

ROMANCE OF A FOUR-WHEELER.

BY JAMES GREENWOOD.

I had set up for myself as a "master cabman in a small way, my "rolling stock" consisting of a single four-wheeler, with a couple of horses, and at the time I lived at Gamberwell, not a great distance from the Green. My stable, however, was a few hundred rods from my place of residence, what had been at one time a gentleman's coach house, at the end of a large garden and approached by a narrow lane.

One night in the summer time I was hailed by a fare in the neighborhood of the Elephant and Castle, at Newington. I had no intention of doing any more business that night, and was jogging along toward home, but as the gentleman who called to me was seemingly going the same way as myself, I, of course, had no objection to carrying another shilling or two.

He looked like a seafarer—not a common sailor—but a mate perhaps. He wore a heavy, blue pilot jacket, and a black silk handkerchief, and a round cap with a peak. He came running along the road after me, and before I could draw up he opened the door of the cab and jumped in and shut the door with a slam, and as though in a hurry.

"Where shall I take you, sir?" I asked him, through the front window.

"Drive straight on," was his answer, "and whip up that old crook in the shafts, I want to catch—"

I did not hear what it was he wanted to catch, but I drove along fast up the Walworth road, and presently he pulled the check string.

"Isn't that another cab coming on behind?" he asked.

"I didn't hear it."

"But I do. Take the first turning, left or right it doesn't matter, and work round a bit to get back into the high road. Don't be afraid as to your fare, we shan't fall out over a shilling."

I had not much experience of cab driving, but it happened that I had plied several times at the East End, in the neighborhood of the docks, and more than once a sailor had jumped into my cab, to be driven off and got out of harm's way, from women and sharpers he had fallen in with. It was not near any shipping where I had picked up my present rider, but what with his being dressed in nautical rig and his desiring to get away from somebody, put it into my mind that it was a similar case, and I did as requested without thinking there was anything extraordinary about it. After winding in and out among the side streets for a few minutes he stopped me when we were near a quiet little public house and got out, and he invited me to come in and have a drink. He was free with his money. On such occasions the fare who treats you does not expect you to go beyond three-pence, but the sailor—! shall call him so at present—called for two sizes of hot brandy, one for himself and the other for me, and two four-penny cigars. He changed a sovereign to pay for what he ordered, and I noticed that he did not take the coin from his waistcoat or trousers pocket, but from an inner pocket of his jacket. I was standing by his side and I have quick ears, and I plainly heard a clink, as though the coin he took from the pocket was but one of many there.

Although it was a quiet, public house, it was one that bore a queer character, as I happened to be aware. A man and a woman were standing at the bar drinking. She was an old woman. They did not take any notice of me or the sailor, but when the latter paid for what he had with a sovereign, carried loose in the pocket of his jacket, the man went out, and in a minute or two in came a young woman who knew the old one. The young one was flashily dressed and very good looking, and all the time she was talking in a lively way to the old woman she was glancing over to the sailor who by that time was drinking his second six pen'orth of brandy as though to make him understand that she wouldn't take it amiss if he were to speak to her.

Certainly it was not his good looks that attracted her. He was well built enough and barely thirty, as well as one might judge, but his face was of the scowling sort, and a zig-zag scar ran from the corner of his life eye to the nostril on that side, and the nostril had a small piece out of it, and the eyelid was pinched up, giving him a sinister appearance.

Presently she spoke to the girl and she had hot brandy and water and the old woman had some, and the sailor had some more and then the old woman went to the door and told my horse was starting and I went to see and found it was nothing of the kind, but as I turned back to the bar I plainly saw the girl put something that was held between her finger and thumb into the sailor's glass.

Of course I knew what the game was, and for my own sake as much as his, thought it was time I made a noise in the matter, especially as before I had time to prevent it—he took up the glass and drained it.

I took the old woman aside and told her what I had seen, and threatened that unless they cleared out at once and quietly, I would drive round to the Police station, which was only two streets off, and tell all about it. It wasn't good enough for them to make a fuss, but, as they were leaving, the young one said spitefully:

"He will be a lot better off for leaving me, won't he? But I've got your number, and I know where you live, and if I hear of anything to-morrow, I'll come forward and do you a good turn. Mark me."

