

TRACKING A CRIMINAL.

OR

Paul Webber, The Detective.

CONTINUED.

ONE morning, a carriage, a coronet on the doors, was pulled up at the entrance to the Westminster Palace Hotel.

A footman leaped quickly from the box, stood at the door, and waited for orders.

"Ask the hotel people," said a fretful but educated voice, "if a Mr. Varli is still living here; and if he is, whether or not he happens to be at home."

"Yes, my lord."

The footman executed the order with excessive promptitude, and replying that the gentleman still lived there, and that he was at home.

"Then help me out," said the occupant of the carriage.

This was soon done, and in a very short time the nobleman was shown into the rooms occupied by the detective.

Webber, seated before the fire, was idly beating the coals with the poker when the door was suddenly opened. Turning he uttered a strange cry of surprise, hurriedly got up, and walked forward to receive his guest, saying, as he did so, "You my lord—you visiting me?"

"Yes. Pray, what is there to be astonished at in the performance? Come, what has happened to all your characters? I had grown to have quite a liking to them. Your Margaret has not much to say for herself, and this much must be said in her favor; but she seems to me a tolerably strong-minded woman. As for Austin Sivory, he is a good example of the disgraceful young men of a corrupted age; though I'm bound to say, nevertheless, that I find I admire him. Well, what is the news about them?"

"I have no news to give you, my lord," was the somewhat dejected reply; "for, during the last week, I have not seen either of the persons to whom you refer."

"What then, has become of your professional duties?" exclaimed his patron.

"My professional duties in this instance consisted in finding a certain murderer and I have found him."

"He—he is trapped, is he, the scamp? So much the better for society; but I rather regret he lost his liberty so soon."

"Yo naturally suppose, my lord, that I am speaking of Sivory?" said the detective.

"Of course, I do suppose so."

"Wrong; Sivory, my lord, is an innocent man."

And thereupon Webber informed the Earl of the facts in connection with Langley and Sunflower, with which the reader is already acquainted.

So far from showing any satisfaction with the turn things had taken, the old nobleman found all his romance overthrown.

"But how is it, if all is at an end, and wound up; if your murderer is bagged, and Austin Sivory shown to be, no doubt, whiter than the driven snow,—how is it I find you still playing the part of Mr. Varli, living in a first class hotel, and wearing clothes which are as well made as my own? Have we come in for a fortune, pray?—or have we really found out our ancestors?"

"My lord," replied Webber, somewhat awkwardly, "I thought I might as well wear out my fine clothes; and I am finishing the month for which I had unfortunately taken the rooms."

"Indeed, my young friend!" replied the Earl; "and do you really suppose that I believe such a tale as that? No. You are clever enough to see at a glance that I have already guessed you secret; you are in love."

"Love her!" he replied, suddenly. "I love her with the love of a man who has never before spoken to a woman of love."

Varli, or rather Webber, then detailed all particulars relative to the private staircase leading to the apartments of Margaret, where he could observe, unseen, all that took place in her room; "and where," added he, "I have watched, and I am to watch. This, my lord, has been my life—this, my lord, must be my life,—I hold my heart with both hands, that its beating may not alarm them."

"Give up all thoughts of this mad scheme," replied Arlington. "The work it was given to you to accomplish—the discovery of the murderer of Graham Forbes—has been achieved. This business is now no longer yours; it passed from the police-office to a court of justice. Go back to your old work, and your honest little garret, which you should never have quitted."

"It is too late," replied Webber. "I cannot go back to my old work and my old habits. I cannot think."

"Supposing you take a long journey? Make a start, and I will provide you with a fair income for life."

"You are very good, my lord," said the poor fellow.

"No, not good, but I have a certain sort of affection for you. Well, what do you say to my offer? Do you accept?"

"No, my Lord, I decline. I shall be strong enough to fight through with this business; but I should never find sufficient courage to keep far away from her."

"Go your own foolish way," said the Earl, petulantly. "Do as you like," added the Earl, snapping up his hat—"and go to the deuce!"

"Perhaps that is good advice, my lord," said Webber, "and the sooner I go the better. Will you take my arm, my lord?"

Not a word was said by either as they went down stairs; but the nobleman parted from his godson in a very kind and even touching manner, when the old lord had been helped into his carriage.

"I like him better than I thought I did," said old Lord Arlington, to himself. "I wish—"

Here the voice stopped.

And throughout that day his lordship's servants found their master very trying.

