

TRACKING A CRIMINAL.

Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

If I could only have known how much pain the reference to the crime with which this knife is associated would have cost you, believe me, I could not have been guilty of the cruelty."

Webber stopped in the midst of the apology, and asked, in the most natural voice in the world, "And how did you get out of the difficulty?"

"In proving absolutely," replied Sivory, "that I could not be the guilty man—if man it was."

"But how happened it that the police suspected you?"

"I admit their suspicions were very natural. I was known to have quarrelled with Graham some time before his death, and to have owed him money upon the day previous to his murder."

"How fearful," replied Webber. "And if it only happened that you should be assassinated this very night, I should be suspected of the crime, simply because I had passed the evening with you."

"Certainly; and I think if the police did not find a more suspicious character, that you yourself would certainly be arrested. I warn you, while you are in London, to be as careful as you can be."

By this time Sivory had gained his color. "The law is so uncertain," replied the police officer.

"Not, perhaps, so much as you think it," replied Sivory. "It simply does its duty, and that is the worst that can be said of it. And, certainly, if a man is innocent, sooner or later he obtains his release. Nevertheless, the affair caused me much suffering, and you have torn open a wound which had scarcely healed."

Sivory was now speaking with calmness. Suddenly he stretched his hand, seized the knife, and examined it steadily for many moments.

"So it was with this blade he was killed!" he said, at last. "Poor fellow! He was not my friend, and, indeed we had a serious money-quarrel. He was very severe with me, but I owed him no grudge; and when I heard he had been assassinated, I pitied him with my whole heart. He was young, rich, healthy, and in a moment he was torn from all—a movement of a murderer's arm, and he was dead! If the man who struck him so fatally had known what I learned when I came to be involved in the affair—that he loved and was beloved—that he was hourly expecting his bride—his arm must have trembled, and Graham Forbes had not died. Poor fellow! and poor bride as well!"

Tears were rolling down his face as he ceased speaking.

At this instant, Margaret, who so far had found courage sufficient to restrain her feelings, and who had suffered very much during the day in anticipation of the final test of Sivory's innocence or guilt, burst into hysterical tears.

Webber's first instinct was to run to Margaret, and whisper to her to be still on her guard. But the next instant he felt that it was of more paramount importance that he should still face Sivory. So, turning to his guest, "It's our fault," he said, affecting brusque anger.

"Here, for the last hour, have we been talking of nothing but murderers and assassinations. You broke down first, while I was foolish enough to be moved myself, instead of turning the subject; and finally my sister is overpowered."

Sivory made no reply. He was watching Margaret weep. But he made no effort whatever to go near her.

"Come—come," continued Webber, seeing that it was necessary to do something, and break up the party; "I think that we should do well to get home, making a mutual promise to be livelier the next time we meet."

Thereupon he rang the bell, asked for a cab, and two minutes afterwards Sivory was alone, and slowly walking down Regent Street towards the Albany.

The detective did not address one word to Margaret as they drove home. Reaching her lodgings, he saw her safely to the door, where, Ellen Fotheringay appearing, he told her to look carefully after her cousin, and then he walked quickly away.

He had sought no explanation with Margaret, for the simple reason that there was no explanation to seek.

What proof did he possess of Sivory's supposed guilt? He had hoped to create a great effect by the production of the knife, and he had succeeded in producing emotion on Sivory's part, but not of the kind he hoped. Sivory had not only turned pale and trembled; he had wept—he had shown all the signs of deep, real grief. But his emotion was not that of guilt. It was the demonstration of pity and sorrow.

Webber was really caught in his own net. He had indulged himself in getting up an elaborate drama, and the only

results he had gained were apparently to prove his adversary innocent—to soften his heart and bring out the best side of his character.

Making these reflections, he turned his footsteps, not to the "Westminster," but to the attic lodgings in which generally he lived, and where he was known as the strange gentleman who was so odd, but who paid his rent regularly.

"Good gracious, sir!" said his landlady, as she opened the door; "and is it indeed you, Mr. Webber?"

"I've been in the country," he said. "Has any one called? or are there any letters?"

"No one has called, sir; and only this one letter has come, and I have kept it in my pocket."

He took the letter, and without a word further went up stairs.

Reaching his room, Webber struck a light, and opened the letter. It was from the Scotland Yard Office, and read as follows:—

"DEAR SIR:—How is it you have sent in no report during the last month? As a rule, you are not to be reproached on this score. Call here; you are wanted to give information concerning one Langley, an escaped convict, and his wife, called commonly, Sunflower. See to this. Yours truly, C. LABELLAMY."

"I'll go early in the morning," he thought; "and now let me see whether I can get at least two or three hours sleep. I fear not."

CHAPTER XII.

INTRODUCING FRESH FACES.

Webber's first visit was to Scotland Yard, where he had an interview with his superintendent, and afforded all the information he could give concerning the escaped convict, Langley.

