

Rogues and Adventuresses

Charles Kingston
1928

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ROGUES AND ADVENTURESSES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

REMARKABLE ROGUES

THE ROMANCE OF MONTE CARLO

THE MARRIAGE MARKET

THE JUDGES AND THE JUDGED

THE BODLEY HEAD



ELISABETH HOWARD, COMTESSE DE BEAUREGARD
(The Historic Barmaid)

ROGUES
AND
ADVENTURESSES

BY
CHARLES KINGSTON

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Rogues and Adventuresses

CHAPTER I LACENAIRE—POET AND MURDERER

If Infamy has its immortals the name of Lacenaire can never die, and, as the most remarkable if not the greatest of French criminals was made the subject of a character study by Victor Hugo in “Les Miserables,” he must share in the immortality of the immortal Frenchman. Yet it is not easy to see why this scoundrel should have attracted the attention he did, or why for a period all France should have regarded him as of far greater importance than a revolution. But Lacenaire succeeded in hypnotizing his country and he achieved this by the pose of philosopher in the condemned cell. Inspired by a vanity which had been his special vice from childhood, he laughed in the face of death because he was philosopher enough to realize that it is always better to laugh than to cry, and by thus making a virtue of

necessity he became a personality as he strutted towards the guillotine, inspired and encouraged by the knowledge that the world was watching him. He had at last captured the popular imagination, having, like so many other poets, obtained a reputation on hearsay—for editors had declined his contributions because his very inferior productions had yet to be rendered marketable by their author turning murderer. When he did, the news that there was a professional criminal who was an author, poet and philosopher, gave France a new thrill, even in an age when thrills were plentiful. The man in the café declared that Lacenaire was unique and that there never had been a criminal like him, and as there is no place in the world where sentiment is so cheap as in France, there were many who wished that the poet and philosopher could have been saved from the guillotine. But the bare truth is that Lacenaire was a criminal and little else. He was a common thief, a clumsy forger and a cowardly and bloodthirsty murderer. He had not a spark of chivalry in his composition and his sense of honour was as deficient as his sense of humour. In fact, a born criminal, one foredoomed from his earliest years to a disgraceful life and an ignominious death.

It is not difficult to trace the growth of the criminal germ in Pierre François Gaillard, better known by the name of Lacenaire, which he conferred on himself. His father was a fairly prosperous iron merchant who resided near Lyons, and Lacenaire was sent to a good class school. The boy, shallow and a boaster, early evinced that effeminacy which is always accompanied by cunning, cowardice and craft. Unwilling to join in the usual sports of boyhood, he led a more or less isolated existence, suffering tortures at the hands of bullies until his nimble brain devised schemes for their discomfiture. Thus he acquired his first lessons in the art of meeting physical force with craft, and so the child grew to believe that nothing mattered except the end, and that the means, however dishonest, which achieved that end were fully justified. The brooding, moody child grew into a sly and effeminate young man, sufficiently educated to be able to deceive himself with cant phrases and a bogus philosophy. He would have preferred to live in vicious idleness, but his father's affairs were not prospering, and Lacenaire was sent off to Paris to study for the law. His evil tendencies had already exhibited themselves, but his parents hoped that they were merely the passing indiscretions of youth, and with astonishing optimism they let loose in Paris this pale-faced, delicate-looking man with the deep, penetrating eyes and long, thin hands, which he had once referred to in a moment of philosophic candour as having been made for strangling.

In Paris Lacenaire was fortunate to make many acquaintances, who would have developed into powerful and loyal friends had his temperament permitted, but his

vanity, spite and boastfulness alienated them, and when he ended a series of quarrels by shooting the nephew of Benjamin Constant in a duel, practically every door in Paris was closed against him. Those who were acquainted with the facts of the case never wavered in their belief that Lacenaire murdered his opponent, and the fact that the successful duellist never attempted to bring any of his calumniators into court was practically an admission of guilt.

However, the duel was to bring to fruition all those vicious and criminal imaginings which had been growing in the mind of Lacenaire since boyhood. Finding himself in the position of a pariah he determined to make war on the society which thus openly despised him, but the eagerness with which he turned professional criminal was an indication that sooner or later he would have taken to crime for a living.

Shortly after the unfortunate duel his father failed, and Lacenaire, deprived of an allowance, at once sank into a lower stratum of society than his ostracism by his former friends entailed. At one step he became a member of a class which does not know the dividing line between poverty and crime, and it was not long before he attained a leading position in the underworld by reason of his debonair manners and swaggering air of superiority. Criminals who could scarcely read regarded with awe this good-looking young man who boasted of a luxurious childhood and affected a profound knowledge of literature and politics. Gossip reported that once he had been received at the houses of ministers and that he had been acquainted with royalty itself. Determined to make use of the boasting young fool, they flattered and toadied to him, and Lacenaire immediately took up the pose of philosopher and poet, and boasted of the wonderful powers he possessed and of the fortune he would lead them to if only they obeyed him.

However, it became absolutely necessary that Lacenaire should obtain some sort of regular employment, and as an ex-law student there was only one occupation open to him, that of lawyer's clerk. The family influence was still strong enough to secure him a post, but Lacenaire was anxious that his fellow clerks and their friends should understand that he was no ordinary employé. To impress this upon them he gave a dinner at a café to celebrate what he called his entry into the ranks of the workers.

The guests were chiefly lawyers' clerks, amongst them being a youngster of the name of Claude. He had never seen his host before, and, having been warned that he was about to be entertained by an aristocratic-looking man who was much too good for work of any sort, he was surprised to see at the head of the table an over-dressed person whose obvious effeminacy could not conceal the fact that his thin

body possessed a supple strength which was in keeping with the vicious luminosity of dark, deep-set eyes.

The dinner was an uproarious success, and Lacenaire was gratified by the deference paid to him by those he patronizingly called his “colleagues.” In his concluding speech he thanked them with the air of an emperor, and he was really eloquent as he described how within a few hours he would lay aside the character of idler and dilettante and take his place amongst those who had to fight the battle of life in the ranks. They applauded that sentiment, for they had drunk his wine, and the man who pays for the dinner has no critics.

In the early hours of the morning the café disgorged a flushed and excited troop of young men, and it so befell that Claude, the youthful clerk, walked away arm in arm with the head clerk in the office where Lacenaire was due to begin work at nine o’clock.

“What do you think of him?” asked the older man, who had been fascinated by the silky personality of his latest clerk.

“He has the eyes of a wild beast,” was the unexpected answer, “and for all his gentleness and politeness I would not trust him anywhere.”

The critic’s words were drowned in a roar of derisive laughter, but they were recalled by the head clerk a few hours later, when on entering the office he found that the safe had been broken open and the contents stolen, while there was no sign of Lacenaire. That was no legal proof that the latter was the thief, but it required no great intelligence to connect him with the affair, for on the occasions of his visits when negotiating for employment he had done all in his power to ingratiate himself with the head clerk, who now recollected that the charming young man more than once brought the conversation round to the safe, and had led him into discussing how it was opened and what it usually contained.

Six months later Lacenaire was actually under arrest, but on another charge, for the criminal who later on boasted that he was a Napoleon of the underworld began with a mean and petty theft in a café. The fact, however, that he had been a law student and was well related was sufficient to lift the affair out of the commonplace, and his trial and conviction created something of a sensation in the comparatively limited circle in which he had been known, for a few years were to elapse before the thief turned murderer and achieved international infamy.

Other experiences of prison followed, and if Lacenaire was usually unsuccessful he was perfecting his pose of super-criminal so that when he launched out he might be able to give some distinction to the character. Vanity was his chief prop in times when failure proved that he was a conspirator of no originality or courage, and the

adulation of the ignorant was the only comfort he had when striving to make the most of his little stock of knowledge.

A memorable incident now happened which was to have remarkable and sensational consequences.

He was in Poissy jail when he met a journalist, a political prisoner, and the result of the meeting was that Lacenaire wrote an article for the journalist's paper on penal methods. It was a creditable production in the circumstances, but in no way remarkable, and only vanity could have discovered in it proof of that genius which henceforth Lacenaire claimed for himself. He talked of devoting himself to literature and started to write a play, but the time was approaching when the unsuccessful thief determined to try his hand at the most serious of all crimes. Literature was abandoned, and the criminal dilettante of the underworld resolved to make a bold bid for recognition as its king by putting his courage and his craft to a supreme test.

When, before his death, he was asked why he had not utilized for money-making purposes the literary gifts of which he boasted, he replied: "I had to choose between writing a play and murder, and I chose murder because it was easier."

Had he been truthful, however, he would have admitted that even had he possessed the necessary talent he would have disdained honest work because his vanity had become so intense that he could not believe he could fail to outwit society.

Had Lacenaire's intelligence or courage equalled his vanity he would not at this stage of his career have taken a partner, but in the case of a man who needed no incentive to self-flattery, blunders were bound to be frequent. It may have been that when he joined forces with Pierre Victor Avril he required a servant rather than an equal, but the underlying reason was that he had not the necessary physical or mental courage to commit murder alone. Avril, a companion picked up in jail, called himself a joiner, but having worked at that trade on occasions so rare the description was apt to bring a smile to the lips of anyone who heard it. However, he was a bloodthirsty ruffian, who, if only by means of contrast, flattered the senior member of the firm, who was now thirty-four, and in spite of all his vicissitudes was looking his best. One who met him at the time described him as possessing the lofty forehead of the thinker and features which were refined and compelling. Able to make the most of his small stock of learning, he could give a varnish to the most revolting of acts and inspire even in men like Avril a sort of vicious admiration.

Lacenaire's imprisonment at Poissy, in 1829, appears to have influenced almost every act of his life up to the final catastrophe in January, 1836. We have seen that it was in Poissy he found his only employment as a journalist, and it was there he came upon his future partner. And where he found Avril he also found a victim, although it

was not until 1834—five years later—that he recalled Chardon, the miser of infamous habits, who now lived in a garret in the Rue St. Martin with his mother, a helpless invalid. Chardon was a vile product of a festering city, despised even by the worst of criminals, one who went through life in a sort of slime, a typical inhabitant of the underworld of the underworld. With an insolent hypocrisy which was almost pathetic in its ineffectiveness he claimed membership of a religious brotherhood, but it was neither his vileness nor his hypocrisy that attracted Lacenaire's attention. In the neighbourhood of the Rue St. Martin it was believed that Chardon had accumulated a fortune which he kept in specie in his garret, and it was that fortune that tempted Lacenaire. Of course, as a philosopher, he had to give his crime a higher motive than greed, and he, therefore, called it revenge for an insult alleged to have been received from Chardon at Poissy, but it was the prospect of laying his hands on gold that caused Lacenaire to take Avril to a café near the residence of the Chardons on the morning of February 14th, 1834, to discuss and plan a double murder.

Lacenaire despised Avril because he was one of the common people, but secretly he admired a man who had once very nearly killed a warder in a fit of temper. His own exploits had not hitherto risen higher than robbing a till, and thus he regarded Avril with a respect he would not reveal, because it was not part of the Lacenaire philosophy to show respect to anyone of inferior birth.

There is little doubt that Lacenaire would have preferred to work on his own, but he had not the courage to face even the debilitated and nervous Chardon, and it is significant that when the two men went from the wineshop to the house of the Chardons it was Avril who entered first on the invitation of Chardon.

"Come in, gentlemen, and sit down," said the doomed wretch, who recognized two former friends in misfortune and therefore did not distrust them.

They were to be his last words in this world, for as he was bowing to them the philosopher and his hired assassin sprang upon him and while Avril's fingers closed round his throat Lacenaire stabbed him again and again in the back until he sank without life to the floor. There Avril finished him off with a hatchet while his partner crept into the next room and murdered the helpless old woman.

Undeterred by the ghostly presence of the corpse, the two men searched for the many thousands of francs they believed to be concealed in the room, but all they secured for their trouble was five hundred francs and a statuette, which proved of no value.

The two murderers behaved with a coolness which seems to suggest that they felt that the murder of Chardon would be regarded by the public as an act of justice, and that in any event the police would not be in a hurry to avenge his death.

Whatever the reason, however, they ran quite unnecessary risks, actually lunching together in a restaurant close by, although their clothes were bloodstained. But Lacenaire, at any rate, had enjoyed the thrill of his first big crime. He felt he was no longer a mere talker; at last he had done something in his own opinion to justify his continual boastings; and he had, in fact, achieved some of his perverted ambitions.

From the café they went to a Turkish bath and, having got rid of the bloodstains, separated, Lacenaire to spend the remainder of the day and most of the night reading Rousseau; Avril to spend his share of the profits in a carousal which lasted until dawn, although he and Lacenaire had already planned their second murder and had agreed to resume work the next day.

They were determined, however, that their next murder should be a much more profitable one, and as it was two days before the double crime in the Rue St. Martin was discovered, they were feeling particularly pleased with themselves and supremely confident when disguised as law students—Avril must have been a very comical travesty of one—they engaged a room in Rue Montorgueil. Lacenaire was now Mahossier, which name he chalked on the door of his new lodgings, but it was unnecessary to rechristen his partner, who was to remain in the background until some unfortunate bank-messenger with a large sum on him was lured into the room which, Lacenaire grimly remarked, would not take long to convert into a mortuary.

Avril was inclined to grumble at the small profits of the first murder, but Lacenaire, who was philosophical enough to accept the inevitable and who never wasted his regrets on what-might-have-beens, affected to be delighted.

“We have done something more than make money, my dear comrade,” he said. “We have achieved the perfect crime. Think of it! We walk into the house in daylight and kill two vermin and we walk out again and no one suspects us. That is an achievement, and if you were an artist you would be proud of it.”

The reasoning was too much for the turgid brain of the ex-joiner, whose dissatisfaction changed to dismay only when two days after the murders in the Rue St. Martin the Paris police discovered the bodies. Had it not been for the unnecessary assassination of the old woman the police might not have done more than make a perfunctory attempt to solve the mystery, but they were roused by the brutality of criminals who had suffocated the old lady, and Avril, an easy prey to terror, unable to discover in Rousseau an opiate for a guilty conscience, spent most of his hours in cafés and drank himself into a delirium of forgetfulness. Had he been able to keep his head all might have been well, but forgetting Lacenaire’s maxim that a murderer should not demean himself by indulging in petty crimes, he reverted to his usual profession of thieving, blundered, and was arrested.

When the news reached Lacenaire at 66 Rue Montorgueil, it drove him into a paroxysm of rage. But as Avril knew all his secrets and was almost indispensable to him he made an effort to rescue him from the police, failing because they would not allow the ex-convict out on such security as Lacenaire could offer. Thus it became necessary for the latter to find a fresh partner, and he began a tour of the cafés and wine-shops in search of one.

It was not an easy task. Paris was plentifully supplied with criminals of all sorts and conditions, but philosophers who are murderers are rare and Lacenaire was particular. He required an assistant whom he could dominate and influence, some one better than a mere brute who would be impervious to arguments however epigrammatic or poetical. He was not, of course, satisfied when after some disappointments he was obliged to accept the cooperation of a burly ex-soldier whose family name was François, but who was known in the circle he honoured with his presence as Red Whiskers. François' position in the criminal underworld of Paris may be gauged by the fact that everybody knew his criminal tariff, which was brief enough to be memorized easily. For five francs he was willing to break into any house in France; for ten he would undertake a commission to disable anyone, and for twenty francs he guaranteed murder. In fact, a choice specimen of the primitive ruffian.

A favourite café of Lacenaire's was the scene of the first meeting of the philosopher and the ex-soldier, and the partnership might have been sealed there and then by much red wine had it not been that François, unable to understand his new acquaintance's flowery language, decided that he was either a lunatic or a police spy.

"I must have proof that you are straight," he said, after listening to a philosophic oration on the grandeur of crime, not a word of which he had understood. "You can talk, my friend, but so can the police when they have a mind to."

"You despise me because you think I am a mere amateur," exclaimed Lacenaire resentfully, "but I have graduated in your university and taken higher honours than yourself, my good François. Have you heard of the murders in the Rue St. Martin? Well, I killed the Chardons."

The disclosure removed the ex-soldier's doubts, and there was admiration in his eyes as he held out the hand which grasped Lacenaire's.

"I am with you," he cried, and they drank to each other like comrades.

"Then come with me to 66 Rue Montorgueil," said Lacenaire, who was always anxious to get to work when money was short. "I have arranged to trap a bank-messenger there, and there ought to be ten thousand francs for each of us if we succeed."

The plans of the philosopher and murderer lacked nothing by way of completeness that day in December, 1834. He had foreseen everything and had prepared carefully every step of his crime. He had begun with a visit to a bank and the presentation of a bill drawn on a certain M. Mahossier, payable on December 31st at 66 Rue Montorgueil. This meant that on that date a bank-messenger would call and present the bill for payment, and as he would previously have been to other houses and collected money Lacenaire had every reason to expect that his third victim would yield him many thousands of francs.

On the morning of December 31st Lacenaire's programme was complete. Dressed in his best clothes he reclined on a sofa reading his favourite Rousseau. Behind the sofa was a sack half filled with straw which he intended to hold the body of the murdered bank-messenger, and in a corner of the room was a large trunk which was to be utilized to convey the corpse to a deserted villa in a distant suburb where it was to be destroyed in a furnace. In fact, Lacenaire planned to be the first of the "trunk-murderers," and it was only an accident that deprived him of that "distinction."

The stage was now fully set for the third murder, and Lacenaire, who had become so natural a *poseur* that he could see nothing fantastic in an attempt to impress François with a display of philosophic calm, was apparently engrossed in his book when there was a knock at the door, the signal for action, although the intended victim could not be expected to know that.

François promptly threw open the door to admit a youth of eighteen, slim and delicate, of the name of Genevay. They saw that he carried a small black bag, which their imagination filled with wealth, and that only a fragile life stood between them and the money for which they craved. Lacenaire lost not a second in coming to grips, and as the youth bent over the bag which he had placed on the table the philosopher stabbed him in the back with the sharpened file which had already proved itself a reliable and trustworthy weapon in the Rue St. Martin.

But this time he was not dealing with a prematurely aged man whose strength had long since been sapped by vice. Genevay may not have been a Hercules, but he had the lungs of youth, and the first sharp pain set him yelling for help. It was such a lusty yell that François, whose appearance seemed to suggest that he knew no such thing as nerves, lost his head, and forgetting everything except the danger of publicity, dashed from the room and fled headlong down the stairs. To infect Lacenaire with his terror was an easy matter, and before Genevay's wound was being attended to by a doctor his assailants were far off and well under cover.

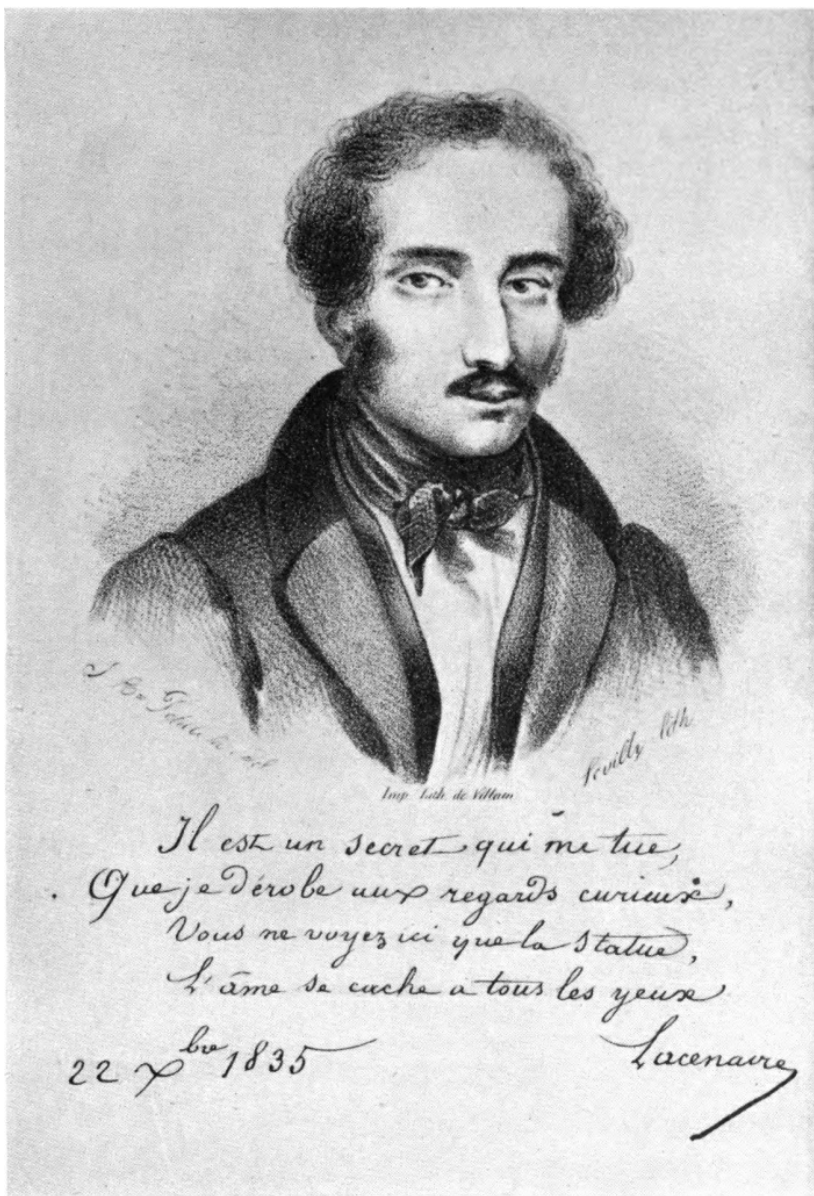
The failure of the plot on which he had counted so much demoralized Lacenaire,

and, hunger and privation proving too much for his flimsy armour of philosophy, he became a petty thief, which was, perhaps, more in keeping with his real character. But he was not to be successful even in his pettiness, and shortly after François was arrested for theft Lacenaire joined him in the same jail on a similar charge. This meant that the police had safely caged the two assassins of the Rue St. Martin and the two would-be assassins of the Rue Montorgueil, for it will be remembered that Avril was already in jail. But they were ignorant of the fact that they had the murderers of the Chardons under lock and key, and had it not been for the hostility aroused by Lacenaire's contemptuous attitude towards his fellow prisoners the mystery might never have been solved. However, François, with that eagerness to betray which is characteristic of the average criminal, decided to save his own skin by sacrificing Lacenaire, and when the ruffian made his confession Lacenaire's active career was as good as finished.

But Lacenaire had a confession to make too, for he was not to be outdone by a mere vulgarian who had proved himself so unworthy of his society, and when the philosopher started to confess he left nothing to the imagination of the police, not sparing either himself or his late comrade in crime, Avril. Mingling detail with epigram, he betrayed his friend with an enthusiasm which revealed fully the blood lust of the man whose only terror was lest he should die alone.

"I shall see Avril and François die first," he boasted to the police, "and then I will lay my head under the knife with relief. After all, death is merely an operation, the success of which depends on what use one has made of one's life."

Lacenaire slept soundly through the night in his dismal cell and awoke the next morning to find himself famous. Paris, for once satiated with revolutions and politics, succumbed to the claim of the murderer, out of whom rumour manufactured many sensations. It was whispered in the boulevards that he was a great poet and a brilliant essayist, and that all his misfortunes were due to the fact that he had been repudiated by his father, who was said to have been a royal prince. All this was pure imagination, of course; but when the gossip filtered through to the prison, Lacenaire felt that he had achieved something at last. He was a third-rate poet and a tenth-rate murderer, but he had captured the imagination of the crowd, and it was something to be a hero in cynical Paris, even if the last act was to feature the guillotine. When he heard that those verses of his which had been rejected contemptuously by every editor in Paris were now being printed and circulated by the hundred thousand, his vanity was comical in its gravity, and he immediately set about composing fresh poems, writing freely and unfettered because he knew that as a dying man he owed no allegiance either to king or to convention.



LACENAIRE (PIERRE FRANÇOIS GAILLARD)

His jailers, proud of a publicity in which they shared, humoured him without weakening the bars of his cage. But they were showmen now rather than jailers, and they acted as suppers at the receptions in the prison attended by all sorts and conditions of Parisians in honour of the hero of the hour. What with his receptions, his literary work, and the necessity for providing each day with at least one epigram

for quotation and repetition in the caf  s, Lacenaire's weeks of imprisonment before his trial passed quickly enough. Fully aware that society was going to cut off his head, not because he had murdered an infamous man and his helpless mother, but because he had attacked property in the person of the bank-messenger, Genevay, he did not commit the blunder of indulging in self-pity. His vanity saved him from that, and it was the only practical good he ever got out of a vice which had changed the morose child into a criminal.

The trial of the three prisoners, who were charged with murder, swindling and forgery, began on November 12th, 1835, and lasted nearly four days. A crowded court gratified the principal prisoner, who was anxious to prove himself equal to an occasion which promised to provide him with plenty of opportunities for histrionic display. He entered the court proudly conscious that although there were three on trial the public had already forgotten Avril and Fran  ois. He knew it was Lacenaire they wished to see, and he did not disappoint them. Almost every day while in prison he had rehearsed his behaviour in court, and he was so word and action perfect that he was hardly ever at a disadvantage even with the dignified judge. His candour was as amazing as his coolness. Nothing disturbed or perturbed him, and he replied to the questions of the President of the Court with a frankness which would have gained sympathy for him had his recital not consisted of one horror after another.

"I have known Chardon since 1830," he said, in a quiet, conversational tone, "but visited him only once; Avril went several times. We learned that he was to receive money from the Queen, and it was said to be an advance of 10,000 francs. I did not learn this from either of my fellow-prisoners, but from a person whom I will not name. I went to engage Frechard in the murder, who, however, declined. I cannot say whether the idea of the murder originated with me, or with Avril. I was armed with an awl, but Avril had no weapon. According to an agreement between us, Avril seized Chardon by the throat, while I stabbed him with the awl, and as Chardon struggled hard Avril seized the hammer-hatchet which was hanging behind the door, and finished the business.

"While Avril was thus engaged, I went into the room beyond, where I found Madame Chardon in bed, and killed her with the awl. Avril took no part in this second murder, as he did not enter the room till I was pressing the mattress upon the body. I was wounded in the hand by the awl, in consequence of it having only a cork for the handle, and the end of it was forced through by the violence of the blows. We carried off some plate, a

sum of 500 f., and some clothes, besides an ivory figure of the Virgin, which we fancied was of value, but afterwards threw into the river, as we were offered only 3 f. for it. Avril sold Chardon's cloak for 20 f., at the Temple, which sum he retained for himself. After the murder we went to bathe at the Bains Turcs, and, having cleaned away all the spots of blood, Avril went and sold the plate, while I waited for him at the Estaminet of the Epi Scie, on the Boulevard du Temple, where we dined, and afterwards went to the Théâtre des Variétés. When I went into Chardon's, I heard the clock of St. Nicholas's Church strike one, and it was about a quarter after when we left the house. In fact, the crime was perpetrated in the middle of the day. On the following day, I hired a lodging in the Rue Montorgueil, in the name of Mahossier, a law student, where I lived six days with Avril.

"I did not become acquainted with François till the 30th of December. I hired the apartment solely for the purpose of robbing a collecting clerk, to accomplish which I should have stopped at nothing. I previously made several attempts of this nature, particularly one in the Rue de la Chanverrierie, which, however, failed on account of the clerk being followed by a porter. The first time we inveigled persons of this description was merely to ascertain how far enterprises of that nature were likely to succeed. François, on the 29th of December, went to the house of a young man with whom I was acquainted, and declared that he was in a desperate state, having no resources; that he was proscribed, that, if arrested, he would be condemned for life, having been before convicted, and that he would kill a man for 20 f. The young man hinted that he knew of a business worth more than that, which he would undertake himself, were he not ill, and offered to put François in his place. François accepted, and was on the following day brought to me by the young man, whom I will not name. François and I went together to the apartment in the Rue Montorgueil, on the door of which I had written the name of Mahossier.

"On Genevay's entering, I requested him to go into the farther room, where I seized him by the shoulder while François put his hand on the man's mouth, but as he shouted murder, François ran away, and I after him. François, believing that if I was taken he himself might escape, pulled the door after him, but I succeeded in opening it, and ran out, crying 'Stop the murderer,' and several persons passed who showed me the

way François had taken. On the following day, François, myself, and the person who introduced us to each other, went to Issy, to rob a relation of François, but not being able to succeed returned to Paris, where I took a lodging in the house of Pageot, under the name of Baton, and François under that of Fusillier. We slept together. Pageot knew who and what we were. It was I and François who robbed Mr. Richmond, in the Boulevard Montmartre, of a clock, which I sold to a dealer in old clothes. A plan was laid between myself and Avril for robbing a collecting clerk of M. Rothschild, but as he never came to the appointment, we were obliged to content ourselves with robbing the room we had been lent for the purpose of a pair of curtains.”

It was then Avril's turn, and he was brought into court to give his version. It consisted of an attack on Lacenaire, an attack in which François later on joined, the two ruffians, who had the best of reasons for knowing the treachery of their leader, reviling him until they had to be threatened by the president. At one period the trial resolved itself into a warfare of verbal abuse by three ruffians animated by a desire for what they called revenge, and there was nearly a riot as a consequence. Lacenaire, ever cool and collected, more than once assured the court that he did not wish to escape the death penalty and that all he wished was to see Avril and François condemned with him.

Like all great trials it had its amusing moments. Thus when Avril wished to call a witness of the name of Robetti, who was then undergoing imprisonment, the president remarked that a person condemned to infamous punishment could not be admitted to give testimony.

“Monsieur President,” exclaimed Avril indignantly, “Robetti is only condemned to three years, and no punishment under five years is infamous.”

On another occasion when the president was closely questioning Lacenaire concerning his numerous swindles the prisoner yawned several times. He resented these reminders of crimes which reduced him to the lowest level of petty villainy, for the philosopher who is a thief is not taken seriously, and Lacenaire wished to inspire terror and not derision, but he endured the unwelcome examination for half an hour before he was moved to protest.

“Monsieur,” he said, with a cynical smile, “you're forgetting your sense of proportion. Your questions produce upon me the effect of a surgeon who amuses himself with trimming a man's corns when he is about to cut off his leg.”

The trial also had its dull moments, but they were not the fault of Lacenaire, who

proved himself a first-rate actor, for there can be little doubt that the show of contempt for death was merely a mask, and that the luminous eyes and smiling lips concealed a writhing soul. But he made almost every witness contribute to his desire for further publicity, extracting from one a tribute to his courage and from another a reference to his poems which served to double their circulation. He treated the dock as though it were a drawing-room, and his attitude towards the judge and jury was that of an old friend who could not quite hide a consciousness of social superiority. The abuse of Avril and François left him unmoved; he brushed them from him as though they were flies, and he succeeded in infecting the audience with a little of his own contempt for them. When called upon to speak in his own defence he was brief and to the point.

"Gentlemen," he said, without any sign of emotion, "one of the advocates has told you that I desire to live. No, gentlemen, life has no attraction for me. I am no stoic. Give me money and fortune and the enjoyment of life, and I will accept them at your hand, but the life of the hulks would be insupportable. I ask no favour. Deal with me as you think fit."

There were other speeches, but no one took any interest in them, for it was Lacenaire's trial, and the fate of Avril and François, two obscure vulgarians, was so unimportant as to savour of an anti-climax. In the opinion of the majority of those present the verdict was a foregone conclusion, but there were some who thought that the frankness and courage of the criminal whom Paris had put on a pedestal might hypnotize the jury into saving his life by coupling "guilty" with "extenuating circumstances."

The jury, however, were relentless, and only in the case of François did they find "extenuating circumstances." Lacenaire bowed like a courtier, and Avril heightened the effect of his leader's philosophical acceptance of his fate by an outburst which disgusted the crowded court.

"I hope they'll give me time enough to finish my memoirs," said Lacenaire, on his way back to the prison of the Conciergerie. "It is a document the world will prize."

There were nearly seven weeks of life left to him, and until the night he was told by the governor that his execution had been fixed for the morrow he enjoyed every moment. The precious memoirs—the usual conglomeration of calculated lies rendered almost credible by their vividness—pleased him mightily, for he foresaw the time when his crimes might be forgotten and his literary work remembered. He would have been crazy with joy could he have been told that many of the greatest writers of his country, from Victor Hugo downwards, were to immortalize him in their books. As it was, he had to be content with the brief fame of the rapidly

passing days and comfort himself with speculations as to the future.

Two nights before his execution Lacenaire composed a lengthy poem which took the form of a prisoner's invocation to God. Judged by ordinary standards it may be described as conventional and uninspired, but in view of the circumstances surrounding it it may be said to possess unusual qualities. Many famous books have been written in prison, but not by those condemned to die, and the poets of our prisons have been, as a rule, comically illiterate. Lacenaire's poem therefore deserves attention, and I will quote its last eight lines by way of a sample:

Dieu que j'invoque, écoute ma prière!
Darde en mon âme un rayon de ta foi,
Car je rougis de n'être que matière,
Et cependant je doute malgré moi—
Pardonne-moi, si dans ta créature
Mon œil superbe a méconnu ta main.
Dieu—le néant—notre âme—la nature,
C'est un secret;—je le saurai demain.

LA CONCIERGERIE, 8 *Janvier*, 1836.

It was his intention to deliver a lengthy harangue to the vast crowd he expected at his execution and also to recite his poem, but when he arrived in the tumbril the sparsity of the crowd revealed to him that the authorities had taken special precautions to discourage a large attendance. Paris had been kept in ignorance of the date of the execution of the popular criminal and so was represented at the end by a few hundred persons, chiefly gathered from the houses within sight of the guillotine. They formed a crowd which was not at all to the liking of the philosopher whose philosophy did not include toleration of those he regarded as the lower classes. Yet it was not contempt which at the last moment, when he came face to face with the guillotine, stifled the words on his lips, nor was it anger which sent the blood from his cheeks. He had mocked at death in his prison; he had scorned life in his poems; but there was the head of Avril in the basket, and no philosophy could keep at bay the terror inspired by those staring, lifeless eyes.

Once he tried to speak to one of the officials, but only half a dozen words were heard, and he was almost unconscious with terror when the knife put an end to a life of thirty-five years which had known little that was not evil since childhood.

CHAPTER II

CORA PEARL

The magnificent salon of what was probably the finest private residence in Paris was crowded with distinguished men and women. They had accepted the invitation of their hostess chiefly from motives which were not complimentary to one who had the reputation of being a heartless adventuress and had in the course of a few years risen from poverty to wealth by trading on the weaknesses of men. Some were there because they wanted to inspect the mansion which was rumoured to have cost two million francs to furnish; others desired a close view of one of the most beautiful women of her time, and the majority had been tempted by the certainty of a banquet, followed by a concert provided by some of the most celebrated singers in the world.

The dinner was a brilliant success, and now the guests, rendered amiable and generous-minded by food and wine, applauded vociferously the singers and in the intervals chattered so animatedly that the noise was almost deafening.

It was during one of these intervals that the owner of the mansion walked over to the piano, where a middle-aged woman who once had been a star in London operatic circles was preparing to sing. When she noticed the approach of her patroness she uttered an exclamation of delight.

"I have acquired a new song especially for Madame," she said.

"Indeed!" said the beautiful woman with the auburn hair and the rosy, plump cheeks. "May I inquire the title of it?"

"It is a song composed by one of your countrymen," said the singer. "I thought it would please you to hear it because it would bring back memories of your childhood." With a quick movement she separated the song from a sheaf and handed it to her.

When the younger woman saw the title-page she started, and her expression hardened.

"I do not wish you to sing this song," she said hurriedly. "I have heard it so often that I am tired of it."

The singer bowed, but before she could speak her patroness left her, for the giver of the feast was Cora Pearl, and the reason why she did not wish to hear "Kathleen Mavourneen" would have been obvious to the vocalist had she known that the world-famous song had been composed by Cora's father. Crouch had fashioned the melody in the year of her birth and she had been brought up with it and, in fact, educated on the profits of its sale. "Kathleen Mavourneen" always reminded her vividly of the days when she was innocent, "joyful and free from

blame.” But she had rebelled against the dullness of their old home in Devonshire, yet now, although a millionairess and able to spend two thousand pounds a week in her pursuit of pleasure, she would have given everything to be back again in that humble home in one of the fairest of English counties.

