

TRACKING A CRIMINAL.

OR Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

NEXT morning, the following paragraph appeared in several of the daily journals:—

"THE MYSTERY IN TAGGART'S INN.—The gentleman whom we reported as being about to be arrested on the charge of assassinating Mr. Graham Forbes, at Taggart's Inn, has volunteered an explanation to a metropolitan magistrate, which has completely exonerated him. It may be added that the police have at last obtained such a clue to the mystery, that the culprit cannot much longer elude the grasp of justice. The more than suspected individual has left the country, but the direction which he has taken is known; and as it is within the boundaries of France, with whom we have a criminal extradition treaty in operation, he cannot long avoid arrest. We need not inform our readers that they will be kept fully informed, in future editions, as to what has occurred in respect to this remarkable case; always, however, reserving information the communication of which would impede the operations of the police authorities."

The success this piece of intelligence had in the posters of the late editions of the evening journals was enormous.

Several of the papers, within a day or two, had short leaders upon the horrors of being arrested on suspicion of murder, and urged upon the police great caution in thus acting.

These articles profoundly satisfied the spider-like detective, Paul Webber.—"The man," he thought, "will never suppose that the police are after him. He will be thrown off his guard—he will say something, and I will sweep down upon him like an avalanche!"

And Mr. Paul Webber rubbed his hands.

But, so far, there was no proof of guilt against Austin Sivory.

CHAPTER VI.

Three days after the appearance of Austin Sivory before the magistrate, a gentleman of remarkable appearance called at the now celebrated suite of apartments in Taggart's Inn. If you could imagine Mr. Paul Webber looking almost a gentleman of foreign extraction, you would have a very tolerable portrait of the personage who now sought to visit Margaret Mayter.

Ellen Fotheringay opened the door. "I want to speak to the lady who lives here."

"Why, sir, it is only nine o'clock in the morning."

"But I come on very important business."

"Who are you?"

"Your mistress cannot know my name; but tell her I am the person she met in the magistrate's room, three days since."

"Oh, that makes quite a difference. My cousin has mentioned you to me, and said that she would see you at any time when you called."

And Ellen now threw open wide the door, she had, so far, jealously kept ajar, and led the way to the drawing-room. Suddenly she stopped, and, turning, said, "I venture to suppose you wish to see my cousin quite privately?"

"As privately as possible."

"Kindly follow me."

"I will let my cousin know at once," said Ellen Fotheringay. "She will, I am certain, be with you as soon as she possibly can."

The moment Webber—for of course the reader has divined who was the visitor—was alone, he commenced to examine on every side.

He found himself in an exquisitely furnished room, in which he looked strangely out of place, seated in a blue damask-covered chair, his hat between his legs, and his cane laid carefully upon his hat.

He was using his eyes steadily. His business had carried him into magnificent rooms, but never yet had he penetrated into one of those comfortable, every-day rooms used by the rich, where all objects that can contribute to ease and comfort are lying about at every point.

It was Ellen Fotheringay who came to show him the way to Margaret's presence.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, pleasantly, as he entered the room. "But I wished to clear off all the business I had to attend to, in order that I might place my time more entirely at your disposal. I am now quite at your service."

"You have seen the papers, miss?"

"Yes; and remarked upon their opinion that Mr. Sivory was innocent."

"He is quite free—no warrant for his arrest will be granted, and it is time to begin."

"What do you contemplate doing?"

"Much, miss, if you will help me!"

"I?"

"You, miss?"

"Very well," she replied, energetically; "my duty, my sole aim in life is to fulfill the last desires of Graham Forbes. I have been told I may fully

trust you, and to you I entrust myself heart and soul!"

"Then we shall succeed," cried Webber, joyfully. "After thinking over the whole bearings of the case for three days, you still hold to the belief that Austin Sivory was Mr. Forbes' murderer?"

"I still believe it—do you?"

