

THE RING AND THE BIRD.

BY C. G. FURLEY.

CHAPTER II.

The effect of the parrot's query was startling. Colonel Farrer started up in such haste that his chair fell clattering to the ground, and with such a pallor overspreading his ruddy countenance that all of us with one accord stood up too, and cried out, "What's the matter?"

"What did that brute mean?" gasped the Colonel. "What does it know about Ram Asoka? I didn't want to kill the old fool, if only he had been sensible and not made such a confounded fuss about his heathen temple. It was a judicial execution; it was necessary to the peace of the district. I didn't want to do it, if Ram Asoka hadn't brought it on himself."

"Perhaps, Colonel," said I, "it would be a good thing if Polly were to give us his version of the affair."

From white the Colonel's aspect changed to yellow. "Sh! What? What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "Are you jesting? It's no joke, I tell you. The native papers, confound them, said—and they pay too much attention to native opinion nowadays. And—Will no one stop that abominable bit?"

For the parrot was so delighted with his coup that he had burst into a shriek of wild laughter, in which I seemed to detect a tone of mocking triumph.

"Agatha, do take the bird away," said Mrs. Gretton; and Polly was taken downstairs and immured in his cage, still laughing in that grim and fiendish fashion.

"But now, Colonel," said Mrs. Gretton when the hubbub had ceased, "do tell us all about Ram Asoka."

I could see that the subject did not please the Colonel; but as a matter of fact he had not the courage to refuse to speak on it. His story was so incoherent, so full of explanations and excuses, that—taken in conjunction with subsequent events—it roused in me a curiosity to read the accounts of the affair which were given in those native papers the Colonel so disliked. From their statements it appeared that Colonel Farrer had been sent to investigate a quarrel between the Buddhist and Mohammedan residents in an out-of-the-way village. The Mohammedans wanted to draw water from a well which the Buddhists regarded as sacred to their god; and religious feeling had been somewhat strained. The Colonel's instructions were to declare the well public property, and he was provided with soldiers who were ordered to see that the Mussulmans were not interfered with when they approached the spring. The matter might easily have been settled on the basis of a compromise suggested by Ram Asoka, the Buddhist priest, who only asked the Mohammedans to avoid the well till the water necessary for the use of the temple had been drawn each day. This arrangement had been all but completed when the Colonel arrived; but instead of giving his assent to it, he chose to take up the Mohammedan cause with quite unnecessary zeal, moved chiefly, it was said, by a desire to sack the Buddhist temple, which contained, among other more modest treasures, a large and valuable ruby, traditionally supposed to have fallen from heaven at the feet of the chief idol in the place. The Colonel and his men entered the temple, destroyed the idols, and killed Ram Asoka, on the steps of his desecrated altar; after which the Colonel stooped and took from the priest's dead hand the priceless ruby he had vainly tried to save. It is more than possible that the native papers exaggerated Colonel Farrer's guilt; but it is certain that the odium he incurred on this expedition made his resignation advisable; and it did look rather bad that after his motives for appropriating it had been so sharply impugned, he should have retained and set in a ring the stone he had taken from Ram Asoka.

I need hardly say that the story as told by the Colonel differed in many points from this which I have set down; but his frequently-repeated statement that Ram Asoka brought his death upon himself, his loud declarations that he had a right to keep the ring, were calculated to rouse in any mind not deeply biased in his favour—in mine, for example—a firm conviction that the annexation of its protector could not be justified on any strict reading of the principles of either law or honour. True it was that Mrs. Gretton said "Of course," and "Yes, indeed, dear Colonel Farrer," at every pause in her guest's narrative; and that Louisa gave it as her opinion that it was better the stone should be on the Colonel's hand than hidden in an Indian village where no one could see it. But Agatha and I were silent.

"What do you think of the new-comer?" I asked my sweetheart in the few precious minutes that Mrs. Gretton allowed us each evening to say good-night.

"He's a murderous old wretch," she replied with great promptitude. "He killed that poor old priest just in order to steal the ruby; I'm sure of it. But—but—Frank, how is it that Polly knows so much about the affair?"

"I don't know. That's the queerest thing about the matter. The Colonel hadn't mentioned Ram Asoka when Polly bawled at his very pertinent inquiry. If—if one lid believe in the transmigration of souls and the repetition of the Balaam miracle! but modern Buddhism is sheer humbug. Still, it's funny."