When Cora was fifteen so many persons praised her unusual beauty that, distressed by her parents’ impecuniosity, she longed to be able to turn it to monetary advantage. She had been well educated, and two years in a convent in France had enabled her to acquire the language of that country, but she knew that her intellectual abilities would not command much in the market, and young as she was, she realized that the stage was the only career open to her. She might not be a born actress, but her beauty would be a compensation, and after a considerable amount of secret planning she began to pay a series of visits to the theatre unknown to her father and mother. Everywhere she was repulsed, and she was returning home one night to the lodgings in London where the Crouch family were living, when she was accosted by a well-dressed and handsome man of middle age who had no difficulty in luring her into conversation. Cora Crouch believed she had a knowledge of the world greater than her years, but she did not read any sinister meaning into the polite phrases of the stranger, and, accepting an invitation to dine with him, found herself twenty-four hours later betrayed and deserted.

In the circumstances she was afraid to return home, and she decided to start life on her own account with a capital of five pounds, the small total of the money left behind by the stranger whose name she never knew. It was now very necessary that she should obtain employment, and it seemed to her that her luck had changed for the better when a theatrical speculator of the name of Brinkwell engaged her to sing and dance in a low-class café he was running in the West End. Unfortunately Brinkwell’s position was desperate when Cora, who adopted the name of Pearl for stage purposes, began her career, and when he disclosed the true state of affairs to her and offered to take her to Paris and find an engagement for her there, she had to consent.

Cora’s chief reason for leaving England was to place herself beyond the reach of her family. She was some years under twenty-one and therefore liable to be compelled by the law to return to her parents, and she knew she had gone too far to even be at her ease again in their presence. Hitherto she had been unlucky, but rather than confess failure and eat humble pie she was ready to venture into a city where she had not a friend and rely solely on her beauty to gain for her position and wealth.

As soon as convenient she got rid of Brinkwell and began to haunt the cafés where singers were required. Starvation wages were paid, but occasionally she was

invited to dinner by some of the patrons, and as from the beginning she felt quite at home in Paris she did not mind so much the poverty and the loneliness it entailed. She was confident that in a city where beauty, especially when allied with youth, was deeply appreciated, she must make good eventually.

Life was an adventure and she an adventuress, and it was in keeping with her temperament and ambitions that she should have passed from poverty to wealth in the course of a few hours. One night she was singing with no very great success a simple French ballad when a young man sitting alone at a table near the improvised stage asked her to drink with him. She did not know who he was, and his appearance did not suggest that he was one of the rich young fools so common in the French capital, but she was attracted by his ingenuous countenance and she accepted.

When he began making love to her she laughed at him, and when he talked of laying at her feet the finest jewels in Paris she laughed louder than ever. The café was frequented by youthful poets and artists, most of them sons of small shopkeepers who were posing as geniuses until recalled to serve behind the parental counters. Cora was perfectly willing that her newly-made friend should spend what little means he possessed on her, but she did not intend to waste much time over him.

“Allow me to offer you supper,” he said, when they had finished their wine.

Cora accepted with a nod. For her the day was beginning, and she did not wish to return to her squalid room until she had reduced herself to such a state of exhaustion as to be unable to notice its hideousness.

“I will take you to a restaurant where they rob you,” he said, rising, and they passed out into the night arm in arm.

She was surprised when the shabby vehicle stopped in front of the most expensive and most fashionable restaurant in Paris, but she was positively startled when she observed with what deference her escort was received by the staff. The manager almost doubled himself in his efforts to be deferential, and the girl listened in wonderment as the *chef*, especially summoned from the kitchen, sketched out a menu which was a combination of taste and extravagance.

“You must be a prince,” she said, staring at him.

“At present I have the honour to be your host and that’s all I desire,” he answered.

But before they parted that night Cora Pearl was in ecstasies because she knew that she had captivated a cousin of the Emperor, who was so madly in love with her that he was willing to place at her disposal his entire fortune.

“If I can’t make you queen of France, I will make you queen of Paris,” he

promised her, when he bought for her a house in the Rue de Chaillot which had proved too expensive for a merchant prince to maintain.

It was furnished regardless of cost, and a platoon of servants waited on Cora in liveries almost as gorgeous as that of royalty itself.

"I love flowers," she said pensively. A week previously she had been overjoyed because her earnings had reached twenty francs.

"Then you shall never be without them," the prince promised. "Summer and winter alike you shall have the rarest exotics."

By keeping his promise he ran up a monthly bill which was never less than five hundred pounds, and often exceeded seven hundred. But this was only one of the many almost insane extravagances of the capricious coquette, who was intoxicated by the power suddenly conferred on her of spending without limit or hindrance.

Beauty is evanescent, however, a fact of which Cora Pearl was well aware, and, though her vanity was almost a mania, she could confess to herself that the time would come when those who knew her would smile incredulously when told that she once had been considered the loveliest woman in Paris. She therefore determined to have created for her an enduring proof of her beauty, and her admirer being willing to go to any expense she commissioned Gallois, France's leading sculptor, to model her in marble. He asked for a fee of three hundred thousand francs—then worth £12,000—and the statue that resulted from his efforts is still said to rival the famous Venus de Milo.

What with the statue and a bath quarried out of pink marble at the cost of a quarter of a million francs, it is not surprising that in less than a year Cora should have spent £200,000. She had all the parvenu's passion for meaningless display, and she behaved as though money ruled everything and everybody, and could procure everything she desired. When the prince departed in a panic, his place was taken by a young man of the name of Duval, whose father had made nearly a million sterling out of hotels and restaurants. Duval first became acquainted with Cora in her luxurious palace, and older and wiser men than himself had their senses taken captive by a woman who knew how to show off to the best advantage all the gifts nature had bestowed on her.

"Will you let me prove my devotion?" he said rapturously, when she showed signs of yielding to his entreaties. "Command me to die and I will die."

"I want you to live and pay my bills," she said, with almost brutal candour. "My desk is almost suffocated with accounts."

He spent the rest of the day calling at various shops, and in addition to the eight thousand pounds which he distributed amongst the tradesmen of Paris who had

trusted Cora Pearl, he placed to her credit the sum of one hundred thousand pounds.

“That ought to last a long time,” he said, when he told her of his generosity the following morning.

“We shall see,” she remarked, with a peculiar smile.

That evening she gave a banquet which cost six thousand pounds. The flowers alone involved an expenditure of twelve hundred pounds, and the entertainment was the talk of Paris for weeks afterwards, which was exactly what Cora wished.

With Duval’s wealth behind her she attained a foremost social position, although her enemies worked overtime saying spiteful things about her. Paris, however, has always been noted for its willingness to be entertained, and the *entrée* to its best society has ever been open to anyone with sufficient originality and ready money to guarantee escape from ennui. It was especially so in the days when Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie were at the meridian of their splendour and Paris was the gayest city in Europe. The virtuous *grande dame* might sneer at Cora, but she seldom refused an invitation from the woman who was known to give the finest dinners in Paris.

Cora took herself very seriously, for clever though she was, she failed to understand that she was really buying her friends, and that as soon as her financial resources gave out she would be friendless. She actually believed that it was her personality and her beauty that attracted, and that she was creating for herself an impregnable social position. But now and then she was reminded that Paris really regarded her as an eccentricity, a sort of social freak, a passing show to which no admission was charged. Once she was lunching in a restaurant when Daniloff, a journalist who specialized in recording the languid activities of the aristocracy, passed her table with a swagger which denoted calculated insolence. Although he and Cora were acquaintances, if not actually friends, he did not take his hat off. When she understood the purport of his challenging attitude she rose to her feet and in a loud voice ordered him to remove his hat.

“I regret I must refuse,” he replied, with a grin.

He had scarcely spoken when Cora seized a cane belonging to a gentleman near her and knocked the hat off Daniloff’s head.

The laugh was against the journalist, but he soon had his revenge. Cora, amongst other things, was childishly proud of her pearls, which were said to have cost Duval twenty thousand pounds. Now there were rumours in Paris that the necklace was an imitation one, and in her anxiety to kill this libel on her most treasured possession, Cora wore the pearls whenever she appeared in public. She was displaying them at

the restaurant in which the hat incident had occurred when Daniloff walked straight up to her and began fingering the pearls.

The famous beauty was accompanied by one of the most noted duellists in France, but the journalist coolly unclasped the necklace and subjected it to a closer scrutiny. While he was doing this Cora's host was pouring flattery in her ears, extolling her as the most wonderful and the most beautiful woman since Helen of Troy.

"Would you exchange these pearls for his fine words?" asked Daniloff disdainfully, his demeanour one of biting contempt.

Cora affected to misunderstand his attitude and she answered him lightly.

"Of course not." Her face was radiant because by now all the diners were watching them and she was proud of the notoriety.

"Why not?" said the journalist, raising his voice so that all might hear him. "Both are equally false."

With a cry of rage she sprang to her feet and snatched the necklace from him. In her fury she broke the string and the pearls scattered about the floor in a dozen different directions.

There were plenty of volunteers to recover them for her, but when they were counted seven were missing.

"Some of your friends must be dining here to-night, my dear Daniloff," said Cora, with a cold precision which was more cutting than the most brutal sarcasm.

The journalist was indiscreet enough to rise to the bait.

"How do you know that?" he demanded, hoping no doubt that she would provide him with an opening for a smashing retort.

"Because seven of my pearls have been stolen," she said, laughing derisively, "and we all know to what shifts you poor journalists go in order to keep a roof over your garrets."

Daniloff had no retort ready and wisely sought refuge in silence, but the story was all over Paris next day, and Cora was content to have lost her valuable pearls in view of the advertisement the incident gave her. But the same week she performed an act of generosity which astonished Paris.

Amongst her admirers was a youthful count who, fortunately for himself, tired of her blandishments and fell in love with the daughter of a general. As he and the girl moved in the highest circles, their engagement was a matter of public interest, and the count, terrified lest Cora should, in her spite and jealousy, cause a breach between himself and his fiancée, took the precaution of going to a lawyer and drawing up a deed of gift entitling the adventuress to the sum of a quarter of a million

francs the day he was married.

Armed with the document he was as usual graciously received. She was always polite to men of means, and even if she was aware that the count had almost begged himself in her service, she was all smiles and flattery when he entered her drawing-room. In fact, she was so effusive—it was only acting, but he did not know that—that he endured torture for half an hour before he blurted out the date of his forthcoming marriage. Cora's eyes glinted and her lips tightened.

"But I have prepared a wedding present for you," he hastened to tell her, producing the document. "Instead of having to give me a present you will be paid a quarter of a million francs on the day of my marriage."

With a languid expression she held out her hand and he placed the deed in it.

"Thank you," she said, without any feeling in her tone. "I think I have met your friend once or twice."

When he had gone Cora tore the paper into fragments, which she placed in an envelope and addressed to the girl who was to be the wife of the man who had once sworn eternal devotion to herself. She was not in the least degree upset by his desertion—secretly she was rather glad to be rid of him because she knew that his finances were in a chaotic condition—but, womanlike, she was inclined to resent the transference of his allegiance to another.

When the daughter of the general received the mutilated deed of gift—she had been acquainted with her lover's decision to placate Cora Pearl—she was touched by what she considered a very generous action. The payment of a quarter of a million francs to the adventuress would have entailed an economy resembling penury during the first few years of their married life, and the refusal of the money meant therefore a great deal to the young couple. Inspired by gratitude she actually called on Cora and thanked her in person.

"Oh, don't praise me beyond my deserts," said the adventuress calmly. "I did it in order to be talked about."

The next morning practically every newspaper in Paris contained a reference to Cora Pearl's generosity, and when she drove out in the afternoon she made almost a royal progress. In every café she was discussed, and stories concerning her wonderful beauty and the number of famous men she had subdued by it circulated all over the city. An enterprising theatrical manager promptly offered the heroine of the hour an engagement at a fabulous salary, and Cora agreed to appear as Cupid in an opera composed by a minor musician. Her acting was poor and the opera was worse, but everybody wanted to see Cora Pearl, and for a fortnight the theatre was crowded, although three times the usual charge was demanded for admission.

At the end of the second week when leaving the theatre escorted by cheering students she noticed Duval, pale-faced and shabby, regarding her with a mute look of appeal from the gutter. She had not seen him for nearly a month, a very long period in the memory of a fickle woman, and she had no desire to be accosted by him at the very moment she was being treated like a queen. It mattered nothing to her that the magnificent carriage into which she stepped had been paid for by Duval, and that the pair of thoroughbred horses which drew her to her home had been bought for a fabulous sum by him. Duval's fountain of money had ceased to flow, and therefore she had no further use for him.

She sighed with relief when the carriage was closed and the coachman flicked the horses, but when she reached the mansion which Duval's purse had maintained for over a year she found him on her doorstep.

"May I come in, Cora?" he asked humbly.

"No, my friend, it is too late," she replied, without a smile.

"You don't want me?" he gasped. His expression was haggard and if she had had a heart it must have been touched; but, although he had ruined himself for her, she had no pity for him now.

Without a word she passed in, and at eleven o'clock in the morning, while she was sipping her coffee in bed, her maid startled her with the news that Duval had committed suicide on her doorstep.

Cora was terrified, but not at all sorry for the young man. She was only afraid of the effect it would have on her reputation and on her recently-gained triumphs, especially her popularity with the mob. It was scarcely any relief to her when later she heard that Duval had only injured himself and that the doctors hoped to save his life. They succeeded after a hard struggle, but so far as Cora was concerned the mischief had been done.

On the Monday night she drove to the theatre, trembling and apprehensive. Her agitation was not without reason, for the moment she appeared on the stage the whole house hissed her, the more militant throwing inodorous vegetables at her. The curtain was rung down and she fled, and for days remained behind locked doors in her mansion, hoping that the fury of the crowd would abate and she would be able to resume her theatrical engagement. But her treatment of Duval had been too cruel and callous to be forgotten easily by the Parisians, and when an English duke wrote to Cora inviting her to come to London she accepted. It was a bitter humiliation for her to have to engage a suite of rooms at the Grosvenor Hotel under an assumed name, but a candid friend in Paris advised her that in view of the Duval scandal no hotel manager in London would admit her. She affected to disbelieve him, but on the

night of her arrival in London she realized to the full how prejudiced the public were against her. Scarcely had her half ton of luggage been deposited in the hall, when the manager came forward and as politely as possible informed her that as she was the notorious Cora Pearl he must refuse to accommodate her. Cora stormed and raved, but he was not to be moved, and she had to rent a house in Mayfair, paying a rental of two hundred pounds a week for a five weeks' tenancy.

In spite, however, of her recent misfortunes she enjoyed a series of triumphs in London. With the assistance of her ducal friend she gave receptions which were attended by scores of noblemen and a few unconventional women of rank. It was said at the time that a member of the English royal family constantly dined with her and that the servants had instructions to announce him as "Mr. Robinson." Cora was delighted with her success, and it was with the utmost reluctance that she set out on a Continental tour, compelled by a rapidly diminishing banking-account as much as by a hint from a very exalted personage that London would be better without her.

A round of visits to the chief casinos of Europe occupied her for nearly eighteen months, and at Baden-Baden, where she was refused admission until she entered the gambling-rooms on the arm of a cousin of the Kaiser, she created a panic by providing her male hangers-on with squibs which they discharged at intervals and sent the gamblers scurrying out of the building in terror.

For this freak she was expelled by the police the next morning, but she went on her way rejoicing to Monte Carlo, and if she lost consistently she was never without an infatuated admirer to recoup her. Cora was not at heart a gambler, but she required something to occupy her mind until it was safe for her to return to Paris, and when at last she could enter the French capital without being assailed by a mob she was happy again.

Some years of the wildest extravagances and pleasure now followed. Her beauty remained to fascinate men and she made a gold mine out of it. Her mansion became a perfect treasure house and was one of the sights of Paris. She continued to give dinners and receptions which were rivalled by none, and, although other beauties had their moments of triumph, it seemed as though Cora Pearl was never to know dethronement.

And then, when she was only twenty-eight, the war of 1870 suddenly changed everything. It certainly effected revolution in the character of the pleasure-loving woman, for it transformed her into a very human and lovable personality. Simultaneously with the proclamation of war she sold the treasures of her mansion and converted the building into a hospital. She worked sixteen hours a day as a nurse, and during the siege of Paris she was ever to be found at the most dangerous

and exposed places tending the wounded. She often closed the eyes of the dead amid the fire of the enemy, and she walked calmly through streets from which everybody else had fled. Naturally the soldiers worshipped her, and her beauty and cheerfulness in the most adverse circumstances acted as a tonic in moments of terror and panic.

When the Germans finally triumphed, Cora, in spite of her sacrifices, had sufficient jewellery left to maintain her in comfort had she been inclined to exercise wise economy, but she forgot that the overthrow of the Second Empire and the establishment of a republic would mean that the class which had hitherto paid for her triumph would be no longer in a position to bring costly gifts to her shrine.

With the proceeds of her jewels and a few lucky deals in pictures and objects of art she was able to hold her own for nearly ten years. But it was a hard struggle and worry and discontent killed her vivacity and took the roses from her cheeks. That was the reason why at forty she found herself in a cheap boarding-house in Paris and quite incapable of attracting even the most susceptible of men because her loveliness had gone and with it her old optimism.

Year after year she sank lower in the social scale, neglected and forgotten, and when in the winter of 1886 she died of cancer not a single newspaper recorded an event which twenty years previously would have startled the world. She had aged so much that the owner of the lodging-house where she expired put her age down as sixty when making his return to the public official whose duty it is to bury paupers. The cheapest of coffins was ordered for her and a local undertaker was told to bury her in a large common grave. He was about to "rattle her bones over the stones" when an aristocratic-looking man with iron-grey hair and impressive features and demeanour entered his shop.

"What will the best funeral possible for Madame Cora Pearl cost?" he asked, producing a bulging pocket-book.

The undertaker named a sum which he fully expected to be cut in half. To his amazement the stranger handed him notes for double the amount.

"The lady must have the finest funeral," he said quietly, "and I rely on you to carry out my wishes. An agent of mine will be present and I warn you that you must fulfil your part of the bargain."

He disappeared and was never seen or heard of again by the undertaker, but Cora Pearl would have been proud of her own funeral, because it was conducted on the same extravagant lines she adopted in her lifetime. Her unknown friend must have guessed that a splendid tomb was the only fit resting-place for one who had sacrificed everything for a temporary splendour and a transient and deceitful

happiness.

CHAPTER III

THE CONVERTED MURDERER

The Gallery of Hypocrites is so overcrowded that the figure of James Cook, the Leicester murderer, is almost unnoticed. At first sight he seems out of place in it, and yet I am not sure that the oily little tradesman, with clasped hands and with the whites of his eyes showing towards the stars, is not greater than the kings and emperors, statesmen and prelates, *littérateurs* and philanthropists who out-glisten him. And if the test be supremacy in the not too easy art of hypocrisy in the condemned cell he is king of them all, a repelling, nauseating king, but all the same a veritable monarch.

No historian has ventured yet to enclose in a boundary of dates that elusive and illusive period to which dealers in clichés are fond of referring to as “the good old times.” Only recently has it been proclaimed that by permitting the “writing-up” of “popular murderers” by the press we are violating the good taste of that visionary epoch when perfection was attained so easily as to leave nothing for criticism. But whatever that period was it was not the early part of the nineteenth century when James Cook, of Leicester, committed a diabolical crime which might have been completely forgotten by now had it not been for the orgy of canting and ranting hypocrisy with which his alleged conversion was surrounded. Murderers of to-day may weary us because of the garrulity of their daily biographers, but it is no longer possible to bestow on an occupant of the condemned cell the halo of a saint and the crown of a martyr. Public opinion would not tolerate it for a moment even if we had a repetition of the phenomenon of a girl of good family brushing aside the prison chaplain and in an ecstasy of fanaticism hero-worshipping a loathsome murderer. Charles Dickens created two supreme hypocrites, Silas Pecksniff and Uriah Heep, and when he wanted material for the latter he embodied something of James Cook in his character.

However, before I develop this feature of a once famous case I will give a brief account of the crime. In the early part of the summer of 1832 Cook was a bookbinder with a workshop in Wellington Street, Leicester, a small, detached building which was overlooked on every side. He was twenty-two, and he had the reputation of being rather a good young man; in fact, he had been such an industrious apprentice that his master had left him his business. That he was quiet and inoffensive we can believe, and had he been as dependable as a master as he had been when an employé he might have attained a certain degree of prosperity. But Cook had grown tired of discipline before he became a man in the eyes of the law, and therefore he

did not discipline himself, working only when the mood seized him, which was infrequently and usually at night. Business grew scarce and debts inevitably accumulated, and the end—bankruptcy—was in sight the morning he received a letter from Mr. John Paas, of High Holbom, London, informing him that the writer would call in person in the course of the week for settlement of his account. Mr. Paas was a brass ornament manufacturer who had supplied Cook with tools to the value of eight pounds, and the debtor knew that failure to settle would destroy his credit at one stroke. The young bookbinder, however, quickly reconciled himself to the thought of losing his business. It did not require much intelligence to arrive at a conclusion that he had no chance of rehabilitating himself. Quite apart from a disinclination for work of any kind he had lost the greater part of his connection, and whatever else happened it was certain that he would have to begin all over again and at a place remote from his native town.

He began to contemplate the possibility of emigrating to America where fortunes were to be made so easily, for your failure is fully persuaded that he has not failed because of his lack of merit but solely because of misfortune. But Cook was practically penniless and in debt, and emigration required capital. Once, however, the heavy, slow brain of the stoutish young man of medium height began to deal with the financial problem it gave birth to evil schemes, and when the letter from Mr. Paas arrived immediately found fresh inspiration in it. Cook rapidly conjured up a picture of Mr. Paas and his doings in Leicester. The London tradesman would have at least a dozen accounts to collect, and if it so happened that he was induced to call last at the workshop in Wellington Street, he would have a goodly sum in his pockets—perhaps a hundred pounds in coin and notes—for everybody in Leicester with whom the London manufacturer did business paid him in cash. What easier task than to kill Mr. Paas, destroy his body in a furnace, and before the mystery of his disappearance was solved—if ever it was solved—emigrate to America, make a fortune, and at the same time rebuild his reputation for respectability.

No sooner was the desperate and dangerous plot conceived than its author accepted it as certain of success. He was not gifted with any great intelligence—the weakness of his expression was a severe handicap to features otherwise pleasing—and he conceded society less. He knew it would be necessary to prepare for his crime by hoodwinking his neighbours in Wellington Street, but all he did was, on the evening before he was due to receive Mr. Paas, to light an unusually large fire in his workshop and leave it blazing away after he had locked up the premises. To his joy the bait took, the occupant of the house close by remonstrating with him for risking a conflagration which might have destroyed the street.

“The furnace is perfectly safe,” Cook answered glibly. “I banked it up myself. I am very busy just now and I may have to work late to-morrow night.”

Having thus prepared the way he was quietly confident when on the evening of May 30th, 1832, the boy he employed ushered Mr. Paas into the workshop. His visitor was a tall, well-built man of fifty, red-faced and amiable-looking, and he towered over the young bookbinder, who welcomed him with the intimation that he had the money ready to settle his debt. The boy was present during this preliminary conversation, but he heard no more, for Cook sent him away on an unnecessary and futile errand and told him to report the next day.

Within five minutes of the boy's departure Mr. Paas was a corpse, Cook creeping behind him and striking him on the back of the head as the older man was bending over the table affixing his initials to a receipt. The furnace was waiting, and the murderer, having removed all the money from the unfortunate man's pockets—it amounted to nearly sixty pounds—and taken his gold watch, rings and other articles of jewellery, proceeded to do his clumsy best to destroy every vestige of his crime. Of course he was not successful, and where an anatomical expert like Dr. Webster failed it was hardly necessary to record that in his efforts to destroy evidence Cook merely created proofs of his guilt. But he worked as he had never worked before, and only when he was completely exhausted did he take a rest. Then, fearful that his continued absence might bring one of his relations to the workshop—his father actually did call and knock, but receiving no answer went away—he went home at nine o'clock, but at one o'clock in the morning after four restless hours he declared that he must return to the workshop because he had an important commission to finish. That was Thursday, and he kept the furnace in full blast all day. Pedestrians saw the reflection of the flames through the covered window, and those who knew Cook marvelled that he should be so industrious. His more nervous neighbours talked of remonstrating with him again, but they did not interfere until late that evening. Meanwhile, Cook, in need of food and rest, went across to the “Flying Horse,” and having obtained both, flourished a handful of gold and silver in front of the landlord as he paid him. Then he sought recreation and diversion in a game of skittles. At eleven o'clock he was in bed at home when he was startled by a sudden ingress of excited men who told him that the landlord of the “Flying Horse” had broken open the door of the workshop, having been alarmed by the fire, and that he was wanted there because something suspicious had been found.

The murderer was fuddled by drink, but he regained his wits during the short walk, and although it must have been a terrible moment for him he displayed no terror when conducted into the room where he had murdered Mr. Paas and was

confronted by a police constable.

The Leicester Dogberry of those days was known by the name of Measures, and from all accounts he must have been a very juicy specimen of the stage policeman. It was the settled opinion of Mr. Measures that crime could not be detected without the aid of beer, and he was further convinced that the peace of Leicester would be destroyed if he failed to inspect his favourite public houses at least three times a day. He was in the half-way stage of one very lengthy inspection when he was dragged to the workshop in Wellington Street, and now he had just sufficient sobriety to be able to stand on his own legs as he was being shown the smouldering flesh before he was presented to the suspect. Mr. Dogberry Measures shook his head gravely and murmured that there was reason for suspicion, and when Cook protested that the cause of all the pothor and bother was merely horseflesh the semi-inebriated sleuth shook his head again and decided that the only thing to do was to postpone the investigation until he was sober and the flesh could be examined by a doctor.

“I must have security for your presence at the investigation to-morrow,” he said thickly. Cook promptly produced his father, who said he would go bail for him. That satisfied Dogberry, and Cook, having entered his father’s cottage by the front door, gathered together a few necessary articles and went out by the back, unwilling to distress Measures by the pathos of a long farewell.

By the time a surgeon had seen the remains in the workshop and identified them as human, Cook was in a coach on the way to Liverpool, and with railways very much in their infancy the start he had was a great advantage which with a little luck he might have turned into complete victory over his pursuers. But when he arrived in Liverpool and went to the docks there was no boat leaving immediately for America and he was compelled to hide for a couple of days. By then the police were at his heels, and although, with the aid of the money he had obtained by his crime, he induced a boatman to take him out to one of the western-bound ships, he was intercepted by a boat containing his pursuers and forced to return to land. There he was made a prisoner as he was in the act of pressing a bottle containing laudanum to his lips.

There was never, of course, any doubt as to his guilt, although he had destroyed the greater part of his victim’s body; indeed, there were so many proofs of his guilt that no one cared very much whether he confessed or not. But all Leicester was in a ferment at his capture, and the inquest was deemed important enough to be attended by the mayor and corporation, while the Home Secretary was kept informed daily of the progress of the investigation. Murderers are never original, and Cook, of course,

denied that he had murdered Mr. Paas in cold blood. Allowing his imagination to proceed on the usual conventional lines he told of a quarrel which had been terminated by a struggle and in which Mr. Paas had received—accidentally, of course—mortal injuries. That had compelled the unfortunate young man to commit the body to the flames because he feared that no one would believe his version of the tragedy. Many murderers have since 1832 unconsciously repeated this absurd story, adapting it to their own ends and never succeeding in finding a believer except an occasional crank out for notoriety.

For the time being, however, James Cook, the Leicester bookbinder, was the chief topic of conversation throughout England, dimming for a time the interest taken in the great Reform Bill. From the moment he was lodged in Leicester Jail he became a sort of national figure, and with that tolerance which is unknown in our more enlightened age he was permitted to receive visitors—chiefly sightseers—every day and enjoyed a freedom which was scarcely hampered by the chains he was compelled to wear. Strangers who had come considerable distances to gaze upon him were amazed at the mildness of his expression and the humility of his manner, for, like Uriah Heep, Cook was always “umble,” and if he was now and then driven into fits of ill-temper he soon recovered his suavity, having duly discovered that humility was the nearest way to the good graces of his indulgent jailers. But he was going to be luckier than he ever anticipated, for amongst those who read of his crime and arrest was a Miss Payne, of Sulby Manor, Northampton, a member of a well-known family. Highly-strung and under the influence of a religious emotionalism which was too much for her weak frame, she suddenly came to the conclusion that it was her mission in life to save the soul of James Cook, and once she got the idea firmly planted in her mind she spared neither herself nor her purse until she began her divinely appointed—as she believed—work of salvation.

Who was Mrs. Lachlan? A hundred years ago the “Morning Post” said of her that her numerous writings “eminently entitled her to the sincere gratitude of parents and guardians,” and she may claim the minor distinction of being the first author to dedicate a book to the princess who afterwards became Queen of England. The latter was only thirteen when Mrs. Lachlan gave forth to the world a novel bearing the name of “The Twins of Chamouni,” “dedicated by special permission of the Duchess of Kent to H.R.H. the Princess Victoria.” She wrote several other volumes, but the most curious of all is that which relates in pious detail the story of the conversion of James Cook. It is an extraordinary compilation, and although the good lady says very little about herself one can deduce from it sufficient to provide material for a pen picture of her. To begin with, she lived in Euston Square, which

was, in the year of grace 1832, dull, acrid, dreary, but eminently respectable. I picture her as a stout, full-faced dame in the fifties, addicted to bombasine and bonnets challengingly unfashionable. She probably employed three servants, who were overworked on weekdays and over-preached at on Sundays, on which day they would not be allowed to do any work not considered necessary by their employer. No doubt, a nice hot dinner for Mrs. Lachlan was a necessity, and was therefore not vetoed, but nothing so sinful as hot vegetables was allowed in the kitchen. No. 22 Euston Square may have been involved in a fog of religious depression every Sunday, but its mistress would have enjoyed it in her own calm way. Intensely loyal, she is sure to have had pictures of the royal family on the walls; and, as she was deeply religious, they would contest for her artistic appreciation with quarter-acre engravings depicting scenes from the Old Testament; while, solidly respectable as she was, her furniture would be weighty, gigantic and with horsehair in profusion. Mrs. Lachlan prided herself on being a champion of poor girls—a female prototype of the gentleman in “The Chimes” who was the champion of poverty irrespective of sex. But she had a lively appreciation of class distinctions, and the only time she was moved to wrath during her championship of Miss Payne was owing to a newspaper referring to Mrs. Paas—“the widow of a tradesman”—as a “lady,” and to Miss Payne as “a Leicester woman.” But Mrs. Lachlan’s greatest passion was for the Church of England. It would be a mistake to describe her as a fanatic, for she lacked the youthfulness of spirit and the elasticity of mind necessary to militancy. Besides, she was too respectable, and although her book shows that she was well in advance of her time and a champion of the rights of her sex she was for the most part stately, staid and superior. The horsehair sofa, the quarter-acre engravings and all the rest of the paraphernalia of a sheltered life passed in dullness and extreme respectability made Mrs. Lachlan what she was—a woman of very high principles, good-natured in a frozen way, a hater of lies who was outraged by shams, and deeply religious without any taint of hypocrisy. Completely devoid of a sense of humour, she judged the world by her rigid moral standard, and with the Bible in her hand looked forward with confidence to the next world, believing that all those who agreed with her would go to heaven and those who did not would find themselves in hell. That was Mrs. Lachlan, the friend of Miss Payne, of Sulby Manor, Northampton, and the author of one of the queerest books in the English language, a volume which would revolt one’s sense of decency were it not obvious that every line was written with perfect sincerity and inspired by the best of motives.

The book is entitled:

Narrative
of the
Conversion
(By the instrumentality of Two Ladies)
of
James Cook,
The Murderer of Mr. Paas:
in
Letters Addressed to a Clergyman of the
Established Church,

and is dedicated to James Thomas Holloway, described as “the conscientious preceptor of a select number of young gentlemen.” Dr. Holloway was also Mrs. Lachlan’s parochial clergyman, and she informed the world that she dedicated her book to him because he was her ideal of a Christian clergyman—the qualification is her own, and is characteristic.

In reality, however, the book is Miss Payne’s, for that portion occupied by Mrs. Lachlan in expounding her evangelical theories is not of absorbing interest. But the adventures of Miss Payne and her companion while converting Cook is a revelation of fanaticism on one side and hypocrisy on the other without a parallel in history or literature.

According to her own statement Miss Payne was not in the habit of reading newspapers and it was quite by chance that she alighted upon an account of the murder at Leicester. At this time she was recovering from an illness and her mind was just in that condition to be influenced by the supernatural. Possessing none of Mrs. Lachlan’s masculinity, her natural piety worked itself up into a religious exaltation which she could not control, and when she decided that heaven had selected her to achieve the salvation of James Cook she threw herself into the task with a fierce energy, which plainly foreshadowed a complete breakdown when the inevitable reaction ensued.

Her first act was to send a long letter to the prisoner exhorting him to repentance and assuring him that if he did so he would go straight from the scaffold to heaven. Cook, who was by no means lacking in shrewdness, seized the opportunity presented and responded with a request that Miss Payne and her friend should visit him. The powerful and wealthy family of Payne of Sulby Manor could not have been unknown to him, and he had every reason for enlisting the sympathy and help of an influential person. Had Miss Payne been troubled by doubts as to the propriety of

her mission they would have been removed by the receipt of Cook's invitation. It threw her into a state of ecstasy, for she saw in it a divine confirmation of her mission, and a few days later she and her companion arrived in Leicester, armed with Bibles, a basket of fruit, a dozen cambric handkerchiefs and other articles which she hoped would lessen the severity of his unfortunate situation. Cook, who had had plenty of time for rehearsing his part, received her with a humility which he tempered with a pretence of indifference to religion. The young scoundrel did not intend to make his conversion too cheap, and when on closer acquaintance he realized that his conversion had become the strange young lady's passion he played up to her with a cleverness which would have done credit to a professional actor, and at the right moment dropped his "hardness of heart" pose and declared himself converted. He had nothing to lose by doing so and he stood to gain a great deal, and when he was asked to prove his conversion by confessing his crime he did so with an alacrity which would have opened the eyes of anyone except a girl who wished to be deceived. The murderer knew very well that the prosecution regarded a confession as quite unnecessary. There was sufficient evidence to convict him a dozen times over, but the confession he wrote at the instigation of his fair chaplain sent her into a paroxysm of joy, and she hastened to inform Mrs. Lachlan of her triumph. The brutal murderer of Mr. Paas became in a twinkling a Christian hero, and the callous, ignorant youth was henceforth an object of almost idolatrous adoration. Nothing could be more eloquent of her state of mind than her own account of his conversion.

"When I entered the prison," she wrote to Mrs. Lachlan, "I fell on a text which gave me a powerful assurance that Cook would be saved; and though I saw in him much to discourage us, yet I never doubted. The assurance followed me that he would be saved, and I knew there was nothing too hard for the Lord. O what an instance of the stony heart becoming a heart of flesh! He is ripening so fast for heaven, that such a sight I never could have imagined I should behold on earth. Could you but see him! He takes the Bible and astonishes us with his beautiful child-like remarks. He does indeed answer the description of receiving the kingdom of God as a little child. In fact, words can never give you an idea of the amazing wonderful change in this being. Christ shines in every look and every word. He seems to feel that God sent us to him, and says he longed to make a full confession to us the first day we saw him, but that the devil prevented him, and that what we had said had such an effect on him, that he never rested till he had confessed. His ripening for Heaven is the most

rapid and wonderful thing I ever beheld. He is the brightest child of God I ever saw. He looks on death with a smile. His exceeding holiness in word, look, and manner, exceeds anything I ever beheld in man. It excites me too much to tell you a hundredth part of what we hear and see. We are the instruments intended to strengthen him for death. What an undertaking! But so it is; and I think he will glorify God to such a degree, that such a death has hardly, if ever, been on record. He has particularly desired to have all the particulars printed, and we intend to have this done. Pray that I may be supported under the trial, for my health is still delicate. I think Christ's coming is close at hand; pray that we may be found among the wise virgins watching for our Lord, loving His appearance. Blissful exchange of earth for Heaven! The nearness of the comet, too, which is expected next October, calls for our serious attention. This world is to be burnt up, and I think it will be at that time. What bliss, to be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and be for ever with the Lord!"

"The brightest child of God" turned to instant advantage the fanaticism and credulity of his patroness, and when the prison chaplain, Dr. Fancourt, tried to discourage her visits, Cook prayed for his conversion also, thereby earning from Miss Payne further pæans of praise for what she termed his "Christian charity and forgiveness." On another occasion when a tactless sightseer referred, within hearing, to Cook as a murderer and the prisoner immediately lifted up his voice and prayed for the tactless one's conversion, Miss Payne could not express in words her wonderment and delight.