"Most certainly, but certainties which are only such in my own brain. Now I need not say that would be of no service to us in a court of law."

"Have you discovered any means by which we could find evidence which would convict him in a court of law?"

"Yes; if you will help me."

"Have I not said I am at your orders?"

"But do not forget that I may call upon you for a very great effort."

"I am capable of being energetic, sir."

"You must be patient."

"I will be patient."

"You must overcome all prejudices, and even self-respect."

"Even self-respect?" she exclaimed.

Then after a pause she added, "Well, to gain this great end, I will overcome even my self-respect."

"The plan I have sketched, Miss Mayter, will seem to you odious, horrible, mad; and at first you will shrink from it."

"What matters it that I shall shrink at first, if at last I shrink no longer?"

"Then listen."

"I am listening."

And so speaking, that she might not lose a word of what he was about to say, she drew her chair still nearer this man.

"In the first place," he began, "you must know that I have scarcely lost sight of the man for one whole hour of daylight since he left the police court. After quitting you and the magistrate, I learned from the police that he had left the station in cab 10,448, and the driver of this cab I had some talk with before six in the evening. I knew where he drove, how long he stopped, and the man he spoke to; and I have followed him up in the same manner for three whole days. Nay, even while I am here, a mate of mine has his eyes on the gate, past which Sivory must come when he leaves his chambers; and when he moves, my mate will move also—he will not budge before. So, you see, he can't escape us. But while this sharp watching is going on, I am busy upon work far more important, and which in the long run, must help us. I am learning the whole of his past life. And this is the result, miss; and pardon me for putting it into shape. From the year in which he became a man, to the present hour, he has never loved—never been devoted to any woman."

"And what matters that to us?" asked Margaret.

"Much more than you think for," replied the police agent. "And you will think upon this subject as I think; if you will condescend to hear what I have to say."

"Pray go on."

"Sivory," he continued, "has never been seriously engaged, and his life has passed as most of the young men of the present generation do pass their existences. He has flirted but never proposed. One woman, and one woman only," continued Webber, "appears to have partially attracted him, and she is not free. This lady is one Lady Pauline Darmer, separated from her husband, and living with an aunt much richer than herself; but about whom and about whose house, scandal has been busy. It is but fair, however, to remark that the police firmly believe that this scandal is not based upon truth. The great reproach against the lady is this—that she allows cards in her house, and that sometimes the stakes are very high."

"But to what does all this tend?" asked Margaret, in a quick and almost impatient voice.

"It tends to this—that a man who has never loved is more like to love deeply than one who, in his youth, has been through the fire of that passion."

"Then you desire that he shall love some one—whom?"

"You."

"I?" she repeated, as though she could not believe the evidence of her senses.

"But the project is impossible!" cried the young lady.

"No; with your help it is quite possible. It is only impossible when you refuse to give your aid."

"I should need to find superhuman courage."

"You will find that superhuman courage."

"I fear that I should betray myself."

"No; you would not betray yourself. For once adopt my scheme, and you will be governed by only one thought—that of success. Sivory will betray himself, and Graham Forbes in his grave will be avenged."

And as Margaret, white, fevered, trembling, made no reply, Webber rose, took up his hat and cane, and turned towards the door.

"Madam," he said, in a low voice, "I

will call upon you to-morrow, at the same hour, when, if, as I hope, you agree to adopt my plans, I shall do myself the honor to go into particulars."

"But now—to-day—" Margaret said hesitatingly; and then became silent.

"To-morrow," said the strange detective in a smooth, soft voice.

And, making a low bow, almost without sound he quitted the room.

CHAPTER VII.