This done, and saying as little as possible about the Taggart's Inn mystery, he returned to the "Westminster." However, he had asked himself whether he should or should not abandon proceedings against Mr. Sivory, urging upon himself that either the man was too clever to be caught, or that he must be innocent.

Restrained by self-love, or by a sentiment of an opposite character, he could not make up his mind to sever the relations between himself and Margaret, and finally he determined to play the part of the Anglo-Roman gentleman for yet a short time longer. But he became in a few hours only the shadow of the personage he had so well played. His toilet, which had hitherto been careful, was now equally careless. When the hotel servants called him Mr. Valli, he would start as though amazed at the action.

Now and again, the servants would hear him walking up and down his room. And if they had listened, they would at intervals, have heard such utterances as these: "Fool! fool! why did you ever leave your peaceful old garret? Why did you want to try fashionable life? See what it has come to—mark what you have become! You encouraged your heart to beat, and it took advantage of the permission, and it does beat! Yes, it beats, and beats, and may be it will beat and break."

Then he would hurriedly leave the hotel; or, if he happened to be out when this strange fit was upon him, he would walk quickly in the direction of Birdcage Walk.

But he never knocked at the door of the house where Margaret still kept the apartments, although the intention with which they were taken apparently had ceased to exist.

Reaching the house, he would stop; and once more he would begin thinking aloud.

"Why see her? What shall I learn if I pass the threshold? That he is near her. I know it—I know only too well. What can I do? I must wait now—wait in silence, without showing myself, and not disturb them. This—is this the one means left me of worming out the truth—to wait; this is the plank which saves me from death—a thin, rotten plank; and I tremble as I walk on it."

Upon one especial day, however, he did not hesitate. He opened the garden gate with his private key, unlatched the door leading to the house, crept upstairs, slid noiselessly by the landing window into the conservatory; then, stooping and crawling forward amongst the plants, he could see into the back drawing-room, in which he knew she always sat.

An hour afterwards he crept away as he came, and no one in the house was the wiser for his visit.

What did he hear and see? Nothing, assuredly, which pleased him, for, after this visit he was much broken and depressed, as they noted at the police-station, where he presented himself about two hours after he had slunk from the house.

"Hallo, Webber!" said an officer, as he came in; "you're just the very man we were wanting. Our people have heard something about that chap Langley. Go in; the governor is talking

with the inspector about the business this very identical moment."

As Webber entered the superintendent's room, he heard the following dialogue between the superintendent and the inspector:

"Then," said the inspector, "you really do attach importance to the information given by this woman?"

"Certainly, I do; for it is her interest to tell the truth."

"According to her statement he will be in Ewer street this very night."

"It is more than probable."

"Then he can be arrested to-morrow morning without any trouble."

"Not without trouble, sir. There is not a man in my division would hesitate to follow me; but it is my duty to warn you that it will be a dangerous job. Langley is no lamb. He has broken jail twice. He is the strongest man in England, I verily believe; and the police are informed that he always sleeps with loaded pistols under his pillow. The first officer who tries to take him is a dead man."

"That is, if he does not know how to manage," here said Webber, who was standing at the door.

"The superintendent and inspector turned their eyes upon Webber."

"I should like to see you trying to manage him, Webber," said the inspector.

"It will be easy enough to see me if you follow me, since I hope to get the authorization to arrest this man without help, and by myself alone."

"Who are you, then?" asked the superintendent, looking closely at Webber, perhaps with the fancy that he was mad.

And this question arises—"Was he, in his despair, desirous of placing himself in the way of being killed?"

"I am Detective Webber," he replied, "and I have been employed in the Taggart's Inn affair."

"Ha! to be sure; and we have been wondering here, how it is that we have received no reports lately concerning that mysterious business. What is there now to report?"

"I have no report to make. I am still on the watch, and very eagerly on the watch, I do assure you."

"Right!—we know you to be a good officer, and we count upon you. To come back to the convict Langley, do you really propose to arrest him yourself and without assistance?"

"Myself, and without assistance."

"But you can know nothing of the man, in question, or you would never make such an offer."

"There, sir, is where you are deceived. I have already had Langley under my management; it was after he first broke prison. He was audacious enough to come down to the station where I was then employed, and ask for a woman who was in custody for pawning some work, and who I afterwards found out was Langley's wife. I suspected him at once, had him followed, and finally he was arrested and sent back to Portland, where he managed to break prison again."

"Since you know him so well," continued the superintendent, "I am astonished that you fear him so little. You remember, of course, that he is almost a giant?"

"Yes; but I recall a certain victory obtained over a giant by a very small warrior," and I am not at all afraid."

"And do you really dare the attempt to arrest him unassisted?"

"I do. I offer to arrest the man alone, and I ask for no help whatever."

"You shall have the order, Webber, most certainly, and I will give directions that you shall be informed of all the particulars of the case. One word more, however. Are you not afraid that if you take this case of Langley's in hand, that you may neglect the other upon which you are engaged—the Taggart's Inn affair?"

