

TRACKING A CRIMINAL,

OR

Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

SIVORY was no longer the man the reader has seen calmly fencing with a magistrate and explaining away suspicion after suspicion the police formed against him. Then he was utterly upon his guard, and no heat, no passion, no eagerness betrayed itself. Now the blood coursed through his cheeks, his eyes spoke as eagerly as his lips; movement, life, were spread over his countenance, and gave it a marvelous charm. For the first time in his life, perhaps, Austin truly existed, absolutely comprehended what it is to live. Love had changed him from a cold, calculating man, into an ardent unreflecting human being, eager, young, and revelling in his strength.

He was about to speak again, to lay bare his very heart, when a summons was heard at the door, and Webber was announced.

A mere glance, and the detective comprehended what had happened. He walked towards Margaret, a smile upon his lips, asked how she was that morning, and then turning to Sivory, he added affecting great good-humor in his voice, "So you are here, are you? And here I have been waiting at my hotel for you the last hour and more."

Austin repeated to Webber the excuses he had made to Margaret. Then Sivory still overcome by his emotion, felt he was too much weakened to sustain a mere trivial conversation, and rising upon the pretence of urgent business, he took his leave of the supposed brother and sister.

"Don't forget that you dine with me to-day," said Webber.

Austin had reached the door when these words struck upon his ears. He turned, and was seeking an excuse to prevent the meeting, when by chance his sight fell upon Margaret, still leaning against the white marble, her elbow upon the slab, her face partly shadowed by her right hand, and apparently lost in thought. Margaret appeared so marvelously beautiful, that he had not the power to refuse himself the glory of again seeing her that evening.

"Quite true," he said, "I shall be punctual."

Sivory had been gone some moments. Margaret remained silent; Webber, silent also, watched her curiously. It was as though he were endeavoring to read her very heart; and that, as he pursued this work, his strong life and soul were torn within him. At last this silent agony probably became too terrible; for, suddenly, he came forward, and he said, roughly, "Well?"

She started, looked at him, and then said, in a repellent voice, "I beg your pardon; I did not know you were in the room."

"I thought so," he replied, with a bitterness he could not conceal. "Here I am no longer worth a copper; for you want my help no more, since I see you can carry on the plot without it. At worst," he said, "something of importance has resulted from this long interview with him?"

"Nothing," she replied.

"Then we must begin again."

"No, no, no," she replied, eagerly. Astounded by this reply, he was questioning her with a searching look, when, suddenly, she abandoned her position, came towards him, and said, "Do you know that what we have been doing is villainous?"

"How so?" he asked.

"Because he loves and suffers."

"Ha! is that so? He loves you, and has told you so?"

"Yes."

"And you believe him?"

"I do believe him."

"Well, where is the difficulty?"

"I have no right," she replied,—"I have no right to let him suffer as he is suffering."

He looked at Margaret, fixedly, and said, in a low, hard voice, "Do you really believe you have no right to cause suffering to the man who killed Graham Forbes?"

"But if he did not kill him?"

"Oh! then you have doubts now?"

"I doubt," she replied, as her head fell, and her face reddened with shame for her weakness. "When he is not here before me," she continued,—"it seems to me that he is guilty; and then the one desire of my life is to revenge myself upon him. But when he is near me, I believe no more in his guilt—I doubt."

"There must be an end to all doubting. This life must not continue."

"No," she replied; "the life we are enduring is living death."

"He must," cried Webber, "give us, once and for all, an utter proof of his innocence, and then my task will be ended. But he cannot do that. I am certain that he will yet betray himself."

"It is not enough to say," returned

Margaret, "that he must betray himself. What means have we of making him do this?"

"I bring a means," he replied, drawing from his pocket a long, narrow, flat object, wrapped in paper.

And as she stared at him in astonishment, he asked roughly, and without any of that preparation which would only have been commonly merciful in such a case, "Do you know with what kind of a weapon the assassin took the life of Graham Forbes?"

"A knife—or a dagger."

"A knife, and one you may have seen, for it belonged to Graham. If you did not find it amongst his property, it was simply because it was in possession of the police."

"And what of this knife?" she asked, becoming pale, and casting her eyes upon the something Webber still held in his hand.

"The magistrate that you saw gave an order for the weapon in question to be handed over to me; here it is."

"She drew back, and asked, "What would you do with it?"

"Put it into his very hands, and then, perhaps, he will betray himself. I think you will do well not to be present when I try the experiment."

"On the contrary, I should not do well were I absent. It is my duty to be near when you make this trial."

"I am going to make the trial this very evening."

"This evening—so be it. But," continued Margaret, "how will you be able to explain your having possession of this weapon? To show it is to betray us as well as him."

"No, it is not so. What matters it that he does know who we are, if once he has betrayed himself? Have you not said the life we are leading must come to an end? Has it not been agreed that this trial shall be the last, and that if he comes out of it triumphantly, he is to be watched no longer? Do you wish not to lose sight of him? Do you seek to make him your friend?"