"I will forgive my enemies ten times seventy times seven," he said, rubbing his hands together and elevating his eyebrows. "I am not sorry for myself—only for the millions who are not converted, for I am going to heaven and they are going to hell."

In a very short time, thanks to Miss Payne's influence and her daily consignment of luxuries to the prisoner, Cook became the king of the castle, and the jailers his subjects. Every luxury that money could procure found its way into his cell, and the jailer whose turn it was to watch him was very grateful when permitted to make a meal off the remnants of roast chicken and other dainties provided for the murderer by his patroness. But Cook never committed the blunder of abandoning his pose of humility, and he applied himself to the richly-bound Bible—a special gift from Miss Payne—with such diligence that he was soon an expert in the art of quotations from the Scriptures, able at a moment's notice to find a text for any and every occasion.

In any other environment he would have been a perfect prototype of Chadband, but as he was within shadow of death all the time he was something more remarkable.

“What sort of a life do you think you would now lead if that were to be spared?” Miss Payne asked him.

“A life of holiness,” he answered. “Yes, it would be a useful life. I should be an ornament to society.”

That was a feeler, of course, for behind the hypocrite’s mask there was always the hope that the influence of his dupe might obtain a reprieve for him.

Later as she rose to go he implored her to sing another hymn with him, and when it was ended murmured that he intended to spend the next two hours on his knees praying for Mrs. Paas and her family. We may be sure that that brought more presents the next day and more adulation for the loathsome hypocrite.

The next morning, when asked how he had passed the previous evening he replied, “Oh, I had such a beautiful night; we read and prayed and sang prayers to God, and then we departed in peace, and met again with love this morning.”

His word was now law in the prison, and with an imperiousness which was concealed artfully by an affectation of humility he occasionally demanded the presence of the jailer and his family so that they might sing hymns together! These performances were always timed to coincide with the arrival of Miss Payne and her companion, and when, as sometimes happened, the hymns were succeeded by prayers for Mrs. Paas, the snivelling hypocrite was surrounded by admirers who whispered to one another hoarsely their amazement at his goodness and charity.

When the keeper of the jail transferred him to another apartment because the ordinary cell seemed scarcely worthy of his distinguished daily visitor, Cook implored Miss Payne to use her influence to have the arrangement cancelled.

“But it’s much nicer than the cell,” she expostulated, thinking that her convert was unnecessarily anxious to embrace discomfort. Of course the roast chicken, the jellies, the wine and the weekly gifts of fine linen she did not consider as luxuries.

“That cell is the dearest spot on earth to me,” he murmured, with a saccharine hypocrisy which was revolting, “because it was the scene of my conversion by you.” Bursting into tears he added, “I shall break my heart if I stay here.”

All his conversations with Miss Payne were religious, and all the time he was “showing off,” to use a schoolboy expression. For he knew that the only way to keep the infatuated woman up to the mark and guarantee the continuance of her gifts was to quote Scripture lavishly and base every topic on his conversion.

“With this blessed book in my hand,” he exclaimed one day, holding the

Testament towards her, "I can declare that if my chains were taken off and all the prison doors were opened I would not attempt to escape. I bless God for bringing me into this prison. I am sorry for everybody outside. There are thousands who would be all the better if they were here."

One can hear the voice of Uriah Heep in this, and I will quote from "David Copperfield" to show that Charles Dickens must have had James Cook in mind when he depicted Uriah Heep in prison. The scene is from the sixty-first chapter.

"Now, Twenty-Seven," said Mr. Creakle, entering on a clear stage with his man, "is there anything that any one can do for you? If so, mention it."

"I would 'umbly ask, sir," returned Uriah, with a jerk of his malevolent head, "for leave to write again to mother."

"It shall certainly be granted," said Mr. Creakle.

"Thank you, sir! I am anxious about mother. I am afraid she ain't safe."

Somebody incautiously asked, what from? But there was a scandalized whisper of "Hush!"

"Immortally safe, sir," returned Uriah, writhing in the direction of the voice, "I should wish mother to be got into my state. I never should have been got into my present state if I hadn't come here. I wish mother had come here. It would be better for everybody, if they got took up, and was brought here."

This sentiment gave unbounded satisfaction—greater satisfaction, I think, than anything that had passed yet.

"Before I come here," said Uriah, stealing a look at us, as if he would have blighted the outer world to which we belonged, if he could, "I was given to follies; but now I am sensible of my follies. There's a deal of sin outside. There's a deal of sin in mother. There's nothing but sin everywhere—except here."

"You are quite changed?" said Mr. Creakle.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir!" cried this hopeful penitent.

"You wouldn't relapse, if you were going out?" asked somebody else.

"Oh de—ar no, sir!"

"Well!" said Mr. Creakle, "this is very gratifying. You have addressed Mr. Copperfield, Twenty-Seven. Do you wish to say anything further to him?"

“You knew me a long time before I came here and was changed, Mr. Copperfield,” said Uriah, looking at me; and a more villainous look I never saw, even on his visage. “You knew me when, in spite of my follies, I was ’umble among them that was proud, and meek among them that was violent—you was violent to me yourself, Mr. Copperfield. Once, you struck me a blow in the face, you know.”

General commiseration. Several indignant glances directed at me.

“But I forgive you, Mr. Copperfield,” said Uriah, making his forgiving nature the subject of a most impious and awful parallel, which I shall not record. “I forgive everybody. It would ill become me to bear malice. I freely forgive you, and I hope you’ll curb your passions in future. I hope Mr. W. will repent, and Miss W., and all of that sinful lot. You’ve been visited with affliction, and I hope it may do you good; but you’d better have come here. Mr. W. had better have come here, and Miss W. too. The best wish I could give you, Mr. Copperfield, and give all of you gentlemen, is, that you could be took up and brought here. When I think of my past follies, and my present state, I am sure it would be best for you. I pity all who ain’t brought here!”

He sneaked back into his cell, amidst a little chorus of approbation; and both Traddles and I experienced a great relief when he was locked in.

But after all Heep was merely a shadow of a greater hypocrite. “Thank God I was detected,” cried Cook to a little audience of admiring men and women; “I shall be in heaven this day week.”

The “bright ornament of society” had by now been informed that the country had been so roused against him that after his condemnation the question of a reprieve would not even be discussed, and so he made the most of his last few weeks on earth, the fear of death overcome by an anxiety lest there should be a sudden stoppage of the luxuries supplied by Miss Payne.

“Don’t grieve for me,” he said to her, and she certainly seems to have grieved for his fate unnecessarily. “I am simply going to heaven first, and who knows when you die I may be your guardian angel.”

Shortly before his trial the jailers came to take a respectful farewell, and the head jailer and his wife he made supremely happy by informing them that he regarded them as his parents.

“I hope I shall meet you in heaven,” he said, for although certain about his own migration there he could not be so positive about such earthy beings as prison

warders. "I shall shine as a star in the firmament of heaven, and I hope that you may all inherit a crown of glory."

We may be sure that the jailers shared in the good things provided by Miss Payne, and we can only marvel that in an age when penal methods were for the most part savage and merciless that one of the most callous and cowardly murderers should have been permitted so much liberty and licence in the weeks preceding his trial and execution. It is all the more remarkable in Cook's case because, save for the little group of admirers in the precincts of the jail, there was not a man or woman in the country who was not eager to see him punished. Now and then there was a reference in the papers to the activities of Miss Payne and she was the object of considerable sarcasm and criticism, but it was all wasted on her. The girl who had persuaded herself that the coming comet was heaven's preliminary to the destruction of the world and the end of all things could not be turned aside from her purpose by the ravings of persons she looked upon as lost souls. To her Cook was no longer a murderer—he was a saint. He no longer bore the image of a mere man—he was the counterpart of Christ. He was, in fact, in his new guise an innocent man, and was not to be held responsible for the misdeeds of his previous existence. And if ever her faith in him showed signs of weakening Cook played his part manfully and off went another letter to Mrs. Lachlan extolling his perfection.

"You will be present at my trial, won't you?" he implored, as he stood in a humble attitude before her. "You are my only comfort and I can't do without you."

A less expert hypocrite might have diluted his religion with a little worldly lovemaking, but Cook was crafty enough to remember always the great difference in their respective social positions, and he was therefore ever very "umble." He must have known that this daughter of a well-known family was completely under his influence and would have faced execration and death for his sake, but he agreed with Uriah Heep that "ambition was sinful" and not suitable to an "umble person like myself, Mr. Copperfield," and behaved accordingly.

The day before his appearance in court he presided in his cell at three religious services, and Miss Payne's parting gift was a book of devotions and a cambric handkerchief which he was to flourish as soon as he recognized her in court.

When she parted from him for the last time Miss Payne found consolation in writing out in full all his favourite hymns. These she despatched to Mrs. Lachlan, before preparing herself for an ordeal which she would have been wise to spare herself. But fortified by her admiration for her convert she was present when Mr. Justice Park took his seat in court and Cook having been formally called upon to plead answered in a firm voice that he was guilty. Just previous to this he had taken

out his handkerchief and shaken it and thereby made glad the heart of the young lady who stared at him with shining eyes and then kissed her hand to him.

Mr. Justice Park was fond of describing himself as a "Christian judge," but his Christianity was of a more robust and practical kind than Miss Payne's, and before he sentenced Cook to death he delivered an address to the convict which was a mixture of sermon and reproof. In language which must have hurt the susceptibilities of the Christian hero and his admirer he described the brutality of the crime, and ignoring the rumours which must have reached him of the extraordinary religious orgies in Cook's cell, implored him to turn from his wickedness and seek forgiveness from Above. This might have been resented by the alleged convert had it not been that throughout the whole of the address he studied the little book of devotions which was Miss Payne's last gift, but the book was not the only thing that was studied that morning, and those who caught a glimpse of the pallid face of the prisoner as he descended from the dock detected genuine terror in it.

On reaching the condemned cell he collapsed, and, aware that Miss Payne would not be permitted to see him again, gave vent to his real feelings. But he had practised hypocrisy too long to be able to discard it at once, and when one of his former jailers visited him he was almost himself again.

"How do you feel now?" he was asked by his visitor.

"Happier than ever," he answered, in the old humble attitude. "Why should I not be happy when I am about to exchange these chains for a crown of glory? There is only one thing that distresses me," he added, after a pause.

"And what is that?"

"I hope that poor Mr. Paas has forgiven me," he murmured, "otherwise it will be so awkward for both of us when we meet in heaven."

The remark proved that he was once more in his old form, and right up to the moment he stood before the crowd, outwardly as fearless as the most heroic of Christian martyrs, he mouthed Scriptural texts which, coming from such a brute, must have sounded the worst of blasphemies in the ears of any decent person. A short time before Cook's execution the government had decided in their wisdom that it was necessary to revive the barbarous custom of hanging in chains. The abolition of this revolting post-mortem punishment had been followed by an increased number of murders, and the Home Office experts of the day decided that Bill Sikes and Co. had lapsed into murderers because their remains could not be exhibited in public after execution. It was a fantastic and ridiculous excuse for a return to methods of barbarism, and even the universal detestation of Cook could not justify the horrible spectacle. There was some sympathy for the convict who seemed to dread hanging

in chains even more than death, but by the time he arrived on the scaffold he had regained all his courage, and, fortified by a determination to “die game”—that is, so far as he could do so consistently with his affectation of “umbleness”—assumed an attitude of patronage towards the sheriff and his retinue, tempered with Heep-like subserviency. It is said that he actually thanked the hangman for being the means by which his mortality was to be changed into immortality and that his last words were an expression of confidence in ultimate glory phrased in such a way as to contain a broad hint to the officials that unless they changed drastically the course of their lives they would never have the pleasure of meeting him in heaven. Then with a glance of pity at the crowd he took his place under the beam and met death without flinching.

His remains were gibbeted in Saffron Lane, and twenty thousand persons, fully representative of the scum of the nation, assembled round the gibbet and held festival until one of the severest rainstorms the country has ever known sent them scuttling back to their slums. Booths were erected and every form of intoxicant and innumerable and incredible edibles dispensed to the multitude which had gathered together to celebrate the death of a murderer.

A goodly proportion of that crowd was quite equal to emulating Cook, but the vicious are never more virtuous than when denouncing crime, and every scoundrel for twenty miles around doubtless felt it incumbent upon him to show by attendance at Saffron Lane that he was on the side of law and order. But when towards the night the wind rose and the moving corpse seemed to be shrieking in unison with it there were many cries of terror from the women, and an immediate trek was begun homewards. Everybody fled from the swinging corpse, and through the long hours until dawn, as the elements played their Satanic and ironic game with it, there were no spectators of the contest between infuriated nature and brutalized man.

The disgraceful scenes in Saffron Lane were reported to the government, with the immediate result that an order was issued for the taking down of the body and its interment, and, as a paper remarked at the time, this meant that never again would a criminal be gibbeted in England, for a custom abolished in the case of the greatest of murderers could not be enforced to punish an inferior criminal. The abolition of the gibbet has been ascribed since to humanitarianism, but those who by virtue of their position abolished it did so not because they disbelieved in its efficacy but solely because they feared the scandal which must arise out of a sudden aggregation of thousands of ruffians and their kind within a comparatively small area.

With the execution of Cook his patroness, Miss Payne, returned to that genteel obscurity which distinguished the well-bred young lady of a hundred years ago. Physically she was weaker than ever, but a quiet confidence in the divinity of her

mission and its success brought her a sense of peace which enabled her to wait with patience for the coming of the comet which she was sure was to presage the end of the world. Almost daily she wrote lengthy letters to her beloved friend, Mrs. Lachlan, who rushed to give them to the world in the book to which I have referred already. Miss Payne found a sombre pleasure in reading the queer letters which were showered on her daily from the time a Leicester paper revealed the reason for her visits to Leicester Jail. The majority were abusive, and in these she took delight, regarding them as the thorns in the crown of glory which had been awarded to her on earth. Newspaper references to herself she treasured, and as these were invariably offensive it required a thickening of her religious skin to read them with equanimity. In those days English journalism had a robustness about it which, even accompanied as it was with coarseness, gave it a flavour not altogether unattractive. If journalists did not exactly call a spade a spade they found a synonym for it as startling as it was eloquent and descriptive, and Mrs. Lachlan, anxious to illustrate the attitude of her friend's critics—"children of Satan" she called them—preserved for us an extract from the "Age," a paper which was known to dabble in blackmail.

"The following remarks," wrote Mrs. Lachlan, "and a great deal more, appeared in the 'Age' of Sunday:

"MURDER AND PIETY.—Cook, the murderer of Mr. Paas, of Holborn, pleaded guilty, was sentenced to be hanged, and hanged accordingly. A more hard-hearted and depraved ruffian never dropped from a gallows—and the penny-a-line men report him, of course, as dying firm, undaunted, heroic, etc., etc. The greater the scoundrel, the greater the favourite with them. Thurtell was their especial hero. However, they, poor devils, are only labouring in their trade; and we shall not quarrel with them through endeavouring to obtain the price of an extra pint of beer by a few extra lines; but there is something to us infinitely disgusting in the interference of some Leicester women, particularly a Miss Payne, in the case. What have women to do with a beastly murderer, who was not a degree above the New Zealanders? Some snuffling saint will answer—she was impelled by piety! Stuff. Had not he spiritual advice enough without her volunteer assistance? She might have left the business to the chaplain. This vagabond, on his trial, never took his eyes off a book he was reading but once, and that was to ogle Miss Payne who sat on the bench—and on his leaving the dock he kissed hands to her. We suppose she had a lock of his hair as a memento. It was on the whole a most disgusting exhibition of

cant and hypocrisy.”

But when the “Age” imputed hypocrisy and the desire for notoriety to Miss Payne it was wrong. The self-appointed missionary to James Cook was wholly sincere and animated by the best of motives. She was misguided and illogical, but that she believed herself to be inspired admits of no doubt. Every religion appears absurd to the unbeliever, and if Miss Payne’s special cult was a rigid Calvinism she acted with the best intentions. In common with her friend, Mrs. Lachlan, she believed in a literal interpretation of every sentence in the Bible, and for one so gentle and refined it is remarkable that she could see no way of escape from the literal fires of hell for all those who did not share her beliefs. She must have derived immense satisfaction and consolation from Mrs. Lachlan’s story of her Leicester crusade, for that good lady completely demolished all opposition—in her own opinion—and by means of a dialogue with a gentleman of her acquaintance (who took the opposite side) demonstrated to her own satisfaction that no one except an avowed adherent of the devil could discover the least fault in the converter of the murderer of Mr. Paas.

I have not delved into Miss Payne’s history subsequent to the execution of Cook. Whether or not she was disappointed by the survival of the world after the appearance of the comet I cannot say, but I can imagine her waiting serenely for a catastrophe which she believed would enable her to renew her acquaintance with Cook and see for herself the fulfilment of all her promises of heavenly happiness which she had made to him in the dismal prison cell. It is now nearly a hundred years since Miss Payne penned her prophecy of the end of all things, but the world goes on in much the same old way, and I have no doubt that every generation has produced its Miss Payne, with her fanaticism and bad taste inspired by the best of motives. She is, however, no longer able to practise upon a condemned murderer owing to the rigid seclusion in which the condemned are shrouded in the interval between sentence and execution. Some of them tried to make a hero of Dr. Lamson, the loathsome poisoner, and their protests were as indignant as they were tearful when they were informed that the flowers they had sent to decorate his cell with had never been seen by the criminal. That was just half a century after the “canonization” of Cook, and it proved that in one respect at least we had improved on an age which will soon be distant enough to be referred to as “the good old times.”

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORIC BARMAID

When the great Napoleon was at the height of his power he made the son of an innkeeper King of Sweden. That was a flamboyant and sensational proof of his personal domination of Europe, but there is something far more amazing and grotesque in the fact that the empire of Napoleon III should have been assisted towards restoration by an English barmaid.

Elisabeth Herriott, who worked this wonder, could have had no conception of her destiny when at the age of seventeen she took her place behind the bar of a public-house in Lambeth and found pleasure in the rough and uncouth crowd which thronged the place nightly. As her parents belonged to the labouring classes it is not surprising that she could read and write only with difficulty, but if their poverty had prevented them showering worldly benefits on their daughter they had given her a magnificent physique and a beauty which was so alluring that it brought her within sight of a throne. The owner of the public-house soon realized he had gained a prize in the person of this pleasure-loving young woman. She was just the type to attract custom and her readiness to enter into a flirtation, combined with a certain cockney wit, gained for her a reputation as a unique personality which must be seen and heard. Just above middle height, the most skilful of sculptors could not have carved a more exquisite figure, and her classic beauty was heightened by a complexion which defied the ravages of time and dissipation. Altogether too good for a common public-house, and that was her own opinion long before a handsome young rake of the name of Jack Fitzroy told her so.

"I want a girl like you," he whispered across the bar one night, his eyes revealing his admiration for her. "I am running a sort of private club, but as yet I haven't got many members. If you helped me to manage it there isn't a young man in London with money who would not cheerfully lose a fortune provided you were in the same room."

The barmaid knew that he was related to the Duke of Grafton, and that was why she took his proposition seriously. For nearly a year Elisabeth had been sighing for a cavalier to come and rescue her from the bar and place her in a position befitting her beauty and her talents. When therefore Fitzroy showed her the path to the West End—and the West End meant to her men of title clamouring for the honour to settle her bills—she thanked him prettily and told him that she was prepared at any moment to start her duties in his gambling hell.

Once she got a footing in the West End Elisabeth Howard, as henceforth she

must be called, did not require Fitzroy's assistance. Her marvellous beauty and her cleverness carried all before them. Night after night she presided with the elegance and good taste of a noble dame over the gambling den owned by her partner, and if the frequenters invariably lost they did not despair, for Elisabeth was always there to give consolation with her bright eyes and with flattering and consoling phrases to urge them on to battle with fortune again.

Elisabeth quickly had reason for complaining that her partnership with Fitzroy was an unequal one and that she was not receiving as much as she earned. It was for her sake that the gilded youth of London crowded the rooms and allowed themselves to be swindled by Fitzroy, the card-sharper; it was because they were all madly infatuated with her that they failed to notice that they were being cheated. She might be young, but she was very cute, and she could see no reason why she should run the risk of besmirching her name and not be paid in proportion to that risk. As a matter of fact, Elisabeth had grown tired of Fitzroy, who, in spite of his aristocratic connections, was simply and solely a cad. But how to dissolve their partnership she did not know, and she was struggling with the problem when it solved itself most unexpectedly.

One night a younger brother of the Earl of Chesterfield caught Fitzroy in the act of manipulating the cards. With a howl of rage he took the cheater by the throat and attempted to fling him out of the window, and in the miniature riot which ensued the lamps were smashed and the furniture damaged. The scene brought the proceedings for the night to an end, but the "club" was never reopened, for Fitzroy's exposure enabled Elisabeth Howard to throw in her lot with Major Martin, of the 2nd Life Guards, who found consolation in his conquest for the money he had lost.

It is possible that had Elisabeth remained the gambling den would have continued to attract, but once it was known that she had retired into private life there was an end to Fitzroy and his swindles.

It was under the auspices of Major Martin, who was one of the best-known men in Society, that Elisabeth really began her amazing career. The major purchased a house in the West End for her and furnished it so lavishly that he nearly ruined himself. But even when Elisabeth quarrelled with him and refused to see him again he did not display any regret for his extravagance, and to the end of his life he spoke with enthusiasm of her. He might have been more critical had he known that the ambitious ex-barmaid had forced the quarrel on him because she wished to make him a stepping-stone to higher things.

Once she had supreme command of the house Martin had given her she entered into a lengthy and successful mimicry of the life of a lady of fashion. Her experience

of the Lambeth public-house and the gambling den had not provided her with opportunities to acquire even a veneer of polish, but she was innately clever and she very seldom blundered, although often lured into difficult situations by the caprices of fate.

A fortnight after Major Martin had taken his departure Elisabeth entertained at dinner the Duke of Beaufort, the Earl of Chesterfield, the Earl of Malmesbury and the Count d'Orsay. These were all intimate friends of hers and the three English noblemen had already given her presents totalling thirty thousand pounds. But it was the French count, the most accomplished dandy of his time and also one of the most powerful men in London society, that she wished to impress. The dinner itself was a brilliant success and Elisabeth's vivid and unconventional humour sent the guests into ecstasies. D'Orsay, who had heard of her obscure origin, was so enraptured that in a whispered undertone to Lord Chesterfield he declared that she must be a genuine Howard.

The male portion of London society now swarmed round the latest and most popular beauty. Their womenfolk avoided her, but as the men for the most part held the purse-strings Elisabeth was satisfied. She was a creature of pleasure and her pleasure cost her admirers thousands of pounds, but they cheerfully paid. The ex-barmaid, however, was a good deal older than her years, and her early experience in the poverty-stricken home of her parents had taught her that there is a poverty worse than death. That was why she began to save as much as possible from the contributions of her friends, encouraging with all the arts of beauty and cajolery their extravagances while she practised in secret the economies of a miser. Whenever she had to pay for her own meals they were meagre and scrappy, but she made up for these temporary acts of self-denial on the numerous occasions she lunched and dined with her wealthy admirers. Almost weekly she invested some money, unaware as yet that the time was to come when she was to speculate with twenty thousand pounds and receive back in the course of a few years a quarter of a million.

It has never yet been explained satisfactorily how Elisabeth Howard became acquainted with the prince known in history as Napoleon III. At the time he was Prince Louis Napoleon and was regarded in London society as a sort of comic adventurer. The glory of the Bonapartes seemed to have vanished for ever, and this imitation of his great uncle struck the average person as a man of no cleverness or initiative who was trading unprofitably on his relationship to the first Napoleon. Exiled from France, looked down upon by his royal and aristocratic acquaintances as one who would never achieve his apparently absurd ambitions, the prince was tolerated merely because of his family. He had nothing to give away and so had few

adherents, and, whatever may be said to the contrary, there can be no doubt that when he and Elisabeth Howard became friends he was in a bad way financially.

The story goes that the prince and the Duke of Beaufort were good-humouredly debating the subject of English and French beauties when the duke declared that he knew a girl in London who would prove his contention that the English type of beauty was supreme. This excited the curiosity of one who had more than an amateur's interest in the subject, and at his urgent request the duke arranged a meeting. Of course the girl in question was Elisabeth Howard, and she justified her ducal champion by bringing the Frenchman to her feet at once.

The friendship between the ex-barmaid and the future emperor quickly developed to such an extent that all her other admirers were compelled to retire into the background. Napoleon III may not have been an efficient emperor and his knowledge of men was certainly crude, but he understood women and it is said that he never had an enemy amongst them. Into the sympathetic ear of the pretty cockney he poured the story of his ambition, to regain the throne of France for the Bonapartes. He had told that story before to men and women of rank, and always he had been conscious that only their politeness prevented them telling him he was a visionary and a fool. But Elisabeth Howard glowed with enthusiasm as she listened and, when she spoke, her rapturous endorsements of his optimistic hopes served to restore the courage which had been sapped by the pessimism of his immediate followers.

"If only I had money I would succeed," he said, after he had explained to her that the comic discomfiture of his previous attempts had been due as much to lack of means as to bad organization.

"How much will you want?" asked the ex-barmaid, thrilled by the thought of helping to change the history of Europe—indeed, of the whole world.

Knowing that she was the intimate friend of several enormously rich Englishmen the prince entered into details. There were certain persons in France to be bribed, and the bribes would involve payments amounting to ten thousand pounds, and almost as much again would be necessary to pay the expenses of himself and his principal adherents. It was not a great deal considering what success would mean, and Elisabeth did not hesitate to place her entire resources at the disposal of Louis Napoleon.

Had she consulted experts she would have been advised that she was simply throwing money away, but Elisabeth Howard, for all her cockney shrewdness, was romantic, and it was the notion of a person of her obscure origin helping a prince to gain a throne that overcame her natural caution and miserliness.

She certainly did get value for her money during the succeeding months, for her house became the headquarters of the Bonapartists, and she could not have failed to be gratified by the realization that matters involving the destiny of nations were being discussed and settled in her drawing-room. Secret meetings were held almost nightly, and men bearing names famous in history passed in and out and always treated their hostess with deference, knowing that she was the power behind the aspirant to a throne.

The working out of his plans took a great deal of time, but Elisabeth, confident of success, never lost hope even when the prince himself despaired. She was not only lending him money now, but introducing him to Englishmen who wielded great influence in society, and her incurable optimism infected all of them in turn. Of course Napoleon was grateful.

"I will never forget you," he said again and again, "and when I am emperor there will be nothing you can ask which I shall refuse."

The ex-barmaid betrayed her feelings by her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, but if Napoleon guessed her thoughts he did not admit it. Later on he maintained that all his references to rewards meant the repayment of the money with heavy interest and nothing else. Elisabeth Howard, however, had made up her mind to become his wife, and it was because she expected to be Empress of the French that she sacrificed everything and worked so hard on his behalf.

It was a time of extraordinary splendour for the ex-barmaid. Only a few years and a few hundred yards separated her from the public-house where she had served workmen with their beer, but she was now the centre of a miniature court and she enjoyed to the full the homage of a prince and the admiration of a score of titled Englishmen. It is improbable that any of her English friends believed it possible that Napoleon would marry her, but being discreet they took no chances and humoured her, conscious that history contained even stranger alliances than the one contemplated by the labourer's daughter. The one person who dared to chaff her on the subject was the Duke of Beaufort, and he only did so when they were alone.

"You have as much chance of being the Empress of the French as Napoleon has of becoming emperor," he said one night when she had irritated him by vague references to her glorious future.

"That he will gain the throne of France is absolutely certain," she said firmly, showing that she had a greater *flair* for foreign politics than His Grace possessed. "He may not keep his promise to marry me, but he will be emperor before you and I are much older."

"Well, I only hope that I may live to see him wear a crown," said the duke,

laughing contemptuously, "for in that case I may rival Methuselah."

Three years later she was driving in the park when she saw the duke and ordered her coachman to stop.

"Napoleon was elected President of the French Republic yesterday," she said, with a smile of triumph, "and it won't be long before he turns the president's chair into an imperial throne."

"I was on my way to eat my own words, Elisabeth," answered the duke, with an elaborate bow. "You have won France for him, and if there's such a thing as gratitude in this world he ought to share his good fortune with you."

This expression of opinion coming from a man of his rank served to revivify and strengthen the ex-barmaid's secret ambitions, which, truth to tell, had been weakening of late. She was still young and beautiful, but Napoleon was fickle, and it seemed to the jealous imagination of the Englishwoman that the world had never before contained so many beautiful and attractive girls. It gave her no hold on him that he owed her twenty thousand pounds. Such a sum would become ridiculously small to Napoleon once he was emperor, and when he had repaid it with interest it would be very doubtful if he would behave as though under any obligation to her. Napoleon was notorious throughout the world and the half world for fickleness and it was said that when in exile in England he fell in love with a different woman every week. In connection with this a story is related of the younger son of a marquis who was accosted by a friend in Piccadilly.

"Why this festive attire?" asked the friend, surprised by his fashionable and spotless attire.

"My dear fellow," was the drawling reply, "I'm doing my duty to my family."

"Even now I don't understand," remarked his companion.

"Isn't it the duty of every young man of good family to propose to Miss Angela Burdett-Coutts?" he retorted, with a grin. "She's the richest young lady in England and I must chance my luck. Do you know who proposed to her yesterday? No less a person than Prince Louis Napoleon. Of course she refused him—she always refuses everybody—but it is my duty to propose, and I will."

Whether Napoleon's proposal was made during the period Elisabeth Howard was his chief supporter and financial prop it is impossible to say, but that it took place is certain. At any rate, it could not have been kept a secret from the ex-barmaid, who must have been grateful to the banker's grand-daughter for her decision.

Once Napoleon had become emperor Elisabeth Howard's star was in the ascendant. She did not make a triumphal entry into Paris, but her reception there by

Napoleon was in itself a triumph, and she must have felt like an empress when he sent two statesmen to escort her to the mansion which had been purchased and furnished especially for her. It was not possible to give her much publicity, but she understood the necessity for tact, and, impressed by the devotion of her lover and his anxiety to surround her with every luxury and comfort, she betrayed no hurry to gain her reward. And when the adherents of the new regime began to compete for her goodwill and abased themselves so that they might gain her patronage she never doubted that she would fail.

Malicious acquaintances hinted that Napoleon was hawking his heart and hand round the courts of Europe and that in London, Berlin, Vienna and Rome he had proposed marriage to various more or less eligible princesses.

"He will never marry anyone but me," said Elisabeth, with a confident smile, "and he will always come back to me."

All the same she studied the newspapers carefully and she suffered hours of anxiety and dread, but these were forgotten whenever she read of another of his failures. The fact was that none of the royal families of Europe expected Napoleon to keep the throne he had gained, chiefly by trickery, and those princesses who expressed their willingness to sacrifice their feelings for the sake of a crown were ordered by their relatives not to accept the imperial offer.

That was why he did return to Elisabeth Howard and ignored the growing criticism of the power and influence of the lowly-born Englishwoman. Republican papers might print caricatures depicting Napoleon leaning against the bar of a public-house with the beautiful Elisabeth on the other side serving him with a drink; the same paper might ask if France was to be ruled by the advice of a cockney barmaid; Napoleon was unaffected, for at this time at any rate he was determined not to desert the beautiful woman who had saved him from despair and had re-united his followers when they had been inclined to desert him. But whenever she hinted at marriage he changed the subject, for foolish as he had been and still was where women were concerned, he knew that to marry the ex-barmaid would be tantamount to committing political suicide. However, he tried to compensate her with lavish presents of money. On three occasions in a single month he gave her the sum of one million francs and the jewellery he purchased for her cost nearly another million.

When she craved for rank he created her Comtesse de Beauregard and gave her an estate for which he paid two million francs. All these were intended to satisfy her, but nothing could satisfy Elisabeth Howard except an imperial crown. It sounds ridiculous and grotesque, but if Napoleon had felt more secure on his throne he

might have risked it for the sake of the beautiful woman who had helped him at the most critical moment of his life.

The ex-barmaid was still assuring her intimates that she was the only woman Napoleon loved when suddenly and with spectacular effectiveness the beautiful Eugénie de Montijo, insolent in her youth and loveliness, entered on the scene. She was not of royal birth, but she was an aristocrat, and had it come to a contest of wits between the Spaniard and the cockney the Spaniard must have won. But Eugénie was not very much concerned with Elisabeth Howard; indeed, she refused to acknowledge her existence, a course of conduct inspired more by the fact that she had enemies and problems of her own to tackle rather than the pride which virtue displays towards vice. When Napoleon became infatuated with her, Eugénie, with the help of her astute mother, planned a grand marriage which would bring with it a crown, and she played her cards better than the Englishwoman, and, as is a matter of history, she won.

“He will not marry her—he dare not,” cried Elisabeth, in a paroxysm of jealous rage when she heard that Napoleon was consulting his ministers as to the advisability of announcing his engagement to the Spaniard. Elisabeth, however, was not so confident when she saw her rival—if rival she can be called—at the opera. Eugénie was very beautiful, and, what was perhaps more important, six years younger than the Englishwoman.

During his courtship of Eugénie Napoleon kept Elisabeth quiet with further gifts, and at the time the marriage took place she had received in money alone nearly six million francs. The fortune consoled her to some extent, but she would not have been a woman had she not regretted the triumph of her rival.

“I could have forgiven him if it had been a princess,” she said to a friend. “But to throw me over for that Spanish woman is an insult I cannot bear.”

She did not add that it hurt more because Napoleon’s defiance of convention proved that he was in love with Eugénie.



THE EMPRESS EUGÉNIE

(From the Collection of the late A. M. Broadley)

Richly endowed as she had been with money, land and a title by the emperor, Elisabeth could not banish her jealousy, and inspired by it she proceeded to inflict a series of petty annoyances on their majesties. Whenever they went to the opera she took the box opposite, so that she could flaunt her jewels and remind the Parisians that their emperor had once been not only her lover but her dependent. Then she had her creatures who kept watch on the movements of the imperial couple so that

they might report to her whenever they were about to drive out. This was to enable her to follow in her carriage or, if possible, drive abreast of the royal carriage. Of course Napoleon and Eugénie could not take any official cognizance of her behaviour, but when a rumour reached the emperor that she was about to write her reminiscences and include in the volume copies of the letters he had written her, he sent half a dozen members of his secret police to ransack her house during her absence. They waited until she had gone to London in connection with some investments and, although they had only a few hours, they did their work thoroughly. When Elisabeth returned she found that not only had every desk been opened but even the upholstery had been taken to pieces and the pictures removed from the frames. She always declared that they had wasted their time, but it is significant that the reminiscences were never written and the letters never published.

But she could not keep up her persecution of her successful rival for long. To make them ridiculous she had to make herself absurd, and, as Elisabeth was a wit, her sense of humour was not too strong where her personal dignity was concerned. It was, however, the realization that the marriage of Napoleon had destroyed for ever any hopes she could have entertained of becoming the Empress of the French that finally made her decide to give way gracefully. She did not see Napoleon alone again and she did not seek an interview, but the emperor had a faithful secretary who transacted the business which resulted in an arrangement. Elisabeth agreed to withdraw from Paris and reside on the magnificent estate which he had given her, and a few days before she departed she passed Napoleon near the Law Courts. For a moment she was embarrassed, but when he raised his hat and bowed politely she flushed with pleasure, believing that his act of courtesy was not only a sign of forgiveness but also an apology.

With an income of twenty thousand pounds a year and a magnificent home situated amid ideal surroundings Elisabeth ought to have felt that she had succeeded, but she had seen too much of imperial splendour and Napoleon had too assiduously fed her ambitions in the days of his obscurity to be able to forget there had once been a time when she had had a chance of becoming an empress. That was why she was restless and unhappy and her wealth and dignity were of little consolation to her. Every paper she looked at told her of the almost daily triumphs of her rival, and it galled her to know that the Spanish woman and not herself reigned over the most superficially brilliant court in Europe. In her loneliness Elisabeth turned to a handsome Englishman, Clarence Trelawny, a member of an ancient Cornish family and an officer in the Austrian Army. She was still very beautiful and scarcely middle-aged, and the marriage ought to have been a success. Elisabeth, however, soon

repented of her decision, and the union was dissolved. Had she waited a little while longer there would have been no need to publish the news of this failure throughout the world, for she was not to live beyond forty-three, and when she died in 1865 she was a disappointed woman. Eugénie had triumphed gloriously, and it must have seemed to Elisabeth Howard in her last hours that providence was favouring the Spanish woman with all its gifts. But we who can look back on that period know that if ever a woman suffered acutely and bitterly that woman was the Empress Eugénie. She, too, knew what it was to suffer almost every sorrow known to humanity, and although she survived the ex-barmaid by fifty-five years—she died in the summer of 1920—most of them were tragic years.