"No; two hours will be enough to settle with this giant Langley. I think that's all, sir?"

Webber left the superintendent's office.

The next morning following the interview with the inspector, about seven, Webber was ascending the staircase of the house—a common lodging house—the street door of which was always swinging open, in which the police had been informed Langley would pass the night.

Reaching the top of the miserable house, Webber knocked smartly at the door before him.

"Who's there?" cried a strong, rough voice.

"A police-officer, who has come to arrest you."

"That's a likely tale, that is," replied the powerful voice. "If you was an officer, you wouldn't say so. But you do, so you're no officer, not you. Is it Tom?"

"Yes, it's Tom; open the door."

"Well, I don't care about turning out of bed; but, for a friend, one must get a bit chilly. I'll open the door."

door drawn, when Webber dashed forward, and before his opponent could turn, he had reached the bed-side, and seized a revolver which lay to hand upon a chair.

Then turning to the convict, he said, "A step more, and it will be your last."

"A thousand deaths, if it isn't an officer!" cried the convict.

"I said so, did I not?" asked Webber. "You've got my pistol, it's true," cried Langley, exasperated; "but my fist is my own still, and I recommend you not to feel it."

"That I may feel your fist, you must come near me; and you know better than to do that."

And his right hand still holding the pistol on a level with his eyes, as though he was taking aim at a target. Webber seated himself quietly upon the warm bed that Langley had only just quitted.

The convict dared not take a step forward. So they looked at each other—the one ready to leap, the other ready to fire.

Webber was first to speak.

"So you have decided not to swallow me? I'm sorry for it, for I should like to die in an original manner."

"Well mate," replied the convict, "I do say that you know'd you was handy, when you had pluck enough to come after me without help."

Here his eyes glistened as he looked about the room, searching for something with which to attack the officer.

"Ha!" said Webber, "I always did say that people thought more of you than you deserved. What are you looking about for—your slippers, perhaps? Well, there they are," he continued, throwing an old pair of shoes towards the convict, "I am not a bad sort of fellow, Langley, if you know me; and though I mean to arrest you, it doesn't follow that I should let you catch cold."

"Thankee!" replied Langley, whose habitual coolness was now returning. "A man all'us feels more at home in shoe-leather than out of it; and, besides, a man can fight better, which is a warning for you."

"Will you dress altogether? Yes. Here, catch your things. Ha! collar, waistcoat, coat, &c., &c. Don't be afraid—here they are—catch!"

"Well, if you're agreeable, I'm agreeable," replied the convict, amazed at the officer's civility, and catching the articles of attire as they were thrown to him.

"Without being curious, Langley," continued the police-officer, "what do you think about doing when you are dressed?"

"I've not quite made up my mind. I'm turning it over, and I'm not yet sure of anything. I'm pretty certain that if it were not for your pistol, that I should have your life. But the pistol is in the way."

"Do you want it?"

"Want it? Yes; but I shan't get it."

"Do you think I want it? Come, now, if I gave it up to you, what would be done?"

"I'd slip a bullet into you in a moment."

"Very well; then take aim at your ease, for here is the pistol!"

And thereupon, Webber walked direct to Langley, handed him the pistol, turned his back upon the convict, walked back, took his seat once more upon the bed, and murmured, "I'm waiting."

"Why, you're no police-officer!"

"If not, what am I? Look here; isn't this your pistol?"

"Here is a pair of handcuffs. Should I have handcuffs in my pocket if I wasn't a police-officer? And, to tell you the truth, I brought nothing with me but these to arrest you with. I have not even brought my truncheon."

"You're a plucky customer."

"I think you said that before, my good Langley," replied the detective, making himself more comfortable on the bed.

"And so you're thinking I shall really let you put those things on me?"

"As you like," replied the detective; "either you kill me or put on the handcuffs. You've not much brains, Langley, or you would know that a man who cared much for life would not care to try and arrest such a man as you without help."

Then suddenly, turning away, and changing the tone of his voice, he continued: "It's rather cold here, and you've got no fire. Suppose we go, they will be waiting for us."

"Where?"

"At Newgate, for I think you will be more comfortable at Newgate than anywhere else. They will look well after you, depend upon it. You will not be mixed with the rest. You will have a cell all to yourself."

"But how about the bullet I'm going to favor you with, friend officer?"

"Let me be—you threaten, but you don't act. This is slow work," said the officer, laying down at full length on the convict's bed.

Langley leaped forward, and pointed the pistol at Webber's heart.

As the police-constable marked the act, he murmured a name, but he uttered no word.—Continued next week.

A Losing Joke.

A prominent physician of Pittsburgh said jokingly to a lady patient who was complaining of her continued ill health, and of his inability to cure her, "try Hop Bitters!" The lady took it in earnest and used the Bitters, from which she obtained permanent health. She now laughs at the doctor for his joke, but he is not so well pleased with it, as it cost him a good patient.—Harrisburg Patriot. 5 2t

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