No doubt I ought to have passed the night awake, musing on the problem of the parrot. But I didn't; I slept uncommonly well. I think that, speaking generally, one does not get up the proper emotional condition for any event till the event itself is past. Then we are full of retrospective admiration, awe, or fear; but at the moment did we feel at all? I think not. I doubt if we could do our work in even passable style if at the moment of action we stopped to think of its nature, or analysed how it might move our souls. Let me admit that I never felt anything to be monotonous that ever happened to me, till long after it was over.

I slept sound and late. When I entered the dining-room next morning, Agatha, her aunt, and the Colonel were there, but had not begun breakfast. Agatha and Mrs. Gretton were talking aside. As I came in I heard the latter say, "Well, you can't do any." At the same time she handed to Agatha a letter she had been reading, and Agatha hurriedly thrust it into her pocket.

"What is the matter?" I asked, seeing that my sweetheart looked troubled.

"Oh, nothing!" she answered; but she left the room, and Mrs. Gretton hastened after her.

I felt annoyed that Agatha should not have confided her vexation, whatever it was, to me; and I wanted to have my annoyance out on somebody. The Colonel was handy.

"That was an interesting story you told us last night, Colonel," I began. "It was queer, though, that the parrot should have known so much about it."

"The parrot! It knew nothing," said the Colonel, and I could see he was testy.

"I knew the name of Ram Asoka, which was strange to us all. I rather think we have to thank Polly for the narration of that interesting incident of frontier administration."

The Colonel grunted.

"We're all rather fond of the bird," I went on, ostentatiously caressing the parrot, who was standing at the open door of his cage; "but you don't seem to appreciate his familiarity with your adventures."

"Oh! I don't mind. It—it's rather amusing to have a parrot echoing all you say."

Polly had echoed nothing, he had taken the initiative in mentioning our guest's doings; but that was how the Colonel chose to put it.

To show his liking for the parrot's smartness, he came up to the cage and stretched out his hand to caress it, as I had been doing; but Polly did not take the courtesy as it was meant; he turned his head and made a vicious dab at the Colonel's hand—at the finger on which he wore the ring. He managed to bite it pretty smartly too; and the Colonel darted back, uttering many imprecations, to which the parrot replied with equal volubility.

Mrs. Gretton and Louisa entered upon this scene, and on learning what had happened, bustled about for bandages and water for the wounded hand. The precious ring, which was fretting the cut Polly had made, was taken off and laid on the mantle-piece; the finger was tenderly bound up; and Mrs. Gretton herself shut up the Parrot in his cage with the assurance that he was "a naughty, wicked Polly."

"Who killed Ram Asoka?" he shrieked defiantly in reply and even now the Colonel started at the words. "I think a fend is in that bird," he cried.

"I think Ram Asoka is," I answered. Then I asked for Agatha.

"She has a bad headache. She won't be down to breakfast."

"Why didn't she tell me that her head ached?"

"Oh! don't bother, Mr. Laurence; a headache isn't a deadly malady—Tea or coffee, Colonel!"

I was shut up; but I was cross and bewildered. Agatha might have told me of her headache; even a very bad headache doesn't make a girl rush out of the room with tears in her eyes and without saying a word to her lover, I hurried through with my breakfast. Before I had finished, I heard the front door close quietly; and looking out, imagined I saw Agatha's figure passing the window. Mrs. Gretton and Louisa exchanged a glance of intelligence.

"Is that Agatha gone out?" I asked.

"Very likely. The air would do her head good."

I hurried from the room, neglecting the parrot's plaintive cry, "Let out Ram Asoka," and tried to follow her. But before I could overtake her—she was lost in the bustle of Southampton Row, and I had to betake myself to my office unsatisfied.

I don't think I did much work that day. I know that I was abominably cross, that I bullied my clerk, blotted my letters, and cursed my pens, and even came near to quarrelling with one of my rare clients, who wanted to have an unimportant change made in a house I had designed for him. I wasted my time so well that when at last I controlled my irritation and attended to some matters that could not be delayed, I had to remain at the office till much beyond my usual hour. I got home just about dinner-time, and found the household in the greatest confusion.

"Oh! Mr. Laurence"—Mrs. Gretton began, rushing out upon me in the hall.