"No, assuredly," she replied.

"On the contrary, if this, trial convinces you of his guilt, why should you care whether he learn who you are or not—for I swear to you he is then as good as dead."

The expression with which the police detective uttered those few last words could not be described. At one and the same time his voice betrayed hate, agony and anger.

Margaret was terrified, and now, for the first time, she thought of looking at Webber, the police detective.

What did she learn? Whatever it may have been, she made no reference to any discovery. She said, simply, "You will call for me in the evening. Good morning."

"Good morning," he said, confounded; and turning, his head fallen, he left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST TEST.

In the case under consideration, Webber's desire was to make the principal hero of this story betray and unmask himself; and firmly he believed he had the means of achieving this end, by putting into his hands the very weapon with which the mysterious murder in Taggart's Inn had been committed.

All he had done led up to this trial, one which he had contemplated from the very beginning, but which he had never put in force, because he knew the proper moment had not arrived.

And now, when at last he was determined to make the great trial, after a friendly dinner, and the victim seated opposite the woman in whom his life was bound up. Webber was so desirous to leave no act undone which should aid him, that he actually chose as the place for the dinner in question, the very restaurant—Verrey's in Regent street—at which Sivory had confessedly dined on the evening of Graham Forbes' murder.

At six o'clock that evening, Sivory called for his friend.

"Margherita is to join us," he said, after complimenting Austin upon his punctuality.

"Indeed!" Sivory said, eagerly.

Half an hour afterwards, the two men received the lady at the door of the room in which the dinner had been prepared.

She met Austin with forced calmness; he took this key-note from her, and the dinner began gravely, and almost in silence, for each of the three was overwhelmed with fears and anxiety.

Webber was the first to master himself; and with a view of at once commencing to throw Austin off his guard, he began talking lightly about a thousand things. As, however, the dinner went on, this strange man, absolutely learned, in his way, became more serious in his style of conversation; and by the time the dessert was on the table, the servants withdrawn, and they were alone, he had brought the conversation to strange questions of crime and wickedness.

"You cannot imagine," he said, in a

after-dinner tone, and looking at Margaret and Austin in the most amiable manner, "how very curious I have always been about criminal trials and investigations, especially those in which there is any degree of mystery. I believe I have read the details of every great trial known to history. Do you know," he added, addressing Austin, "why, the moment I heard your name, I took a decided liking to you?"

"Really, my dear Varli, I can't tell."

"The idea is absurd, ridiculous, I admit, and I have no doubt you will owe me a grudge for it, but—"

"Go on; I am quite sure I shall not feel any ill-humor about you."

"Well, then, because your name was familiar to me—easy to pronounce, because it scarcely differs in pronunciation from that of a celebrated criminal, known to all men in Italy—one Rene Savari, a Duke of Rovigo, whose memoirs I know almost by heart."

"It is very fortunate for me my name pleased you."

"Oh, you have qualities which should make you liked, and I found them out almost as soon as I came to know you. But I confess candidly it was your name at first attracted me."

"My name never did me a greater service," replied Sivory, frankly.

Webber nodded as pleasantly; and continued with his usual volubility: "Police cases, murders, are my passion. Is there a day passes that I do not ask you to take me to your prisons, your law courts, and your Old Balleys? And that reminds me that I was determined to wait no longer without seeing the outside of the Old Bailey and your Scotland Yard at least. So after leaving you this morning, I asked my way to both places, and I am willing to make a bet that I can describe them quite as well as yourself. At the Yard, a civil policeman offered to show me about the place, and I booked him at once. I have seen everything that may be seen in Scotland Yard, and more than I expected. Seeing a half-open door, I asked my guide what was beyond it."

"Oh, that is the evidence-room," said he.

"What evidence?" said I. "May I go in?"

"He nodded, and led the way. Papers on every side, and small parcels, and heaps of boxes, portfolios, and bundles. Never saw so much rubbish and so much dust in the whole course of my life."

"Here was a complete museum of all the objects that had, or might have had anything to do with undiscovered crimes, especially the gloves which, in Eliza Greenwood's case, nearly hanged an innocent young man. Here you find the weapons with which murder has been done—the hat the murderer has left behind him—the blooded handkerchief found upon a suspected man—sometimes the clothes of the murdered, and often a stolen watch, for which there is no owner—in fact, all what the police, they tell me, call substantial evidence. When they are wanted, there they are; and the murderer who has escaped the course of justice through a quarter of a century (nay, more), may be quite sure that the evidence against him is still waiting at Scotland Yard. Let suspicion but fall upon the man, and the chain may be completed at Scotland Yard."

"But," said I, "if you were to keep everything that has had, or may have, any connection with a trial, you would want an entire parish for their accommodation."

