

THE MASTER OF MAN :-: By Sir Hall Caine

An Outspoken and Moving Study of a Deep Sex Problem by the Noted Author of "The Manxman," "The Deemster," "The Eternal City," "The Woman Thou Gavest Me," Etc.

PERSONS OF THE STORY
VICOR STOWELL—Chief judge of the late vicarage. In a moment of mutual passion he had a brief and illicit relations with Alice Gell, the daughter of a vicarage peasant.



Alice Gell was in danger, then, and the situation was different.

CHAPTER XLII
In the Valley of the Shadow
GOOD heavens, what does it matter? A lie is only dangerous when it does so later.

Remembering that he had seen placards of the Atlantic sailings in the railway station, he walked over to the station from the glen. It was all right—a big Atlantic liner was timed to leave Queenstown at 12 that day. It could be out on the open sea by this time—steaming past Kinsale where the Manx boats fished for mackerel.

But just as he was leaving the station with a sense of security and even triumph a train from Douglas drew up at the platform.

The guard shouted something to the station-master; and, looking back, Stowell saw a crowd gathering about a first-class carriage.

Somebody was being assisted to alight. It was the speaker. He was utterly helpless. Between two members of the House of Keys the stricken man was half led, half carried to a dog-cart that was waiting for him at the gate.

His mouth was agape, his legs were dragging behind him, and his large hands were shaken by gentle trembling. He did not speak, but as he went by he looked up, and Stowell felt that from his red eyes a mute malediction was being thrown at him.

That he had done harm then! Was this the mystery of sin—that it must go on and on, from consequence to consequence, deep as the sea and unsearchable as the night?

On returning to Ballamoar, Stowell found Janet in great agitation. Mrs. Gell went across to ask if Robble could run to the doctor to fetch Dr. Clucas. The doctor had come and gone. The speaker had had a stroke. It was his second. The third would almost certainly prove fatal.

All that day Stowell was shaken by a chill terror. If the speaker died would Alice Gell come back to claim his inheritance? If so he would hear it all on all sides, and he would be killed by his father by the disgrace he had brought on him.

What then? Would he tell the whole truth under that terrible temptation and thus bring down Stowell himself to ruin and extinction?

"But what nonsense I'm talking," thought Stowell. Gell could never come back, because Bessie could do so. Then why was he to know that it was a lie that Gell had suddenly called his father?

This fell on him like a thunderbolt. How was he to marry Fenella with a thought like this in his heart? It would be his ruin, night and day. He might even blurt it out in his sleep.

"Assassin! It was I who killed the old man by letting that lie go on." Feeling feverish and unable to remain indoors, he went to the garden path in front of the house. The fresh air revived him and he took possession of himself again.

"If the speaker dies it will be the act of God," he thought. He would be in no way responsible. Neither would Gell. If rumor charged the son with killing the father it would be a lie—a damned lie, manufactured by Fate, the great liar.

It was not as if Gell were in any danger—the danger of arrest, for instance. That would be different. But Gell was in no danger—none whatever.

"Therefore bury the thing! Bury it and go on as usual," he told himself. The evening was closing in. It was beautiful and limpid. With a high step, Stowell was walking to and fro on the path. Visions were rising before him of Gell and Bessie Collister and the big tree, plowing their way through the dark, arking over to the continent "where the clouds sailed higher—Archibald Alexander and his sister Elizabeth going out to the new world to begin a new life.

the necessary warrant and assist Farrell to the "distinguishing marks" which may be needed for Gell's identification. If Bessie signs the warrant in reopening this wretched inquiry, I had hoped to bury it once for all when I decided on what you thought the extreme step of sending the guilty woman to the gallows. But law and order must be upheld and the sooner we can silence the people who are saying we are winking at the corruption of justice to spare the son of the speaker and the friend of the Deemster, the better for everybody.

"Be here at 11. (The attorney and the chief constable are coming) will be waiting for you. Good Lord, haven't you been long enough away from this house anyway? If there are strained relations between you and Fenella let them be faced squarely and straightened out at once. Yours, etc.

"JOHN S. STANLEY.
"Brig.-Gen., K. C. B.
"P. S.—Fenella says you have a photograph of Gell which was taken in America some years ago. It is probably the only one on the island, and therefore irrefutable to Farrell at this moment. Bring it with you—don't forget."

Stowell was struck with stupor. Alice Gell was in danger, then, and the whole situation was different.

Raising his eyes after reading the Governor's letter he saw Gell's photograph on the mantelpiece in front of the fireplace. At the sight a flame of passion took possession of him, and, snatching up the picture, he flung it in the fire.

"No, by God!" he said aloud. And if Farrell ever asked him for "distinguishing marks" toward Gell's identity, he would take him by the throat and choke him.

But what about the warrant? Any justice of the peace might issue it, but if the Governor asked him to do so the request would be equal to a command. Suppose he did, what would be the result? Bessie would be brought back and executed. Worse than that, even worse if it differed way. Gell would be arrested and tried—perhaps by him, and under his warrant!

"No, no, no!" it would be a crime—a base, cowardly, infamous, abominable crime.

Yet what alternative had he? After dinner he had tried to eat to keep up appearance before Janet in prey to the thought that he was thinking things out. He had sat long hours in the den and the fire had died down, when a kind of melancholy peace came to him and he thought he saw what he had to do.

He had to get up early in the morning, reach Government House before the others had arrived, see the governor alone and say to him in secret:

"I cannot issue this warrant for the arrest of Alick Gell for breaking prison to procure that girl's release because I did it."

"What would happen then? The governor (he was just a man if a hard one) would say:

"In that case, you cannot be a judge on this island any longer."

But that would be all. Out of consideration for his daughter, and perhaps for the man who was to become his daughter's husband, the governor would go no farther. Some show he might make of publishing the police notice, but he would never send to a foreign country.

There would be no scandal. The public would know nothing. They had heard that the new Deemster had been unwell, and would be told that his health had broken down altogether, and he had had to resign his office. It would be a month's talk, and then—time would cover up the whole miserable story in the merciful veil in which it hides so many of our misdoings.

And Fenella? He would tell Fenella also. It would be a shock to her, but she would be on his side now. She would see that he had only tried to prevent a judicial murder, to secure the happiness of two unhappy creatures who, but for him, would have been plunged in misery. They would marry and go away from the island, to Switzerland perhaps, and live there for the rest of their lives.

"Yes, that's it, that's it," he told himself. It was a cruel comforting—like the surgeon's knife, which, while taking away a man's disease, takes some of his life-blood also.

He thought of his father, how proud the old Deemster had been of his judicial position and how anxious that his son should succeed to it—it was pitiful. He thought of Fenella, what great things they had planned to do when he became a judge, and now all their hopes had fallen to dust and ashes—it was agonizing.

Was it necessary? Inevitable? To be cast aside on life's highway in suffering and shame everlasting; to be like a wretched ship that lies at the bottom of the sea, swaying to the ground-swell below, and moaning like a lost soul to the moaning of the other wrecks in the womb of the ocean?

It was not as if he had injured anybody. He had done harm to nobody and nothing. Yet he must do what he had thought of. There was no help for it.

It was late. The household was asleep. The log fire he had been crouching over had fallen to ashes on the hearth. He was shivering and he got up to go to bed. Before leaving

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the library he sat at the desk under his mother's picture and wrote—
"Please call me at six. I must take the first train to Douglas."

He was laying this on the table on the landing, lighting his candle and putting out the lamp, when he heard a loud ringing at the front door bell. Who could have come at this time of night? Candle in hand he went down and opened the door.

It was Joshua Searff.

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