"Where's Agatha?" I interrupted.

"Agatha! She's out. But I wanted—"

"Has she been out all day?"

"No. She came home for lunch, and went out afterwards, just as usual. She'll be in to dinner.—But, Mr. Laurence, the Colonel's ring—his beautiful ruby ring—has disappeared."

I almost ejaculated, "What is that to me?" but restrained myself, and asked, "What has become of it?"

"We don't know. It is terrible! To think of a man like Colonel Farrer, my poor dear husband's friend, being robbed in my house. Oh, what shall I do?" Mrs. Gretton began to cry, and her distress pierced the thick crust of my egoism and annoyance.

"Tell me how it happened," I asked.

"When was the ring missed?"

"Not half an hour ago; but it must have been gone for hours."

"When did you notice it last?"

"Just after luncheon. It had been lying on the mantle-piece, where I put it when I took it off the Colonel's hand, all the morning. I should have locked it away in some safe place, I know; but in the confusion I didn't think; and I knew Jane to be as honest as the day, though the Colonel declares he'll have her box examined, and she an orphan, and it'll be the ruin of her character."

"How do you know the ring was on the mantle-piece after luncheon?" I asked judicially, interrupting my landlady's wail.

"Because Louisa took it up and tried it on her finger—only she and Agatha and I were in—and said, 'Isn't it lovely?' and Agatha answered, 'Yes; I wonder how much money is shut up in that crystal, which almost looks like a great spot of blood.'"

"I remember exactly what she said, because Polly—I can't think what has come to the bird these two days!—caught up her words and began screaming out, 'Money! Blood! Blood-money, blood-money.'"

"Polly has brains in his head," I said with a laugh.

"Oh, Mr. Laurence, don't speak like that. The poor Colonel, with his hand hurt and his ring gone! There Polly sat on top of his cage, flapping his wings, and crying

out 'Blood-money!' till he quite made me nervous, and I was glad to get out of the room."

"And then?"

"Oh! that's all I know. I went downstairs to help Jane, and Agatha and Louisa both went out; and when the Colonel, who had been at the War Office or somewhere, came home and remembered his ring, it wasn't to be seen anywhere."

We had a very uncomfortable dinner that day—cold salmon, cold lamb, cold tart; the cold and stale remains of yesterday's feast, and a deeper coldness and depression weighing on those who ate it. The Colonel's loss did not trouble me; I did not love him well enough for that; but Agatha had not come home to dinner, and her vacant chair was a vexation to my eye. An electric discomfit filled the rest of the party. Mrs. Gretton would fain have begun to cry; Louisa looked at her mother with furtive glances of warning and reproof; and poor Jane nearly dropped the Colonel's plate when she met the distrustful glare in his angry eye. Only the parrot, though imprisoned in his cage, kept up a wild hilarity and laughed and chuckled like a bird possessed.

I left the party still in the dining-room, discussing the missing ring, and retired to a small room at the back of the hall where I was free to smoke and sulk. Before long I heard a latchkey in the door, and guessed it was Agatha coming in. I was going out to meet her, but Louisa was before me. She met her cousin in the hall: "Oh, Agatha," she exclaimed, "the ring is gone. What's to be done?"

Then Agatha answered in a voice I had never heard from her lips before, a dull despairing wail: "I couldn't help it, Lou. Will you need the money to-day. I shall get my salary in a day or two, and I thought I could get the ring back then, and neither Frank nor anybody would know."

Louisa started back with a shocked exclamation.

Agatha hurried towards the staircase; but as she reached it I caught her in my arms. "My darling, what is the matter?" I exclaimed.

"She wrenched herself free. 'I'll tell you to-morrow, Frank; let me alone for to-night.'"

She hurried up-stairs; and while I stood hesitating about following her, I heard a confusion of exclamations in the dining-room and Louisa's voice—did I wrong her in thinking it contained a tone of spiteful satisfaction?—saying, "She admits it herself. It was for Will's sake Agatha stole the ring."

TO BE CONTINUED.

How She Doctored Him.