But I didn't care for that. I had never been guilty of a crooked thing yet, and I didn't mean to begin then.

My sailor was getting on toward being drunk this time, and wanted to wait till the girl came back—he hadn't heard a word of what she said to me—but I got him to the cab again. The stuff they had given him did not seem to have taken much effect on him, and when I asked him where I should drive him to, he said he had an appointment near the Elephant at 1 o'clock, and so that I landed him there at that time it didn't matter which way I went meanwhile.

I thought that was queer, but half-drunk people have strange whims at times, and cabmen have to do their best with them.

It was a fine night, and I drove him easily along, so as to wear away the half-hour it wanted to 1 o'clock, but when it was that time and I got down to let him out, he was either insensible, or so fast asleep that I could make nothing of him.

Of course, I know what I ought to have done, I should have taken him to the Police station, but it came into my head that I

might do better for him than that. There was a spare bed at my own place, and he would be more comfortable there than in a Police station cell, and, very likely, as he had money, he wouldn't mind paying for his lodging.

Anyhow I drove him to Chamberwell, and to the stable, where I put my cab up, meaning to wake him up somehow then and take him to the house. But when I got one of my lamps to see him, he was still in the same dead-asleep state, and lying on the cab seat, but hidden by the lappels of his jacket, there was a colored silk handkerchief, and tied up in it a quantity of money. I untied a corner of the handkerchief and was a bit startled to find that the money was all in gold. I couldn't guess how much there was, but as much as would have filled a pint pot.

I tried all I could to move him but did not succeed, and he was too heavy for me to lift, so I did what I thought was the next best thing for him. I loosened his handkerchief and made his head comfortable with a spare cab cushion, and covered him over with the horse-rug, intending to come back to him very early, to see if he had any sense in him, and to let him have a few hours in bed if he wished. The handkerchief with the money in it I took for safety.

It was then about half-past 1 in the morning. There was a bar and a chain with a padlock on the outside of the coach-house door, and I made that secure and went home. But I couldn't sleep, and at 5 o'clock—it was broad daylight—I was up again, and went back to the coach-house, to find—what?

Why, that it had been broken into from the outside, and that my man was gone! Nor was that the most alarming part of it. There had been a fight there, there were blood marks on the floor, and on the cab-linings, and on the mat inside a pool of congealed blood as large as a saucer. And, lying on the mat, too, there was the knife the mischief had been done with—a dagger-knife of the clasp kind, with a spring back and a blade about four inches in length. The blade was stained as well as the handle.

I was terribly alarmed, and my first impulse was to communicate with the police, "I will leave everything as it is," I said, "and go and tell them all about it, and they can see for themselves and form their own conclusions."

But when I came to think "what all about it" meant I hesitated. No one could have been more innocent of iniquitous intention, but when I repeated to myself the story I should have to relate at the Police station it seemed as much like a "hatchup" as anything could.

I had not even taken the man up as a fare in the ordinary way.

He had hailed me as he was running along the road at midnight, and the only direction he gave me was "straight on." But, when he had gone some distance, he no longer wished to go "straight on," but to thread the dark streets to escape pursuers. But, then again, he is not so desperately bent on doing so, but that when he got among the back streets he bids me to stop at a public-house, where, while drinking at the bar with him, I see two women apparently dragging his liquor. After that, I find him dead asleep or insensible in my cab, and I think it best to convey him to my own abode: not to my private house, however, but to the stable, which is a secluded place, two hundred yards or so distant; and then, next morning, I discover sanguinary evidence that he has been cruelly dealt with, and he has disappeared, and I have all his money—or, at least, as much as I choose to own to—tied up in a pocket handkerchief!

As I have already stated, the padlock had been broken, but I had closed the coach-house doors and made them fast as well as I could with the bar and the broken chain, and was on my way to the Station House, when I found myself walking slower and slower.

The evidence seemed to point to my having a murder to answer for. If I went to the police I should certainly be suspected and detained, for it was impossible to say how long a time, and meanwhile my business would be ruined. How was it possible for the mystery to be satisfactorily explained, that I should be completely exonerated? How was it to be accounted for—that somebody had broken into the coach-house and murdered a man, a perfect stranger, and one who they could have no grudge against, and after that—the victim, with his bleeding wounds, should walk off without attracting attention or making the outrage known, or saying a word to anyone?

