

A DEAD RECKONING.

CHAPTER XIII.

Cummershays, in one of the most northerly of the northern counties of England, although it considers itself to be a piece of no small importance, has not the good fortune to be situated on any of the great main lines of railway; consequently, to most people it has the air of being somewhat out of the world. Of late years, however, a branch line has found it out, and has thereby enabled it to emerge from the state of semi-torpor in which it seemed destined to languish for ever. The branch line in question, of which Cummershays is the terminus, is about twenty miles in length, and leaves the main line at Greenholm Station. About half way between the two places, but about a couple of miles distant from the line itself, are certain important collieries, to meet the requirements of which a secondary branch has been constructed, which turns abruptly from the main branch at a point dignified with the euphonious title of Cinder Pit Junction. Here a signalman's box has been fixed, a wooden erection, standing about six feet above the ground, with an arrangement of levers inside it, for working the points and signals in connection with the traffic to and from the collieries. At the time of which we write two men were stationed at the box in question, who came on duty turn and turn about, in each case a week of day-duty alternating with one of night-duty. The cottage of one of the signalmen was about half a mile from the box, on the road leading to the collieries; while that of his "mate" was about a quarter of a mile down the road in an opposite direction.

Into this second cottage, which stood by itself in a lane a little removed from the high road, and having no habitation near it, we will venture, Asmodeus-like, to take a peep on a certain April evening. It was already dusk in the valleys, although a soft rosy light still made beautiful the tops of the distant fells.

In half an hour James Maynard, the signalman, would be due at his box to take his "spell" of night-duty. His thick blue overcoat was hanging behind the door, ready to put on, his wife was washing up the crockery and Maynard himself was smoking a last after-tea pipe before leaving home. He was a well-built stalwart man, with a jet-black beard and moustache, and close-cut hair of the same color, to which his dark-blue eyes offered a somewhat striking contrast. He had been about three months in his present situation, and among the drivers and guards who worked the traffic between the junction and the collieries he had come to be known by the sobriquet of "Gentleman Jim." It was not that he ever set himself up as being in anyway superior to or different from his mates; indeed, he was universally popular; but these grimy-faced men, who in their way are often keen observers of character, had an instinctive feeling, that although necessity might have made him one of them to outward seeming, he was not so in reality, and that at some anterior time his position in life must have been widely different from that which he now occupied. But genial and good-natured though "Gentleman Jim" might be, he was a man who brooked no questioning and no one thereabouts knew more about him than he chose to divulge of his own accord.

Maynard and his wife had been chatting pleasantly together. Suddenly the latter laid a hand on her husband's arm to bespeak his attention. "What is it?" he asked. "I heard nothing."

"There was a noise of wheels a moment ago, and now it has ceased. It sounded as if some vehicle had stopped suddenly at the end of the lane. Do you remain in the background, dear, while I go and ascertain whether any one is there."

She opened the door and went out quickly. There was still light in the valley to see objects a considerable distance away. One side of the lane in which the cottage was built was bounded by a high bank. Up this Mrs. Maynard now clambered, assisted by the branch of a tree; she knew that from the top of it she could see not only the lane, but a considerable stretch of high road on either hand. After gazing for a moment or two, she leaped lightly down and ran back to the cottage. "A carriage with two horses is standing at the corner of the lane," she said to her husband. "A lady has got out of it and is coming toward the cottage, and—oh, my dear—I'm nearly sure it's Lady Fanny Dwyer."

"Lady Fanny! Well, I shall be very glad to see her. No doubt she is visiting at Seaton Park; and as she knows we are living in the neighbourhood, she must have made inquiries and discovered our whereabouts."

"I hope she has not made her inquiries in such a way as to arouse any suspicion that we are at all different from what we seem to be?"

"I think you may trust Lady Fanny for that. She generally knows pretty well what she is about. But had you not better go and meet her?"

Clara hurried to the door; but as she opened it, Lady Fanny appeared on the threshold. She looked a little white and scared, adventures with a spice of risk or romance in them, not being in her usual line. Making a step forward and grasping Clara's hand, she said in a whisper: "Is it safe to speak aloud? Is there any one but yourselves to hear us?"