While six gentlemen were waiting at a depot in a small town in Arkansas, in America, a coloured woman came up and asked if anyone was a doctor. One of them was, and she rolled her check apron in her hands in a fussy way, and asked if he wouldn't "just step ober tu de cabin an' see what ailed her ole man." He found that he had time and said he would go, and two or three of the others went with him. As they drew near the cabin the woman halted and said, "I ze bin all de doctah he's had, and I ze willin' to allow dat I might er make some mistakes. When he was first taken in gin him turnip seed tea. Was dat right, doctah?" "I guess so." "Later on I changed to a poultice of wild onions. Was dat right?" "It might have been." "Den I soaked his feet in hot water wid wood ashes in it, and put a mustard poultice on de back of his neck." "Yes." "Den he allowed he felt wuss, an' so I changed de mustard to his stomach, an' soaked his head. He dun complained all de mawning, an' now I ze got mustard on his feet, a poultice on the middle, horse radish on his neck, an' he's takin' sassafras tea to warm up de inside." "Well." "Wall, if dere's been any mistake don't let on to de ole man. Just skip it ober." The doctor went and examined the patient and found he had a broken rib, and told him what to do for it. As he left the cabin the woman followed him out and exclaimed, "Fo' the Lawd, doctah, but what a blessin' dat you dun come along! I was dun doctored in de ole man fur softenin' of de brain, an' if I hadn't cotched you to-day I was dun gwine to try to harden 'em up by mixin' sand wid his porridge!"

The Ravages of Panic.

Here, in the shape of a story hailing from the East, is a capital parallel, or rather antidote, to the Sultan's fatalistic telegram on the ravages of the cholera. One day as a pious Mollah was riding into Smyrna his donkey was seized by a hideous looking figure. It was the Cholera spectre. "I know thee," said the holy man; "what mischief art thou now planning?" "I am going into Smyrna," replied the Cholera, "with a command from Allah to kill 700 of the faithful." "Get up behind me," said the Mollah, "we will enter the city together." As they drew near the gates the holy man said, "I conjure you, in the name of Allah, and by the pure faith of a Moslem, that thou wilt not slay one more than the Lord has commanded." The Cholera took the oath, alighted from the donkey, and at once set about his commission of slaughter. Instead of 700, however, 7000 of the faithful died during the period of the Cholera's visitation. When the Cholera had finished his appointed work, and was about to depart from Smyrna, the Mollah again met him. "How is it," demanded he, "that thou hast committed so great a perjury, and violated thy oath to Allah that thou wouldst not slay more than 700?" "I have slain the 700," answered the Cholera, "neither more or less. All the others have been slain in Panic, and not by me; blessed be Allah!"

Bank of England Coiffers.

The Bank of England is the custodian of a large number of boxes deposited by customers for safety during the past 200 years, and in not a few instances forgotten. Many of these consignments are not only of rare intrinsic and historical value, but of great romantic interest. For instance, some years ago the servants of the bank discovered in its vaults a chest, which on being moved literally fell to pieces.

On examining the contents, a quantity of massive plate of the period of Charles II. was discovered, along with a bundle of love letters indited during the period of the restoration. The directors of the bank caused search to be made in their books, the representative of the original depositor of the box was discovered, and the plate and love letters handed over.

There are three things that beat a drum for noise—one is a small boy and the other two are drumsticks.

ROMANCE OF TWO GRAVES.

A STORY OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR.

A French Soldier Saves His Sweetheart From Dishonor and Both are Killed by the Merciless Prussians.

At the time of the declaration of the Franco-German war Alphonse Delorme was living quietly with his only son, Andre, upon their little farm, situated between St. Genevieve and Fleury. The youth was but nineteen years of age, and his mother having died in his infancy, the whole of the poor old man's affection was centered in the boy. When the dread war cloud burst over France young Delorme, who was a youth of ardent, adventurous spirit, determined to defend his country against the Prussians. The old man had naturally many misgivings, but was too patriotic a Frenchman to interfere with the wishes of his son, who forthwith enlisted as a private in a foot regiment early in the month of August. These were stirring times, and the corps young Andre joined was ordered to the front, and the lad went away to the frontier after bidding an affectionate adieu to his father.

THE LOVER'S FAREWELL.

Andre had a sweetheart, a beautiful young girl of 17 who lived some three miles from the house of his father, and he was allowed by special permission of his colonel to go and bid her farewell ere his regiment marched for the theatre of war. The parting between the young lovers was a most affecting one, and Andre's fiancée with her own hands placed a rose as a tribute of her love inside his kepi as he gave her a final embrace before he started off on a starry midnight to rejoin his regiment, which was under orders to march at daybreak.