About this time, a man, still young, and of very distinguished appearance, might have been seen almost every day, towards six in the evening, gravely purchasing a bouquet, at the end shop in the avenue of Covent Garden Market. The bouquet being wrapped in blue paper, the purchaser took it up carefully, and then walked away—always in one direction.

The individual who so watched would have also had the opportunity of remarking that this gentleman was closely followed by a small, frail, and far from good-looking man, who followed the first about twenty paces off, and who did so until he turned up the passage leading from Birdcage Walk.

At this point he continued on, past several houses, where he let himself in at a garden gate, which he closed after him. He then entered the house by the back door.

And these proceedings taking place in February, it need not be said that it was dark, when both men entered the same house—the one by the front door, the second (one half a minute after him) by the garden entrance.

The first man entered a brilliant drawing-room, where was seated a beautiful woman, who received him with a smile.

The second man, with noiseless step, stole up the staircase, opened the door-window on the first landing, thus reached a balcony, and crept along until he was hidden amidst the shrubs with which the wide, long balcony was filled. From this point he could see into the back drawing-room, where the beautiful woman was always seated waiting for her visitor.

A brilliant fire blazed cheerfully, and the scene was lit by a great lamp.

These persons were, as the reader knows already, Austin Sivory, Margaret Mayter and Paul Webber.

Austin and Margaret sat near each other.

She was still in deep mourning; but a close examination of her toilet would have shown that faint attempts had been made to modify the severity of the costume, while Margaret's very beautiful black hair was not worn so plainly as when first she was introduced to the reader. On the particular night at which we have now arrived, a sprig of white lilac lay in her hair, it was Austin who had brought that lovely flower.

"Dare I believe you?" said Margaret, continuing a conversation already commenced with Austin. "Dare I give implicit faith to your oaths? Do not all men believe that a promise made to a woman is not binding? I have already been the victim of a lover's treason."

It was impossible that Margaret could avoid admiring this man, whose almost feminine delicacy but enhanced his manliness.

She did not perceive that Austin had drawn nearer to her—that even one of his hands touched hers as it rested on the sofa, neither was she surprised as Sivory said:

"I love you—I love you with the whole force of my life! Have pity on me! I am dying because I see you daily, and that I dare not press you to my heart! Am I to die or live?"

"Live!"

From his hiding place Webber uttered a sudden piercing, despairing cry.

Nor Margaret nor Austin heard the heart-rending sound.

They did not notice the rustle of the evergreens in the balcony.

He was fleeing, for he could endure no more.

What should he do to save himself from himself?

This was his one thought as he rushed through the night air.

Whither, he neither knew nor cared.

CHAPTER XV.

LANGLEY'S TRIAL.

The Third Court at the Old Bailey was

crowded, for it was expected that a very interesting trial would be heard—that of Langley, the ex-convict.

When the prisoner was brought in, there was a low murmur of interest, as his colossal size and powerful make were remarked.

Upon the table before the judge were the objects to be used as secondary evidence at the trial—a long, thin dagger-knife, a red-covered pocket-book, open at the page upon which Graham Forbes had written his last direction—"Margaret—avenge—it was"—and various other objects.

The jury had been already sworn, and the clerk of arraigns read the indictment, which charged Abel Langley with the wilful murder of Graham Forbes, on the 27th of October, 1866, at a place called Taggart's Inn, Strand, London.

We are not here going to give all the particulars as set out by the barrister, because most of them are known to the reader.

The counsel then dilated on the confessions as made to Webber; the statement made by a woman suppose to be the prisoner's wife; and finally devoted some time to clearing away any slight contradictions which appeared to clash with the evidence he should adduce.

The first witness called was Paul Webber, who deposed to the interviews he had had with Langley and the woman called Sunflower.

The reader is in full possession of all the facts to which Webber would naturally depose.

The next witness called was Margaret Ponsoby Mayter, who deposed to the finding of the dead man, and to those other particulars with which the reader is already acquainted.

The counsel for the prisoner refusing to cross-examine Miss Mayter, she requested to know if she might leave the court.

She was told she might, and she did so, after having been recalled to be asked this question: "Do you know the prisoner?"

"I never saw this man until to-day," was the reply.

Two or three other witnesses being called, the porter at Taggart's Inn, the locksmith, and the first policeman who appeared upon the scene, the prosecuting counsel said, "Call Adela Coulton, alias Mrs. Langley, alias Sunflower."