What was best for me to do I did not know, but it certainly seemed like running my head into danger to go to the police—at all events, until I had given myself time to think over the matter a little. So I turned back, and was walking the way I came, when I met the night policeman, whom I knew, coming off duty.

"Morning, Mr. Petterick," says he smiling, "been in the wars, haven't you?"

"What makes you think so?" says I, feeling myself turn pale.

"Only there is a smear of blood on your cheek," says the policeman, "or praps it's paint?"

"Oh, that's more likely. I've been painting," I replied, not knowing what else to say at the moment, and rubbing my cheek with my hand, and he went off.

I was conscious that I had committed a great blunder. It was blood. It was on the back of my hand, a mere smudge, but unmistakable. I must have got it off the cab, or off the handle of the knife when I picked it up to look at it. I should have told the friendly night policeman all about it, and taken his advice, not told a lie about it. Now, what would the man say if called on?

"I met him in the morning, between 6 and half-past, and seeing his face smeared with blood, I mentioned it to him, when he turned pale and rubbed it off, saying it was not blood, but red paint, as he had been painting."

Why, unless to conceal my guilt, should I make such a false statement?

If I could but make sure that the assaulted man, or anyone concerned in attacking him, would not turn up again. It would be easy then and manifestly the best thing I could do, to say nothing about what had happened, but to clear away all traces of the fray and keep the money.

Come to think of it, it wasn't likely there would be any bother about it. Those who had broken into the coach-house would, of course, be the last to come forward, and since the injured man had gone off or been carried off without any noise, the chances were I shouldn't hear any more of him.

I went back toward the stable, looking left and right before I turned into the lane that led to it, to see that no one observed me, for all the world as though I had committed a crime, and unbarred the door again. I drew a pail of water and had the straw mat on the stones mopping the stains from it, when a slight noise at the door startled me, and looking up I saw a man.

It flashed to my mind instantly that I had seen him before somewhere. He was a threadbare looking chap in a buttoned-up black coat and a shabby tall black hat.

"You are hard at it early, gov'ner," he quietly remarked, as I looked up.

I felt my knees trembling, but made him no reply, thinking that if he found I was surely, he would go away. But he didn't.

"Had an accident, mister?" was his next remark.

"No, why?"

"There seems a good sprinkling of blood about, that's all."

"Well, the horse cut himself as we was bringing him in last night, if you wish to know," said I going on with the mopping.

"Fancy that, now," and coming in, he took up the spring-backed knife I had laid on the ledge. "Is this what the poor animal cut himself with, mister?" And he laughed.

"That's my knife. Put it down."

"I am aware that it is your knife, gov'ner. I saw it in your hand last night."

"You saw it in my hand? Where?"

"Oh, I see, it is such a long time ago you don't remember! Why, at the Loaf and Crown. You wasn't there, I suppose? Well, there are not more than about half a dozen witnesses that you was, so you are quite safe in swearing it. But, I say, mister, what a beastly cruel thing to kill him?"

"To kill him! To kill who? What do you mean?"

"Who?—why, the chap that Poll gave the pinch of 'lullaby' to. Your fare, you know; the man you was so anxious about! Making sure I knew what your game with him was, I felt anxious about the poor fellow, too, and thought I would give you an early call just to inquire after her health, and see if there was a chance of going snacks in what you robbed him of. But money won't square it now. What have you done with him?"

"Oh, with it, if you like better. His body."

I felt dazed and ready to faint for a moment, and then it suddenly flashed on me that I had discovered a key to the mystery.

Who was the murderer?

This was the man I had seen with the old woman when the sailor and myself first went into a public house. No doubt, although he went away, he still kept watch, and knew all about the drugging, he and the old woman and the young one being of one gang. One of them may have heard the click of the loose gold in his pocket, as I had, and loath to lose such a rare haul, this man had followed the cab when I drove away—I had driven but slowly—followed us home to the stable, and, for all I know, peeped through the chinks of the gates, and saw me making him as comfortable as I could inside the cab. After that he may have broken in, thinking the man had still the money about him, and perhaps, was searching for it when the sailor came to his senses; and then there was a fight and a desperate struggle and bloodshed!