A letter from Lord Arlington has already, been copied here. Perhaps the following extracts from another letter by this nobleman to Paul Webber will show that the detective had a chance of being rewarded more substantially than by his own approbation for his services in the cause of justice:—

"On my word," said my lord, "your letter pleases me, Paul, and it excites me. You are very good to try and please an old man; and if you are not careful, you will not be able to avoid being set down in my will for a handsome sum. If your lovely Margaret were a Londoner, I would say mistrust her—for Londoners are too clever by half; but, as it is, I think you may believe her. Go on, and keep me acquainted with all you do; she will destroy him, if he is to be destroyed. That is, she will, if she accepts your plan. Will she? Being a woman, and therefore, a mere contradiction, perhaps at the last moment, she may throw you over. Write and let me know. By the way, I am at a loss to see why I should save in favor of my nephew; so if you are in want of money to carry on your scheme, draw upon my funds. I shall be amply repaid with your letters. Write often."

This letter Webber answered within the first quarter of an hour after receiving it. He wrote:—

"My lord—I have received your letter. I broached the subject to Margaret Mayter yesterday. She was shocked; and seeing she must have time for decision, I took my leave. This morning, not an hour since, I again paid her a visit. This time, I had no time to wait before I saw her. She said, 'I have reflected, and I have decided; and I accept your plan blindly.'"

"Very well," I replied.

"And without more ado, I explained my plan. She turned pale, shrank several times, but, uttered not one objection. I am now about to begin operations. I will keep you well informed upon all points. If you, my lord, will bestow upon me a hundred pounds or two, assuredly it will be the better for the letters I shall write your lordship."

This letter hurriedly written, Paul Webber left his dingy rooms, and immediately directed his steps to Lady Pauline Darmer's house.

It was here that he intended Margaret should first meet Austin Sivory.

It was about one in the afternoon when Paul Webber drove up in a well-appointed carriage, which he had taken, as usual, from certain livery-stables, and his man thundered away at the knocker of the house in Curzon street.

The inquiry as to whether Lady Pauline Darmer was at home resulting in a favorable answer, the visitor sent in two cards, upon one of which figured the words, "Mr. Varli," upon the other, "Lord Arlington."

A minute afterwards, Mr. Varli was in Lady Pauline's presence.

"Good morning, Mr. Varli, I presume you are a friend of Lord Arlington? Is his lordship in his usual good health, and does he still remain at Rome?"

"Yes, my lady; and here is a letter of introduction from his lordship to yourself."

As he spoke, Webber handed the lady a letter, which she took very graciously, and read slowly.

"I see by this letter," she said at last, "that you are partly English and partly Italian."

"I am."

"And that you have a sister, Margherita, who sings beautifully, and who is excessively desirous of coming out as a public singer, although you are a man of some fortune, and are not at all desirous that your sister should appear in public?"

"That is just my case."

"You have lived in Italy a long time, I presume?"

"Almost all our lives. Our father was Italian, our mother English, but we are not clever as Italians. Yes, we have come to England that my sister's desire to appear as a singer may be satisfied; and as we knew nobody in London, we were excessively grateful to Lord Arlington for his introduction to your ladyship."

"It was very kind of his lordship to think of me."

"So many people think of your ladyship, and say the kindest things possible."

Lady Pauline smiled; she was one of those round, plump, pleasant-looking women that always look young, even when they live to be four-score.

"So you know nobody in London?"

"Not a soul."

"Then you must look upon my house as your own."

"Your ladyship is too kind!"

"Do you intend to settle in London?"

"So much depends upon my sister; and then, again, shall we like London?"

"Oh! one must be so rich to live in London!"

"I am not troubled on the score of expense."

Here Lady Pauline smiled. Respectable as she was, she never objected to learn that any new friends she made were rich.

Presently her ladyship remarked, "Let us see; I have a sort of quiet party this evening. Will you make one?"

"But how can I leave my sister Margherita alone?"

"Bring her with you."

"How very kind you are, my lady. I will present my sister to you this evening."

"I shall be delighted to see her. Your sister will, perhaps, sing a little, while the gentlemen take a hand of cards, for I allow my visitors to meddle with cards. I am quite at a loss to understand why we ladies should expect men to sit about talking and dawdling throughout an entire evening. Cards do them no harm, and I allow half a dozen packs in my drawing-room. I am afraid you find me very eccentric."

