of chambers fitted up over the offices, and spent the best part of my time there, smoking a great deal more than was good for me, and dwelling upon the past in a way that was not conducive to good health and spirits.

Whenever I met an acquaintance about town, he told me I was looking "precious queer," and advised a trip to Canada, or the States; and I knew my mother and Jen—although the latter had an approaching crisis of her own to distract her thoughts—fretted a good deal about me. I was too selfish, however, to shake off the unwholesome depression that held me fast in its grip.

Living in this deplorable state of self concentration, I may easily be imagined that I did not trouble myself much about the well-being of people surrounding me. Nevertheless, and in spite of my increasing indifference to outward events, the knowledge was abruptly forced upon my unwilling mind that something was going wrong with our head clerk Levens. Formerly the most steady and sober of men, he was now—when well on in the fifties—taking to habits of intemperance.

The first time I noticed it was one afternoon in the middle of October, when he had brought a letter to me to read. A fog was gradually settling over the city, and I could not read with ease, so I pushed the matches across to him and asked him to light the gas.

He lighted it three times, each time turning it out again when he tried to moderate the flame.

than another, I should say it is this man Levens, seeing he did it himself." "You are mad!" I gasped. "What put such an idea into your head? Levens had nothing whatever to do with it; the forger was—"

"As I abruptly checked myself, a new light suddenly came into his eyes, and he struck his leg vigorously with his open palm.

"Bring me if what I thought once or twice wasn't right after all!" he exclaimed energetically. "You've been shielding the wrong party!" "You're mistaken," I said obstinately. "You must be mistaken! Levens was not concerned in it."

"I wonder if you'd give me another five hundred to prove that he was," he returned quietly; and something in his tone of calm conviction kindled in my heart the first feeling of hope it had known for all those weary months. But I was desperately afraid of being cheated; besides, what was this detective's word against Cynthia's voluntary confession?"

"He's such a favorite in the house, then?" "Not exactly what you would call a favorite, sir; but he has always been very much looked up to and respected since he has been with the firm; and I suppose no one likes to see a man throwing away a good position like he is doing."

When Richards had left the room, I sat for some time thinking over what he had said. "It was only early in the year when he broke out like this." Early in the year! Then Levens had taken to drinking habits at just the very time when I was least likely to notice the alteration in him—while I was still smarting violently from the pain caused by the loss of Cynthia. True, the pain was no less acute now than it had ever been, but it was different sort of pain. It no longer came in bitter spasmodic attacks, as it had done at first; it had simmered down into a dull, steady, hopeless heart-ache, a constant gnawing sense of something wanting, which I was always dimly conscious of, no matter how I was occupied.

I wondered what she was doing now? In his last letter Horace had told me nothing of her wishes, and my sin as they really are. Can you understand what my anguish would be a day after day, when I saw—or fancied I saw—your manner to me growing cooler and more reserved? How should I be able to help thinking the change was due to your memory of that shameful act? The thought would be an intolerable torture; I could not live under it; I should go mad or kill myself. The bare idea is so terrible that, if you would tell me no, I must either go back and marry you or throw myself over the side of the ship this instant. I would a thousand times rather drown myself."

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he evidently thought was a crushing blow, although in reality there was scarcely enough force in the movement to displace a fly.

"You cruel devil to torment me like this!" he whispered hoarsely, with his eyes fixed upon some imaginary object before him. "You incarnation of evil! You heap of wickedness!"

"I stood at the foot of the couch again, watching the writhing, unceasing roll of his head from side to side, and listening to the words of terror that fell from his blackened lips. Only a year ago—only ten months ago, in fact—he had been one of the keenest, most reliable of business men to be found in London; and now, what was he?"

"What?" I asked myself in silent wonder. "What had brought him to such a pass as this at his time of life?" "What do you honestly think of the case, doctor?" I asked presently.

For answer he took Levens' wrist and timed his pulse. "The narcotic has got hold of his system," he said, "but he has had a very nasty shake for a man of his advanced age and his habits. Has he drunk all his life?"

"I know of no such thing," I replied. "Good heavens—you don't say so! Then he must have given his mind very thoroughly indeed to it since then. What do you honestly think of the case? Well, I think it is just possible we may catch him up for a few years, under certain conditions."