What had become of wounded or murdered man was a mystery still, but I felt so certain that my surmise was true that I turned on the fellow and said:

"We will have no more talk about it here. We will both go to the Police station, and have our say there."

"That's the very thing I was going to propose, mister," said he, "Come along."

And as he spoke he picked up the knife again and dropped it into his side pocket. I thought he meant to conceal it.

"Don't forget you have got the knife," I remarked. "I believe that was the weapon the wounding was done with!"

He laughed.

"I'm not a policeman, but, all the same, I can tell you that you had best keep your mouth shut, for all you say will be repeated."

may think what you like about it, but I too am innocent."

"Not guilty, only shy, eh?"

"Not guilty, or I may be struck dead as I stand for telling a lie, but—what was you saying about—about—going snacks?"

He laughed aloud at that.

"That's good, for a man without a stain! Well, what about it? How much did you make by the job?"

"It is madness for me to make such a proposition, but are you willing to keep what you have seen to yourself, if I give you twenty pounds? It is a large sum for such a small service."

He seemed in the humor now to be amused, and I was not sorry for it.

"Well, you are the coolest, wisest I ever came across. A small service, is it, to save you from hanging? A small service maybe, but worth more than twenty pounds to you, I should think. Make it fifty, and we'll come to terms."

"But what security should I have?"

"Hold hard—one thing at a time. It is to be fifty, then? You have got as much about you?"

"I know where to lay my hands on it at any rate. Yes, I'll say fifty pounds. But what security have I that you won't after all, give information?"

"The very sound security," he replied, with a wink and a grin that an accessory after the fact catches it as hot as a principal. "Now, go and lay your hand on it—on the coin, I mean, and pay up and have done with it."

There was no help for me. I took him to the house, and he waited down stairs while I went up and counted fifty sovereigns out of the silk handkerchief and gave that to him and he left me.

But not for good. When he said, "Pay up and have done with it," I made sure that I should hear no more of him. My secret seemed safe. It wasn't likely that such an unprincipled scoundrel would relate what he had become acquainted with even to the two women, and share the money with them, when he could hold his tongue and keep it all to himself.

But he paid me another visit in less than a month. It was early—I had not yet had breakfast, and he seemed in a great hurry. He demanded more money. I told him I had no more, when he coolly remarked that most likely it was a lie, but, anyhow, if I hadn't money, I had money's worth, and the best thing I could do was to sell my cab and horses. But another fifty he wanted, and meant having. I had counted the money in the handkerchief by that time, and there was a trifle more than two hundred pounds. I had turned it over in my mind what I should do in the not unlikely event of his persecuting me, and had settled it in my mind. I would sell off my little property, and having no one dependent on me—I had been married, but was then a widower—and slip off and emigrate.

"I shall be a ruined man, if I do what you ask," I said to him.

"You are ruined already," he made answer, with a brutal laugh, "so it won't make much difference."

"But, of course, you will let me have part of what the goods fetch?"

Then he seemed to relent a little.

"Look here, now! I don't wish to be hard on you—can you give me another twenty pounds, sharp?"

"Suppose I can—what then?"

"Just this—you will never hear any more of me. It is no use asking you to take my word, but it is a fact. Give me another twenty pounds down—and we say good by."

Of course, I did not believe him, but he spoke so earnest, it seemed worth the chance so I gave him twenty sovereigns more. He placed it carefully in his pocket, and then, with a grin, remarked:

"I am going to give you a receipt this time—on paper," and as he spoke he produced from his greasy old hat a newspaper, and handed it to me, and was gone before I could ask him what he meant by it.

But I soon found out! Naturally I expected to find something printed in the newspaper—which was that morning's—that concerned me, and I presently found it:

"Thank the Lord," says I, "and if I am tempted to go crooked again, and the thought of the horrible time I have had don't check me, why let the very worst happen, that's all."

I was not long in getting to the Police station, where I told my story, and as I took with me the remainder of the gold in the silk handkerchief—a hundred and thirty-two pounds ten there was—there was no reason for them to doubt what I said.

Of course, and it served me right, I got into disgrace for taking the man to my place, instead of handing him over to the police, but that was the worst that happened to me. The burglar died without revealing the name of his "pal," and the latter was never discovered, and as for the scoundrel who had the seventy pounds—the fifty first and the twenty afterward—he vanished. It is now nearly thirty years since the affair happened, but it was a lesson through life for me.