CHAPTER V

PRIEST AND MURDERER

There are scientists who profess to be able to account, by means of their special knowledge of heredity and environment, for the vagaries of human nature. They would have us believe that all our acts are directed and governed by invisible forces which have their origin in our ancestors, and if they had their own way jails would cease to exist, for every criminal could with their aid prove that he was not responsible for his actions. But whatever one may think of these theories there can be no doubt that hundreds of cases could be cited to disprove them, and one of them is that of Francis Salesius Riembauer, the German priest, who is remembered now only because he was a wholesale murderer.

Riembauer was the son of a labourer and a domestic servant, and as far as the available records went his ancestors were menial in the extreme. Hard work and undernourishment had been the lot of the family for generations, and Riembauer, senior, was a stunted, little man with expressionless features and a mind almost imbecile by reason of its immobility. Frau Riembauer was even less intelligent than her husband and she had never been troubled with good looks. And yet they were the parents of one of the handsomest and most intelligent boys in Langquaid who from his earliest years attracted attention because of his aristocratic appearance and cleverness. By the time he was thirteen Francis, although he had had little schooling and was already earning his living in the fields, had the face and figure of an Adonis and a store of knowledge amazing in the circumstances. Not only that, but he had a genuine thirst for learning, and when told that there was to be no more schooling for him he sought out the priest of the parish and implored his help. The boy was so engaging and fascinating that the priest took an immediate interest in him, and having put him through a brief examination realized he had discovered a prize.

"I want to be a priest like you, reverend father," Francis exclaimed fervently. "I want to serve God and to take part in the holy work of saving the world."

The priest secured him admission to the chief school in the town, and there the son of the daily labourer quickly outdistanced all competitors. His lowly origin did not handicap him in the least, for even as a boy he had a wonderful personality which, combined with a handsome exterior, silenced those who sneered at his birth. But then it was almost impossible to believe that he was so lowly born. The lofty forehead, the luminous and compelling eyes, the aristocratic nose and the firm yet friendly-looking mouth would in themselves have given him a leading position in any society. When, however, in addition he carried off all the prizes and displayed a

charming gift of oratory, rumour insisted that he was not the son of Peter Riembauer at all, but the offspring of some aristocrat who had transferred him at birth to the labourer and his wife.

A brilliant boyhood was fulfilled and justified by an even more brilliant early manhood, and when after his ordination he donned the rich vesture of his office there was a gasp of admiration as his tall, handsome form turned towards the people to bless them. Only twelve years had passed since he had been running barefooted after sheep at Langquaid, flattered if a farm servant took notice of him, and rendered happy for hours if he was invited into a kitchen and given something to eat. In those days he had been too humble and obscure to be permitted to sit down at the same table as the farm servants, and it had been the custom for the poor shepherd-boy to munch his bread and meat as he stood in a corner watching the servants as they sat at table. But now he was an ordained minister of an all-powerful Church, and henceforth would be invited to the houses of the great and given the place of honour. We know that such was the thought uppermost in the mind of the young priest because he confessed so years afterwards. That he should on such a solemn occasion have been absorbed in his worldly prospects rather than in the work to which he had been appointed reveals that he entered the Church solely because it was the only ladder by which a boy of his origin could attain any sort of social position. In other words, the Church was to work for him; he was to utilize it entirely for his own selfish ends, and if it did not come up to his expectations then so much the worse for the Church. And in this spirit Francis Riembauer began his career as a priest, resolved to make history before he was done with this world. He succeeded in making history, but it is not difficult to believe that it was not exactly the sort of history he really desired.

From the very beginning of his ministry Riembauer had a magnetic, almost hypnotic, attraction for women, who were fascinated by the handsome and unctuous ecclesiastic whose humility made him appear in their eyes a veritable saint. They were not sophisticated enough to be able to detect the pride which aped humility and they saw nothing to make them suspect that the young priest was a clever actor. But it was not so with his colleagues, who long before Riembauer became notorious knew that he was a danger to society and did not expose him because they did not wish to bring scandal on the Church.

He had his outspoken critics, of course, but as these were chiefly jealous women discarded in favour of prettier rivals to his good graces they were not taken seriously, for wherever he went Riembauer carried all before him. A magnificent preacher, he knew how to adapt himself to any congregation, and he convinced

strangers of his sincerity by the whole-hearted manner in which he conducted services, for it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of that beautiful voice or resist the appealing eyes of the eloquent priest in the pulpit. Yet the bare truth is that almost from the day of his ordination he was a libertine and a thief, and all through his ecclesiastical career he lived a double life—a hard-working rogue and a parish priest who never neglected his duties. Deeply learned in ecclesiastical law, he could by mere sophistry convince himself that he did no wrong to the Church by his scandalous behaviour, arguing that the moment he put off his vestments he became another person. For everything he did he professed to find a parallel in the lives of the saints, and he may have been sincere when he gave himself absolution for his misdeeds before he entered the church to conduct one of its services.

Soon after his appointment to Hirnheim he persuaded one of his servants to become his secret mistress, removing her objections by quoting what he called in his perversity a precedent from the Fathers. She was the first of a succession of mistresses, and it is astonishing that he should have continued his immoralities for so many years with impunity; but Riembauer never would admit he was doing wrong, and to this day there survives a treatise in his own handwriting in which he “proves” that by having children he was doing nothing contrary to the law of his Church. One of his arguments was that there was nothing to prevent his illegitimate sons becoming in due course priests and thereby benefiting humanity!

The very audacity of his wickedness was, paradoxically enough, his greatest protection, for when scandalous rumours about him began to circulate they seemed to be too exaggerated to merit belief. It was quite impossible to imagine the eloquent preacher and hard-working parish priest as a vulgar seducer and common swindler, and the suggestion was ridiculed that a man of Riembauer’s learning would condescend to intrigues with servant girls when it was well known that ladies of birth and position were amongst his devoted admirers. And Riembauer had yet to be accused of a love affair with a woman of his own class!

Once he extricated himself from a dangerous position by carrying the war into the enemy’s camp. It happened that he offended another priest by the lightness of his behaviour towards a girl who, if her occupation was humble, was a cousin of his confrère. There was a heated scene in the street between the two priests, and Riembauer went off with a threat ringing in his ears that he would be reported to his superior. Now no one knew better than the offender that a report would lead to an inquiry and an inquiry to exposure. The situation was therefore desperate and called for a desperate remedy, and Riembauer promptly wrote to the bishop complaining of the lax conduct of the clergy in the neighbourhood. In well-chosen phrases he

deplored their worldliness, and he wound up by asking to be removed from temptation by transference to another parish. Always anxious to preserve the good name of the Church, the bishop granted his request, and Riembauer was sent to Pirkwang, a cure which included that of Lauterbach, a tiny village which was to play the most important part in the life of Germany's Jekyll-Hyde.

The change was to have tremendous consequences for the young priest, who never anticipated that amongst all his victims there was one girl whose passion for him would turn to hatred the moment he gave her cause to believe that she was to be discarded in favour of some one younger and prettier. That girl was Anna Eichstadter, the kitchen-maid at the clergy house at Hirnheim who had succumbed to Riembauer's hypnotic attractiveness the first time she had gone to confession to him. Anna, the daughter of a carpenter at Furth, was tall and strong, and was exceedingly handsome. Her chief pride was her pearl-like teeth; indeed, she was chiefly known because of them and her perfect figure. There had been many suitors for her hand before Riembauer came to live in the house where she was employed, but once she understood that the new priest was attracted by her appearance she banished all other men from her little world. But she did not surrender to Riembauer as readily as that person wished. Anna had her own principles, and when the priest talked of love she shrank from him. He was determined, however, to have her, and he announced to her one night that he would himself perform the marriage ceremony between them.

The girl was well aware of the ecclesiastical law which enforced celibacy on the clergy and said so, but Riembauer told her of saints in the early days of the Church who had had secret wives and had not been considered any the less saintly because of that. He assured her that she was going to marry Riembauer, the layman, and that only whenever he donned the sacred vestments would she cease to be his wife because then he would have become the priest.

Anna was satisfied, or at any rate professed to be, and the strange ceremony was performed in a bedroom at the top of the house, Riembauer officiating in full canonicals and placing the ring on her finger before he blessed her. After that the girl had no further scruples, and, proud of having won the love of the parish priest, she kept her secret, continuing to perform her menial duties for meagre wages and saying nothing likely to embarrass the man she believed to be her husband.

When a child came—a handsome boy who was the very image of his father—Riembauer baptized him and, to Anna's joy, declared him dedicated to the priesthood. To the German peasant woman the idea of being the mother of a priest was a source of intense pride, and if she had to work harder to add to her wages because Riembauer could or would not help her with the additional expense she saw

no flaw in her idol and reminded herself of the midnight ceremony whenever she heard rumours concerning his infatuations for other women.

For a couple of years the girl was happy enough, and the eloquent young priest made rapid progress. Whenever he preached it was to a crowded congregation, and if his fellow priests disliked and distrusted him he left the atmosphere of suspicion behind him whenever he entered the house of a layman. He was exceedingly popular with the men as well as with the women, and the general opinion at Hirnheim had been that he would be a bishop before he was forty. Then came his transference to Pirkwang, and Anna, being unable to accompany him in the capacity of servant because her father would not allow her to leave the town, Riembauer found himself free from her watchful care, and immediately proceeded to find fresh victims. One of his reasons for wishing to leave Hirnheim had been Anna's growing jealousy, in addition to which he had become rather tired of a woman who, if only twenty, was losing her figure and beauty. She had sworn a solemn oath to keep their so-called marriage a secret, but the priest knew that at any moment she might betray him, and he was relieved therefore when opportunity removed from her the temptation of his conduct. He hoped that once he was out of sight she would weaken in her attachment for him, and that she might find another lover to take his place.

The name of Riembauer was in certain circles now synonymous with immorality and hypocrisy, but circumstances combined to give him a clean start at Pirkwang and Lauterbach, and within a few weeks he had created such a deep impression on his parishioners of sincerity and holiness that when adverse rumours filtered through from Hirnheim they were ridiculed as the imaginings of insane malice. Had Anna appeared on the scene then and claimed him as her husband she would have been stoned out of the place, and had Riembauer been capable of permanent reformation the locals would have canonized him, but he was panting for fresh victims, and being tired of the heavy, almost masculine Anna Eichstadter he looked out for some one more fragile, a girl with a trusting nature who would be as clay in his hands. Anna had always been a little too independent and managing for him, and he wanted a change, or at any rate thought he did.

He had been in his new parish about three months when he met the girl he believed had been specially created for his purpose. One Thursday afternoon he was composing in his study a special sermon to be preached on behalf of a charity when the servant entered with a message from a farmer who lived at Lauterbach, a village in his charge. It was simply a request that he would come and visit a sick woman, and in the ordinary way Riembauer would not have been in a hurry to perform this not unusual duty. But, as he afterwards said, something seemed to tell him that this

was no common interruption and that it was to have a peculiar influence on his life. Whatever his reason may have been it is a fact that he immediately abandoned the writing of the sermon and made his way with all speed to Thomashof, the farm where the Frauenknechts lived. He had yet to make their acquaintance, but he knew of them by repute already because they were well known in the district for their goodness and charity, which was in generous proportion to the value of their property. And as Riembauer entered the farmhouse he must have envied the comfortable home and the obvious wealth of the farmer.

In the hall of the farmhouse he was accosted respectfully by a girl with the face of a Madonna who curtsied to him before she conducted him to her mother's room. Magdalena was the elder daughter and only seventeen, and her fragility and beauty made her appear much younger. When on the landing outside her mother's bedroom she paused to allow the parish priest to pass in before her she was considerably embarrassed when he stopped and stared at her with something other than benevolence in his large grey eyes. Riembauer must have been comparing her involuntarily with Anna, and he must have been dwelling on the extraordinary contrast between the two girls, for Magdalena was everything that Anna was not, and it did not need the knowledge that the younger girl was an heiress to make the priest resolve there and then that she should take the place of the girl at Hirnheim.

A minute later he was administering religious consolation to the farmer's wife, and as there was no man in Germany who could ape the saint more convincingly than this roué, the sick woman became his slavish admirer on the spot. The doctor had told her she was very ill, but after two visits from the parish priest she was able to leave her bed, and she declared with tears in her eyes that she had been healed simply by touching the hand of the holy man. Now the farmer's wife had never been exactly religious, and when therefore she became a regular churchgoer, and scarcely talked of anything except the virtues of Father Riembauer, she carried with her the general opinion of Lauterbach, and ever afterwards whenever Riembauer appeared in the village he was treated as a saint.

On the occasion of his first visit to Thomashof the priest did not address a single word to Magdalena, and when at the farmer's urgent request he dined there two days later the only notice he took of the beautiful daughter of the house was to order her to sit at the same table. Magdalena and her younger sister, Catherine, who was only ten, had been warned by their parents that they must wait on the great man because they were not good enough to ape equality by sitting at the same table, and his condescension in allowing them to share the special feast was another source of joy to the somewhat humble-minded family. After that, visits became fairly frequent,

and the turning point was reached one Saturday morning when the farmer, in the act of handing a glass of wine to Riembauer, remarked casually that his two labourers had run away.

"I will help you," said Riembauer, with an assumption of impulsiveness. "I know something about farming, and at the worst I can do as well as one of your labourers."

The farmer thought he was joking and did not speak, and when later he saw the priest seize a shovel and begin to dig, speech was beyond him. In dumb amazement he watched, and it was only when he realized that this was not make-believe and that Riembauer was really working hard he ran to him and begged him to desist.

"It's not right that your reverence should so demean himself," he said, lost in admiration.

"There is nothing demeaning about it," said the priest, the sunlight playing on his handsome countenance. "Farming is the only secular work in which a priest may profitably interest himself. It was the hobby of many of the most learned saints in the past, and there are scores of instances on record where holy men of the Church have kept themselves by their labour in the fields."

That night he shared the supper of the farmer's family and for many nights afterwards, and soon it was common knowledge in Lauterbach and Pirkwang that the parish priest was in partnership with the owner of Thomashof, who was openly envied because of his good fortune. Of course the priest had an ulterior object in view, but no one could deduce it from the way he worked on the farm. The farmer never had a more capable assistant, and Riembauer, first to begin work and the last to leave off, did more in a week than two ordinary labourers accomplished in a fortnight.

It is probable that Riembauer was inspired to put his heart into his work by his desire to convince himself that in reality he did possess two personalities. He was a born sophist and dialectician, and we know that in deceiving others he deliberately sought to deceive himself. In no other way can we account for the thoroughness with which he played the rôle of humble labourer before he brought to fruition his plan to acquire possession, not only of the farm but of the farmer's daughter.

Where so many more experienced women had failed to keep their heads, Magdalena, aged seventeen, had little chance against the powerful and persuasive personality of the ingratiating and handsome priest, and she was in love with him and he was making love to her before she quite understood the seriousness of this new stage in her humble and obscure career. But Magdalena, like her unknown predecessor, Anna, had her principles, and they were strengthened by her devotion

to her religion and her reverence for the clergy as typified in the person of Father Riembauer. Whenever Riembauer was with her she could forget that he was a priest, but when alone her conscience played havoc with her romance and she longed to be able to go to confession. As, however, he was her parish priest she would have had to confess to one who was equally culpable, and she realized the absurdity of this. However, once she had incautiously betrayed her chaotic state of mind to him, Riembauer became eloquent on the subject of his double personality.

“The preacher Riembauer is not the farm worker Riembauer,” he said, as garbed in rough, secular clothes he stood beside her in the sitting-room of the farmhouse looking as handsome a lover as the world has ever known. “Thus when you come to confession to me I am not the man who has made love to you. In my capacity of priest I know nothing of your affairs and nothing of your friends. You can speak to me freely in the confessional, tell me of your innermost thoughts, and as priest I will give you absolution. Why, I confess to myself regularly because no priest can understand and appreciate my position.”

Magdalena, who was madly in love with him, listened eagerly to his sophistries, seeking in them an excuse for yielding to him, and when she brought the subject of marriage round he said at once that if she had no objection to marrying a mere farm hand he would perform the ceremony, combining at one and the same time the character of bridegroom and priest. Events proved he had spoken at the right time.

Daily the situation had been growing more favourable for the maturing of his criminal plans. Magdalena’s mother was completely under his control and influence, and the farmer was showing signs of failing health, a mysterious disease having suddenly attacked him which compelled him to rely more and more on the advice of his partner, the masterful priest. Had the older man been in his right senses he would never have agreed to sell Thomashof to Riembauer for four thousand crowns, nor is it possible that he would have signed the agreement without reading it and thereby failing to notice that one of the clauses stated that the purchaser had paid already on account the sum of two thousand crowns. But Riembauer was now supreme at Thomashof, where his orders were never disobeyed. The household stood in awe of him, and even Magdalena, who had many proofs that he was anything but a saint, forgot everything except that he loved her. Curiously enough the only person who doubted his saintliness was Catherine, Magdalena’s younger sister, and even this scepticism was due to her youth, the ten-year-old girl being too terrified of the priest to have any other conception of him than that of an ogre. In the playground of the village school she had heard it whispered that Father Riembauer was in constant communication with angels and demons and that he had the power of bringing to his

aid inhabitants of the upper and the nether regions. These stories were firmly believed by the child who saw for herself every day how the priest dominated her parents, and she decided that he must be a demon too!

One night Catherine, unable to sleep, left her bed and crept to Magdalena's room, hoping to gain permission to spend the rest of the night with her. She had just entered the room, however, and discovered it was empty when she heard her sister and the priest approach and she darted behind the curtains. When she had regained a little of her courage she peeped out and to her amazement saw Riembauer in his vestments and Magdalena kneeling before him. Catherine was so frightened that she did not discover he was reciting the marriage service until he produced a ring and placed it on her sister's finger. Then she understood fully, and, although she was old enough to appreciate the honour of such a marriage, she was still puzzled, her little mind instinctively groping for a memory of some other priest who had a wife. She had been told that priests never married, but now she supposed it was due to choice and not to compulsion, and yet she wondered. But her strongest impression was a memory of the scene she had just witnessed, the tall, handsome priest, who looked God-like in the rich robes of his office, and at his feet the kneeling girl, simply dressed, the pallor of her face enhanced by the flickering candle-light, and her expression rarefied and etherealized by the radiance of her love. Had the man been other than Riembauer Catherine would have rushed out and embraced her sister, but fear kept her limbs rigid, and she might have had to remain behind the curtains all night had it not been necessary for Riembauer to take his vestments to the box in another room where he kept them. Then Catherine, unknown to her sister, slipped out, and with her head under the blankets lay awake until dawn trying to solve all the puzzles the incident had created.

When early in the morning Magdalena came to her room in a curiously excited condition, Catherine at once told her what she had seen and overheard. To her amazement her elder sister laughed derisively.

"You imagined it all," she exclaimed, but her mirth was forced and there was fear in her eyes. "You mustn't mention your silly mistake to anyone else," she went on earnestly. "If you do I'll be very angry with you."

Catherine promised faithfully, and even if she had been inclined to break that promise all temptation was removed by the sudden death of her father a week later. The blow prostrated them all, and they left everything to Riembauer, who arranged the funeral and performed the last rites. No one could have been more sympathetic, and when he had to remind the widow that he was now the owner of Thomashof she agreed meekly, willingly signing a statement to the fact that her late husband's

indebtedness to the priest exceeded the two thousand crowns required to pay the balance of the purchase money.

During all these remarkable happenings at Thomashof Anna Eichstadter had not been forgotten completely by Riembauer, but he only recalled her existence on those rare occasions when he sent her money for the maintenance of their child. Gradually, however, the remittances grew more meagre and infrequent, and the day that found Riembauer the owner of Thomashof marked the end of a year in the course of which he had had no communication whatever with Anna. This was a bad policy on his part, because he must have known that Anna was easily moved to jealousy and that her anger was in proportion to her strong, healthy frame and aggressive manner. It would have been better for the faithless priest and lover if he had kept in the good graces of the deserted girl by taking the trouble to see her now and then, but he was so confident and vain that he could not imagine that any ignorant peasant woman would dare oppose him. In this he was mistaken, however, and it was a mistake which was to bring about the great catastrophe.

Anna was no fool and she knew that she would be exposing herself to derision if she divulged details of the secret wedding ceremony between herself and the late parish priest of Hirnheim. She knew well enough that the ceremony was not legal and that she had no enforceable claim on Riembauer, but she intended that he should keep the secret promises made to her, promises emphasized by solemn appeals to the Almighty. In the eyes of the world she might be merely a servant and he an eloquent and popular preacher with a reputation for sanctity, but in the little world which comprised just the two of them he was in truth her husband and by every law of honour and decency pledged to be faithful to her and provide for their child. Anna knew that he had not been faithful to his priestly vows, but the very nature of his faithlessness seemed to her to demand a rigid faithfulness to herself. All things considered she was remarkably quiescent in view of her knowledge of her lover's real character, but it may have been that she thought she had him in her power and that he dare not run for the second time the risk of an intrigue with a woman.

When, however, a whole year went by and she had not a line from him her jealousy bred suspicion and she determined to seek in person the answer to the letters which he had ignored. She therefore set out for Pirkwang, and having ascertained there that he spent most of his time at Lauterbach, she eventually arrived at Thomashof. There she was told Riembauer was its owner, and she walked into it with the confident manner of one who is taking possession of her own, but in the hall she pulled up with a jerk when she saw before her a young and pretty girl of fragile beauty. This was sudden and quite unexpected, and Anna quickly identified the

stranger as a serious if not a successful rival.

“Where is Father Riembauer?” she demanded, her anger revealing her jealousy.

“He went to Munich yesterday,” Magdalena answered quietly. “He has to pass an examination there and will be away for a week.”

While she was speaking Anna was staring at her as if trying to read what was passing in her mind, but the younger girl looked too innocent to be involved in a vulgar intrigue, and Anna decided that it was possible that the farmer’s daughter was not the explanation of the year’s silence on the part of Riembauer.

“I am his cousin,” she said suddenly, ending an embarrassing silence. “Take me to his room.”

“I can’t do that—it’s locked,” said Magdalena, surprised.

“Give me the key then,” retorted Anna, who was keeping her temper with difficulty. “He may have left a letter for me containing money.”

“I can’t allow you to enter his room without his permission,” said the farmer’s daughter, and, although she was physically and mentally no match for the stronger and more determined woman from Hirnheim, she held her ground, and it was not until she had handed the key over to her mother that the stranger obtained possession of it. The widow was too nervous to resist Anna’s request, and she and Magdalena stood on the landing outside the door and listened as the stranger ransacked the priest’s room.

Anna remained the night at the farmhouse and left early the next morning after expressing her intention of returning very soon, but it was nearly four months before she reappeared, and again Magdalena was the first person who met her in the farmhouse. This time she was dressed in her best clothes and she carried a green umbrella of startling hue, the handle of which bore the initials, J. O. As Riembauer had previously confirmed her claim to be his cousin and had also admitted he was in her debt, Magdalena’s reception was more cordial and she told her at once that the priest was in his room at the top of the house.

Less than a minute later Magdalena, standing in the hall, heard a distant door close sharply, and suddenly becoming uneasy she stood rigid and did not even speak when her mother joined her. Presently a woman’s cry rang through the house, causing them to shudder, and when it was followed by screams for mercy they had not the power to move. Suddenly they heard pattering footfalls, and turning their heads saw Catherine, ashen with terror, rushing towards them with outstretched hands.

“He’s killing her, he’s killing her,” the child gasped, gripping her mother frantically by the arm. “I looked through the keyhole and saw him do it.”

The widow and her two daughters uttered cries of terror when they heard a door upstairs open and some one emerge. Huddled against the wall it seemed as though they were expecting a ghost to confront them when a turn in the staircase revealed the stalwart frame of the priest, his countenance calm and serene, and no sign in his manner or person of the terrible crime they knew he had committed.

“Bring me a bucket of hot water,” he commanded, and the women—glad of the excuse for action—rushed to obey. Later he sent Magdalena to borrow a carpenter’s plane, and on her return she found him on his knees washing away the bloodstains on the boards. It shows the marvellous confidence of the man and the completeness of his power over his dupes that he should have permitted the girl and her mother to enter the room and view the corpse of the girl he had murdered because she had threatened to blackmail him during that last stormy and tragic interview.

Where the water failed to eradicate the bloodstains he used the plane, and after three hours’ work he pronounced the room barren of possible clues should his crime ever be suspected. It was only then that he called the family together and administered an oath of secrecy to them, taking special care to impress on Catherine that if she uttered a word derogatory of him he would punish her in this world and also in the next.

When he had made certain of their secrecy and allegiance he enlisted their services in the disposal of the body. A careful inspection of the farm led him to select an outhouse about fifty paces from the main building, and here he dug Anna’s grave, and, according to his own statement, hallowed it by performing the funeral service. Probably this is the only case of its kind, but Riembauer was even as a criminal *sui generis*.

Half a dozen times during the following week his crime was very nearly discovered, chiefly owing to the haste with which he had interred the remains of his victim. However, once more his daring and audacity were his salvation, and when he put a padlock on the outhouse which was Anna’s sepulchre he banished the incident from his mind and behaved as though she had never existed. Taking a dislike to Catherine, he decided to send her to school, and accordingly she went as a boarder to Ratisbon, certain that he had inspired her with so great a terror that she would never dare to breathe a word of the tragedy in the farmhouse.

Then followed two years of comparative peace in the life of the extraordinary criminal. He permitted the widow and Magdalena to live on the farm, but they were in reality his servants, and when he was transferred to the village of Priel he made them keep strict accounts and remit to him regularly all the profits. Not that he ever

gave them much latitude or freed them from his personal influence. Whenever possible he stayed at Thomashof, but when pressure of work at Priel threatened to curtail his visits to Lauterbach he began to be troubled by fears that the widow might betray him in order to regain a property which was yearly increasing in value.

Riembauer always denied that he murdered Magdalena and her mother, but all the circumstances of the death of the two women branded him as guilty of it. That he had grown tired of Magdalena just as he had tired of Anna was obvious to the girl herself long before the night she and her mother drank the wine which the priest insisted on their taking and went to bed in a state of collapse. They were dying when a sympathetic neighbour sent for Catherine, and at the subsequent double funeral the most conspicuous figures were the officiating clergyman and the grief-stricken girl in black. These two entered the farmhouse alone after the service, and Riembauer's first act was to offer to make her his heiress if she would remain at home. Catherine, who had not yet any cause for suspicion with regard to the death of her mother and her sister, agreed reluctantly, but within a month she was running back to Ratisbon, almost hysterical with terror. She and the priest had quarrelled, and as Catherine knew the fate in store for anyone who offended Riembauer she hastened to reach a place of safety.

The marvel of it all is that the girl should have waited another four years before denouncing the murderer of Anna Eichstadter, and it says much for the invisible influence of Riembauer that for so long a period she should have been afraid to open her mouth on the subject of the tragedy, memories of which always haunted her. But at last she denounced the popular preacher as a cold-blooded murderer, and although those who first heard her believed that she was out of her mind, she repeated her story with so much circumstantial detail that it was decided to make an examination of the padlocked outhouse at Thomashof. There the searchers immediately found the skeleton of a woman, and they identified it by the well-preserved teeth of which Anna had been so proud in her lifetime. There were other clues pointing to her identity, and as soon as certain little details lacking in Catherine's story were filled in by independent witnesses Riembauer was arrested. One of the most damning proofs against him was a statement by the carpenter at Lauterbach that on the day mentioned by Catherine in her account of the murder he had lent Riembauer a plane.

The law moved slowly in the early years of the nineteenth century, and whereas Riembauer was arrested in October, 1813—he had murdered Anna six years previously—it was not until August 1st, 1818, that sentence was passed on him. The actual trial lasted about two years, the remaining three being spent by the prisoner in

his cell or in the room where he was examined with a view to forcing a confession from him. From the beginning, however, he maintained his innocence, accusing Magdalena of the murder of Anna, and, when the absurdity of the suggestion was pointed out to him, coolly transferring the guilt to Catherine, making the wildest and most improbable statements with an air of ingenuousness and candour. There was one dramatic moment during the preliminary examination when the prisoner was ordered to stand in front of a table on which was a box covered with a cloth. The examining magistrate suddenly whisked away the cloth and disclosed the head of Anna Eichstadter.

“Confess now that you murdered her,” exclaimed the magistrate dramatically.

“If she could speak,” answered Riembauer calmly, “she would proclaim my innocence.”

But years of the most rigorous imprisonment broke down the iron resolution of the man and made him realize that his hypocrisy deceived no one. He had contradicted himself so often that his condemnation was certain, and believing that if he confessed his life would be saved because of his priesthood, he withdrew all his false statements and told the truth about the death of the woman who had turned blackmailer when she had discovered how she had been deceived.

The law of Bavaria allowed the judge discretion in the matter of punishment for murder, and to the general surprise Francis Salesius Riembauer was on August 1st, 1818, condemned to imprisonment for life. The official reason for this leniency was that apart from the prisoner’s confession there was no proof of his guilt, while no one had come forward to swear that he had led an immoral life! So Riembauer passed into servitude, and was not heard of again until ten years later, when at the age of fifty-eight he died in the prison-fortress where he had attained the lead amongst the convicts by reason of his dominating and attractive personality.

CHAPTER VI SOPHIE DAWES

It is only in real life that a career such as Sophie Dawes's could be possible, for no writer of fiction dare violate the probabilities or outrage our credulity by inventing a heroine who in the course of a few years is transformed from picking winkles for her living on an English beach to giving breakfasts in a royal palace to French princes.



SOPHIE DAWES

From a miniature printed by Huet-Villiers in 1812 Musée Condé, Chantilly

But Sophie Dawes herself was stranger than fiction, and her astonishing career one series of unexpected happenings. Life promised no greatness for her when, in 1790, she was born in a humble fisherman's hut at St. Helen's, in the Isle of Wight. Had she not been endowed with more than usual health she would not have survived infancy, for her father, who combined smuggling with gross intemperance, could scarcely provide his family with food, and as often as not little Sophie went hungry. Eventually the Dawes had to seek the refuge of the workhouse at Newport, and it was from there that the child started the battle of life on her own account, the workhouse master finding a situation for her as maid-of-all-work in the family of a local farmer. As she grew up it was noticed that she was developing a very determined will, and she was more than once warned that she would experience much unhappiness unless she assumed a more humble and respectful demeanour towards her betters. Sophie, however, must have already decided to become one of the "betters" herself; and, clever enough to realize that youth and beauty and health were not sufficient for her purpose, she early on resolved that at the first opportunity she would educate herself.

A few weeks after her arrival at the farmhouse she vanished, and when next heard of she was a chambermaid in an hotel in Portsmouth. But Portsmouth was only another stage on her journey to London, and the workhouse was still a vivid memory when she became an assistant in a millinery establishment in the West End of London. She had had no references and no friends, but her beauty and personality gained her the situation, her employer shrewdly foreseeing that the apparently unsophisticated country girl would be an attraction and earn for him the patronage of numerous wealthy speculators in feminine charms. Sophie, however, enraged her employer by indulging in a serious flirtation with a mere workman, and the immediate sequel was a period of unemployment and semi-starvation, partially ended when she was permitted to hawk oranges in the gallery of Covent Garden Theatre. She was engaged in this trade, which has been rendered romantic by the association of Nell Gwynne with it, when a wealthy army officer fell in love with her freshness and beauty. Now whatever ambitions may have animated her and inspired her to make London her objective had long since been killed by poverty and disappointment, and she quickly accepted the offer of her new friend to provide her with every luxury on the condition that she did not ask him for his name.

Adventures are for the adventuress, and Sophie Dawes treated them whenever they came as a matter of course, and took no thought for the morrow, leaving the future to look after itself. It was sufficient for her that she had advanced so far from her workhouse days as to be able to spend money regardless of economy, decorate

herself with the latest fashions and earn the homage and admiration of men. Her beauty was a great asset, but, aware that it would not last for ever, she placed chief reliance on her wit and intelligence to enable her to keep her place in a society which she was determined should not remain foreign to her much longer.

Her first affair, however, had the usual conventional ending. Sophie worked hard to keep her lover at her feet, but a few years of her masterful personality made him tired even of her prettiness, and after numerous quarrels he bluntly informed her that he had made arrangements to leave her.

"I will settle fifty pounds a year on you," the young officer said, obviously expecting to be thanked for his generosity.

"Why, that won't pay my dressmaker's bill!" she cried contemptuously, having already forgotten that she had once picked winkles for sixpence a week.

She pleaded for a much larger sum, and only succeeded in convincing him that his decision to abandon her was a very wise one. Sophie thereupon dried her eyes and proceeded to live at the rate of fifty pounds a month until her creditors became so insistent that she had to disappear from her usual haunts. At this period the luck seemed to be going against her. She clamoured and manœuvred to get in touch with men of rank and wealth, and signally failed; her beauty passed unnoticed; her wit excited only derision. Conscious of her ignorance, she bought a stock of school-books and tried to master the intricacies of grammar and acquire a knowledge of literature and politics. Her old enemy, hunger, abruptly terminated her studies, and having squandered her annuity, Sophie Dawes was forced to accept the situation of servant to a woman of no character who kept a house of no reputation in Piccadilly.

To an ambitious girl who had determined that her beauty and her brain should make her fortune this must have seemed like a descent into the inferno. Certainly it was a position which promised nothing except degradation, and it was only when she had been in the house for some months and had had time to appreciate the strength and the weakness of the men who frequented it, that Sophie discovered the silver lining to her particularly dark cloud.

At this period London was crowded with foreign royalties and noblemen who had been compelled to seek refuge in England from the enmity of revolutionary governments at home. Sophie waited humbly on princes and peers, and was happy if a compliment to her appearance was included in a lavish tip. Quick-witted and shrewd, she kept her eyes open and learnt a great deal more about human nature than she could ever remember. She was often threatened with dismissal for being too curious about the visitors to the house, but her vivacity and sprightliness were not to pass unnoticed by her mistress's clients, though it was a chance conversation with

the valet of a royal duke which altered the whole course of Sophie's life.

One night after dinner the most famous of the French royal exiles in England, the Duc de Bourbon, was complaining of London fogs and ennui, when his valet casually mentioned that he had discovered the one woman capable of exhibiting that vivacity and versatility which distinguished his own countrywomen. It was the duke's settled opinion that beauty and brains were rarely met with in the same individual and he was heartily tired of the pretty girl with the vacant mind. But this was entirely due to the fact that while in London he confined his choice of female society almost entirely to a class of woman he would not have dared to ask his wife to receive. However, Gay, his valet, waxed so eloquent on the subject of the charms of Sophie Dawes that His Royal Highness consented to drive to the house in Piccadilly and interview her.

It was almost the most momentous day in the life of the humble fisherman's daughter, and it came at a moment when she was in hopes of achieving a position almost as great as that which the duke subsequently offered her. Rumour had connected her name with a near relative of Queen Victoria and rumour was also responsible for the statement that an earl was madly in love with her. But when the royal duke bluntly proposed to take her from her present menial position and establish her in a house and allow her a large income, she promptly dismissed the English prince and the English earl and henceforth identified herself not only with the head of the Bourbon family but also with his country.

And now Sophie Dawes, the workhouse-bred girl who had once hawked winkles for a living, began to study her future. Years of ups and downs had convinced her that her policy of living entirely for the present was not only foolish but dangerous. She realized that she was being given a chance as would never come her way again, and she resolved to turn it to the very best account. Almost any other girl in her position would have been content with the homage and the golden gifts of the duke: Sophie remembered that beauty is transitory and that men are fickle, and she set herself the task of gaining a complete ascendancy over her royal friend. To do that she saw that she must first educate herself so as to be able to talk to him on equal terms, and then, having done that, make him her slave by sheer force of personality.

The duke enthusiastically approved of her wish to begin her education, but he laughingly prophesied that a few days' study under the supervision of the professors he hired would cure her of her ambition. In this he was quite mistaken, for Sophie, with a perseverance and a thoroughness without parallel, worked hard at her books and delighted her tutors. She not only acquired French, but delved into the mysteries of Greek and Latin, while her historical researches were conducted with all the

minute and pedantic energy of a university don.

Meanwhile history was being made, and Sophie Dawes was gradually approaching the day when she would find herself the mistress of a royal palace. She did not aspire to become the wife of the duke, but long before a reversal of French policy restored him to his vast possessions in France she had become the only person in the royal set who could influence him. She knew when to be humble and when to be imperious. She specialized in humouring his whims and in keeping bad news from him. Above all, she was always by his side to banish care and depression from one who was peculiarly liable to both.