"On the contrary, my lady, I find you very kind."

"But I permit no gambling, Mr. Varli. A few half-sovereigns—perhaps even guinea points, but nothing beyond that. You quite understand me, do you not?"

"Oh, quite."

"Then, now I must ask you to run away, for I have some visits to make, and a deal of work to get through. We shall see you and Miss Varli in the evening. You will find us tea-drinking about eight and we shall be quite eager for your arrival."

"Good morning."

Webber behaved as much like a gentleman as he could, and took his leave at once.

Reaching his carriage, and as the horses' heads were turned, he thought, "I don't know what to make of my lady, but I'm quite sure of this—that Austin Sivory will be brought face to face this evening with Margaret Mayter. Let him but love her, and she will glean the secret from him—will learn how he killed Forbes. And then—we will denounce him!"

Webber had played his part with admirable talent. He had gained the introduction he had wished for, and well knew that taking tea at Lady Pauline's really meant playing at cards; and that when Lady Pauline herself took a hand for half an hour, there was a large amount of consideration shown her, and she rarely rose from the table a loser.

Her aunt, a Lady Gralleigh, was always present.

Upon the evening following the interview between Lady Pauline and Detective Webber, her ladyship's drawing-rooms in Curzon Street began to fill early.

Her lady friends were the first to arrive, and it must be admitted that these ladies, many of whom were charming, had chiefly that independent air which is the result of defying the prejudices of society.

It was not before eleven o'clock that Lady Pauline's rooms began to fill thickly. It was past eleven when Austin Sivory entered the house. This was his first appearance in public since the affair at the police-court. The ladies present received him and spoke to him with far more friendly feeling than did the men; for talk as we may, we never can look upon a man after he has been suspected of crime, and has had to skirmish with the police, as we did before this catastrophe fell upon him.

The men present did not avoid Austin Sivory, but their manners were marked by restraint.

Webber and Margaret were the last guests to arrive. The latestess of the visit was an especial piece of management on the part of the detective, who, despite his conviction in the strength of Margaret's determination, was afraid that perhaps at the supreme moment, when she stood face to face with the man she believed to be her lover's murderer, she would fall. He argued that the later they arrived, the less possibility there would occur of their being remarked.

He was right. When then arrived, everybody was so engaged that little notice was taken of them, and they reached the very centre of the company before any one especially noticed that strange faces were present.

Those who were playing had quite enough to do to look after their cards.

Never had Margaret's innocent eyes fallen on such a scene as that which met her view.

Grave and eager, Margaret sat upon a sofa, watching and waiting. She was, to a certain extent, in shadow, and therefore could more easily see than be seen. This was more especially the case, that a fire-screen stood, by accident, before her seat, and hid her from the general view.

Her eyes were fixed upon Austin Sivory, who was standing near one of the card-tables, looking on only.

She had seen him but once, and then under the most unfavorable of circumstances. Now she studied his features, his every look and movement. She saw the difference between the man before a magistrate, and the same man at his ease in a drawing room. And assuredly the difference was very natural.

Defending his liberty, fighting for his honor, he had put a guard upon his face—a mask which had hidden the natural play of his features. His very safety depended upon a mere gesture—a sudden start—a flush of color over the face.

But in Lady Pauline's drawing-rooms it was different. He did not dream of supposing that he was watched, however slightly. Nobody could warn him that the espionage to which he was subjected before the magistrate was as nothing compared with the watchfulness which was now concentrated upon him.

The fact which at once and strongly impressed itself upon Margaret's mind in relation to Austin Sivory's countenance, was the profound melancholy of its expression.

"This man," she thought, "is either suffering from some deep grief, is the victim of a terrible despair, or he is tortured by some horrible remorse." Continued next week.

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