Canadian Eggs in England.

If the Canadian hen could fully appreciate the good news that her owners have received from across the ocean it is probable that she would indulge in such a cackle of delight as would make the barnyard intolerable to everything that has ears. Now she may live and flourish, notwithstanding the uncertainty that for several months has hung over her useful life, for John Bull says he is prepared to pay a fair price both for her and her product. The cable announces that a first consignment of eggs shipped to England since the passage of the McKinley bill has resulted most satisfactorily, the eggs arriving in good order and selling readily for 24s. a dozen. This by the dealers is regarded as very encouraging. Said a Toronto shipper, on hearing the result, "If our eggs can command that price it would have paid our holders to have shipped to the London market instead of rushing their stock over to the States before the McKinley bill was put into force." At 24s. a dozen it is estimated that the exporter will have about 20c. clear at Toronto, i. e., that 4c. a dozen will cover commission, freights, and all expenses. Nor is there any danger of glutting the English market. 75,571,340 dozen eggs were imported into that country during the first nine months of the current year, an increase of more than five million dozen over the corresponding period of last year. Indeed, the money sent out of the country for eggs in more than two thirds that paid for cheese, being \$12,000,000 for the first nine months of this year. There can be no doubt that if our commission men and exporters show the same diligence in catering for the English egg trade that the dairymen have employed in catering for the cheese trade the Canadian egg industry may be made more profitable to both farmers and exporters than ever it has been. Already the managers of several lines of ocean steamers have expressed their readiness to do all in their power to promote this trade by providing suitable shipping space, while the arrangements being considered for the establishment of cold storage depots to hold immense supplies. With proper shipping facilities and suitable storage establishments, it will matter little to those who are interested in this industry how high our neighbors build their tariff walls.

The Mormon Prophet.

Compared with the countless number of fanatics who have played other parts in the religious drama, the number of persons who have assumed the prophetic role is surprisingly small. A few, however, there have been. One of these, Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet and founder of the sect, is soon to have his claims to Divine inspiration severely tested. Among the articles of faith which he claimed to have received from Heaven was this, "that Christ will reign personally upon the earth, and that the earth will be renewed and receive its Paradisaical glory." Moreover, he stated that it had been revealed to him when the grand and solemn event should take place. This is his record: "I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man when I heard a voice repeat the following: 'Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore, let this suffice, and trouble me no more in this matter.'" Now as Joseph was born on Dec. 23rd, 1805, it will be seen that the approaching 23rd December is the time fixed by the prophecy. That is dangerously near for those who have not yet made their peace with Heaven. But in this instance as in those which have preceded, the 23rd of December is likely to demonstrate that "the old prophets are dead and the young ones are false."

A History of the Dominion.

The Committee on Canadian History have just announced that they are in a position to offer tempting pecuniary inducements for the production of a history of the Dominion. In making their announcement they explain that "this action is rendered possible by the magnificent gift of two thousand five hundred dollars made within the past ten days, and which is now announced for the first time. There will be offered a series of three prizes open to the world for the best Dominion text-books of Canadian history, and it is believed that since the first prize will be not less than one thousand dollars and the others proportionately great, the ablest historians will be induced to take part in the competition. The donor is a Canadian who is proud of his country, who has faith in its future, and who is sufficiently generous at heart to contribute materially to its educational needs. Although his name will not be announced at present, his noble gift will be highly appreciated, and it is to be hoped that its purpose will be realized." This announcement will be hailed with delight by many who will entertain the hope that we shall soon have a history of our country, popular in style, reliable as to facts, and comprehensive without being prolix.

Some of the loudest advocates of protection for home industry are never engaged in any industry at home.

According to Robert Giffen, the English statistician, Great Britain, since 1883, has lost 9,000,000 of her population by emigration and that of this number 7,000,000 were of British or Irish origin. But though so many have gone out her population has steadily increased, gaining in the thirty-seven years about 10,000,000. These facts confirm the opinion that emigration affords no sufficient check upon the population of the United Kingdom. Indeed since '85 the natural increase, after deducting for emigration, is over 4,000,000.