The duke was proud of the progress she made under his direction, and the bond between them was strengthened by her gratitude. Nevertheless when the wheel of fortune enabled him to return home he made an effort to break off their relations. Apparently conscious that the members of the French royal family were on trial, his first intention was to live quietly at his palace at Chantilly and do nothing likely to create scandal. But Sophie had other plans for him, and, although it took her more than a year to win him back to her side, she did not consider the time wasted when, followed by a waggon-load of luggage, she entered Chantilly, to rule the palace and its owner until the hour of his tragic death.

Her long reign now began, and for fourteen years a splendid reign it was. The workhouse girl from the Isle of Wight had the world at her feet and her cleverness did the rest; Chantilly was a mansion of the type which ordinary people can only dream of, and to Sophie Dawes it was Fairyland. Time had not dealt tenderly with her beauty, and, if the truth must be told, she was too stout and her features had become too coarse to enable her to claim to be a beauty. Tall and heavy-limbed, she had in the past captivated men by the freshness of her complexion and the brilliance of her chatter. When her beauty went she had only her brains left, but, in spite of the opposition of many unscrupulous enemies, she kept her position until a tragedy upset all her plans.

When she was established at Chantilly she, womanlike, became seized with the desire to regularize her position. She had never been in love with the duke, but she wished to retain his influence and to have his vast resources at her mercy. All this, however, could not satisfy her unless by some means she could gain an entrance into the ranks of the French nobility. Her peculiar tragedy was that, whereas all the men paid court to her, their womenfolk snubbed her. In the palace at Chantilly she had the powers of a queen, but outside she was helpless because the only homage she received she had to pay for, and that kind of homage did not satisfy her.

The one solution was, of course, a husband of rank, and Sophie, with the aid of

an unscrupulous woman who wished to earn a hundred thousand francs, found the man to suit the adventuress. This was Adrien Victor de Feucheres, a young nobleman who held a commission in the Royal Guard, and who was apparently as shortsighted as he was brainless. Before he was presented to Sophie he was confidentially informed by the conscienceless matchmaker that Sophie was a daughter of the Duc de Bourbon and that her *dot* would consist of ten million francs. After that it scarcely required the Englishwoman's glib tongue or fascinating personality to extract a proposal of marriage from the baron.

They were married in London, and on their return to Chantilly the baron was given a position in the duke's household, the youthful bridegroom fondly believing that his wife ruled the palace as daughter of the prince. The fact that there was a difference of thirty-six years in the ages of the duke and Sophie further blinded the young officer to the realities of the situation. He was delighted when Sophie, as the wife of a French nobleman, was presented at Court and made her bow to the king and queen. He was overjoyed when royalty flocked to her parties and princes of the blood royal vied with one another to win a smile from the baroness, who a few years previously had been scrubbing floors for a living. He saw Sophie surrounded by a brilliant throng listening enraptured to her witty chatter, and under the impression that she was to be the heir of one of the wealthiest princes in Europe he often congratulated himself on his good fortune.

It was, indeed, a marvellous transformation. Sophie, Baroness de Feucheres, was not yet thirty and the workhouse did not seem so very far away, but she might have been born in the purple judging by her conduct and demeanour when the uncrowned queen of Parisian society. The infatuated duke showered millions of francs on her, and he purchased two estates so that he might leave her something tangible in his will, the royal property having to go to his nearest blood relation. She had sufficient jewellery to stock a shop, and her horses and carriages were the wonder of even luxury-loving Paris. Sophie, who had known hunger in its ghastliest aspects, now gave banquets which frittered away a fortune, and on more than one occasion she entertained at her tables princes who were destined to ascend thrones. When her brothers and sisters were filling the humblest situations in the Isle of Wight she was receiving men like the Duc d'Orléans, known in history as Louis Philippe, King of France, and his predecessor on the throne, Charles X. It is on record that during one of her visits to Court a brother of hers was dying in a workhouse infirmary, and the day he was buried in a pauper's grave his sister, the baroness, played whist with three royal princes.



LOUIS PHILIPPE JOSEPH, DUC D'ORLEANS

And then suddenly came the first serious set-back since her entry into the palace at Chantilly. Her husband was undoubtedly a fool, but he could not be kept in ignorance for ever, and when at last his eyes were opened he acted promptly. Having bitterly denounced Sophie for her deceit, he not only censured the duke, but actually wrote to the king resigning his commission and explaining everything. Then he disappeared from Sophie's life, and although she professed to be relieved by his departure, when she was informed that by the king's orders she was no longer to be received at Court, she became hysterical with grief and would not be comforted. In vain did the duke attempt to console her with more presents. Sophie already possessed everything material she required, and her royal friend could not give her

the one thing she required, the right of entry to the Court. She had spent millions of francs and nearly exhausted her energies in gaining the position for herself that she had coveted from the moment she had left the workhouse at Newport—in other words, to use the argot of her class, she had become a lady—but she doubted the genuineness of the hall-mark when she was denied entry to the circle of royalty.

However, the facts of the situation had to be faced, and Sophie soon began to exercise her nimble wits in evolving a solution of the problem. Another difficulty, however, interrupted her, and for some time this caused her to abandon her efforts to regain royal favour.

The duke was by now well over seventy and physically almost a cripple, but he was still prone to a sort of senile fickleness which threatened Sophie's position every time a prettier and younger face attracted him. When therefore she heard that he had been inquiring about a certain very beautiful young Englishwoman whose exquisite figure rendered Sophie's a veritable caricature she redoubled her vigilance and watchfulness and discharged practically all those servants who were loyal to the prince. In their place she put men and women devoted to herself, and she organized a system whereby none of the duke's correspondence left the palace without first being seen and, if necessary, censored by herself. Of course all letters for him were treated in the same way, and in view of his age and disability there is no exaggeration in the statement that the last of the great Condé family was merely a prisoner in his own house.

But even now Sophie was not satisfied. She had the duke completely under her thumb and almost daily she added to her secret store of money, but he was old and feeble and she was haunted by the possibility that he might avenge himself by secretly making a fresh will—the one in existence had been approved by her—and having disinherited her, escape from her thralldom by dying. It was a problem few persons would have attempted to solve because it would have struck most people as being unsolvable. Sophie, however, possessed a brain which was far above the average, and she eventually devised a scheme which she believed would make her richer than ever when the duke died.

Briefly, her plan was to invite one of the most influential of royal princes to become her partner in an effort to induce the Duc de Bourbon to make his heir one of the prince's children. Sophie foresaw that if she made the duke leave her everything his relations would begin a series of lawsuits which would last beyond her lifetime, and so she conceived the ingenious plan of figuring in the will along with a cousin of the king, a combination which would defeat any attempt to question the written instructions of the testator. The royal family would have to make her cause

their own, and she would see to it that her share of the plunder would be immense. There was another motive for her decision, and that was nearly as important to her as inheriting some of the millions of her benefactor. She did not intend to benefit any prince who could not help her to have the ban against her reception at Court raised, and therefore it was with the object of killing two birds with one stone that she selected a younger son of the Duc d'Orléans for the position of heir to his relative, the Duc de Bourbon.

It was without any difficulty that Sophie found the right coadjutor for her purpose. At this time the Duc d'Orléans was harassed by a comparatively small income and a numerous family, and the throne of France seemed utterly beyond his reach. When therefore Sophie broached the subject of persuading her exalted friend to make a younger son of Orléans his heir, Louis Philippe metaphorically threw himself at her feet. He knew that even when the rapacious appetite of the Englishwoman for money and lands had been satisfied there would be sufficient left to make his son a millionaire, and the head of the Orléans family had had such a close acquaintance with poverty that he was terrified of it.

When Bourbon heard of the arrangements he protested that he would rather throw his money into the Seine than bestow it on a family he detested, but by now Sophie's supremacy at Chantilly could not be questioned, and it required only one exhibition of hysterics to secure the signature of the duke to a will in accordance with her wishes. Once this was accomplished she hastened to acquaint Louis Philippe with the success of their joint conspiracy, and shortly afterwards the Baroness de Feucheres shed tears of joy when notified that the king would be graciously pleased to receive her at his Court.

Sophie Dawes was now at the zenith of her powers. She held the duke so much under subjection that in his terror of her he plotted secretly to escape from his own mansion, and when his plans were discovered he hid himself from her in a corner of his palace, shrinking from her censure with the pathetic terror of a man in his second childhood. He tried to appease her by a present of fifty thousand pounds, but no money could purchase his liberty, and Sophie, armed with the power she had robbed him of, once more resumed her place as a leader of Parisian society, and was spitefully critical of those members of the royal family who protested against her admission to Court.

It was an astonishing position for an Englishwoman who had been in turn workhouse drudge and domestic servant, but Sophie, if her appearance was a trifle coarse, was not uneducated, and her French was perfect. Her witty tongue was her sharpest weapon, and now that her future was assured because of her secret

partnership with a royal prince she carried herself with the air of an empress.

But once again in the hour of her triumph the unexpected was to happen, and she was to find herself battling for her existence again. Up to this point there is very little mystery about her, but beyond it all is doubt and suspicion. Was Sophie Dawes a murderer? Did the woman who shadowed the old duke in his palace day and night kill him because she discovered that he had made a secret will disinheriting her? Did the finding of that will make it his death warrant? Millions of persons believed she killed the duke, and only a very small and interested group maintained that the last of the Condés committed suicide.

A few weeks after Louis Philippe had become king of the French, Sophie and the duke, together with a couple of gentlemen-in-waiting on His Royal Highness, dined at the Château de Saint-Leu, a palace the duke had purchased for Sophie, and subsequently the quartette indulged in whist. The prince displayed no signs of depression, and he retired to his bedroom and gave instructions to his head valet that he was to be called at eight o'clock the next morning. What happened between midnight and dawn remains to this day a matter of conjecture. Sophie's enemies declare that she entered the duke's room when he was asleep, and with the aid of a creature in her service strangled him. That seems too melodramatic to be true, but the fact remains that when at eight o'clock the valet knocked at the door there was no response, and that when, on the instructions of Sophie, the door was smashed in, His Royal Highness was found hanging from the fastening of the long French window. He was quite dead, and the first impression of the terrified servants who crowded the room was that he had committed suicide.

A closer inspection, however, revealed numerous suspicious and disturbing facts. To begin with, between the window fastening and the floor there was only a matter of thirty inches, consequently the prince had only to place his feet on the floor to relieve the pressure on his neck. Then the two handkerchiefs—which were clearly the property of the duke—which had been used to strangle him were tied in a manner peculiar to sailors. Now the duke was most unlikely to have a knowledge of tying such a knot, and it is significant that at the time of the mysterious occurrence Sophie had staying with her in the palace a nephew of her own, and it will be remembered that all the Dawes family were brought up by the sea and that the majority of its male members were fishermen or sailors.

Another clue to the presence of a second person at the moment of the duke's death was the position of his bed. A heavy, cumbersome contrivance, it had always stood against the wall, but now it was nearly two feet away from it, and those acquainted with the prince's physical disability ridiculed the suggestion that he could

have pushed it from the wall himself. These facts, combined with the well-known horror the Duc de Bourbon had of suicide and contempt for those who took their own lives, convinced the Parisians that the unfortunate man had been murdered. The only independent doctor who examined the rooms said that the prince had first been strangled in his own bed and that his murderers—he suspected two at least—had then stage-managed the ghastly mockery of suicide in an attempt to deceive and defeat justice.

The mysterious tragedy at the palace naturally created an enormous sensation. Rumour, which had always been busy with Sophie Dawes, now worked overtime defaming her, and it was well for her that she had a friend in the King of the French. That monarch had, of course, to send investigators to examine the scene of the tragedy and draw up a report, but when he heard that it was proposed to arrest the Englishwoman and put her on trial for murder, Louis Philippe forbade the issue of a warrant. He dare not have his son's fellow-legatee under the will of the dead duke placed in the dock, and it was to save his own face that he saved Sophie, actually compelling his investigators to draw up a report which whitewashed the woman who had been queen of Chantilly for fourteen years.

The Parisians, however, branded Sophie as a murderess and issued pamphlets and books and caricatures which did not err on the side of reticence. They made out a very strong case against her, and when fragments of what seemed to have been a will were found in the grate of the room where the tragedy occurred the crime was reconstructed with vivid detail and eloquent comments. Sophie Dawes was accused of having strangled the Duc de Bourbon because he had made a will disinheriting her, and when his alleged last will was published the Parisians smiled significantly and shrugged their shoulders when they realized that ever since the death of the man who had once loved her she had had for protector no less a personage than their king.

With that rare courage which had distinguished her since she had begun the adventure of life, Sophie Dawes confronted her enemies with a serene countenance. The threats of the mob did not affect her, and the poisoned pens of the journalists left her cold. She was not to be terrified into surrendering any of her rights under the will of the duke, and although there was a period of litigation ostensibly about the will, but in reality her alleged crime was the issue, she emerged triumphantly from the ordeal, richer by several million francs, two palaces and thousands of acres. But with the death of the duke her interest in France had ceased, and, as Louis Philippe was only too anxious to get rid of his embarrassing friend and partner, she pleased everybody, including herself, by turning her possessions into English money and returning to her native country.

Not yet fifty, she had every reason to look forward to many years of enjoyment of her wealth, and with a view to taking her place in English society she purchased a house in the West End of London and another in Hampshire. Her income was estimated to be £25,000 a year, and she was undoubtedly one of the richest women in the world in the early days of Queen Victoria's reign.

However, the workhouse girl who had lived in princely style for twenty years and more was not destined to live much longer. Her needy relatives had begun to cluster round her and intrigue for benefits to come, when she was attacked by dropsy. Warned by her doctors, she started on the making of a will, but a sudden attack of *angina pectoris* brought about her death before the document could be signed.

When the news reached Paris the press commented eloquently on the fact that the woman who had been accused of strangling the Duc de Bourbon had died by strangulation herself. They saw in her end divine confirmation of their suspicions!

Sophie's body was scarcely cold when the hungry herd of humble and obscure relations started quarrelling over her fortune. She had clearly intended to make a favourite niece her principal legatee, but uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, cousins, and many who were not relations at all but merely bore her name, entered into the fight, knowing that they stood to lose nothing and might gain a lot. Eventually a compromise was effected, and relatives and charities benefited, and, incidentally, the world heard for the first time the true story of the workhouse girl who had become a power in France and had helped to shape the destinies of that great country.

Sir Henry Jenner-Fust, the judge who granted letters of administration of her estate, said in delivering judgment: "She was a person of very extraordinary talents, and her history is the greatest romance of real life within my knowledge." He might have added with truth, "within the knowledge of any man."



Constant Bourgeois del. Schroeder sculpt.

THE CHÂTEAU OF ST. LEU

CHAPTER VII

THE CULTURED CRIMINAL

Oxford men of forty years ago will remember Reginald Birchall; indeed, the difficulty would be to forget one of the strangest and most complex characters that university has ever known. Yet it is not easy to realize that he was not a mere creature of fiction, a creation of a romantic and sensational novelist, born to provoke the ridicule of the reader who knows his Oxford and therefore cannot treat such an absurdity seriously. In one respect, however, Reginald Birchall was conventional enough, and that was when playing the rôle of a typical Oxford rake. And never was there a more thorough one at either university. From the day he entered Lincoln he began to "make things hum," and those who had heard of his eccentricities at Rossall and Reading schools could hardly have been surprised. Not for him the cloistered study, and he had an ingrained contempt for high thinking and plain living. To him, Oxford was not a place of learning, but a place where life was to be lived riotously and extravagantly.

Within a month of his arrival he had his own horses, and was already notorious as a gambler. The first supper party he gave created almost as great a scandal as it had sensation, and there is little doubt that had it not been for the long connection the Birchalls had had with Oxford he would have been sent down instantanè. But the young man was no respecter of family traditions, and he determined to prove that the last of a long line of clerics could be the father of a rake whose boisterous and scandalous behaviour was to recall some of the worst excesses of the seventeenth century.

Very soon Reginald Birchall had gathered around him what he termed the choicest spirits of Oxford. These were young men who were plentifully supplied with money, and under his leadership they indulged in carousals which became the talk of the university. But the wildest of the followers was tame compared with the leader, for Reginald Birchall, anxious to maintain his supremacy, was ostentatiously extravagant, almost criminally foolish and blatantly anarchistic in his defiance of authority. When his father, who was an old and much respected clergyman, could no longer respond to the constant demands for money, Birchall had recourse to moneylenders, who advanced him thousands of pounds, knowing that there was plenty of money in the family somewhere and that it would be forthcoming when scandal threatened.

The earliest sign of criminality in this descendant of a family noted for at least two centuries for its respectability was a predilection for cruelty. He did not care what

injury he inflicted on the weak and the helpless when perpetrating what he called a practical joke, and for one who was devoted to hunting he was remarkably severe on his horses. No genuine sportsman is ever cruel to animals, and Birchall therefore could never claim to be one, but at the same time he was capable of displaying self-sacrifice when it came to helping a friend. These were, however, but passing virtues, for the real man was a combination of bully and parasite. He lived on his family and his friends and resorted to every mean trick to obtain money, and had it not been that no amount of dissipation could affect the powers of his remarkably tenacious memory he must have been expelled from Oxford before he completed a term. But he did sufficiently well at his studies to hold his own, and as he was a witty and a clever conversationalist many of those who disapproved of his doings were inclined to sympathize with him, believing that it was better to allow a clever young man to sow his wild oats in Oxford than in London, where temptation would be greater and the consequences of yielding to it more serious. These benevolent critics remembered that Reginald Birchall was supposed to be studying for the Church, and they hoped that time would calm the exuberance of his spirits and make him fit for the Church of which his father was such an ornament.

Meanwhile, Birchall went from one extravagance to another. The acknowledged leader of the noisiest crowd at Oxford, he ruled his followers in the manner of a tyrant. Slackers in the pursuit of pleasure were banished and the man without money sent to Coventry. In his second year he founded a club which he called the Black and Tan—a name which some thirty years later was to be revived in extraordinary circumstances in Ireland—and the qualification for membership appears to have been an almost fanatical disregard of the laws of God and mankind. Members were not allowed to pay their debts unless it was impossible to obtain further credit, and the unpardonable sin was to attend chapel or show respect to a don. To attain high position in the Black and Tan Club it was necessary to invent an original “rag”—originality was judged by the amount of damage inflicted on persons and property—or devise a scheme whereby funds were raised for fresh carousals.

But, as I have said, no one discerned in Reginald Birchall any evidence that he was otherwise than a lively young man with an extravagant sense of humour. Those who professed to know him best believed that complete reformation was a matter of two or three years, and that in due course he would continue the Birchall tradition by taking Orders. His spasmodic displays of vicious temper, cruelty to animals, bullying of servants and cheating of tradesmen were all translated into polite phraseology by those who knew his father, and consequently could not believe that there could be any real vice in the son.

Within three years, however, Birchall abruptly left Oxford and took up his residence in the West End of London. He had by then exhausted the whole of his resources, including the few thousand pounds to which he had become entitled at his father's death. But a distaste for work and a consciousness of irretrievable insolvency did not dim the good humour of a young man who was described by an admirer as "one of the brightest and the best of the sons of the dawn." In London, Birchall, who, as was to be expected, posed as a person of means, became a magnet for the well-dressed riff-raff of the West End. The semi-illiterate adventurer, the gutter-bred hanger-on of the stage, the County Council board school boy turned pseudo-journalist, and the penniless degenerates of good families gathered round the youngster, who apparently knew no care and was never without ready money. They flattered him and toadied to him and persuaded him that he could make London his kingdom just as he had a certain portion of Oxford, and Birchall, as is common with all clever fools, implicitly believed them until his bankruptcy cost him their allegiance. Then he tried to earn a living as an actor, and failing, relieved the financial pressure for a time by eloping with the daughter of a railway official. Birchall was just the handsome ne'er-do-well to fascinate a young girl, and, although they began their married life almost overwhelmed by debt, they were happy enough. Birchall spoke vehemently of reforming, and he persuaded even a hostile father-in-law to believe that now that he had assumed the responsibilities of a married man he would settle down and work.

This was a critical point in Reginald Birchall's life, although no one could possibly have known that remorseless fate was pursuing him slowly and stealthily and that the reaping was soon to begin of the harvest he had sown at Oxford. For it is hardly likely that the extravagant undergraduate and man about town would have boldly entered on the career of professional murderer had circumstances permitted his remaining in his own country. He was a lover of crowds and of great cities and he had not the temperament of the pioneer. But his debts compelled him to turn emigrant, and it was in the loneliness of a Canadian wilderness that the evil which had been lurking in his brain from boyhood found that incentive which crowded everything else out of his mind and persuaded him that only as a murderer could he acquire the means to resume his life of luxury and win back the allegiance of his former admirers.

It is easy to trace the criminal development of Reginald Birchall, the spoilt child and pampered egoist. As a boy, he had been afraid of the strong and contemptuous of the weak, and when in a temper he had been in the habit of venting his spite on cats and dogs. When he grew older his cruelty became more violent, and during his

wild career at Oxford it mattered nothing to him who suffered provided his own skin was saved. The elderly servant whom he pushed down the stairs in the course of a drunken frolic had to be compensated because she broke her leg, but Birchall paid her fifty pounds not because of any sympathy or to show his regret, but to avoid the exposure of a law case. To him human suffering was generally a subject for a joke and he dubbed as fools those of his companions who were weak enough to be sympathetic or considerate. Reginald Birchall lived entirely for the present, and long before he turned professional murderer he was in the habit of solving temporary problems without taking into consideration the consequences to himself or to others.

The comparatively trivial cruelty of the child became in course of time the blood lust of the adventurer crazy to obtain that money without which life was not, in his opinion, worth living. All he had learnt at an English public school and a famous university was that the end justified the means and that nothing was criminal which served his ambitions. Yet those who knew him intimately would have described him as a charming rascal, inclined to stoop to shady methods when in want of cash, but otherwise a very pleasant and agreeable companion who never refused to help a friend out of a difficulty. No one suspected that behind the mask of geniality and good humour there lurked a brain as dangerous as it was depraved and that its possessor would have murdered without compunction anyone whose death would profit him to the extent of fifty pounds.

Birchall's first visit to Canada took place shortly after his romantic marriage, and as it was caused entirely by the necessity for avoiding his creditors for some months it is easy to guess that he arrived in America with very little money. But he had already acquired some of the stock business of the adventurer and criminal, and it was under the alias of "Lord Somerset" that he descended upon the not too sophisticated society of a small Canadian town. In this connection it may be worth while commenting on the extraordinary fascination the name of Somerset has for criminals. It would be easy to compile a list of a score of men and women who have bamboozled the credulous on both sides of the Atlantic by assuming the family name of the dukes of Beaufort. About once in every five years one hears of a fraudulent "Lord Somerset," and there have been in the present century three adventuresses styling themselves "Lady Somerset." However, Birchall and his wife as "Lord and Lady Somerset" had quite a successful time in Woodstock, Ontario, and when his numerous begging letters to England failed to elicit a response "his lordship" condescended to borrow from a confiding tradesman, promising in return huge interest when the family solicitor had obeyed his instructions to send out several thousand dollars.

There is no doubt that Birchall's sole object in visiting Canada was to avoid the unpleasant ordeal of attending in person the bankruptcy proceedings which had been begun against him, but it is equally certain that before he returned home he had conceived the scheme in which he saw no flaw, the scheme with which he hoped to lure into his clutches young men of his own caste and murder them at a profit of so many hundreds of pounds per head. The idea would seem to have occurred to him first when one of the friends he made at Woodstock drove him for a picnic to Pine Pond, a pool in a desolate forest known as Blenheim Swamp. Strangers were always fascinated by the utter wildness and desolation of the Swamp, the loneliness and isolation of which had a haunting effect on the imaginative. It was an unknown world, a place where all sorts of animals had their home remote from humanity, and the mournful music of the birds sounded like the moaning of restless spirits. People were attracted to Blenheim Swamp because it was primeval nature, sheer and stark and, paradoxically, utterly unnatural. Reginald Birchall, *alias* Lord Somerset, came under its spell at once, asking innumerable questions and even talking of exploring it.

"If you entered the Swamp alone you might never be seen again," said his friend, an hotel-keeper, to whom he owed a considerable amount. "The undergrowth is almost impenetrable and a hundred men might search the Swamp for you and fail to find a trace."

"But has no one ever explored it?" said Birchall.

"There are a few men who visit it from time to time to cut down wood," was the answer. "They are expert woodmen and yet they have to be careful not to go in too far. Of course one of these days the Swamp will be taken in hand, for there is a fortune in wood in it, but it will require a lot of capital to make it workable."

Birchall asked no more questions and did not refer to the subject again, but he must have done a great deal of thinking. That night in the hotel there was a discussion about the Swamp in which he did not take part, but he listened eagerly to one man whose story of how human bones had been found near Pine Pond, relics of some unfortunate explorer who had died far away from human assistance and could never be identified because time had practically obliterated him. Birchall, the spendthrift who had dissipated his entire fortune and had exhausted either by importunity or fraud all sources of financial aid, sat as though spellbound, his handsome countenance flushed and his engaging, dark blue eyes alight with the excitement of discovery. Blenheim Swamp was a very long way from London, and surely the money earned in the Canadian forest could be spent in the great city without any risk of friends or strangers suspecting its source and origin?

On the voyage back to England, Birchall prepared the groundwork of his

extraordinary scheme. Hitherto he had despised business of any sort, but now he threw himself with energy into the task of planning a campaign of murder by which he hoped to make an income of at least one thousand pounds a year. The Blenheim Swamp was the basis of his plan, and on it he constructed a method by which each murder would result in a profit of at least two hundred and fifty pounds. He was sanguine enough to expect at least double that amount, but he would be satisfied with a smaller sum, even if it involved a multiplication of the risks by making it necessary to multiply the number of his crimes.

By the time he and his wife arrived in London his scheme was cut and dried, and so complex and puzzling is human nature that Birchall forgot all his worries and troubles now that he believed himself to be assured of a regular and profitable occupation. The fact that that occupation was the profession of murder in no way alarmed him, and neither was he in the least degree conscience-stricken, because he knew that his victims would have to be men of his own age and standing, products of the public schools and the universities, men who would succumb to his wiles all the more readily because they would be unable to suspect how far he had sunk below the standard of honour which he as well as they had been taught. But Reginald Birchall, the happy-go-lucky schoolboy and the rakish undergraduate, was now at the age of twenty-four a murder machine, void of conscience and of mercy, tigerish in his cruelty and devilish in his perverted ingenuity. He wanted money and money he must have, and to get it he resolved to lead young men to that desolate swamp in far-away Canada and murder them in cold blood.

In the privacy of a West End club he composed the advertisement which may be described as the preliminary bait, and shortly before the Christmas of 1889 it appeared in several newspapers in London and the provinces. It had an engaging simplicity of style which was its chief attraction, and it lacked all those incentives to suspicion, such as glowing promises and demands for excessive capital. Here is a copy of the advertisement which its author composed within sight of fellow clubmen, some of whom he hoped might be tempted to reply to it:

CANADA.—University (Oxford) man possessing large farm desires to meet gentleman's son to live with him and learn farming with a view to partnership. Must invest five hundred pounds to extend stock. Board and lodging and five per cent. interest until partnership arranged.—Address, J. R. Birchall, Primrose Club, 4 Park Place, St. James's, London.

The advertisement may be said to have been the result of nearly a year's plotting

and planning, and there was, superficially at any rate, some reason for Birchall's confidence that he had at last discovered how to make crime pay. He had found apparently the one spot where the dead could never be found, and it seemed to him that even if the worst happened and suspicion were aroused he could never be proved legally to be a murderer for the simple fact that no corpse could be produced.

But the very success of the advertisement was to be the chief cause of its author's ultimate failure, for Birchall, ensnared by greed, changed his plans when almost simultaneously two young men of good family offered themselves as candidates for the partnership in the Canadian farm. Instead of choosing what was in his opinion the easier victim, Birchall could not resist the temptation to obtain double the money he asked, and accordingly he entered into correspondence with the applicants, Pelly and Benwell, unknown to each other. Pelly had recently left Oxford and was anxious to get an open-air occupation, while Benwell, the son of a colonel, was equally fascinated by the prospect of making his way to fortune in the New World. They both belonged to families which had plenty of money, and Birchall, who interviewed them on successive days, was blinded to all sense of danger by the readiness with which they agreed to his proposals.

One astonishing feature of the transaction is the cold-bloodedness of the murderer in prospective. Pelly and Benwell were typical of the young men with whom Birchall had associated ever since leaving school. They belonged to his class and had had pretty much the same experience of life. They were good-natured and friendly, and in Birchall each thought he had discovered a kindred soul. The owner of the agricultural El Dorado in far-away Canada struck them as a charming man of the world whose honour could never be questioned. For his part, Birchall treated each of his intended victims as a real friend, admitted them at once to intimacy so that neither of them could suspect what his ultimate object was. But this product of Oxford University who was planning murder boldly and deliberately could not have behaved otherwise, for the simple reason that he could have had no hatred in his heart for either of the young men. They had never done him any injury and did not intend to hurt him, and had it not been necessary, in Birchall's opinion, for them to die he would willingly have cemented a friendship likely to last all their lives. However, he believed it was essential to his own welfare that they should die, and so while he laughed and joked and talked of their brilliant future he was never unconscious of the fact that he would have to kill them before they were three months older.

In the long and gloomy annals of crime the case of Reginald Birchall stands out

completely by itself. Other men have gone into murder as a sort of trade, but never with the businesslike thoroughness which Birchall displayed. He omitted none of the little preliminaries which preface a business partnership, and although, by sheer force of personality, he soon had Pelly and Benwell ready to obey his slightest wish, he insisted that as they had given him references they should examine his. Pelly, knowing nothing of the existence of Benwell, referred Birchall to an eminent Q.C., and a gentleman who by a coincidence was on the staff of the Marquess of Lansdowne, then Governor-General of Canada. Birchall's references were not so imposing, but they satisfied Pelly, and after that an imposing legal document was drawn up by Birchall's lawyer setting forth exactly the terms on which he would take a partner. Nothing was done without the help of a solicitor, and it would have been utterly impossible for any friend or relative of either of the young men to suspect that there was no farm in existence and that the object of every word and document was murder. All those legal formalities were so many aids to luring a young man to cross the Atlantic to Blenheim Swamp and go for a walk with the handsome, ingratiating Reginald Birchall, a walk from which Birchall intended he should return quite alone.

When the necessary legal papers had been completed and a payment in advance made to Birchall, the latter with his wife and young Pelly left England on the "Britannic," due to arrive in New York on February 14th, 1890. Before their arrival, however, Pelly had a shock, which engendered a suspicion that never quite left him. The advertisement he had answered had stated distinctly that Birchall wanted one partner only, and when therefore on the second day out he saw another young man in the company of the Birchalls he was taken aback considerably. For a time the leader of the expedition quieted his fears by informing him that Benwell had nothing whatever to do with the Canadian farm, and at the same time he advised Pelly not to have anything to do with him.

"He's not exactly our style, Pelly," he said, with his usual charming intimacy of manner. "Between you and me he's a bit of a simpleton and I'll be glad to get rid of him at New York."

Pelly, who trusted Birchall implicitly, accepted the explanation and kept Benwell at a distance. The latter, who had been told a similar story about Pelly, ostentatiously avoided him, and thus the two young men—whom Birchall had planned to murder in Blenheim Swamp—did not speak to one another until the ship was nearing New York. Then by accident they met on deck late one night, and discovering that they were of the same class and had the same hopes and ambitions, they involuntarily fell into intimate conversation. To Pelly's amazement he heard that Benwell had answered the advertisement, had been accepted and had supplied references, and

was looking forward with zest to making a fortune by farming and horse breeding in Canada.

This was in fact Birchall's amazing blunder. Had he carried out his plans as originally settled he would never have taken two young men out at the same time, for in numbers lay grave danger to himself. But he had been unable to resist the monetary temptation, and it was well for civilization and justice that he had not been proof against it. For had he taken his victims one by one to Canada it is possible that his active career as a murderer would have lasted for several years or, in the event of the luck going against him, he would have escaped punishment for his first crime. One can only ascribe his blunder to the stupidity of super-vanity, for only an utter fool would have run the risk of allowing two of his intended victims to spend a week boxed up in a ship and have trusted to a lie to keep them apart. By telling Pelly that Benwell was a fool and convincing the latter that Pelly was a semi-idiot who had intruded his company on them Birchall had thought to remove all risk, but had he not been blinded and drugged by over-confidence he must have anticipated that in a very short time Pelly and Benwell, two youngsters who had been to public schools and had been brought up in the same society, must discover that they had many things in common—if only their youth and their ambitions and Reginald Birchall!

Pelly, who appears to have been a young man of character and resource, was so angry at the deception Birchall had played on him that he went straight to him and declared that as he had been grossly deceived he would withdraw from the enterprise. He reminded Birchall that during their negotiations he had assured him that he was to be the only partner, and now the younger man plainly showed he suspected that all these lies were so many efforts to conceal a gigantic fraud. But Birchall was ever resourceful, and whenever he chose to exert himself he could be irresistible. Within five minutes he had Pelly apologizing for his roughness, and eventually the latter went to his cabin almost persuaded that he had misjudged him.

"I'll get rid of Benwell at the earliest opportunity," Birchall had said, and had meant it too.

But Pelly could not deduce from this very ordinary remark that the removal was to be effected by murder.

The Birchalls and the two candidates for partnership in the mythical farm did not remain very long in New York, chiefly because Pelly and Benwell were anxious to see the farm. There was another reason, however, for their hasty departure, Birchall experiencing an unpleasant surprise when an old acquaintance of his "Lord Somerset" days hailed him in his hotel by his assumed title, greatly to the surprise of his companions and to the consternation of Mrs. Birchall. The murderer had the best

of reasons for wishing to avoid the acquaintances he had made on his previous visits to America, and it was with feelings akin to panic that after the unfortunate encounter he packed up and took his companions off to Buffalo. Here they put up at Stafford House, Mrs. Birchall silent and anxious, in noticeable contrast to the young men, who were growing more enthusiastic as they approached the place where they believed the marvellous farm to be. Birchall assured them that they were now within three hours' journey of it, and he declared that the next morning he would take them to view it.

"You can both come along with me and see for yourselves what the possibilities are," he said, in that free and easy tone of his which was as convincing as it was captivating. While he spoke he had no intention whatever of allowing both of them to visit Blenheim Swamp at the same time. That would have rendered it quite impossible for him to murder them, but he had already thought out a plan to separate them, and almost in the same breath he carried it out. "I know my wife will be very lonely by herself in Buffalo, where she doesn't know anyone," he continued, "but we won't be away for more than a few hours."

Pelly, always chivalrous and considerate, accepted the hint and thereby saved his life, for had he not spoken at once there is little doubt that Benwell would have done so, and as a consequence Pelly would have accompanied Birchall to Blenheim Swamp the next morning.

"I will stay behind and look after Mrs. Birchall," Pelly said. "There is no tremendous hurry so far as I am concerned and I can inspect the farm the day after to-morrow."

"That's very kind of you," said Birchall gratefully, and changed the subject.

The next morning—February 17th, 1890—Birchall and Benwell left Buffalo for the farm which he had described as the finest in Canada, promising Benwell the spectacle of a regular hive of hands at work and the glad sight of a stud of horses. In fact, he was to see the El Dorado at its best!

There is a commonplace remark to the effect that the world is a very small place, and Birchall must have thought it small indeed during their journey, for he recognized at least three persons who indicated that they had not forgotten him. Apart from these incidents he could not have been unaware that he and his companion attracted attention wherever they went. Their clothes alone, new and fashionably cut, were sufficient to account for this, and then they were both good-looking and obviously strangers. We can only marvel that in the circumstances Birchall should have persevered with his bloodthirsty expedition, but he did, and when they entered Blenheim Swamp—beyond which lay the farm, as he told Benwell—he was

coolness itself and there was not the slightest tremor in his voice as he spoke with enthusiasm of their expedition. Through the break in the trees they could see the dull waters of Pine Pond, but they had little chance for gazing ahead, the bracken and the undergrowth being so thick that there were times when they had to force themselves through it. They were soon, however, in the depths of the forest and heading for what looked like an impenetrable wood. At this point Birchall unostentatiously fell behind, and Benwell, as though unaware of the incident, tramped straight on, his thoughts apparently far away. Then his treacherous and murderous companion crept close up to him and shot him through the back of the head.