"And those are?" "The most important of course is that he should keep from the drink; but absolute freedom from worry and anxiety of all kinds is almost as necessary for his cure. What could have driven such a man to intemperance now?"

"On that part of the matter I can give you no definite information," I replied. "I wish I could."

"I wish I could," remarked Benson from his post of observation by the fire. "We must make him comfortable with rugs and pillows for the night, I suppose. How long is he likely to sleep?"

"Eight or ten hours, if it is to do him any good."

"And will he know what he's about when he wakes?" "Most likely; but there will be no depending on him. He will be sensible one minute and the victim of his fancies the next. But you'll not find him so difficult to manage as he has been to-day. I'll be back in about an hour, I expect him to wake up. If you want me sooner, though, don't mind sending for me."

"Hold me as the responsible person in this case, doctor," I said, as he began to put on his gloves. "I don't at all know what Mr. Levens' present means are, so I will be more satisfactory for all concerned if you know who is cashier on this occasion."

"The clocks were striking twelve as he left, and soon after I heard the people in the bar outside clearing out quietly under the instructions of those in charge. Then some bolts were shot, and a sudden silence fell upon the house."

"Benson," I said, when he came back presently with his wife, "I will stay here tonight, if you will allow me. I shall be quite comfortable in that large bed of mine, and I shall be able to get up before the time mentioned by the doctor. I shall have more control over him than a stranger would have. The first thing in the morning you must send for a man from Guy's hospital, and we'll get him away to his own home."

There was a little demurring to this arrangement at first, but I meant to have my own way for a particular object I had in view. I did not quite like the doctor's tone when he had spoken of the probable length of Levens' sleep. It seemed to me that he had hinted at serious consequences in the event of the sleep not lasting the predicted time. Something in his manner had even suggested that immediate danger might be apprehended. If this were so, I would not run the risk of missing what little chance I had of learning something about the forged cheque by the first few moments of his awakening.

The foolish hope, once planted in my mind, increased in strength every moment. I would not have confessed as much to any one, but it was true that, in spite of the warnings of common sense, which told me I was only preparing a bitter disappointment for myself, those wandering words of Levens, which pointed to an ever present consciousness of discovery, would associate themselves in my mind with the theft and forgery of my cheque No. 9031.

I kept on telling myself that I was mad to dream of such a thing, that Levens had never had the least chance of getting at my private cheque book on the night it had been tampered with, but that desperate, wild, improbable hope had been infused into my mind by the ex-detective's forged cheque, by Levens' unconscious words, and it flatteringly refused to leave me again.

Benson's old-fashioned little tavern was situated in an out of the way side street, through which scarcely any traffic passed at the busiest time, but now, in the small hours of the morning, there was an intense silence around us, broken only by the chiming of the distant church clock, and the toll of the quarters over another street.

Now and again the shouting of a street brawler would break the stillness, robbed of all its discordant coarseness by the distance, and seeming rather to accentuate than disturb the soothing quiet of the night.

As I stood there one of the doors was opened wider and Cynthia stepped into the hall and saw me.

"In that dim light I thought she looked taller and more ethereal than ever, although somewhat pale and worn, in spite of the peace which she had in her dear eyes."

"She stood still, gazing at me in breathless wonderment, with her lips slightly parted and a look of fear gradually stealing over her face."

"Cynthia," I murmured softly, "have you no word of welcome for me?"

With a tremulous little cry she was across the hall and her dear arms were round my neck.

"I thought it must be your spirit," she sobbed, with her head upon my shoulder. "I thought you were dead and that your spirit had come to warn me."

"Cynthia, do you remember your impossible dream, dear—your dream of crime and sin—your cruel hallucination of evil doing? The time of the blessed awakening has come, my child! I am the prince in the fairy story who is to awaken you from the long dream of sorrow and trouble. The sin was only a delusion after all, the crime only an evil dream so far as you are concerned, my queen among women! Another—in whom you are neither of us interested—has confessed to the wickedness which in your dream you thought you had committed. Awake, princess, and see how fair the world is again for you. Throw off this long dream of evil, and see yourself as others see you, a noble hearted, generous, self-sacrificing woman, in whose past life there is no flaw or blemish—a woman who is an honor to her sex and a pride to her future husband."