It would be making the tale too long to follow the fortunes of young Andre during the war, but suffice it to say that he behaved with conspicuous bravery in several engagements. Victory, however, rested with the arms of the German troops, and young Andre was mortally wounded in a fierce engagement near Choisy while saving the life of a wounded officer of his regiment who had been attacked by half a dozen Germans. He knew that his condition was hopeless—the regimental surgeon told him so—and he determined to make his way to the house of his fiancée, and to bid her farewell before he died. The undertaking was a dangerous one, for the country was overrun with Germans, who had entered Montigny and established a camp near the residence of his sweetheart, between Saint-Genevieve and Fleury. However, young Delorme knew the country well, and by the exercise of great caution managed to elude his foes. He painfully dragged himself through the woods and by paths known only to the natives of that part of France, and thus was able to reach the home of his beloved unperceived. The young girl, Jeanne Bernier, lived in a pretty white farm house surrounded by vineyards, with a spacious yard in front.

A MELANCHOLY TRAGEDY.

On the eve of a hot autumn day the dying soldier arrived at the gate with his uniform blood-stained, torn and covered with dust and his wretched features rigid with pain. Poor Andre knew he had not many hours to live, for the blood was again beginning to flow from the wound where the foe's bullet had pierced his breast. He could not open the door, so he broke the glass in one of the windows, and raising it quietly, entered the house and made his way to the room where he knew he would find his fiancée. On opening the door, what was his horror to find Jeanne struggling terrified in the arms of a Prussian officer, whose object it was not difficult to determine. Andre, maddened with rage, braced himself up and fired his loaded revolver at the cowardly assailant of the young girl, who rolled over dead on the floor with a bullet through his heart. The young lovers had barely time to embrace each other when a body of Prussian soldiers, who had heard the report of the firearms, burst into the house and entered the room. When they saw the French uniform and their dead officer lying on the floor, they with brutal violence

DROGGED THE DYING SOLDIER

from the arms of the almost fainting girl, and taking him outside, placed him roughly against the wall for instant execution. It was in vain that Jeanne pleaded with Andre's captors to let him die in peace; the soldiers pushed her aside and a file of riflemen were drawn up, who leveled their guns at the figure of the dying soldier, whose life blood was welling forth over his travestied uniform and dripping on the ground. With a supreme effort the youth straightened his back against the wall and, defiantly facing his foes, exclaimed, "I die for my country and my fiancée." While the men were making ready to fire Jeanne crept closer and closer, and when she saw the lips of the man in charge of the firing party about to give the fatal order she rushed in with outstretched arms as if to shield her lover, and when the smoke cleared away there were two corpses on the ground, each pierced with several bullets.

The lovers were buried side by side in two graves in the little cemetery of Saint Genevieve des Bois with a tombstone at the head of each. The young girl's grave bore a sentence in French intimating that she had been "killed by the enemy," and on the anniversary of the death of herself and her lover the youths and maidens of the adjacent villages cover their graves with flowers.

A 24 Story Building.

At Chicago capital has been subscribed, the ground purchased and plans drawn for the construction of the tallest office building in the world. The site of the structure is 110 feet of frontage on Dearborn street. The building will be 24 storeys high, surpassing the tower of the Auditorium by six storeys and the Masonic Temple by five. Steel will be the chief material.

A Strange Reminder.

Early in January Germany was curiously reminded of the fact that just twenty years had elapsed since the great war with France by the number of young men eligible for military service in the coming spring being exceedingly small, owing to the great diminution in the number of births in 1871. It is now learned that most of the mountain districts of Franconia will not contribute a single recruit in April.

THE RETURN OF THE BIRDS.

The Robin the First to Bring Us Spring Cheers.

The Order in Which the Feathered Singers Come Back to Us.

The season has returned when the migratory birds will soon be with us again.

Who can tell the first bird that revisits Ontario after the stomy winter is fairly broken?

The first bird to return is the robin. The robin is known as wanderer on the face of the earth. He usually makes his appearance early in February, when the ground is still mantled in snow and ice, and when, it would seem, he could find nothing to eat. The robin visits every part of the Dominion. He makes his mud-splattered nest on an apple bough in the orchard. The eggs are usually of a blue-green color, and from four to six in number.