"True," replied my guide; "but where a case has been tried and finished, valueless things are burnt, or returned to relatives; and articles of value not claimed are kept for some time, and then they are sold, a correct account of the sale being kept, so that at any time a claimant would receive the sale-price of the object, even if the object itself has been sold."

"How often are the sales?" I asked.

"Once or twice a year. Why, to be sure, there is one to-day."

"Whereabouts?" I asked.

"Near here," was the reply.

"I need not say I requested to be taken to the auction room. Where it was, I do not know; and I suppose that when we reached the room, the sale was progressing; and, to end a story which, perhaps, my dear Austin, you may not find so interesting as I do myself, within a quarter of an hour, I was the proud possessor of a very singular object."

"A stolen watch?" asked Austin.

"Something more precious than that. Look!"

And, without farther preparation, he thrust before Sivory's eyes the very knife with which Graham Forbes had been murdered. This weapon he had been holding below the table for some moments.

Margaret, pale and trembling, half-fainted, leaned forward, and eagerly examined the accused man's face.

As he placed the knife under Sivory's very eyes, he rose from his chair, and when his hand quitted the weapon he was standing.

Such was the group;—Webber, watching his victim sternly; Margaret observing him, almost with shame at the part she was taking in endeavoring to trap a perhaps innocent man; Sivory, his eyes upon the steel implement before him.

At last the truth was to be learned.

If Sivory were the murderer, it seemed impossible that he could avoid betraying himself by a cry, a word, a movement, or even a slight shudder, when his eyes fell upon the most material object in connection with the murder.

At first Sivory manifested a certain repugnance to the weapon placed before him. Then he took it up, examined it carefully, and replaced it upon the table, saying, "I should advise you not to use this old knife; it is as rotten as steel can be."

Webber was stricken silent with wonderment.

All his calculations were blown to the four winds of heaven.

He turned to Margaret, while Sivory who had laid down the knife, moved to the fire.

Margaret's attitude remained as before. But she was less pale than she had been an instant previously, and a strange, sad smile wandered on her lips. It might have been said that she was quite indifferent to the result which had been obtained.

"The game is not yet lost," Webber said to himself. "The test to which I have put him is not yet complete. It is just possible that in the heat of exasperation a murderer may turn upon his victim the first weapon which comes to hand, and even without looking at it, and that consequently, if seen afterwards by him, it will not recall the deed he accomplished with its aid. I will complete the test."

He took his guest by the arm, walked him up and down the room once or twice, and then brought him to the table, and therefore in the full glare of the lights.

"So," said Webber, when they were once more seated, and pointed to the knife, "this knife would really be no use if I were attacked?"

"I think not," replied Sivory; "the point is quite blunted. Look at it yourself."

"True," replied Webber, pretending to examine with great care. "It is evident that the point must have struck against a rib of the victim."

"Why, has this knife really been used against a human being?" asked Sivory, in a quick, horrified voice.

"Yes; and the wound was mortal."

"Who told you so?"

"My guide down in Scotland Yard. Do you suppose I should buy these objects, and give a price for them unless they were warranted. This knife is now historical, and I know every fraction of the history attached to it. It belonged to a young man who was assassinated last October in Taggart's Inn, Strand."

Sivory started.

Webber continued.

"This young man was called—called—I have forgotten the name; I shall remember it directly. He was called—"

"Graham Forbes."

The name was pronounced by Sivory. It was now Webber's turn to start.

"You know all about that affair, then?"

"Certainly, I do; for I was directly mixed up with the frightful business."

"How mixed up?"

"I was suspected by the police of being the murderer."

"You?"

"Yes—I. You may now easily comprehend my emotion when you referred to that fearful crime. Why, I believe I have not yet overcome the shock. Yes I can see in the glass that I am as pale as death. Kindly pass me the water-bottle."

Webber obeyed, Sivory swallowed half a tumbler of water, and continued.

"You cannot imagine the trouble, the vexation into which this half-accusation plunged me. Can you believe it? I only narrowly escaped being arrested."

"Is it possible?" cried Webber.

"Possible—and only too true. However, I managed to escape." Then turning to Margaret, he continued: "Pardon me this excitement, Miss Varli. I am quite aware that agitation and emotion are almost unpardonable in the presence of a lady; but when I recall my fearful sufferings, I am no longer master of myself."—Continued next week.

Worth Remembering.

Now that good times are again upon us, before indulging in extravagant show, it is worth remembering that no one can enjoy the pleasant surroundings if in bad health. There are hundreds of miserable people going to-day with disordered stomach, liver or kidneys, or dry, hacking cough, and one foot in the grave, when a 50 ct. bottle of Parker's Ginger Tonic would do them more good than all the expensive doctors and quack medicines they have ever tried. It always makes the blood pure and rich, and would build you up and give you good health at little cost. Read of it in another column. 24t

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49 3m JOHN BHEATON, Chairman.

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