Without a cry the unfortunate youngster dropped to the ground like a log and Birchall stood erect for a few moments listening. The noise had disturbed a colony of birds, but their cries and the flapping of their wings quickly died away and the living and the dead were left alone. Immediately he was certain that his crime had not been overheard the murderer knelt down, and taking a pair of scissors from his pocket proceeded to remove from the clothes of the murdered man all identification marks. For the scoundrel who had spent many months planning his crime had not forgotten this little yet important detail, and the murderer who had engaged lawyers to help him unwittingly in his enterprise had shown himself capable of going to a shop in Bond Street and buying a pair of scissors with the sole object of using them on the underclothing of the man he intended to murder thousands of miles away before he was three months older.

He worked swiftly and yet thoroughly, and when he had satisfied himself that the body contained no clue to the identity of Fred W. Benwell, he washed his hands in a pool of water before proceeding to escape from the scene of his crime. It had been his intention to throw the corpse into Pine Pond—which was so deep that some people believed it was bottomless—but a recent storm had created an irregular barrier of broken trees and shrubbery, and Birchall realized that it would be impossible to give his victim a watery grave. He was not, however, perturbed because this part of his programme had to be cancelled. A superficial inspection of Blenheim Swamp must have convinced this most deliberate and most cautious of criminals that long before anyone entered the Swamp Benwell would have become a mere collection of unidentifiable bones. The murderer had chosen what he considered the safest period of the year for his crime, giving himself at least two months before the weather permitted any general invasion of the Swamp by the public.

As he had already told Pelly on at least two occasions that his sole object was to get rid of Benwell, his story, when he returned to Buffalo, that the latter had decided

to seek his fortune in the United States was accepted as reasonable and consistent with previous events and incidents. The murderer embellished it by alleging that Benwell desired his luggage to be forwarded to a hotel in New York; and over a late supper at Stafford House in Buffalo, on the very day which had witnessed the tragedy in the Swamp, he enlarged on the brilliant prospects for himself and Pelly, now they had finished with Benwell. Pelly was thus the only candidate for the partnership, and although he was not altogether fully satisfied he was determined to go forward because, having come so far, it seemed only reasonable that he should go a little farther. Birchall was anxious to get rid of Pelly, who was doubly dangerous to him now that Benwell was dead, and although Blenheim Swamp was out of the question as the scene of a second murder there were immense possibilities about the Niagara Falls, where there were many spots from which an unsuspecting young man could be hurled into the fast-flowing water and battered beyond recognition.

The day after the murder in the Swamp Birchall and Pelly left Buffalo and took rooms at an hotel on the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls. The older man was in a very talkative mood throughout the journey, and more than once he expressed the hope that Pelly would like the farm and the overseer. Benwell, he explained, was a snob, who had come out to Canada with the foolish impression that the farm was staffed by public school and university men and had withdrawn on discovering that farm life entailed association with men of rough manners and habits.

“We’ll take a stroll along the Falls to-morrow,” said Birchall, “and discuss our joint plans. I haven’t the slightest doubt what your decision will be when you see the farm. You’re not a fool.”

It did not occur to Pelly when they started out for the walk that his companion was leading him to the loneliest and most desolate part of the Falls, and it was mere nervousness which caused him to hesitate when they came to a standstill and Birchall invited him to descend a ramshackle stairway, the last relic of a period when this particular spot had been a favourite bathing place. The loneliness was almost unnerving, and Pelly, whose thoughts had not been comfortable for many a day, drew back, ill at ease and suspicious and yet quite unconscious of the reason for his strange and perplexing emotions. But Birchall was determined to get him to the bottom of the stairway where he would have at his mercy the only man who could hang him if the truth about Benwell’s disappearance was ever ascertained, and exerting himself to the utmost he persuaded Pelly to climb down. To the consternation and discomfiture of the murderer he discovered, when he had followed his companion to the base, that by a marvellous stroke of luck—for Pelly—there was actually another man surveying the Falls. Now the chances of a third party being

present were something like millions to one against, and for once Birchall was nonplussed and bewildered.

It happened at the very moment Birchall knew that all his plans for the murder of Pelly had come to naught that his intended victim turned from gazing at the stranger to stare interrogatively at him, for Pelly had got the impression that this was no coincidence and that the unknown intruder was either a confederate of Birchall's or else was there to commit a crime on his own account. When he noticed Birchall's unusual pallor and the curious expression of his eyes he misinterpreted it to mean that he, too, suspected the stranger of criminal designs, and, already nervous and apprehensive as Pelly was, this was sufficient incentive to cause him to dash past Birchall and climb back to the top of the cliff and to safety.

The relations between the two men were by now strained, and yet Pelly agreed to accompany Birchall on another walk the next day. In all probability he was so anxious not to have to return home empty-handed that he subdued his suspicions and hoped and acted for the best. That is the only explanation of his willingness to fall in with Birchall's constantly rearranged programme, but a special providence must have been guarding the younger man, for when he was apparently for the second time at Birchall's mercy—they were crossing the Falls by the lower suspension bridge—two men came into sight and the bloodthirsty Birchall, in the very act of advancing on his victim, was compelled to abandon his murderous intention there and then. That was to be his last opportunity of getting Pelly alone with the means of a swift death close to hand, for within twenty-four hours the younger man was reading a Canadian paper which not only gave an account of the finding of a body in Blenheim Swamp but displayed a photograph of the unknown, which Pelly instantly identified as his former travelling companion in the "Britannic."

"That looks like Benwell," he said at once, passing the paper over to Birchall, who must have had to exercise all his self-control on hearing that the crime which he had fondly hoped could never be discovered had been laid bare within four days.

"I don't agree with you," he said, with well-affected indifference.

"In any case you ought to go to Woodstock and see if it is Benwell," Pelly persisted.

"You'd better come with me then," said Birchall quietly.

But there was something in his expression which induced Pelly to provide himself with a loaded revolver before he set out for the third time in the society of the man who puzzled and frightened him.

It was at Woodstock that Birchall heard of the trivial yet momentous accident which had led to the finding of the body in Blenheim Swamp. A woodman on his

way home with his brother was passing through the Swamp when for the first and only time in his life he tripped over some hidden blacken and fell forward. As he struck the earth his right hand involuntarily clutched something which caused him to start convulsively and to cry out when he found himself staring into the dead face of a young man. In a few moments they had carried the corpse out of the Swamp and had laid it reverently on the turf, and as soon as possible the police were notified and news of the sensation published to the world.

From the beginning the mystery promised to be complicated and puzzling, although there were several illuminating and informative clues. That he had been murdered was obvious, and that his murderer was a man of iron nerve was equally plain, but removing the identification marks from the underclothing had not disguised the fact that the dead man was of good family, a stranger to the neighbourhood and only recently arrived in Canada. Murray, who was placed in charge of the investigation, searched the Swamp with a score of detectives and was delighted to find a cigar-case bearing the initials, "F. W. B." This was a very valuable clue, but whether the initials were those of the murdered or the murderer it was then impossible to say. However, it was something to go upon, and when the photograph of the corpse was published the important item of information was added that the probability was that the dead man's initials were "F. W. B."

That was the position when Birchall and his wife granted an interview to Murray. The murderer would never have dared face the detective had it not been that Pelly practically compelled him to do so. Birchall knew well enough that if he decamped Pelly would go straight to Murray and tell him everything, and it was as much as his life was worth to do anything likely to make Pelly join in the hunt for the murderer. The position was full of danger and extremely critical for him, but he was Reginald Birchall, the clever and witty man of the world, when he faced Murray and answered his questions. He was, however, soon on the horns of a dilemma, for he had either to admit that he had been with Benwell up to within a short time of his death or declare in the most positive manner that they were the barest of acquaintances. And knowing that his own neck was in danger he sought in lying a way of escape.

"I scarcely knew him," he said, without the slightest sign of fear. "I think we chatted once or twice on the 'Britannic' coming out. He told me then he was going to Canada, but I took little interest in his affairs. That's all I can tell you, Mr. Murray."

During the conversation Mrs. Birchall listened with terror in her eyes, and how she managed to refrain from screaming as she heard her husband lie recklessly it is impossible to say. But the detective was watching her as well as Birchall, and her

surprise on hearing statements which if true must have been familiar to her convinced him that Birchall was lying.

Once, however, the corpse had been identified the task of the police was easy enough. That Birchall had actually brought Benwell out from England was proved immediately; that they had been two of a party of four staying at Stafford House at Buffalo was another fact established, and that on the day of Benwell's death Birchall had been his companion was gathered from the testimony of three persons who had seen them together. Therefore, instead of being a mere passing acquaintance of the murdered man, Birchall had been his constant companion, and it did not require much detective ability to deduce from all the lies told at Woodstock that Birchall was the murderer.

If the authorities had feared a miscarriage of justice their doubts must have been removed within a few hours of the arrest of Birchall and his wife—the latter was promptly discharged because it was obvious she was guiltless—for in the luggage of the prisoner and his victim there was found sufficient to convict the suspect, and if the trial at Woodstock attracted world-wide interest and attention it was not because there could be any doubt as to the result. That was known to everybody before the proceedings opened, and the reason why every paper of importance sent its special correspondents to the little Canadian town was the social standing of the prisoner and his victim and the realization that Reginald Birchall, public school and university graduate, was one of the greatest criminals in the world. That a man of his abilities and social position could have become a professional murderer by choice was so incredible that even when it became a reality it seemed too fantastic to be believed. In the course of the trial, however, it was proved clearly that for nearly a year Birchall had plotted and planned in London to turn the far-off Blenheim Swamp into a ghastly treasure ground, treasure which was to be wrung from the earth by human sacrifice. Proof was adduced of this youthful member of a very respectable family calmly and coolly embarking on a carefully chosen career as assassin.

The brilliant lawyer who defended the prisoner did not plead any insanity on the part of his client, preferring to go out for an acquittal on the plea that his client could not have led Benwell into the Swamp and have murdered him within the four and a half hours stated by the prosecution to have been reserved by him for the deed. One witness had seen Birchall and his companion near the Swamp and another had seen Birchall alone walking away from it. Between these two periods there had lapsed four and a half hours, and it was by persuading the jury that Birchall could not have murdered Benwell and walked four miles either way in the time stated that counsel for the defence hoped to secure an acquittal.

The inevitable verdict was followed by sentence of death, and on November 14th, 1890, Reginald Birchall was executed. He made no confession and he died almost stolidly, and when they buried him in a shameful grave it was just eleven months since he had sat in a London club composing the advertisement with which he was to begin his career as a professional murderer. And had he not committed the blunder of conducting two victims simultaneously to Canada his career would certainly have lasted much longer than it did.

CHAPTER VIII

DR. WEBSTER OF BOSTON

No one can say that there never has been a perfect crime because unsolved mysteries provide no data to enable us to pass judgment, while the triumph of justice involves, of course, the failure of the criminal. All the great criminals of the world, from Cain onwards, have been at the best but sorry fustian, and even the cleverest and the most learned amongst them were novices in ingenuity compared with an English ex-reformatory boy, uncouth and illiterate, who did on two occasions at least very nearly achieve the perfect crime. I refer to George Joseph Smith, who drowned his brides in a bath, and who would never have been brought to justice had he not attempted to repeat his success once too often. Smith was a typical product of the slums who had to be educated by force disguised as an Act of Parliament, and, although he resisted as best he could the allurements of a very superficial form of education, he imbibed sufficient to develop a brain cunning enough to make him superior to the efforts in crime of men of deep learning.

Dr. John W. Webster, of Boston, was a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Medicine as well as Professor of Chemistry and Mineralogy in Harvard University, but when he turned murderer his attempt to achieve the perfect crime was so complete a failure that if he and Smith ever meet in what Wordsworth called the "sunless land" I am sure the learned professor will bow to the superior achievements in crime of the illiterate graduate of a British punitive academy.

There was nothing very remarkable about Dr. Webster throughout the period in his career when he was accepted by his fellows as a respectable citizen. University professors, however they may attempt to disguise the fact, are, after all, merely human beings, and Webster's successors of to-day are pretty much the same as the men who staffed Harvard in the forties of the last century. They included all sorts and conditions of eccentrics, cranks and *bon vivants*—and at least one poet—and the two chief figures in a tragedy which stirred profoundly all America in the winter of 1849. There could have been no greater opposites than Dr. Webster, the murderer, and Dr. Parkman, his victim. One was a hedonist; the other an ascetic, and dividing them lay all the worlds comprised in the difference between these two terms. Webster had the reputation of being popular, but had Boston taken him at his face value that popularity must have waned, for the close-set, small eyes and the heavy mouth suggested cunning and sensuality. Clearly not a man to be trusted, but, although there may be a lurking suspicion that learning can drive a man to madness, we do not think it likely to drive him to crime. Webster was fond of society and

entertained considerably, and he gave every indication that he preferred to be one of the men in the street rather than the professor in the class-room. He was a family man too, and outwardly paid a tribute to the conventions by attending church regularly. It is not to be wondered at that those Bostonians whom he gladdened by admission to his circle of acquaintances were delighted to know the learned gentleman whose tubby figure and rather flabby countenance were so familiar in Boston and its suburb of Cambridge, where the Websters resided. But it may be doubted if he was really popular. It might be nearer the truth to say that he had hundreds of acquaintances and few friends, for the reason that intimacy with the doctor seems to have bred suspicion and dislike. Oscar Wilde once remarked of Whistler that he had no enemies, but his friends disliked him, and had Oliver Wendell Holmes and other American wits who knew Webster thought of it they might have coined the epigram forty years before the Irishman. It would have fitted perfectly the Harvard professor of chemistry who had the brain of a criminal and was predestined for a violent end.

On the other hand, Dr. George Parkman, the ascetic, was a combination of eccentricity and ill-humour, not fond of society, one who might be described as a recluse had it not been for his devotion to his family. His salary as a professor at Harvard was never too small to be saved and he lived with a frugality which was advertised by his lean figure. Boston knew him by sight as well as it did Professor Webster, for his curious walk suggested a skeleton on wires, and yet if few persons ventured to accost him on his way to the Medical Building in Grove Street, those who knew the real man respected him much more than they did the more showy and superficial Webster. Parkman never broke a promise and was scrupulously honest in all his dealings, and if he had the reputation of being excessively thrifty, those who knew his circumstances were aware that his object was to make provision for his wife and invalid daughter. His critics thought his circumstances might have been happier had he not sacrificed so much of the present for the future, for with his practice at No. 8 Walnut Street and his professorship at the University his income was quite a respectable one. However, he was not the man to tolerate criticism or interference, and they wisely left him alone.

Such were the two men who came into close contact solely because they were opposites in every respect. Webster, the extravagant, gravitated towards Parkman, the thrifty, by sheer force of accumulating financial embarrassments. The professor of chemistry was almost at the end of his resources in 1842 when it occurred to him that Parkman might assist him with a loan. Judging by the available records it would seem that at first he advanced money without asking any interest, a remarkable act

of generosity which was enhanced by his acceptance of Webster's acknowledgment as his only security. But the crisis of 1842 was repeated the next year and for years after that, and we may be sure that Parkman was suspicious and exasperated long before that final quarrel which paved the way to the tragedy. It is certain that he would have broken off all relations with Webster had the latter ever been able to repay him in full, but the fact was that Webster could never quite get out of his colleague's debt and Parkman was not willing to bring about a state of affairs which, while punishing Webster for his many breaches of faith, must cost the lender every dollar owing to him.

The relations between the two men continued more by force of circumstances than by anything else. Parkman's dislike for Webster soon amounted to positive hatred because it was founded on the knowledge that the man to whom he had been so generous was incurably dishonest. Had not Parkman thought more of money than anything else he must have broken with Webster, who never at any time owed him more than five hundred dollars, but he endured innumerable disappointments although he could have avenged himself at any moment by driving him from the university, hoping to recover his loans some day.

It was inevitable, however, that the peculiar relations between the two professors could not continue indefinitely, and the wonder of it is that they lasted for such a lengthy period as seven years. But all Webster's ingenuity as a liar and a shuffler could not disentangle him from the mesh in which he found himself in April, 1849. His chief creditor had long since suspected fraud, but now he knew it, and, furthermore, had proof of it, and Webster was conscious he was on the verge of exposure and ruin.

The final crisis was the result of an accident. Exactly a year earlier Webster had borrowed money from another source, and when repayment was demanded, and inability pleaded, his creditor threatened to levy an execution on his house and furniture. Now this would have been a catastrophe indeed for the Harvard professor, who had built himself a fine house and furnished it extravagantly out of the fortune of fifty thousand dollars which his father, the proprietor of a chemist's shop, had bequeathed to him. It was not that he worried because the furniture and the contents of what his friends called his museum—in reality a valuable collection of minerals—had been mortgaged already to Dr. Parkman as security for his loans. What he dreaded was an unsavoury publicity which might reveal to the citizens of Boston how he had been making both ends meet for several years. In his dilemma he committed a blunder which could have been inspired only by a cynical contempt for his chief creditor or a belief in miracles, for he actually went to Parkman's brother-in-law, a

Mr. Shaw, and asked him to lend him twelve hundred dollars on the security of the collection of minerals. Of course he gave no hint that the collection was legally not his property, and Mr. Shaw cheerfully parted with the money, believing that he had the very best security in the shape of a bill of sale on the valuable minerals.

And then some time in April, 1849, Shaw met his brother-in-law near Walnut Street and, after discussing family affairs, turned the conversation in the direction of Dr. Webster.

"It's a great pity," Shaw remarked, "that a man of Professor Webster's attainments should have such a beggarly salary as twelve hundred dollars a year."

"How do you know that?" asked Parkman, who was rather tired of the subject of Webster's financial position.

"Because when I lent him twelve hundred dollars on the security of his mineralogical collection he remarked that the amount was equal to a year's salary," answered Shaw, and was amazed at the effect his words had on his relative.

"But that collection has been mortgaged to me for years," exclaimed Dr. Parkman, his cadaverous face distorted with passion. "So he's taken to cheating me, has he?"

There and then he terminated the interview, abruptly leaving Shaw, who watched him until he saw him enter his house and close the door with a bang. He, too, was shocked by the revelation of his friend's duplicity, but he was more easy-going than his brother-in-law, and was optimistic enough even now to hope for the best. On the other hand, Parkman's rage was something which was not to be extinguished lightly. A man of honour and of rigid principles, he believed that he had treated Webster with generosity, and he was therefore all the more determined now to punish the swindler. Parkman prided himself on being just and even generous, but he never made any secret of the fact that he never forgave and that if he was imposed upon he would be relentless and merciless in seeking redress.

From that time forward there was more or less open warfare between creditor and debtor. Parkman, not liking to crush his enemy by recourse to the law, refrained because by so doing his money would be lost beyond recovery, but he called on Webster in his private room at the Medical School and poured upon him a torrent of vituperation which lacked nothing in strength and virility. Having his man at his mercy he insisted on a written surrender of the fees he would receive for lecturing in the coming winter season, and not satisfied with this he seldom lost an opportunity to brand Webster as a cheat and a swindler. There is on record a story illustrating his hostility towards Webster which is very characteristic. The Professor of Chemistry was lecturing one afternoon to a class of forty students when the door of the room

was violently pushed in and Dr. Parkman entered. Walking straight to the front row he sat down exactly opposite the lecturer and tried to stare him out of countenance by making the most hideous contortions with his face. That the unhappy Webster should have been able to continue in spite of this handicap says a good deal for his nerve, but on the only occasion he referred to it—he was then in the condemned cell—he declared that it was the ugliness of the man and not his motive that affected him.

By hook or by crook, however—chiefly by crook—Webster managed somehow to keep Parkman at bay from April until November, 1849. How he achieved this feat remains a matter for wonderment and speculation, but it may have been that Parkman, who had years previously recommended Webster for his professorship and had canvassed actively on his behalf, was reluctant at heart to hurl into disgrace his former protégé. This is all the more likely because in spite of his eccentricity he had a deep attachment for Harvard, and if his critics insisted that it was his money and not the prestige of the university he was thinking of they probably did him an injustice. However, the middle of November found his patience exhausted, Webster having perpetrated one more mean swindle on him early in that month. Having secured a short lease of Parkman's neutrality by undertaking to allow a representative of the latter to collect the lecture fees, Webster induced his agent to hand him over the money shortly before Parkman's representative appeared on the scene. With memories of the fraudulent mortgage on the mineral collection, Parkman's wrath on discovering how he had been cheated again was almost too much for him, and going straight to Webster he delivered an ultimatum which meant that the Professor of Chemistry could only buy off Ruin by repaying within a week every cent he owed him.

Webster's thoughts turned at once towards murder as a solution for all his troubles and difficulties. He was rendered desperate by worry, but the readiness with which he planned the slaying of Dr. Parkman proves that the evil germ had been there for many years and only needed the opportunity to bring it to fruition.

Of course he would not admit the possibility of discovery and retribution—murderers seldom do—and he was all the more confident because there would be no need for him to vary the ordinary routine of his life. No one, for instance, could accuse him of suddenly taking to remaining in his laboratory after his students had gone—he had been doing that for years—and it was well known that the college janitor, Ephraim Littlefield, had often had to remain at his post because the Professor of Chemistry had been experimenting by himself. Then the fact that he would require a furnace ought not to excite suspicion either, and it would practically pass unnoticed

if he had to devote two or three hours to working in the laboratory behind the locked door. In fact, to make his crime complete and run no risks, all he would have to do would be to lure Parkman into the laboratory, and that would be an easy task because he had merely to hint that if the doctor called at a certain time he would receive the money owing to him.

Not that Dr. Webster was going to commit murder for the sake of money. He owed Parkman less than five hundred dollars, and we may be sure that if there was nothing except the debt he would not have troubled to soil his hands in his enemy's blood. But there was something greater to Webster than a mere debt, and that was his Respectability. He wished to keep his place in Boston society and his post at the university, and so that he might conceal his comparatively trivial offences he determined to commit the greatest of all crimes.

The first act of the benevolent father of a family and the genial chairman of convivial gatherings was to procure a heavy hatchet. Then he made the arrangements for a fire which was to render his victim unrecognizable; and after that he studied the geography and the construction of the Medical Building, going out of his way to ask Littlefield questions which were so unusual that the janitor never forgot them. It was, in truth, rather a dismal old building which housed the Medical School attached to Harvard University, and it had the sepulchral appearance of a mortuary.

Satisfied that there was nothing more to be done except bring his victim to the slaughter, Webster called at Dr. Parkman's house in Walnut Street at eight o'clock on Friday morning, November 23rd, and informed him that if he came to the laboratory at the Medical School about half-past one o'clock that day his account would be settled.

There was no surer method for guaranteeing the keeping of the appointment by Dr. Parkman, who shortly before half-past one entered a greengrocer's shop near the Medical Building, and having bought a lettuce—rare at this period of the year—to tempt the appetite of his invalid daughter, he intimated to the proprietor that he would call back for it in a few minutes. As Webster was waiting for him less than a hundred yards away, and as it was obvious that it would not take long to receive the money and write a receipt for it, the doctor had every reason to believe that he would be on his way home with the lettuce before a quarter to two. But he was destined never to be seen alive again after he entered the building which he knew so well and walked into the laboratory where his debtor and enemy of years was waiting for him with murder in his heart.

What actually happened when the obsequious and fawning Webster closed the door behind his victim can be surmised without any great strain on the imagination.

From the point of view of the murderer everything depended on the first blow, and when he took the unconscious visitor from behind and struck him on the head with the hatchet and his victim collapsed without a cry he must have believed that he had passed from danger into safety. At the very moment of his crime the room immediately above him was occupied by Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was gathering up his papers at the conclusion of a lecture, and that famous literary man testified at the subsequent trial that throughout the afternoon he never heard a sound from Webster's laboratory. This was remarkable in view of the gruesome task Webster worked on until nearly five o'clock, for in spite of his expert knowledge of anatomy he experienced more difficulty than he had anticipated in destroying those parts of the corpse which would identify it. Once he had a terrible fright when he heard the janitor pause outside the door and turn the handle, but Littlefield was too well trained not to be able to guess that the professor was working late and must not be disturbed, and he passed on, leaving the cleaning of the stove until another day. But he reminded himself that he had never known Professor Webster remain so very late.

Shortly after five Webster left the Medical Building and went straight home. Dr. Parkman had been missed already by his family—his failure to return to the usual two o'clock dinner having created anxiety owing to the fact that he had always been extremely punctilious—but Webster could scarcely be expected to worry about this, and when he arrived home his family saw no change in him. He was as talkative and genial as ever, and although he had just come from dismembering the body of the man he had murdered he could after dinner sit down and read Milton's "L'Allegro," and pass a pleasant, even a serene, evening with his wife and daughters. When on the following afternoon all Boston was agog with excitement over the vanishing of Dr. Parkman his murderer preferred to turn again to Milton for recreation, ignoring completely the copy of a Boston daily paper with a front page shrieking at the top of its headlines the latest details of the great mystery. The paper had been purchased by Webster's daughter, and the murderer, not daring to destroy it, sat at the table on which it lay and sought distraction in the most epigrammatic of Milton's works. It was an extraordinary juxtaposition, and had not Webster's family been so infatuated with the father and husband they considered perfect the incident must have bred amazement if not suspicion. In common with practically everybody in Cambridge, they knew that Dr. Parkman had been something more than a mere colleague of Webster's at the university, and the fact that the Professor of Chemistry was apparently the only person unaffected and unexcited by the mystery was in itself remarkable. Yet if anyone ought to have been upset, or at any rate intensely interested in the affair, that person was Webster. As it was, he acted as though he

had never heard of Parkman, and when the mystery was three days old he actually gave a whist party at his house and was positively brilliant in his gaiety and good humour.

Meanwhile, Boston was almost crazy with excitement, and the relatives and friends of Dr. Parkman were working day and night in their efforts to solve the mystery. Handbills were printed offering rewards amounting to thousands of dollars for information, and, as usual, almost every fool in Boston came forward to swear he had seen Dr. Parkman after two o'clock on the Friday, but as hardly any two agreed the problem was only complicated further by these offers of help. Amongst those who volunteered evidence were two men who swore they had seen the doctor enter the Medical Building, but their testimony was confused when equally reputable persons placed the missing man a mile or so away at the very same time. Forty-eight hours after Dr. Parkman's disappearance all that the family and the police knew was that shortly before half-past one on Friday, November 23rd, he had walked out of the greengrocer's shop after promising to return in a few minutes and that he had vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up. And the mystery was all the more baffling and tantalizing because not only had the missing man been well known in Boston but his eccentric appearance and extraordinary gait had attracted attention everywhere. In fact, he was about the last man one would have expected to vanish so easily and completely.

It was four o'clock on the Sunday after his last meeting with Parkman that Webster decided it was time for him to do something. He probably realized that his avoidance of the burning topic of the day and his apparent lack of interest in the fate of a colleague who was known to have befriended him would prove dangerous, and so he went to the Rev. Mr. Parkman, the doctor's brother, and in a curt tone which did not conceal his embarrassment informed him that Parkman had called at the Medical Building on the Friday to receive payment of a debt.

"I paid him a sum I owed him personally, and when he scribbled a receipt he left me," said Webster, keeping his eyes averted all the time and speaking with the extraordinary abruptness of one who is reciting a distasteful lesson acquired by heart.

Naturally the clergyman was astounded, not so much by the statement as by the fact that Webster should have waited two days before making it. There was not a friend of Dr. Parkman's in Boston who had not been trying to discover the person who had last seen the missing man, and that Webster should have gone about his social and professional duties without troubling to collaborate with the Parkman family and the police amazed him. Taken in conjunction with the professor's curious

manner it instilled into the clergyman's brain a suspicion that he knew even more than he had admitted.

Events now moved with rapidity. Boston was plastered with handbills and the efforts of the police were reinforced by thousands of amateur detectives. Webster, no longer able to play the rôle of indifferent spectator, followed up his visit to the Rev. Mr. Parkman by devoting himself to the task of turning suspicion away from himself. And once he did so he proved that however learned he may have been academically, as a criminal he was a clumsy and stupid novice. In one respect, however, he was a typical criminal, for in his efforts to deceive others he deceived himself first and, assuming that he was dealing with persons equally foolish, perpetrated a series of blunders.

It being essential to the safety of the guilty man that Boston should be persuaded that Parkman had not met his end in the Medical Building, Webster proceeded to construct three fairy tales to which he attempted to give the appearance of reality by embodying them in anonymous letters. Each letter was sent to the City Marshal and each one was supposed to come from independent sources, but the learned professor, quite apart from the suspicious *naïveté* of his compositions, made the almost incredible blunder of writing all three in the same disguised hand, although the second of the epistles was put forward as the work of an illiterate person. The three letters are worth reproducing if only as evidence how stupidly a normally clever man can practise self-deception.

DEAR SIR,

You will find Dr. Parkman murdered on Brooklyn Heights.

Yours,

M., Captain of the Darts.

Dr. Parkman was took on board the ship herculun and this is al I dare to say as I shal be kild. Est Cambge, one of the men, give me his watch but I was feared to keep it and throwd it in the water rigt side the road to the Cam bige to Bost.

DEAR SIR,

I have been considerably interested in the recent affair of Dr. Parkman, and think I can recommend means, the adoption of which might result in bringing to light some of the mysteries connected with the disappearance of the aforementioned gentleman.

In the first place, with regard to the searching of houses, etc., I would

recommend that particular attention be paid to the appearance of cellar floors: do they present the appearance of having been recently dug into and covered up again? Or might not the part of the cellar where he was buried have been covered by piling of wood? Secondly, have the outhouses, etc., been carefully examined? Have they been raked sufficiently?

Probably his body was cut up and placed in a stout bag containing heavy weights, and thrown off one of the bridges—perhaps Craigie’s. And I would recommend the firing of canon from some of these bridges, and from various parts of the harbour and river, in order to cause the parts of the body to rise to the surface of the water. This, I think, will be the last resort, and it should be done effectually.

And I recommend that the cellars of the houses in East Cambridge should be examined.

Yours respectfully,

CIVIS.

The City Marshal, however, was not so impressed as Webster hoped he would be, and no practical use was made of these curious communications. Those who were in a position to judge had long since narrowed their search to the space bounded on one side by Walnut Street and on the other by the Medical Building, two boundaries beyond which the missing man had seldom gone in his lifetime. Many houses in the “crooked little streets”—to quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s endearing description of the Boston of his day—were entered and searched, and in due course the investigators approached the building containing the laboratory which was the sepulchre of Dr. Parkman. This occurred within four days of the disappearance, and as the deputation which interrupted Dr. Webster in his studies had not as yet any special knowledge of the events of the previous Friday they did not do more than give a perfunctory glance around the room. On the surface there were no signs of the body, and in any case it must have struck them as an absurdity that they should be looking for murder in an institution devoted to learning, and so they withdrew with apologies.

But there was one unlearned person in Harvard University who had sufficient of the common mind to be unable to credit all his fellows, however eminent, with impeccability. This was Ephraim Littlefield, the janitor, who had several reasons for suspecting that all was not well with the conscience of the Professor of Chemistry. Shortly after he had heard of the disappearance of Dr. Parkman he had recalled the

questions Webster had asked him about the thickness of the walls and the depth of the cellars, and when he remembered that other rather curious questions had been followed up by the present of a turkey—the first gift Webster had ever made him—he wondered if the gift had been in reality a bribe. Littlefield, however, was too shrewd to endanger a comfortable situation, and leaving Boston's professional and amateur detectives to waste their time following up useless clues he did a little detective work on his own. Very soon he discovered evidence that the laboratory of Dr. Webster had been the scene of a terrible crime on the Friday of Dr. Parkman's disappearance, a thorough search resulting in the finding of a human leg and other relics of the dead. At once he discarded his habitual reticence and sought the counsel of Professor Bigelow, the oldest member of the staff.

The heads of Harvard were naturally thunderstruck when Littlefield's discovery was communicated to them, but they had no option but to notify the police. It was difficult to imagine that the genial, easy-going Professor of Chemistry had committed such a diabolical crime, but their worst fears were quickly justified. When the expert investigators arrived they timed their visit so that the suspect might be at his home instead of in his laboratory, and they worked undisturbed and with immediate success.

Underneath the laboratory were many bones and in a tea-chest in the laboratory itself there was the body of a man minus legs and head. They had no doubt in their own mind that they had solved the mystery which had been puzzling Boston and all America for a week, although at this stage there was a chance that the murderer might escape because of the difficulty of identifying the remains. But of course that could not delay the arrest of Webster for a moment, and officers were despatched to his residence in a cab to take him to jail. This was accomplished without a scene, the detectives informing Webster that his presence was required at the Medical Building because a second search was contemplated. And so Mrs. Webster and her daughters parted from the beloved husband and indulgent parent without the slightest suspicion that never again was he to enter that house.

Before they reached the jail in Grove Street Webster guessed he had been trapped and he was almost unconscious with terror when they carried him from the cab into the prison. A sort of delirious optimism had inspired him hitherto with a curious courage, but, as might have been expected, it now plunged him into the depths of despair. For the sake of respectability he had turned murderer, and now, crushed by the certainty of retribution, he sank under the ruins of his own life.

The arrest astounded Boston, a city which has always been singularly free from serious crime, and, as is usual in sensational murder cases, the interest was promptly

transferred from the victim to his slayer. During the five months the prisoner awaited trial he was almost the most prominent man in the United States, and long before he was brought into court to face Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw and three Associate justices public opinion plainly indicated that neither sentiment nor influence would be permitted to interfere with the punishment of the guilty.

It was in every respect a great trial conducted with appropriate dignity. Counsel on both sides excelled themselves, and considering the nature of the evidence against his client Mr. Merrick's closing speech for the defence was a masterpiece of subtle argument as well as verbal dust-throwing.

Webster had not been idle during the intervening months, and with a stupidity which might have been expected by now of the author of the three anonymous letters he charged Ephraim Littlefield with having murdered the person whose remains had been found in the Medical Building a week after Dr. Parkman's disappearance. Absurd as this was, it found its believers, and Littlefield lay under the shadow of it for months. But the friends of the prisoner could not be satisfied with this explanation, and they propounded a theory to the effect that the remains were not those of Dr. Parkman at all, but belonged to a corpse smuggled into the laboratory by mischievous students who wished to make the sensation caused by the Parkman affair the basis of an original practical joke. To buttress this argument they declared that Dr. Parkman had been seen alive two days after the date fixed by the government experts as having witnessed his murder in Professor Webster's laboratory. We can sympathize with the prisoner's champions, but there can be no doubt that Webster himself relied upon the inability of the prosecution to establish the identity of the remains to secure acquittal. Certainly he may be excused for not having anticipated a piece of good fortune for the prosecution which was to establish beyond the possibility of a doubt that the headless trunk in the tea-chest was Dr. Parkman's.

The trial began on Tuesday, March 19th, 1850, and ended on Monday, April 1st, thus lasting twelve days, and the first two days were chiefly occupied by counsel relating the story of the events leading up to Dr. Parkman's disappearance and the prisoner's indebtedness to him. So far there was nothing of a sensational character, but on the third day the prosecution called Dr. Keep, a dentist, and his evidence sent a thrill through the crowded court. For nearly thirty years Dr. Keep had been Dr. Parkman's dentist and a few years before the crime Parkman had had especially made for him a set of false teeth. Now amongst the gruesome exhibits at the trial were a couple of teeth which had been blackened by the laboratory furnace in the Medical Building, and these Dr. Keep recognized at once as belonging to the set he

had made for his patient. In itself this evidence was not impressive, but it so happened that by a fateful chance Dr. Keep had preserved the cast he had taken of Dr. Parkman's mouth, and no one who had ever seen the murdered man could have contradicted the statement that there was no other mouth like his in all Boston. Thus when Dr. Keep demonstrated in court that the parts of the mouth recovered from the furnace fitted in perfectly with the cast and that the false teeth also had been made for the same mouth, the cleverest cross-examiner could not demolish the facts so established.

One can readily imagine what the tactics of defending counsel were. Littlefield was cross-examined with severity, and when that did not fasten an atom of suspicion on him, as much as possible was made of the rumours pointing to Dr. Parkman having been seen alive on a day subsequent to November 23rd. With great discretion the defence treated the anonymous letters with affected indifference, well aware that it was impossible to disprove the statement of the experts that although the author had disguised his hand he had forgotten to vary the disguise when penning three letters purporting to be written by three different hands.

The trial dragged a little towards the end, but excitement was revived when the prisoner ignored the advice of his counsel and insisted on making a statement. Palpitating with the excitement of terror, he complained that his case had been presented badly, rambled on for some minutes about the anonymous letters, and finally resumed his seat in tears. Had it not been obvious that nothing could make his situation worse, his intervention at the last moment would have done him grave injury, but his blunder—if blunder it can be called—could not have affected the jury either way, a verdict of guilty having been inevitable from the moment Dr. Keep, the dentist, had answered the last question of his cross-examination.