"Dear Gerald," she said softly, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, "how can you find out? Who is the real culprit?"

A fortnight later my wife and I sailed for England.

The idiotic fuss my mother and Jen made when they heard the whole mystery is beyond the power of my pen to describe. They have now subsided into a chronic state of admiration of my wife. I often tell my mother she will spoil Cynthia; but she smiles and answers quietly:

"You cannot spoil refined gold." "Poor old Levens was dead and buried before I reached home."

A Famous Lawyer. Simon Greenleaf, the famous law professor at Cambridge, and author of the best treatise on evidence ever written, was a native of New Gloucester, Me. Of poor but respectable parents, his early advantages were extremely limited. He commenced the study of law, and commenced practice in Gray, a little town about twenty miles north of Portland. He was so poor as to be once arrested for debt. He removed to Portland, where he made such a favorable impression that he was appointed reporter of decisions after Maine became a state, and acquired a fine reputation. His business was large, and he stood among the first when he was invited, through the influence of Judge Metcalf, to become royal professor of law at the University of Maine, where he soon acquired a national reputation. The treatise on evidence was written here.

He also wrote a work in defense of the Gospels, which was a failure, inasmuch as the attempt was made to support the testimony of the evangelists by the rules of evidence administered in courts of justice. No genius or learning could make success of a work on this basis. The Gospels are true, but the evidence is of a far higher kind than that administered in courts of justice, although lawyers sometimes affect to be very wise, and talk in a watery way on this subject. Their efforts in this direction do not strengthen the evidences, and sometimes tend to throw a doubt over what is clear enough when seen from another and proper standpoint. Judge Metcalf, a sturdy believer in the truth of the evidence, pronounced the work of Mr. Greenleaf "the meanest look ever written by a white man."—Boston Beacon.

CULTURE OF THE GRAPE. Requirements Necessary for the Proper Production of the Wood and Fruit. The conditions most favorable to rapid vine growth are generally well understood, but that they are antagonistic to the production of fruit has been almost entirely overlooked. There are distinct stages of growth absolutely necessary to the proper production of wood and fruit. These are explained as follows by a Kansas horticulturist in Popular Gardening: The one is the germinating, unfolding, developing and expanding period, the other the elaborating, contracting, solidifying and maturing period. The first produces a rapid and succulent, the latter a slower and firmer growth; and conditions beneficial to the one are often detrimental to the other.

The first stage of development is aided by very high, stimulating culture, the latter by the opposite treatment. The one produces the stock, the other the fruit. In case of excessive stimulation the plant becomes too succulent and tender, unable to withstand the vicissitudes of the climate; in case of the opposite extreme the plant dies from neglect, debility or overbearing.

Upon these principles we base the true system of pruning, training and culture, for these different stages of growth must be kept properly balanced. The first requires deep and thorough cultivation with considerable moisture and a mean temperature of from 55 to 65 degs., while the latter needs somewhat shallow tillage with diminished moisture and a mean temperature of from 70 to 80 degs. To mature the grape requires 15 degs. higher temperature than it does to grow the vine. This higher temperature is not only necessary to elaborate the sap, but also to solidify and mature the seeds, harden the wood, and to oxidize and diminish the acid, thus increasing and concentrating the sugar. All these processes take place in proportion to the high temperature and diminished rain fall of the maturing season.

Even during the period of the perfect surface drainage and a free circulation of air, as nothing tends so much to diminish the temperature of the soil as excessive moisture and shade. Every inch of rain absorbed by the soil requires 40 degs. of additional heat to restore the lost equilibrium, and this is equal to the loss of half a day in the ripening of the grapes. This retarding of the maturing season, by either excessive moisture, low temperature, cloudiness, unfavorable location or latitude has the effect of reducing the amount of sugar in the grape, and the saccharometer has shown this to reach 65 degs. to 85 degs. in the above cases, equal to one half of a pound of sugar to twelve pounds of grapes, or at the rate of six hundred pounds of sugar to the acre. Thus the excess of acid reduces the value and quality of the fruit.

Origin of a Word. The word "teetotal" had its origin through a stammering temperance orator, who urged on his hearers that nothing less than "te-te-te-te" abstinence would satisfy temperance reformers. Some one at once adapted "teetotal" and it sprang into general use.—London Times.