"Stop this," cried the prisoner; "I admit I did it. I killed him. Sentence me to be hanged, and don't call her! Don't—don't call Sunflower!" But the judge had her summoned.

The first question put by the cross-examining counsel was:

"Has anybody told you," asked the barrister, "that a wife cannot bear witness against her husband?"

She hesitated.

"Now, take care, because, perjury is no joke, and you may find yourself present at another trial, where you will be in a less interesting position than the one in which you are now placed. I ask again, have you been told that a wife cannot bear witness against her husband?"

"Yes, I have."

"Then you know that if you were this man's wife, your evidence could not be taken."

After a long pause, she replied, "Yes."

"Then, now I ask you, are you this man's wife?"

A still longer pause having been made she replied, "No, I am not his wife."

With a terrific oath, Langley cried, "She lies! We were married in Ireland!"

"Where?" asked the judge.

Langley thought for a few moments, apparently in an agony of effort, and then he replied, "I can't remember. It was a long name, and we went by rail from Cork. I should know the place if I saw it. And we was married in false names, because we was afraid her father would stop it all. But we are man and wife, as true as I've this hand."

"What do you say to that?" asked the judge of the witness.

"I never was in Ireland, and I am not the prisoner's wife. And that is all I have to say."

The cross-examination therefore went on as though the woman was not his wife. She did not at all contradict herself as to the particulars she had given in examination.

So far, the prisoner had said no word after Sunflower had left the box. But his eyes were upon her. The woman had taken a seat—room being made for her—near a very handsome and gentlemanly man, apparently a jurymen in waiting.

Langley's eyes were still upon his wife and, doubtless, wife she was—when the counsel rose for the defence. This defence had been pieced together hurriedly during the trial. It was not, therefore, perfect. It ran as follows:

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the jury—I appear for the prisoner, and I maintain that he is innocent of the charge brought against him in the indictment. The opening counsel attributed the prisoner's silence to remorse; I attribute it

to despair—despair of love, desolated and broken love. He says he is guilty; I say he is not. If you condemn this man, gentlemen, you will be the accomplices of self-murder. This you cannot do—this you dare not do."

The counsel now despatched upon the nature of the evidence apart from the witnesses themselves; and he very cleverly urged that the last words written by Graham Forbes could not have referred to Langley, because it was impossible to suppose that two such differing men could be known to each other.

"Throughout the whole of this business," continued the counsel, "there is a mysterious, strange something, to the heart of which I confess I cannot reach."

Then the counsel turned to the prisoner, and said:

"Speak; declare yourself not guilty; explain the mystery which hangs over your mad confession. If you have no mercy upon yourself, have mercy upon the jury."

Langley's heart was good. This appeal was quite effectual.

"I'm not guilty!" he cried.

The emotion now experienced by those present was terrible.

The judge looked up, calm, if pale.

"Let there be silence in the court."

His words were followed by a complete hush.

"Prisoner," said the judge, "if you are innocent, how came it that in the first place you would not plead at all, and in the second that you declared yourself guilty?"

"I said I was guilty," he replied, "because I thought I was."

"How thought you were?" asked the judge. "A man does not think he is guilty of murder. He is certain either one way or the other."

"I killed a man—that's true enough. Why, you can easily guess; but it was not your Graham Forbes."

"What was the name of the man you killed?" asked the counsel for the defence.

"I don't know, but I'm sure it was not Graham Forbes."

"How so?"

"Why, that gentleman," pointing to the counsel for the prosecution, "has been talking hour after hour about blood which came from the man's wound; about the knife with which he was killed; about a room, and a bedroom, and a heap of things that had nothing to do with him and me. I hit him down with this fist; and I hit him down as he was going in at his own door in Taggart's Inn, in the Strand."

"This is nonsense," cried the prosecuting counsel.

"I fear, prisoner, you have condemned yourself," replied the judge, "for no other man was killed on that night, at that spot, except Graham Forbes."

Suddenly there was a cry in Court.

"What noise is that?"

"My lord," replied an excited voice, "I must speak—I will speak! I see it all—every bit!"—Concluded next week.

A few days ago a letter was mailed in New Orleans, addressed as follows:

"Swift as the train pursue your way,
Stop not for flag nor banner,
Until you reach Miss Sophie May,
In Clinton, Louisiana."

Bad roads and weather made this sweet missive miscarry, and when it was set right again by the postmaster at Port Hudson, he wrote on it:

"Go on! go on! You must not stay!
Since mail facilities are great!
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