Clinging to life with that desperation which characterizes the criminal who can plan murder in cold blood, Webster waited until his appeals for mercy were rejected before thinking of some one other than himself. When, however, he knew that he must pay the penalty for his crime he sent for Ephraim Littlefield and asked his pardon for having accused him of the murder. Afterwards the convict, under the influence of a clergyman, told of his last encounter with Parkman, claiming, however, that his crime had been unpremeditated, but no one examining the evidence could believe that.

Webster, who in his confession blamed the indulgence of his parents for the inability to control a temper which he said was responsible for the final catastrophe, had always, in spite of an affectation of geniality, possessed a partiality for the horrible and the weird. There is a passage in Forster's *Life of Dickens* which I will

quote as evidence of this. Writing to Lord Lytton during his visit to America in 1868 the great novelist said:

Being in Cambridge I thought I would go over the Medical School, and see the exact localities where Professor Webster did that amazing murder and worked so hard to rid himself of the body of the murdered man. (I find there is, of course, no rational doubt that the Professor was always a secretly cruel man.) They were horribly grim, private, cold and quiet; the identical furnace smelling fearfully (some anatomical broth in it, I suppose), as if the body were still there; jars of pieces of sour mortality standing about, like the forty robbers in *Ali Baba* after being scalded to death; and bodies near us ready to be carried into next morning's lectures. At the house where I afterwards dined I heard an amazing and fearful story, told by one who had been at a dinner-party of ten or a dozen at Webster's less than a year before the murder. They began rather uncomfortably, in consequence of one of the guests (the victim of an instinctive antipathy) starting up with the sweat pouring down his face, and crying out, "Oh heaven! There's a cat somewhere in the room." The cat was found and ejected, but they didn't get on very well. Left with their wine they were getting on a little better, when Webster suddenly told the servants to turn the gas off and bring in that bowl of burning minerals which he had prepared in order that the company might see how they looked by its weird light. All this was done, and every man was looking, horror-stricken, at his neighbour, when Webster was seen bending over the bowl with a rope round his neck, holding up the end of the rope, with his head on one-side, and his tongue lolled out, to represent a hanged man.

Cruelty is the special vice of cowards, and Webster was a coward, morally as well as physically, from the time his doting parents pandered to the child whose mind was ever a compound of vanity and cunning. They taught him to think he was a lord of life, but the fifty thousand dollars he inherited from them was not sufficient to maintain his lordliness, and so he had to resort to dishonest schemings to obtain those luxuries which he regarded as necessities. And the end of it all was a painful scene on the scaffold on August 30th, 1850, when Professor Webster, of Harvard University, went with perspiring and pallid reluctance to another if not a better world.

CHAPTER IX

A COLLECTOR OF HUSBANDS

The first sign the Hon. Jane Digby gave of possessing an abnormal temperament was her disappearance with a gang of gipsies who had encamped in the neighbourhood of her father's estate. She was only sixteen, but for years her volatile spirits, love of adventure and absolute fearlessness had been the despair of her parents, who, however, had consoled themselves with the reflection that time would sober her. When she vanished the whole country-side was excited, and it was chiefly due to the exertions of hundreds of volunteer searchers that after four days she was discovered in a gipsy camp and brought home. The girl was very frightened when she realized the trouble and distress she had caused, and she promised not to offend again, meekly listening to lectures on what was expected from the daughter of an admiral and the niece of a peer, who, she was told, ought to maintain a higher standard of conduct than less lucky people.

"I think she has learnt her lesson," remarked a relative of the family, a dowager duchess, who had been sent for when Jane was missing.

"I am sure she has," agreed Lady Digby, who like her husband was heavy and dull and made outsiders wonder from where the loveliest of all the Digbys got her beauty and vivacity.

Eighteen months later Jane proved beyond a doubt that she was still unrepentant by eloping with one of the grooms. The admiral and his wife were entertaining a small party of friends when an agitated maid rushed into the dining-room with the news that Jane was missing and that Harper, a very handsome young groom, had not been seen since midday. Immediately the party broke up and horses and every variety of vehicle were pressed into service and the chase began. Once more the pursuers were fortunate, and the admiral was just in time to prevent the groom becoming his son-in-law, at the last moment rescuing his daughter from what he would have considered a very disastrous marriage. But if he could have looked into the future he must have admitted that Jane could have done worse.

The girl accepted her defeat with a pout and a laugh and declined to behave as though she had done something of which she ought to be ashamed. She was a very self-possessed young person and, although not yet eighteen, men and women alike were captivated by her beauty and fascinated by her infectious gaiety.

Her golden hair, large blue eyes, creamy, peachlike complexion and her perfect teeth, combined with her figure, served to make her the most beautiful woman of her time. Add to these charms an unfailing cheeriness of disposition and an incurable

optimism which made her the most delightful of companions, and it will be guessed why it was Jane Digby discovered at an early age that she had the power of bringing all sorts and conditions of men and women, especially men, to her feet. And the tomboy of the nursery remained a tomboy when her beauty created a sensation in the drawing-rooms of Mayfair.

The elopement with the groom, however, could not be regarded as a childish freak, and the Digbys gathered under the family roof in large numbers to discuss the problem of the wayward and freakish young beauty. Starchy generals and rugged admirals, their vinegary wives, maiden aunts of marvellous rectitude and busybody relatives of every degree sat in conference and decided unanimously that Jane must be married. They further agreed that her husband should not be a frivolous and inexperienced young man who would allow her to have her own way because he would not be proof against the pleadings of large, innocent-looking, blue eyes. They considered that Jane required firm handling and that a grave, middle-aged and sober-minded man who had outgrown the vanities and weaknesses of the world was the only person who could save her from herself.

Of course they had already selected the man, and in Edward, second Lord Ellenborough, were to be found all those dismal if perfectly respectable qualities which apparently appeal to maiden aunts and devout dowagers. He was more than double Jane's age and he had already buried one wife—the daughter of the Marquess of Londonderry—but these disadvantages were more than compensated for in the opinion of the family by his reputation for sobriety and piety. Lord Ellenborough took himself with great seriousness and his chief god was Respectability. It was said of him that his favourite reading was the latest government blue-book and that his conversation was confined to statistics. Altogether this son of a famous Lord Chief Justice was a heavy, dull-witted bore who had no use for the graces of life and who was on the look-out for a second wife who would help him to achieve his ambition, the premiership.

When Jane was informed that a husband had been found for her she expressed the utmost delight. At the moment she was quite willing to embark on what she considered the great adventure of matrimony with either duke or dustman, and it mattered nothing to her that Lord Ellenborough was old enough to be her father. She wanted to have a house of her own in London and to be able to give dinner parties and dances and take her place amongst the leading hostesses. Her home life was dull and she was crazy to make her mark in the greater world without. As the nobleman who had been chosen for her had sufficient money to pay the numerous tunes she intended to call, she rather astonished her relatives by enthusiastically accepting him

and preparing for her wedding with zest.

There was a fashionable ceremony and hundreds of presents, a short honeymoon, and a season of entertainment in London. Lord Ellenborough was proud of her beauty, but prouder still of her influential connections, and he humoured her whims and behaved with an easy tolerance and generosity of demeanour which proved that, after all, he was more human than he looked. However, it was soon whispered in society that if Lord Ellenborough was not careful he would lose the wife he had won so unexpectedly against great odds. He was advised to spend more time at home than in Parliament, and he was warned that a certain Prince Schwartzberg was being seen too often with Lady Ellenborough. The nobleman, however, refused to believe that the woman who had the honour of bearing his name could be disloyal to him. He had all the average Englishman's contempt for foreigners and it was impossible for him to treat Prince Schwartzberg as a rival.

The German princeling was soon Jane's most frequent and most welcome visitor. She admired his tall, handsome figure—her husband was undersized and physically unattractive—and as he encouraged her in all her plans and desires she preferred his conversation to that of the grave statesman who had taken to lecturing her on her frivolity and pointing out how she was compromising their dignity. There were other men who clustered round her and helped to form a salon over which she reigned with girlish enthusiasm, but Prince Schwartzberg was her favourite, and when he began to make love to her she did not repulse him.

The climax came the evening Lord and Lady Ellenborough were due to attend a reception at the Foreign Office. The nobleman who later was to occupy the posts of Viceroy of India and First Lord of the Admiralty attached tremendous importance to this function and earlier in the day he had warned Jane that he would expect her to make a special effort to look her best. He was gratified when she told him that she had ordered a new dress for the affair, and when a little earlier than usual he returned home he did not inquire after her until, in the uniform of a Privy Councillor, he descended to the drawing-room. Then he learnt that his wife had gone for a drive at three o'clock and had not returned, although it was now seven. Irritable but not suspicious, he despatched servants to several houses in the neighbourhood where it was possible she might be visiting, but they all returned without any news, and Lord Ellenborough did not attend the Foreign Office reception and after a sleepless night discovered that his wife had eloped with the German prince.

Hitherto her passion for dramatic escapades had proved more or less harmless and they had been excusable on the ground of inexperience, but this time her lack of balance and fondness for the melodramatic were to end almost tragically. The

handsome prince with the soft and insinuating voice and manners persuaded her to sacrifice husband and social position for exile and derision, but she believed that he would stand by her and that when she was free he would marry her. She knew that Lord Ellenborough would take steps at once to sever their connection, and so she settled down cheerfully in an Italian town with the prince and waited for the slow process of the law to mature. During the period of waiting the prince professed to have only one ambition, to regularize her position by marrying her. Again and again he railed against the slowness of the English law, and Jane, his admiring slave, was deeply touched by his devotion.

It was nearly four years, however, before Lady Ellenborough read a letter at breakfast which brought tears of joy to her eyes. The prince was sitting opposite to her, and when she waved the letter above her head triumphantly his dark eyes gleamed—but not with relief. Had she not been so excited by the news that she was legally free to marry again, she must have detected a sort of nervous dread in the expression of the man she trusted so implicitly.

“I am no longer married to Lord Ellenborough,” she said, laughing spontaneously while the tears ran down her cheeks.

Prince Schwartzberg rose and approached her from behind and laid a hand on her shoulder.

“That is, indeed, good news,” he murmured, speaking all the more confidently because his face was hidden from her. “I will go and see to the arrangements for our marriage.”

He stooped and kissed her and strolled out of the room, and she never saw him again.

It was a very base and foul desertion, the blackest of treachery and the greatest of insults, for Lady Ellenborough had no money of her own and she was in a strange town and knew no one. Even her servants were leagued against her, all of them being in the prince’s pay, and that is the reason why she was the last person to hear that Schwartzberg had had his luggage packed two days previously in anticipation of the news for which he had professed to be hoping.

When at last she had to be told the shock was so terrific that she collapsed and was helpless with brain-fever for nearly a month. But when able to leave her bed it was the old Jane Digby who rushed towards the mirror to examine her features.

“Thank God, I am still beautiful,” she cried, and she was so relieved that from that moment she never mentioned the prince again and she even forgot the wrong he had done her. Knowing that she still retained the beauty which gave her her sway over men, she faced fearlessly the world, confident that she would achieve her

ambitions although she was penniless and in debt.

Her beauty and vivacity and sunny personality quickly gained for her popularity in those exclusive social circles in Italy to which she was admitted as a sister of an English peer. Wherever she went she was the star attraction and she was soon the object of numerous proposals. At a ball given by Princess Corci, in Rome, she made the acquaintance of an officer in the artillery who carried her off her feet by means of lavish presents and eloquent flattery. He was rather undersized and in some respects reminded her of Lord Ellenborough, but it did not matter to Lady Ellenborough now whether men loved her or not provided she could secure a wealthy husband. A gift of a costly diamond necklace tempted her to accept her suitor, and she was actually on her way to the church to marry him when one of his discomfited rivals informed her that the artillery officer was a pauper and that he was about to be arrested for cheating jewellers. The same day she heard of his arrest and, as she was short of money, she disposed of his gifts at less than half their value to a shady dealer in precious stones. She had no sooner received the money than she was served with an order to place them in the hands of an official appointed by the criminal court to deal with the matter, but her ladyship laughed derisively in the official's face and scoffed at his threats. She had never really liked Lord Ellenborough, but now she was glad to save herself from imprisonment by boasting that she was the wife of a British statesman.

The lover who had exposed the officer expected to be rewarded by her hand, but she turned from him to the only son of one of Italy's ambassadors. When the latter heard that Lady Ellenborough was being persecuted by the disgruntled denouncer of the artillery officer he challenged him to a duel.

"How romantic!" the adventuress cried, clapping her hands gleefully. "I will marry the survivor."

It was a cold-blooded way in which to treat the situation. The young diplomat had come to her to tell her that he was about to risk his life for her sake. He had been confessing that he was a very poor swordsman and that as his opponent, who was a captain in a line regiment, was reputed to be an expert, and had chosen swords as the challenged party, he hardly expected to survive the encounter, when she gave vent to her delight and satisfaction.

"I have made my will leaving you everything," he said, too much in love with her to resent her callousness. "It is not much, but it will serve to remind you of my devotion."

"You mustn't be so pessimistic, my friend," she said gaily, not at all impressed by his tragic manner and indifferent to his generosity because she knew that he had very

little to bequeath her.

“With your promise to marry the winner I will fight with superhuman courage,” was his parting message, and her laughter followed him down the spacious corridor of the old Italian mansion and into the sunshine of a perfect day.

If Lady Ellenborough could have had her way she would have preferred the duellists to kill each other, for she was tired of both of them, but at the same time she revelled in the flattering notoriety created by the contest. The two men belonged to noble and distinguished families and Roman society was electrified by the news that they were to fight to the death for the possession of the beautiful Englishwoman. The young diplomat’s friends considered that he was doomed, but to everybody’s surprise he managed by sheer impetuosity in the first few seconds of the fight to run his opponent through, though not before he was badly cut about the face himself.

His wounds kept him to his apartment for three weeks, and then, flushed with victory, he drove to Lady Ellenborough’s residence. She uttered a scream of fright and annoyance when he presented himself.

“Oh, I couldn’t marry you now!” she cried, recoiling from him. “I once made the mistake of marrying an ugly man, but I’ll never do it again.”

In vain did he remind her that he had been disfigured in her service and that he had risked more than his personal appearance to save her from the persecutions of an unscrupulous admirer. She insisted that she could not keep her promise and that he had no right to expect her to as he was now not the same man to whom she had given her word.

He left her broken-hearted and that evening committed suicide. Had he waited another twenty-four hours he must have heard that the real reason for the beautiful Englishwoman’s decision was her engagement to the nephew and heir of an enormously wealthy government contractor. Her latest lover had been sent to Rome by his uncle, who supplied him with practically unlimited funds in order that he might buy his way into aristocratic circles. A young man with a passion for dissipation, he laid siege to Lady Ellenborough because of her social position, and when he accompanied his proposal with an offer of a huge settlement she told him in her pretty broken Italian that she loved him. It was easy for the adventuress to say that, because by now she had become an expert liar.

However, if she imagined that happiness lay in a wealthy marriage she was quickly disillusioned. Her first honeymoon had not been a success, but her second was disastrous, and she grew to hate her husband so intensely that she appealed to some of her male friends to prevent him forcibly entering the house she took for herself two months after the ceremony.

But she could not banish him entirely from her life, and twice he attempted to assault her in public and his attitude towards her was so threatening that hostesses, anxious to avoid distressing scenes, ceased to send Lady Ellenborough cards of invitations. Banishment from society was purgatory to the pleasure-loving woman, and there is no knowing what she might have done had not her husband been killed in a street brawl. On learning she was a widow Lady Ellenborough at once left Rome for Florence, and for several years the world heard nothing of her.

It was rumoured that during that interval she had been married twice, and it was in the capacity of recently-bereaved widow that she startled the members of the English colony in Naples by appearing in their midst, alone and very poor. The ladies ignored her until they found that it was practically impossible to get any men to their parties unless Lady Ellenborough was present. Then they took her up and she was seen everywhere, and for a couple of seasons she was able to live extravagantly on the bounty of a Greek admiral who was said to be engaged to her. She never confirmed the rumour herself, possibly because she was on the look-out for a richer man than the Greek, but when a youthful nobleman whom she had ruined by her extravagance committed suicide and she knew what it was to be hissed at in public, she married the admiral.

This marriage relegated her to obscurity for some time, and it is not known what the reason was which led her to take up her residence in Homburg without her husband. There was a casino then in full swing at the famous health resort and Lady Ellenborough—she always paraded the title conferred on her by her first husband—was seen in the rooms gambling heavily and with varying luck. A story was current to the effect that two men fell madly in love with her and that she agreed to marry the one who could make the largest marriage settlement. The aspirants to her hand thereupon engaged in nightly battles with Fortune at the casino, risking everything they possessed until both were ruined. The story is reminiscent of the duel in Rome in the early days of her adventures, and as she was incapable of experiencing love and unselfish affection it is just possible that in her anxiety to provide herself with funds she entered into the agreement referred to. History is silent as to the sequel, and there is reason to believe that the German baron she married at Homburg was not one of the suitors who had put their luck to the test of the tables.

Meanwhile, her first husband, Lord Ellenborough, was rising steadily in public estimation, and if ever she saw an English paper the former Jane Digby must have read a good deal about the advancement of the middle-aged and ambitious man who had given her everything except real affection. If she read of his political or social triumphs when she herself was living from hand to mouth in the cheapest and vilest of

lodging-houses she must have shed bitter tears, but if these reminders of the past came when she was enjoying one of her periods of prosperity she, doubtless, laughed lightly and felt no pangs of regret. For Jane, Lady Ellenborough, knew what it was to go for a day without food and to lay her tired and aching body on a bed composed of rags. Once she was reduced to such extremities that heavily veiled she begged in the streets. Yet when a few months later a credulous youth with more money than sense was cheerfully financing her wildest extravagances she could forget she had ever suffered and take no thought for the future.

She had been wandering about Europe for many years when she read an account of the adventures in the East of Lady Hester Stanhope. Instantly she became seized with the ambition to outrival Lady Hester, and, as it happened she was in funds, she set out for Damascus and began her preparations there for a tour across the desert. Before she started with her escort of Bedouins she succumbed to the peculiar charm of the East and decided never to return to Europe again. An additional reason for her decision was the personality of the Arab in charge of the escort. This was a swarthy young man of the name of Mijwal, a semi-savage with piercingly dark eyes and regular and handsome features. Day after day as they wended their way across the desert Lady Ellenborough and Mijwal rode side by side and chatted in French, a language the Arab had acquired in the course of his duties as escort and provider to foreign visitors.

The setting was romantic, but it seemed impossible for a highly-bred Englishwoman to fall in love with an Arab. However, Lady Ellenborough, as we have seen, was no ordinary person and none of the usual laws applied to her. She admitted afterwards that she was already in love with Mijwal before he passionately implored her to marry him and be his bride of the desert.

The marriage of this curiously ill-assorted couple proved to be the most successful of the many matrimonial alliances the extraordinary Jane Digby contracted during the course of her life. She had been brought up amid every luxury money and good taste could procure and she had all her life exhibited a passion for extravagance quite in keeping with her contempt for conventions of society. But when she became the wife of Mijwal she willingly humbled herself to milk his camels, prepare his meals and generally behave as his slave. She insisted on acting as any Arab woman would in the desert and they spent six months out of every twelve away from the outposts of civilization.

When, however, they were installed in her house in Damascus they led a semi-European life, and Lady Ellenborough was once more the refined Englishwoman and her husband paid her that deference which he learnt was the custom of her race. Her

English friends naturally found her marriage embarrassing, for Mijwal had not the advantage of being educated and his manners were uncouth. He was at home in the desert, but not in the house at Damascus, yet he never complained, and in return for Lady Ellenborough's service during the six months they were primitive Arab man and woman he ignored all the snubs and slights of her European acquaintances.

A typical instance of the complications caused by the curious marriage occurred when Lady Burton, wife of the famous explorer, called on Lady Ellenborough. She was admitted by an Arab whom she took to be a servant and to whom she spoke rather sharply because he was dilatory and even insolent.

"You must get rid of him, my dear," said Lady Burton, who prided herself on her knowledge of the East.

"I am afraid I can't," answered Lady Ellenborough, with a smile. "You see, he's my husband."

Mijwal, silent and humble, joined them at dinner at the earnest solicitation of his wife, but he would not eat in the presence of the great English lady, and he insisted on waiting on them. It was, however, only when strangers were present that he demeaned himself, according to the views of his race. When alone with his wife and their servants he was the Oriental husband who, if he relaxed some of the rules because they were living close to the European colony, insisted on his rights as not only the head of the house but also the supreme master of his wife's destiny. The most wonderful feature of this quaint *ménage* was the ready submission of the aristocratic Englishwoman who from her earliest years had been accustomed to rule men by her beauty and her wit. She was certainly subdued by the glamour of the East and hypnotized by that peculiar fascination, a fascination which cannot be explained.

During their wanderings in the desert they had many adventures, and whenever they were attacked by marauding bands of hostile Arabs Lady Ellenborough was first and foremost in beating the enemy off. She became so expert in the use of the revolver that the superstitious Arabs called her the "white devil" and ascribed her supernatural powers to friendship with the Evil One. Her greatest exploit was when her husband and their small escort ran away on the approach of a chieftain and his followers noted for their cruelty. Lady Ellenborough stood her ground and with her first shot killed the leader. Thereupon the others fled, and Mijwal and his terrified retainers crept back shamefacedly. That night they talked of killing her lest the story of their cowardice should be published in Damascus and other places, but Mijwal swore that he would stand outside his wife's tent through the night and would knife the first man who tried to enter it. There was no necessity to guard her in daylight

because they were all afraid of her then.

Lady Ellenborough was an old woman when she passed away in her sleep in 1881, and when the news reached Europe it startled society. Those of her former friends who were alive had been under the impression for many years that she had died shortly after her elopement. They hastened to forget her again, but there is no stranger story of real life than that of the beautiful English girl who married an English peer and died the wife of an Arab. It is a story happily unique.

CHAPTER X

INSPECTOR MONTGOMERY'S CRIME

It is more than half a century since Inspector Montgomery was executed for the murder of William Glass, a bank cashier at Newtownstewart, and yet less than a year ago I met a man who had known him before he entered the Royal Irish Constabulary. According to my informant Montgomery was always insane, and even in boyhood his brain appears to have been simmering with madness, tragedy being inevitable the moment it boiled over. As a boy he was secretive and subject to fits of depression, but in spite of these handicaps he was not without friends, and if they were not many they were, at any rate, select. Like all boys he had his passionate attachments, but it was noticed that he was more than usually jealous and that when roused a fierce light burnt in his dark eyes which gave him a very unpleasant appearance. However, Montgomery reached manhood without disaster, and at eighteen entered the service of an Ulster bank. In those days the ambition of every middle-class Protestant of small means in Ireland was to make his son either an officer in the R.I.C. or a bank clerk, and Montgomery was bitterly disappointed when he had to wield a pen instead of a sword. He had told all his youthful friends that he was going into the constabulary, and it was a severe blow to his pride when lack of means compelled his father to put him to the prosaic occupation of bank clerk. The young man brooded over his disappointment, and for a few years led the conventional and peaceful existence of clerk, indulging in the harmless pleasures of his class, but nursing in his own mind his ambition of reaching the R.I.C. one day. It was sheer pride that inspired him to work in his spare moments so that he might qualify for the competitive examination for entrance to the police force, for he was not naturally studious. But he craved for power, and he believed that once he was a member of the constabulary he would soon attain to charge of a district which he could rule as he wished. It was sheer torture for a person of his temperament to have to work away at a desk for so many set hours a day, and whenever he was reproved for slackness it required all his self-control to prevent him assaulting the manager. Then he gave the first outward and visible sign of his inward madness, though it was not until some years later that its significance was appreciated and understood.

He had been a bank clerk for nearly two years when he was invited to a dance at a house in Belfast, and as he knew that a very pretty girl in whom he had begun to take an interest was to be present he accepted. Usually he devoted his spare time either to studying for the R.I.C. entrance examination or to solitary walks, but the

chance of dancing with the one girl who had displayed some appreciation of his saturnine humour banished everything else from his mind and he was almost boyishly excited when he arrived. An expert in manly beauty—if there are such—might have been impressed unfavourably by the vivid whiteness of his skin and the restlessness of his curiously luminous, black eyes, but the bank clerk was not without a certain dignity of carriage and demeanour, and his tall, broad-shouldered figure stood out in a gathering chiefly composed of very ordinary people. Conscious that his personality had not been lost in the crowd, he went up to the girl for whose sake he had come and with a swaggering air of authority boldly claimed half the dances on her programme. But she was high-spirited and not to be coerced, and she declined to give him more than three.

“Very well, then,” said Montgomery, with a sudden gloom in his expression that frightened her, “I’ll have the first three and finish with you.”

At the end of the third dance he left the room abruptly, and a few minutes later a frightened servant came running up the kitchen stairs and gasped to the first guest she encountered that a burglar had broken into the house and she could hear him moving about in the cellar. The guest happened to be the man I was to meet more than fifty years later, and as he was at the time of this episode young and strong he made for the cellar alone, determined to capture the intruder single-handed.

The first surprise he had was the finding of the cellar door wide open, followed by the sight of a tall man searching in the gloom for something. The second was the discovery that the suspected burglar was none other than Montgomery, the bank clerk, the man who had the reputation amongst his acquaintances of being half mad.

“What on earth are you doing here, Montgomery?” he asked, in astonishment.

“I’m looking for a hatchet,” was the answer, and the last word was pronounced with a fierce emphasis that sent a shudder through his companion.

“And what do you want a hatchet for at a dance?” was, in the circumstances, a natural question.

Montgomery, who was now standing at the bottom of the stairs, glanced in the direction of the room from which sounds of revelry proceeded.

“That’s my business,” he muttered, trembling with passion.

Ten years later, Montgomery, who had in the meantime passed the R.I.C. examination with credit, had realized his ambition and as inspector in charge of Newtownstewart, County Tyrone, was one of the most important personages in the district. He was now a married man, but he would not set up a home of his own, preferring to live in an hotel because, as he explained, it would be useless to take a house in view of his expectations of promotion to a more important district. How he

had managed to evade disaster during the intervening years it is difficult to explain unless we ascribe it to the kindly tolerance of the Irish, who have been noted always for their pity and forbearance for the mentally afflicted. Rumour had never ceased to play havoc with the reputation of the bank clerk turned policeman, and there were weird stories in circulation of outbursts of maniacal fury which had not resulted in murder only because the maniac had been overpowered in time. "Sure, he's only mad!" was the common apology for Montgomery even by those who had experienced the raging tempest of his fury and had felt his murderous fingers around their throats. In a more materialistic society Montgomery would have been put under restraint or else banished, but local sentiment was against such drastic measures, and thus on the day of the tragedy, June 29th, 1871, Montgomery, who had been insane from boyhood, was actually the official guardian of the peace and the lives of the inhabitants of Newtownstewart.

As the local inspector of the R.I.C. Montgomery was on friendly terms with the leading inhabitants, who invited him to their houses, but the few friends he had were chiefly to be found at the hotel where he boarded, and amongst these was William Glass, the cashier of the local bank who was studying to enter the police service. Glass was naturally only too delighted to have the friendship of the inspector, and he was gratified whenever Montgomery, finding himself with half an hour or so to spare, strolled into the bank and spent the time chatting with him. The manager, Mr. Grattan, lived over the bank, but his wife and children resided during the summer at the seaside, and when every Thursday Mr. Grattan went to a branch office in another part of the county the cashier—the only other member of the staff—was in sole charge at Newtownstewart. This fact was common knowledge in the town, and that Montgomery was well aware of it he proved by generally choosing Thursday afternoon for a visit to his friend. The inspector also knew that Mr. Grattan kept two servants on the premises, a man and a woman, and that on this particular Thursday, June 29th, he had staying with him a cousin, a Miss Thomson. In a place like Newtownstewart nothing was too small to be unworthy of gossip, and the daily routine of the bank manager and his cashier was so well known to everybody that nobody, least of all the bank employes themselves, ever expected they were in any danger. The bank itself was situated in the most public part of the town, and had anyone hinted at murder and robbery, or either, he would have been informed derisively that even a lunatic would not be mad enough to risk his life or his liberty by attempting the impossible.

But for a long time one man in Newtownstewart had been thinking of the fortune which William Glass guarded alone every Thursday in the two little offices

comprising the bank, and that man was Inspector Montgomery, who represented to Glass the magnificent force which the Crown had established to protect men like himself. He must have felt more secure than ever once he had obtained the friendship of the head of the local police, and when shortly before three o'clock—the hour when the bank closed for the day—Montgomery walked rapidly in the cashier invited him into the room behind the one in which public business was transacted, there to wait until the last customer of the day had been disposed of.

The event which happened a few minutes after Montgomery's arrival developed subsequently into a mystery—if mystery it can be called—which convulsed the whole of Ireland for many months to come, and drew the eyes of the world to the little Ulster town which was the setting of the problem which the authorities were trying to solve. But those who had charge of the case never admitted that there was any mystery about it at all, and looking back now over the intervening half century one can only experience a feeling of bewilderment that it should have required three full-dress trials to bring down the vengeance of the law on the murderer who walked out of the bank on June 29th, 1871, leaving behind him the battered corpse of the young man who had called him friend.

When Montgomery entered the bank that summer afternoon to greet Glass his position was so desperate that he was fighting every moment to keep panic at bay. Ruin was treading at his heels, and unless he could raise some hundreds of pounds within a few days he knew that he would have to exchange the uniform of which he was so proud for the tragi-comic costume of a convict. And Thomas Montgomery was less afraid of prison than he was of the imaginary jeers of his acquaintances who, as he thought, had nothing else to do but to watch his progress through life. That was why he came to the bank that afternoon carrying under the raincoat doubled across his arm a murderous bill-hook heavily weighted with lead. Years previously a bank clerk, crazy with a desire to kill the girl who had repelled his bullying advances, had gone to a cellar to look for a hatchet with the intention of murdering her, and now the same man when he found himself involved financially decided to use an almost similar weapon to extricate himself from his difficulties. With the daring and the self-deception of madness he ignored the dangers of his bloodthirsty enterprise and with amazing sang-froid shut his eyes to the hundred and one reasons why discovery was inevitable. Montgomery could think only of the money he had received from certain of his subordinates who had entrusted their savings to him for investment and were under the impression that the interest he paid them from time to time represented dividends on the stock, and he knew that the time was rapidly approaching when his inability to continue these periodical

payments must lead to exposure. And then there was the further unpleasant fact that he had incurred debts of his own by methods which savoured of fraud and that unless he obtained a large sum of money at once the constables would begin pressing for repayment in full, and at least two of his other creditors would resort to blackmail.

That was why the tall, broad-shouldered, black-bearded inspector of police decided, after weighing the pros and cons of his pressing problem, to turn murderer, and he chose his friend to be his victim because by doing so he would have at his mercy some thousands of pounds. The brain which had been simmering with dark and baleful thoughts for years had now reached that point when murder assumed the aspect of a virtue, and convinced its owner that in his necessity he need know no law and no mercy.

It would be an exaggeration to credit Montgomery with the cunning of madness that afternoon; rather was it the stupidity of insanity that made him act so seriously the rôle of reckless fool.

At five minutes past three a woman passing down the street saw the outer door slowly open and caught a glimpse for a moment of the face of a man in a dark suit. When their eyes met he darted back and closed the door hurriedly, and vaguely wondering how such a harmless person as herself could have frightened anyone she went her way. Then followed an interval of nearly an hour, for it was not until just after four that Emma McBride, Mr. Grattan's maidservant, coming from the kitchen into the hall was horrified by the sight of a trickling stream of blood under the door of the outer office. She ran screaming into the street and brought back with her a small crowd of inquisitive persons, and when the door was opened the first thing they saw was the corpse of William Glass. He had been savagely attacked on the head from behind, and had it not been that the safe had been emptied the ferocious nature of the crime would have suggested at once that it was the work of a lunatic. The first blow must have deprived the unfortunate young man of the power of resistance and it must also have left him incapable of uttering a cry, and yet the murderer had continued the attack with a meaningless lust for blood. That he should have left a great many notes and a lot of gold lying on the floor was accepted as proof that in his haste to get away he had not waited to collect all the money on the premises.

A doctor was soon on the scene, and accustomed though he was to death the sight of the tragedy unnerved him, for Glass had been his friend. Strangely enough, however, when the police were notified and, as was expected, Inspector Montgomery came in person to superintend the investigation, he displayed not the least perturbation on seeing the body of the man with whom he had been on intimate

terms. All those who were present when he entered the bank watched him as though expecting he would be overcome, but for once in his life the inspector was the official machine, exhibiting no human emotions and behaving with as little unconcern as though dealing with a trivial case of larceny.

The one man who could have told them exactly how William Glass had met his death now began to act as though he wished to create a suspicious and unfavourable atmosphere for himself. Montgomery had never been reticent in expressing an opinion of his super-cleverness and his contempt for those who had not his learning, and yet at the moment when his life depended on his keeping his head he behaved like a suicidal idiot.

Standing in the office with the body of his victim almost at his feet, the rifled safe within a few paces and the walls splashed in a ghastly and suggestive manner, the head of the local police, the man who was by virtue of his position chief of the detectives, remarked in a bland voice that the probabilities were that William Glass had committed suicide!

The derision which it excited immediately discomposed him and he sought escape from embarrassment by pretending to be angry. In his gruffest tone he ordered everybody out of the building, and, although he had unconsciously tried to infuse into the grim tragedy a touch of farce, there was no laughter as the ejected men emerged into the street. They could not laugh or even smile, for they had all known young William Glass, and his gentle manners and unfailing good humour were recalled now amid expressions of deep regret. If the inspector's hearing was acute he must have overheard unfavourable comments on his conduct and intelligence, but the insane fool was rushing to catastrophe and no power on earth could have saved him.

In spite of the hostile reception of his suicide theory he decided to make every effort to obtain credence for it, and pretending that the secret of the tragedy could be solved only by an examination of Glass's belongings he visited his rooms and made a thorough search.

"Do you really think he killed himself?" asked the landlady of the hotel, who had already heard several versions of her lodger's death and did not know quite what to believe.

"Of course I do," Montgomery barked back at her. "Only a fool would think otherwise."

The search having yielded nothing, he telegraphed to his colleague in the service, Inspector Purcell, who was stationed at Omagh, requesting him to notify the coroner that "a death under suspicious circumstances" had occurred at Newtownstewart and

that an inquest would be necessary. The words I have quoted were Montgomery's own, but what Inspector Purcell thought of the "suspicious circumstances" when he saw the battered corpse he kept to himself, because he had not been in Montgomery's society more than a few hours before he came to the conclusion that he alone knew who had murdered the bank cashier.

With the appearance on the scene of the inspector from Omagh rapid progress was made in the investigation. Inspector Montgomery might go about shaking his head gloomily and hinting at poor Glass's hidden sorrows which had driven him to suicide, but Purcell turned the whole of the force available on to hunting for the murderer, and four days after the tragic discovery at the bank he felt justified in taking into custody his fellow officer. When the warrant was read to Montgomery he laughed contemptuously.

"I'm innocent and I have nothing to fear," he said, disdaining to resist, although the detectives indicated by their numbers that they had come prepared for a struggle.

When they had locked up their prisoner the police did not slacken their efforts, aware that they had a long way to go yet before they could afford to rest. That Montgomery was the murderer scarcely admitted of doubt, but as yet there was no sign of the weapon which had been used to strike down Glass and there was not a trace of the large sum of money in notes and gold—nearly seventeen hundred pounds in all—for the sake of which the murder had been committed. Almost every day added to the strength of the circumstantial evidence against the prisoner, but a battalion of detectives failed to discover exactly how Inspector Montgomery had spent the remainder of June 29th, after he had left the bank. A doctor told how one night after dinner the inspector had casually asked him what was the most vulnerable part of a man's head. He had answered the question, thinking it was a reasonable one for a policeman to ask, but now he remembered how carefully Montgomery had listened and how anxious he had been to make certain that he was right. Then there were two casual acquaintances of the prisoner who reported that more than once he had laughingly expressed the opinion that it would be the easiest thing in the world to murder the cashier and get away with the contents of the safe. At the time they had thought nothing of it, and they were hardly likely to suspect evil designs in a man who was paid by the State to protect the bank, but taken in conjunction with recent events it showed that for three months at least Montgomery had been considering the possibilities of such a crime.