The second bird to return is the bluebird. Familiar to all must be this cheery bird, one of spring's earliest visitors, and one of the most welcome ones withal. All of us who have ever been in the country can recall finding the bluebird's nest, usually in some hollow stump or other artificial retreat. A dainty nest it is, too, lined with horsehair and the depositor, perhaps, half a dozen pale blue eggs.

Then comes back again, next in order, the meadow lark. This bird is clumsy in form, though of rich yet subdued plumage. Its general aspect is brown, with streaks of ash over its crown. The meadow lark flies low over the fields, its wings rustling much of the startled fashion of the quail started from cover. Its nest is a rude affair, loosely constructed of small twigs, dead wood, etc.

The song sparrow follows the meadow lark. This cheery songster is with us the year around. It comes first in the early springtime. Who does not know the song sparrow? A modest bird, of simple, unadorned plumage, this bird is the life of our hedges and groves, whistling a soft, subdued note, sweet and tender in its melody.

The blackbirds next return to their old haunts. There are many species of this family of birds, such as the crow black bird, the red-winged blackbird, etc. The blackbird is much in demand at the hands of the amateur hunter or sportsman, who finds this bird easy game.

Then back again, whistling plaintively and shrilly in its haunts in some thick bramble or copse, is the catbird. This songster is indeed a familiar one of our bird life. The catbird is of a somber, slate gray in color, clear-limbed, spry, graceful, and of aristocratic bearing. There is much dignity in the carriage of this bird, although it must be confessed that its walk is not the poetry of motion. But for this shortcoming its song more than counterbalances. Ringing forth sharp and clear, a peculiar quality of defiance is heard in its quivering note. The catbird remains with us nearly the entire year.

The tohee bunting is one of spring's earliest visitors. This bird is glossy black in color, with a dash of rich chestnut at its sides.

One day the swallows return again, and soon after the warblers. The first of the wood warblers is the San Domingo yellow-throat, of which there are no less than twenty varieties. The Maryland yellow-throat is next in line. This bird takes its name from the color of its breast and from the fact that over its head it wears a black hood or mask. These birds are among our most sprightly singers.

By the middle of May the woods are alive with returned wanderers in bird land. The Baltimore oriole returns to nip the opening cherries. This bird is the prince of migratory songsters. In plumage it is of dazzling beauty, its breast glowing like a flame, with back and wings of glossy black or olive color.

City people can know nothing of the delight of watching the birds come back in the springtime. That pleasure is reserved for those who, simple in heart like nature, are content to pass their days near her deep green woods and her wild haunts, beyond the habitations of men.

Points for Girls.

Your mother is your best friend, Have nothing to do with girls who snub their parents.

Tell the pleasantest things you know when at meals.

Do not expect your brother to be as dainty as a girl.

Exercise, and never try to look as if you were in delicate health.

Introduce every new acquaintance to your mother as soon as possible.

Don't think it necessary to get married. There is plenty of room for old maids, and they are often happier than wives.

Enjoy the pleasures provided for you by your parents to the fullest extent. They will like that as a reward better than any other.

Take care of your teeth at any cost of time or trouble, and do without new dresses rather than neglect a needed visit to the dentist.

Most fathers are inclined to over-indulge their daughters. Make it impossible for your father to spoil you, by fairly returning his devotion and affection.

Never think you can afford to be dowdy at home. Cleanliness, hair well-dressed and a smile will make a calico look like silks and satins to a father or brother.

Do not quarrel with your brother; do not preach at him, and do not coddle him. Make him your friend, and do not expect him to be your servant, nor let him expect you to be his.

At a meeting of the Aberdeen Steam Navigation Company, an application for interdict was lodged at the instance of several of the shareholders against the directors of the Company, to find and declare that the balance-sheet and profit and loss accounts were incorrect, and to interdict the chairman of the meeting attesting it as a correct balance-sheet. The interdict has arisen in connection with a pleasure trip which the directors and their friends took to Norway in one of the Company's steamers last summer and the expense of which the shareholders protest against being paid out of the company's funds. The meeting was adjourned for a few hours, and on assembling, the objectors consented to withdraw the interdict on the understanding that any money expended in connection with the trip was made good by the directors.