Nearly six months after the murder at the bank Montgomery was put on trial at Omagh, and that obscure court-house at once became famous. The ferocity of the crime, the official position of the accused, the element of mystery which had been

introduced by the inability of the police to discover the stolen money and the weapon which had been used by the assassin, and a prevailing anxiety lest a very cowardly murderer should escape, all combined to concentrate the attention of the whole country on Omagh for that day and several succeeding days. Mr. Justice Lawson presided, a judge of the old school, pedantic and precise, and the prosecution was led by the Attorney-General, while for the defence there was Francis McDonagh, almost if not quite the most brilliant man at the Bar and, of a surety, the very best for such a case as this. McDonagh appears to have been forgotten, and if that is so he has been wronged, for he was one of the leaders of the Irish Bar when it more than held its own with the English Bar, and there never has been a barrister who could make better bricks without straw than he could. The most hopeless of defences were given a new complexion by his ingenious style of cross-examination and his powers of persuasive oratory. Montgomery affected supreme confidence from the moment of his arrest, but when he was informed that Francis McDonagh, Q.C., had been retained for him he had some justification for exultation, and it was the presence of McDonagh in court that enabled the man in the dock to maintain his composure in the face of the most persistent attacks on it.

The Attorney-General, having outlined his case, proceeded to call witnesses, ranging from the small boy who had heard a table fall and a moaning sound from the bank, to the inspector of the R.I.C., who testified that Montgomery had expressed his wonderment that no one took the trouble to knock Glass on the head and vanish from the country with a few thousand pounds belonging to the bank. In between these two there were half a dozen persons who proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Montgomery had been in the bank from five minutes to three to five minutes past the hour on June 29th, and no one disputed that Glass had been murdered during those fateful ten minutes. That they could have mistaken him for some one else was quite incredible, for the tall, powerful figure of the inspector was in itself a sort of human landmark, and when in addition he wore a conspicuous black beard and had a pair of eyes that once seen were not likely to be forgotten, even the most sceptical must have been convinced. The Attorney-General developed his case with fairness and precision, showing how from the day prisoner had spoken of the ease with which the bank could be robbed he had behaved consistently and naturally in view of his present position in the dock. Having established the fact that Montgomery was in the bank at the time of the murder he turned to the question of motive, but as he was about to reveal the malversations of the accused, McDonagh, a wise tactician who combined craft with audacity, rose and objected, asking his lordship to rule that the financial position of his client had nothing whatever to do with the charge of

murder. It was only one of McDonagh's bows drawn at a venture, but on this occasion succeeded, and to the surprise, almost stupefaction, of the court, Mr. Justice Lawson held that evidence as to the prisoner's means was inadmissible.

The decision was a severe blow for the prosecution, and yet so overwhelming was the evidence already received that a verdict of guilty seemed to be inevitable. There could be no doubt that the bill-hook found in the wood had been the prisoner's property. The addition of nearly twenty pounds of lead to it settled that, for it was shown that shortly before the murder Montgomery had purchased that amount of lead. Now what use was it to an inspector of the R.I.C.? What was he doing in the bank at the very moment William Glass was being murdered? Why was it that he was the only man in Newtownstewart who had ever broached the subject of a possible attack on the cashier? Why was he unable to account for his movements between half-past two and half-past three on the afternoon of June 29th? The Attorney-General asked these questions, and was confident they would be answered only one way.

Montgomery was, on the surface at any rate, the most composed as well as the most interested spectator of his trial. His behaviour was that of an impartial observer who has no reason to feel embarrassed or ashamed, and each time he entered the court he did so with the air of a man attending a social function where he expects to meet several friends. But his acting was just a little too perfect to be natural and he committed the error of assuming a mask of indifference at moments when innocence must have been horrified and overcome. Thus when a model of the skull of the murdered man was produced so that experts might explain to the jury exactly how William Glass had been killed, the murmur of horror that went round the court was not joined in by the prisoner, who, alone, was completely unaffected by the horrifying spectacle. Never was there such a ghastly exhibit in the course of a great murder trial and the most innocent of prisoners might have been excused almost any expression of fear or revulsion of feeling, but Montgomery was of stronger stuff than human nature, and while the doctor was pointing out the fearful gashes the prisoner watched him, fascinated and yet unruffled.



GRACE DALRYMPLE ELLIOT

From a mezzotint by John Dean after a painting by Gainsborough

When his turn came to speak Francis McDonagh quickly convinced his audience

that he was at the top of his form. With a confidence which was in the circumstances more than superb he declared that no jury could convict his client on such evidence as that which had been brought forward by the prosecution. In his best jury manner McDonagh invited the twelve men who were to decide the fate of the inspector of police to debate amongst themselves the possibility of anyone murdering a man in the way Glass had been murdered and yet leave not a trace of blood on his own clothes. The unknown assassin—as counsel preferred to call him—had acted like a madman, and that he had attacked his victim after life had been extinct was evident from the state of the office when entered by the police. Blood was everywhere—on the walls and the furniture and even on the safe—and yet if Montgomery was the criminal, as the prosecution contended, he must have wallowed in blood for several minutes before walking out into the blazing daylight of the principal and most crowded street of the town, his clothes unstained and, furthermore, carrying on his person a formidable weapon weighing more than twenty pounds and nearly two thousand pounds in notes and gold. Counsel declared in ringing tones that such a feat was utterly impossible, and he made it the foundation of the defence, emphasizing it by reminding the jury that the Attorney-General had admitted that all Montgomery's clothes had been accounted for and that none had been produced in court for the reason that none were bloodstained.

Whatever may have been the preconceived theories of the jury they were removed by McDonagh's closing speech, and after the judge's charge they went to their room with counsel's warning ringing in their ears that innocent men had been murdered judicially on account of evidence stronger than that which the prosecution had brought forward at that trial. It had been proved to them that the murderer of Glass had turned the office into a regular shambles, and because three members of the jury could not conscientiously believe that the murderer had avoided contact with the blood and had been able to leave the bank unobserved with the weapon and the money, they refused to vote with the remaining nine who had no doubt of the prisoner's guilt. Thus the first trial resulted in a disagreement, and a sensation which had begun to get on the nerves of the country was prolonged until such time as the State placed Inspector Montgomery on trial for his life for the second time.

At the second trial, which took place in the month of March, 1873, Serjeant Armstrong, McDonagh's great rival at the Irish Bar, led for the prosecution, and Mr. Justice Lawson was replaced by Mr. Justice Barry, recently promoted to the Bench. Francis McDonagh again had charge of the defence, and although doubly handicapped by the decision of the judge that evidence of the prisoner's financial dealings with his subordinates was admissible, and Serjeant Armstrong's superiority

as a criminal advocate to the Attorney-General, McDonagh for the second time brought off what was in the circumstances almost a miracle, a disagreement on the part of the jury.

The prosecution drove home many points against the prisoner, but the second jury would not run the risk of convicting, not being satisfied that it was possible for a man of the prisoner's abnormal physique to have left the bank carrying the weapon and the money without being seen and identified as a murderer and robber.

Irish juries have always had a weakness for paying more attention to speeches of counsel than to the evidence, and that is the only explanation one can hazard of the extraordinary inability of two apparently intelligent juries to convict Montgomery. As more than one judge has pointed out, it is only rarely that a murderer commits his crime in the presence of witnesses and therefore circumstantial evidence is the only evidence to be obtained in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. And the evidence which the Crown brought forward at the two trials of Inspector Montgomery was overwhelmingly adverse to the prisoner. However, there was nothing to do but to put the prisoner on trial again, and the following June he became for the third time the central figure in the most sensational Irish murder mystery of the century. He was apparently as confident as ever, but his confidence was nothing compared to that of Mr. Serjeant Armstrong, who had during the interval found the solution of one of the problems which had puzzled a minority of the jury at the two previous trials. The learned gentleman, who was McDonagh's match for eloquence and craft, had the Royal Irish Constabulary searched for a man resembling the accused inspector, and he had the luck to find in Constable O'Neill an almost physical replica of the man in the dock.

There is always a touch of the theatrical about a sensational murder trial, and the Old Bailey has witnessed many such which have rivalled the transpontine drama of the type of theatre associated with the immortal name of Crummles, but nothing more dramatic or effective than the stage-managed scene which Serjeant Armstrong now presented and in which the two principal parts were played by himself and Constable O'Neill.

Once again McDonagh declared that the prisoner could not have left the bank for Newtownstewart's most populous street and walked away unnoticed with a fortune in notes and gold and a bill-hook weighing over twenty pounds concealed by a raincoat carried over his arm. Once again this point was emphasized and made the main plank of the defence, for McDonagh knew that if he secured a third disagreement the Crown would enter a *nolle prosequi* and Montgomery would be permitted to leave the country.

Then came Serjeant Armstrong's turn, and he immediately called Constable O'Neill to the witness table and an amazed court saw a tall, broad-shouldered man, the very physical counterpart of the prisoner, walk to his appointed place wearing the same clothes that Montgomery had worn on the occasion of his last visit to the bank, carrying the same overcoat over his arm, and under that coat the same heavy bill-hook thrust into his trousers pocket, the stolen notes and gold secreted about his person. It was a complete reconstruction of the escape of the murderer from the bank premises, and it proved conclusively that it was possible for Montgomery to have walked from the scene of his crime into the street and so home, carrying his booty and his weapon, and yet excite no suspicion. Everybody in court watched as though fascinated the tall, burly policeman as in obedience to Serjeant Armstrong's instructions he took two or three paces up and down and then one by one laid the coat, the money and the weapon on the table. And because until he emptied his pockets no one suspected their contents everybody knew that Montgomery's fate was sealed.

There was another impassioned appeal by Francis McDonagh, but Serjeant Armstrong's well-managed and cleverly staged *scena* took all the honours, and after forty minutes in their room the jury returned with a verdict of guilty. Instantly all eyes were turned in the direction of the dock, and if a fresh sensation was expected it was more than realized by the extraordinary speech of the convict in reply to the usual question as to whether he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed on him. With both hands clutching the rail of the dock he thrust his head forward and addressed the court in tones which never once were broken by emotion:

"I wish to say, my lord, that at the time of the perpetration of the murder and for twelve months before I was in a state of complete insanity," he said, all the pent-up feelings of the man struggling so fiercely for expression as to compel him to abandon the pose of innocence he had maintained for two years. "In the month of June, 1870, I was invited to Milecross, the residence of Mr. Bradshaw. At the time I was in the enjoyment of excellent health, and was there deliberately drugged and poisoned with the object of rendering me weak-minded. When I went to the doctor he told me I had only a few days to live, and that I could scarcely recover, and in that state I was directed and compelled, and being weak-minded, consented to marry, and grew worse and worse. In the month of November I embarked on those foolish and ridiculous

speculations, when I lost enormous sums of money, larger sums than have transpired in evidence, for some persons who gave me money have not come forward to say anything about it. I became vicious, and this monomania for attacking banks took possession of me. I stated repeatedly to several members of the constabulary, not only how this sort of thing could be perpetrated, but that I myself would do it. I told my own orderly, on one occasion I went to Holywood, that I intended going to the bank and killing the cashier, and would carry the money to Cave Hill, and would build a house of sods for myself to live in. The man said I was mad, and followed me after that day. When I was in Newtownstewart I was in a state of complete derangement. The Head Constable meant far more than he said when he stated I frequently complained of my head. I never could get sleep unless I kept towels on my head. I never would have injured anyone if I had not been mad. Serjeant Armstrong called it a terrible murder, and there is no doubt it was a murder which no educated man or man with feeling could have performed. Why, a savage of New Zealand could have done nothing worse, but I was a demented being at that time and bereft of reason, and there is a very great difference between my case and that of a man who, knowingly and willingly, commits an act of the kind. In my case I was entirely in a helpless state, weak-minded and silly, and I don't think an act of mine when in that state should be visited on me as an act of a wise man."

The sensation caused by this remarkable address had not died down even after Mr. Justice Barry had passed sentence of death and the prisoner had been removed from the dock. The sudden confession was in the nature of a violent anti-climax after three fiercely contested trials, and it is not to be wondered that the court should have emptied reluctantly as though everybody half expected the return of the convict.

During the few weeks of life left to Montgomery he was the most talked about person in Ireland and in his peculiar way he rather enjoyed the novel position. Condescending to receive a deputation of journalists he confessed to them that his clothes had been stained by Glass's blood but that he had removed all marks by the immediate application of a sponge. If he is to be believed Miss Thomson, who in her evidence said that she had seen him at half-past two in the bank, made a grave error with regard to the time, for, according to Montgomery, it was after he had murdered Glass that they met in the hall.

"I wonder she did not notice how bad mannered I was in keeping my hands in

my pockets all the time we were speaking,” he said, “but I had to do so because both my hands were covered with blood.”

Then he went on to talk high morality and, incidentally, to introduce a touch of farce. After asking his auditors to warn society that it must not shirk its duty by refusing to put under restraint men like himself who exhibited signs of madness he suddenly added, “Poor Glass, he had an easy death of it.”

It may be that Inspector Montgomery had the misfortune to be born before his time, for it is easy to conjure up a vision of the agitation for a reprieve that must assuredly have followed his confession had he been convicted in the present year of grace. Ronald True escaped the gallows because the Court of Medical Appeal upset the verdict of the Court of Criminal Appeal; but, strong as was the case brought forward by the alienists on behalf of the murderer of Olive Young, a case ten times stronger could be constructed on behalf of the ex-bank clerk and constabulary officer who had been mad for many years before that day in August, 1873, the hangman performed his grisly duty.

CHAPTER XI

GRACE DALRYMPLE ELLIOTT

The artistically furnished dining-room was on the small side and when the guests entered there was much good-humoured confusion as they strove to find places round the table. Eventually all were seated, but as Mrs. Dalrymple, the daughter of the distinguished army officer who owned the house, was about to sink into her chair she uttered a mock scream of surprise.

"There are thirteen of us," she cried, really serious although she was smiling. "Something terrible will happen unless we make the number up to fourteen."

"Why not turn one of the servants into a guest?" remarked her father dryly.

There was a brief and awkward silence before Mrs. Dalrymple's expression indicated that she had found a solution.

"I know what we'll do," she exclaimed delightedly, "we'll have Grace downstairs. After all, she's nearly sixteen, and it will be a great treat for her to dine with us."

The guests unanimously approved of her decision, and five minutes later Grace Dalrymple made her debut in society.

When she entered the room those who had never seen her before were amazed by her loveliness. She was rather tall for her age, but the dark golden hair falling about her shoulders and her large grey eyes and delicate, mobile mouth served to present a spectacle of youthful innocence which was entirely obliterated by the girl's self-possessed manner. For if they expected her to be shy and timid at her first dinner party they were very soon disillusioned. Grace talked with the assurance of a woman of the world and she startled some of her auditors by her frank criticisms of certain well-known persons. That she knew how to attract men she proved by the way she played upon their feelings with flattering phrases accompanied by eloquent flashes from her eyes which could not be misunderstood.

Curiously enough, the guest who was most impressed by her was the one man of whom she scarcely took any notice. This was Dr. Elliott, a noted physician who was subsequently created a baronet. Although not yet forty the doctor looked more than fifty, and as there were younger and handsomer men at the table it is not surprising that the girl who had acquired all the arts of flirtation before she was out of the schoolroom should have ignored him. Elliott, however, had had no eyes for anyone else, and when the party reunited in the drawing-room he was so enthusiastic in praises of her that Mrs. Dalrymple guessed he was in love with her daughter.

It was a discovery which greatly pleased the woman, whose own marriage had

been a failure and who was very anxious to see Grace securely married. Like most matchmaking mothers she thought of nothing except security. Apparently, it did not occur to her that it might be better to find a husband likely to make Grace happy rather than rich. Elliott's age and rather irritable disposition she ignored. It was sufficient for her that he was well off and that he had earned the patronage of members of the royal family. He was clearly destined for wealth and a title, and Mrs. Dalrymple consequently more than met him half-way and let him understand before his carriage called for him that she sympathized and approved of his sudden desire to forsake bachelorhood.

A couple of days later it was hinted to Grace that Dr. Elliott wished to marry her. Her mother broke the news gently, nervous lest the girl should be frightened by the suggestion that she should become the wife of a man who was older than her father. Her relief was therefore all the greater when Grace flushed with pleasure and excitedly confessed that she longed for the independence marriage would give her. As so often happens she never thought of the man; it was only the opportunity to escape from the thralldom of her family that caused her to accept one totally unsuited to her. Grace was the possessor of a crafty and intriguing brain, and she was prepared to do anything which would enable her to gain a footing in the world which lay outside the unpretentious house in Bloomsbury.

The marriage was, of course, a disastrous failure. Grace was not experienced enough to know how to humour her husband or lure him out of the fits of bad temper into which she threw him by her conduct. She opened her house in the West End to a crowd of fashionable young men who came solely to see her, for the beautiful young wife of Dr. Elliott had begun to be talked about the week of her marriage. These votaries of pleasure invaded the doctor's rooms and filled the house with their laughter, and generally upset everything and everybody except their hostess. Elderly patients complained of practical jokes played on them by semi-intoxicated lordlings, but Grace merely laughed in her husband's face when he remonstrated with her and met his reproaches with expressions of her own regret for having married an old fogey.

It was a time when society was in a more or less easy-going and unorganized state. George III was on the throne, and the young man of good family and large means sowed his wild oats freely and publicly and was applauded by his fellows. He drank and gambled and flirted, and unless he went into the army and learnt the lessons of life on the battlefield he developed into a brainless sot who sacrificed his patrimony and left his successors little or nothing. A typical specimen of these unthinking revellers was Lord Valentia. Let loose on society at an early age with a

large fortune and no brains, he was a hardened sinner by the time he was introduced to Mrs. Elliott at a dinner party given by Lady Forest. Grace had been warned of his reputation and, to use her own words, she decided that he must be “delightfully wicked.” Lord Valentia, for his part, quickly detected Grace’s weak points, and determined that she should be another of his victims, and so he made her the objective of all his arts and crafts. Professing to worship the very ground she walked on, he became her slave. His fortune was placed at her disposal, and what was more gratifying to her he persuaded many of his highly-placed and influential relatives to invite Grace to their houses. The girl-wife had already grown tired of ancient doctors and their dowdy wives and she was only too glad to have the opportunity to crowd them out of her receptions and parties. A cousin of Lord Valentia, seeing how the land lay, ventured to warn her that she was playing with fire.

“I love fire,” she answered pertly.

“You’ll not think so if it scorches you,” said her ladyship, and Grace was silent.

The next afternoon it was known all over London that Mrs. Elliott had eloped with Lord Valentia and that Dr. Elliott had been prostrated by the catastrophe. A little later the doctor was seen on his usual rounds, and when he obtained a divorce and a verdict for £12,000 damages from Lord Valentia the general opinion was that he was the luckiest of the trio involved in the matrimonial disaster. Those who knew Lord Valentia said that he would never marry a girl who cost him such a large sum, and when Grace and her lover parted after a stormy scene she must have realized that she had been victimized by a heartless scoundrel and that henceforth she would have to battle for her existence.

Society, of course, professed to be shocked and offended, and the name of Grace Dalrymple Elliott was never heard in polite circles. She had closed the doors of all the great houses against herself, but her critics and her enemies forgot that she was young, beautiful and clever and that with these aids to the reconquest of the social world she had every prospect of victory.

Grace herself, however, was lonely, depressed and frightened by the outcry she had created, and she retired to France, where she had been educated. She was existing in a dismal hotel—her relations had circulated the news that she was in a convent—when she encountered a former acquaintance, Lord Cholmondeley, as she was shopping. The peer, well beyond the reach of the censure of his people, joyfully renewed their friendship, for he had been longing to meet some one from his own country and the opportunity to act as host to an exceptionally pretty girl was too good to be missed.

“Do you know who was talking about you the other day?” he asked across the

table in the restaurant where they were dining.

Grace, who was not yet twenty, smiled bitterly.

"Oh, I expect plenty of people talk about me," she said grimly.

"I mean in a complimentary manner," Lord Cholmondeley hastened to assure her. "It was the Prince of Wales. He saw that portrait of you at Houghton and was enthusiastic in its praise. He inquired about the original, and when told you were the lady he expressed a wish to see you in order that he might test our statement that you were even lovelier than your picture."

Grace trembled with excitement, the excitement of reborn ambitions and the knowledge that here was a chance to rehabilitate herself. If only she could meet the impressionable prince and win his friendship and patronage society would forget her blunder and receive her back, not as a penitent, but as one of its leaders.

"I think I will return to London," she said, after a pause.

"I go back to-morrow—why not come with me?" said Lord Cholmondeley, and there and then she settled her plans.

Lord Cholmondeley was one of the most intimate friends of the Prince of Wales, and it only required an intimation from him that the original of the portrait at Houghton was in London to reawaken the curiosity of His Royal Highness concerning the personal attractions of Grace Dalrymple Elliott. At his request a private party was arranged to which Grace was invited, and, dressed provocatively and with a taste which doubled her charms, she suddenly appeared in the room where the prince was drinking with his companions and took him by storm. Many beauties were paying court to the man who was later to become George IV, but few of them had the cleverness of Grace Dalrymple Elliott and none of them her uncanny knowledge of men. An intimate friendship between the two was begun that night, and the result was that the girl who had come from a cheap hotel found herself endowed not only with a fortune but with all the influence the heir to the throne possessed.

Of course his relations disapproved of his passion for Grace. He was threatened with parental displeasure, and his enemies at court terrified the king by hinting that the prince was plotting to make the adventuress his wife. Only the young and gay party which the Prince of Wales headed approved, and Grace's cleverness was their chief weapon. But she had one failing, and that was extravagance, and the prince was soon embarrassed by her demands on his purse. He had humoured her when she had ransacked Paris for the latest fashions in order that she might re-enter London society with the air of a conqueror. He had been pleased with her success at the great houses he had opened to her, but when she obtained jewels on credit

worth many thousands of pounds and gaily exhibited the unpaid accounts he foresaw the possibility of his young friend involving him in very serious difficulties.

Judged by ordinary standards he had a large income, but there were innumerable demands on it and the ready money at his command was less than that of most of his aristocratic friends. When he intimated to Grace that there were limits to his means she was delightfully incredulous, believing that as heir to the throne he had all the financial resources of Great Britain at his mercy.

When he persisted she became angry and sulkily complained that he had grown tired of her. He protested, but she was in the humour for a quarrel, and when he left her she cried petulantly that she did not wish to see him again. Familiarity with the prince had born in her a certain amount of contempt for him, and besides that she had been such a success with the great men of the period to whom His Royal Highness had presented her that she could contemplate without regret the possibility of the severance of their relations. She might be an old woman in experience, but in years she was very young and her loveliness and her powers of fascination remained unimpaired.

When a few days later she read in a paper that the Prince of Wales had gone down to Brighton, she interpreted this to mean a snub to herself, and to prove that she was indifferent to his displeasure she started for Paris with only a single maid in attendance. There was, however, more behind her apparently sudden decision than appeared, on the surface, for she had a definite object in going to Paris, and that object was to renew in a more convenient and suitable environment her acquaintance with the Duke of Orleans. France was in a topsy-turvy condition, but Grace Dalrymple Elliott was too pretty to bother about politics, and she remembered only that the duke had often whispered eloquently to her of an undying devotion and a wish to prove it in a practical manner. The beautiful Englishwoman had therefore decided to give him the chance to spend some of his wealth by paying for those costly luxuries which to a person of her temperament were necessities.

The French prince, unconscious of the pending storm, opened his palaces and his purse on her behalf and entertained her royally, but the whole of the royal family were now on the brink of a volcano, and it was one Sunday evening as the duke and Grace were returning to Paris from a day's festivities in the country that their carriage was held up by a soldier who informed them that the revolution had broken out. The woman did not treat the news seriously until she saw for herself dead bodies lying about the streets, but it was not until she was horrified by the spectacle of the revolutionaries carrying the head of the Princess de Lamballe that she realized the worst. It was too late then for her to get back to England, and, as she afterwards

confessed, she felt like a mouse in a trap.

Of course her sympathies were with the royal family, and she imagined that the Duke of Orleans would stand by her and save her from the fate which confronted everybody with any pretensions to good birth. Orleans, however, had made up his mind that as the revolutionaries were succeeding he would pose as a believer in freedom. The adventuress was horrified at what she considered his betrayal of his own caste, but with her own head in danger she concealed her opinion and embarrassed him by claiming his protection on every possible occasion.

Meanwhile, her position was becoming one of increasing danger. Day after day she was compelled to witness the terrifying acts of the revolutionary leaders, and cultured and gentle ladies who had invited her to their houses because of her friendship with the duke now passed her in the street on their way to execution. One night when Grace was warned that Robespierre was about to issue a warrant for her arrest, she fled to the house of a friend who had been on intimate terms with her. She knocked on the door and was admitted by an elderly servant, who whispered to her that not only had the countess been guillotined but her husband and three sons and two daughters. Half mad with terror the Englishwoman rushed back to her own home and for a week remained shut up in her bedroom.

It was a request that she should assist in the escape of a high official of the court that brought Grace Dalrymple Elliott to her senses. Her loneliness and her habit of brooding over her troubles were rapidly driving her mad when the request reached her. Immediately she threw herself into the plot to get the marquis out of Paris, and she was soon involved in a complicated series of escapes and plots which prevented her thinking of herself.

The leaders of the revolution were set on guillotining this particular official whom they regarded as a dangerous aristocrat. Consequently, when he was not found in his usual haunts, an order was issued that on a certain night everybody was to remain indoors between ten o'clock and five the next morning so that there might be a complete house-to-house search for the wanted man. It was an order which presaged death for Mrs. Elliott herself as well as for the man she was hiding, and until ten o'clock on the night of the search she and the marquis and a faithful servant debated how to defeat it. The position was not rendered any easier by the fact that the marquis was too ill to walk more than a hundred yards, and eventually Grace decided that the only hope for them would be for the old man to lie between the two mattresses of her bed on which she would be resting when the soldiers arrived.

It was after one o'clock in the morning when the knock on the door which no one dared disobey sounded and was quickly followed by the tramp of half a dozen

men on the stairs. Grace was in bed now and striving to banish the terror from her eyes and the trembling from her body, and it was fortunate for her that the soldiers should have left her bedroom until the last. When they did enter she was apparently the only occupant of the bed and she instantly won the admiration and goodwill of the soldiers by apologizing for receiving them that way. She explained that as they had not come before midnight she had decided they were not coming at all and accordingly had retired.

"I am sorry, but I must carry out my orders," said the officer in charge. "The marquis was seen to enter your house and no one has noticed him leave it. I must therefore search every corner."

With the beautiful young woman in bed gripping the clothes to prevent herself screaming, the soldiers looked everywhere and even reduced the table, the chairs and the sofa to tatters with their swords. They disfigured the walls in their efforts to discover a secret panel, and Grace was momentarily expecting them to order her to leave the bed so that they might run their swords through the mattresses when the officer came to her side again.

"I have now obeyed my orders fully," he said, with a bow, "so I will say good night, madame."

She gave him a smile of gratitude in return which almost defeated its object by making him hesitate to go, but as if afraid that his men might report he was in love with an aristocrat he tore himself away.

Grace and her maid at once dragged the old man from between the mattresses and discovered he was unconscious, but it was sheer terror and not suffocation which had brought about his collapse, and when they restored him he flung himself at his benefactor's knees and thanked her humbly. The next day he was transferred to another house and later reached safety.

But Grace Dalrymple Elliott herself, although she darted hither and thither and tried all the tricks she knew, could not get beyond the cordon which the leaders of the revolution had drawn around Paris. Her passport was no use to her and her nationality was derided. Spies were everywhere and the execution of the king and queen had not lessened the ferocity of the mob. Fresh victims were demanded every day, and when full supplies of aristocrats began to fail, workmen who were incautious enough to complain of the new regime were arrested and guillotined. It was a time of horror, and the woman who was a born adventuress was experiencing adventures which she neither sought nor desired.

Grace was living in extreme poverty when she heard that the Duke of Orleans, who had tried to save his neck by posing as a champion of the people, had been

arrested. This meant that the revolutionaries had determined to execute him, and, although she had been embittered by his conduct towards his relatives, she was terribly depressed at the loss of the only man in France who could have helped her if ever it came to her own trial. She was mourning for the duke when her room was invaded and she was thunderstruck to hear from the lips of a bloodthirsty ex-butcher who had been given a commission in the army that she was under arrest and that the charge against her was corresponding with the enemies of France. Before they condescended to explain anything else they carried her off and threw her into an underground dungeon where for three months her daily food consisted of raw, pickled herrings and uneatable haricot soup. She suffered all sorts of indignities and witnessed heartrending spectacles almost daily, for the prison was expected to supply fifty victims for the guillotine a day, public executions having become the favourite spectacle and sport of the Parisians. On one occasion when the batch of fifty men and women had been chosen two young noblemen sprang from the top landing to the stone pavement beneath and were killed on the spot. The jailer scarcely glanced at them as he nodded to two other prisoners to join the forty-eight so that the original number might be completed.

Almost every day Grace was warned that her hour had come, and what with semi-starvation and nights of sleeplessness on the hard floor in a crowded and suffocating room the marvel is that she did not lose her reason. But she was in full possession of her faculties when she was told by the judges who examined her that amongst the papers of the guillotined Duke of Orleans was a letter in which her name was mentioned several times. The presiding judge, who had been previous to the revolution a street labourer and who was unable to read or write, announced pompously that he believed the incriminating letter had been written in cipher and was a danger to the republic. It was full of strange figures and curious words which puzzled the clerk of the court, who prided himself on his knowledge of the English language.

“Let me read it,” said Grace, with a smile. “I don’t know anything about it, but I do know that none of the English friends of the duke wrote in cipher.”

When she had the letter in her hand she burst into loud laughter and the unlovely faces of her judges clouded and their lips tightened because they suspected she was trying to make fun of them.

Then in eloquent French the Englishwoman explained that the strange phrases and figures related solely to horse-racing and that the letter was entirely about the chances of certain horses belonging to the writer which were entered for valuable races in England.

“We don’t believe you,” said the presiding judge, with a snarl, and ordered her to be removed to another prison.

Here she had an unnerving experience the week of her arrival. It was necessary for the prisoners to go to the head jailer’s room whenever they required anything, and on the occasion of Grace’s first visit to this formidable and sinister person she came upon him seated at a table drinking wine with a very handsome, smart young man.

“Sit down and join us,” he said, with a gruff cordiality which was both rare and amazing.

The Englishwoman dared not refuse, and she took her place beside the handsome stranger, who at once entered into conversation with her.

She was beginning rather to like him because he was so courteous and seemed so kind, when she observed the jailer grinning at her. Before he could speak, however, the young man rose and consulted his watch.

“I must be off,” he said hurriedly.

“No, your work will not begin until twelve o’clock,” remarked the jailer carelessly. Then he turned to Mrs. Elliott. “I am glad you have made friends with Citizen Sansom,” he said to her, with a gravity which she at once suspected was assumed. “He will be your executioner and it is just as well to be on good terms with him.”

Grace experienced such a revulsion of feeling that she almost fainted, and she was, indeed, in a half-fainting condition when the courteous young man suddenly measured her throat with his hands.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said, with a cold-blooded smile, “it will soon be off your neck, for it is so long and small. If I have the honour to despatch you it will be nothing but a squeeze.”

In the same prison she also witnessed one of the most curious incidents of the revolution. Amongst her fellow prisoners was a Madame de Beauharnais, a lady who had been separated from her husband, the Marquis Alexandre de Beauharnais, for several years. She had not seen him since the day they had parted and she had almost forgotten his existence the afternoon the great prison doors swung open and a batch of aristocrats were hustled in at the point of the bayonet. Madame de Beauharnais was gazing at the unfortunate men when one of them straightened himself and came towards her, and with a cry of surprise she recognized her husband. They had once been bitter enemies, but conscious that they were in the shadow of the guillotine and that death was only a question of a few days at the outside, they there and then became reconciled and even lovers.

Every day prisoners came and went, but those that went never returned. Madame de Beauharnais was at first terrified lest her husband should be torn from her side, but as the days passed and he was still alive she began to hope that the jailer, touched by the romance of their reconciliation, had purposely forgotten them. If he had history might have been altered, for had the marquis been spared Madame de Beauharnais, whose Christian name was Josephine, could not have become the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte and subsequently his empress. But she knew nothing, of course, of the fate made possible for her when Beauharnais was suddenly ordered into the ranks of the condemned and led out to be murdered by the State.

According to Grace Dalrymple Elliott's story of her sufferings in prison during the revolution it was owing to a fluke that she was not guillotined. She tells how one night she and eight other women shared their miserable dinner together and how by ten o'clock the next day she alone of the party was alive. The others, all of whom bore historic names, had been offered up as sacrifices to the all-devouring and insatiable guillotine. But she was not to die a violent death, and when Robespierre fell the prison door was opened to her and she recovered her health and her spirits in a cottage some distance from Paris. She made no attempt to leave the country, and she watched events with an intelligent but impartial eye. France had become impossible to her and she was only waiting the opportunity to realize the property she had bought with the Duke of Orleans' money to seek refuge in England.

She was conferring with her man of business in Paris one day when she saw Madame de Beauharnais enter a hairdresser's shop. Following her with the intention of talking over their adventures together in prison she found her examining a magnificent blue and silver dress which was displayed before her on a sofa.

"How very charming!" exclaimed the Englishwoman impulsively. "May I ask where you are going in this magnificent attire, my dear?"

Before she answered her Madame de Beauharnais sent the hairdresser out of the room.

"That dress is from your country," she explained, with a forced laugh. "It was ordered especially for my marriage which took place this morning. I am now the wife of General Bonaparte and we are both very happy because he has obtained command of the army in Italy."

Mrs. Elliott guessed from the woman's tone that she was not in love with the man she had married, and she further gathered that the bride of that morning was rather glad that her husband was going away and leaving her in Paris.

"How could you marry a man with such a horrid name?" said Grace, speaking according to her cue.

“Well, I thought he might be of service to my children,” was the calm reply. “I lost everything in the revolution and I don’t mind sacrificing myself for their good. Bonaparte will rise very high in the army and the children should benefit accordingly.”

To the day of her death Grace Dalrymple Elliott maintained that when Josephine presented her to Napoleon the latter fell in love with her and shortly afterwards made a proposal of marriage to her, undertaking to get a divorce from his wife if Grace would pledge him her word of honour to marry him the day he was free. It was a very romantic story and one which has been rejected by historians, but if there is no proof of its truth there is at any rate no proof of its untruth.

It must have been soon after this alleged proposal that Mrs. Elliott appeared in London suddenly and startled society, which had come to the conclusion that she had been one of the victims of the French revolution. When some one mentioned to the Prince of Wales that he had seen the famous beauty His Royal Highness was too surprised to believe him, but when the news was confirmed he returned from Brighton to London at once so that he might send her a letter begging her to go to him. She accepted the invitation, hoping that as her loveliness had scarcely been affected by her sufferings, she would be able to bring the prince to her feet again. But, although he received her with great cordiality and presented her with five thousand pounds to enable her to set up an establishment of her own, she soon saw that what he offered her now was not the same intimate friendship which had once inspired him to share all his secrets with her. It was a blow to her pride and ambitions, but she accepted her position and with the aid of his generous monetary gift had a season in London which proved that she was very much alive.

Anxious to banish memories of the past and doubly anxious to prevent herself thinking of the future, she plunged into gaiety and dissipation and spent the fortunes of more than one man. Wealthy noblemen and aspiring commoners rallied round her with flattery and with gifts, and in the days of her triumph she placed the arms of the Prince of Wales on her carriage and acted as though she was a princess. This annoyed the prince and he gave orders that the arms were to be removed from her carriage, by force if necessary, and when she declined he notified his circle that anyone who was friendly with Grace Dalrymple Elliott could not be friendly with him. Had this happened ten years previously the adventuress might not have lost a single friend, but she was now only a shadow of her former self, and the men found it easy to sacrifice her at the whim of the heir to the throne. Their desertion angered her, and, what was worse, crippled her financially and, unwilling to face the jeers and the scorn of rivals she had defied and insulted, she withdrew to France to spend the remainder of her life there. During her last illness she talked only of Napoleon; and,

forgetting that he had died in exile, she boasted how he had given her the chance to become his empress.

“If I could have foreseen his triumph I should have accepted him,” she murmured sleepily, and died that night. She was sixty-five and the year of her death was 1823.

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been retained.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

Some photographs have been enhanced to be more legible.

The illustration of Jane Digby, mentioned in the list of illustrations to face page 178, is missing. Whether this is an original error, or an error in the scan is unknown.

[The end of *Rogues and Adventuresses* by Charles Kingston]