Reassured on this point Lady Fanny threw herself into her friends' arms and burst into tears, holding out a hand to Gerald, as

she did so. "I can't talk to either of you till I have had my cry," she said between her sobs. "What a wicked, wicked world this is!"

Here it may be remarked that it was through the influence of Lady Fanny's husband that Gerald Brooke had obtained his present situation as signalman at Cinder Pit Junction. The mode of life was of his own choosing. He wanted something to do that would take him out of himself as much as possible, and while not entirely isolating him from his fellow-men, would not bring him into contact with too great a number of them. In this out-of-the-way valley among the fells and moors, if anywhere, shelter and safety might surely be found.

"O, my dear, my dear," cried Lady Fanny, as she dried her eyes and looked round her, "and has it really come to this, that this dreadful poky little hole of a place is your home—the only home that you have!"

"It is not a dreadful little hole by any means, dear Lady Fanny," answered Gerald with a smile. "It is a substantial well-built cottage of four rooms—quite large enough for a family without encumbrances. You don't know how snug and comfortable we are in it. Economy of space is not half enough considered in a small world like ours."

"I am glad you keep up your spirits," retorted her ladyship; "though how you contrive to do so under such circumstances is a mystery to me."

"We have really and truly been very comfortable since we came here," answered Clara. "I have conceived quite an affection for our little house, and somehow, I hardly know why, I feel as if we were safer here than elsewhere. Probably it is the loneliness of the place that gives one this feeling of security; and then the air that blows down from the moors is so pure and invigorating that both Gerald and I feel as if we were growing young again."

"Oh, of course you try to make the best of everything—it's just your aggravating way," returned Lady Fanny. "But if I were in your place, I should fret and fume and worry, and make myself and everybody about me as miserable as possible. That would be my way."

"I don't believe it," answered Gerald with a laugh. "You don't know how many unsuspected qualities you possess that go towards making a capital poor man's wife."

Lady Fanny shrugged her shoulders. "And so you, Gerald Brooke, the owner of Beechly Towers, are living here as a common railway signalman," she said; "finding your companions among a lot of engine-drivers and—shunters, don't they call them?—and grimy people of that kind. What is the world coming to!"

"My companions may be grimy, as you say; but I can assure your ladyship that they are a very hard-working, good-hearted, decently behaved set of fellows, and that among them is more than one of whose friendship any man might be proud. And I can further assure you, Lady Fanny, that I am quite satisfied with my mode of life—for the present, and until brighter days return, if they ever will return. And that reminds me that I have had no opportunity of thanking Dwyer, for the trouble he must have been put to in procuring me my present situation. Is he here with you?"

"Oh, dear no. His last letter was dated from Cairo; where his next will be dated from, goodness only knows."

"Well, I hope you won't forget to thank him for me when next you write."

"By the way, how did you succeed in finding us out?" asked Clara.

"To tell you the truth, my dear, one of my chief objects in accepting an invitation to Seaton Park was the hope of seeing you and your good-for-nothing signalman. I knew you were living close by, but not exactly where. I also knew that you were passing under the name of Maynard. Accordingly, I set my maid to work to make certain inquiries, telling her a white fib in order to stifle any curiosity she might feel in the matter; in fact, my dear Clara, I gave her to understand that before your marriage you had been in my service, and that I was desirous of ascertaining how you were getting on in life. It was the most likely tale I could think of, and I've no doubt it answered its purpose; anyhow, this morning Simpkins brought me your address, and here I am."

"How it brings back the memory of old times to see you and hear your voice!" said Clara. "It seems years since I left the Towers, although it is only a few short months ago. I am often back there in my dreams."

Lady Fanny squeezed her friend's hand in silent sympathy. Then she said: "By-the-by, what has become of darling, quaint Miss Primby? I hope she is quite well?"

"She has gone to stay for a time with some friends in Devon. This place was too bleak for her during the winter months; but now the spring is here, she will be back with us again, before long."

"You talk as if you were likely to remain here for ever and a day," answered Lady Fanny. "And that reminds me that I have done to-day as our sex are said to do habitually with their postscripts—that is, I have left mentioning till the last the most important of the reasons which brought me here. Algy, in the last letter I had from him, charged me to either see or communicate with you as early as possible, and tell you from him that his banker is at your service for any amount you choose to draw upon him. He has a lot of money lying idle, and would only be too glad if you would favour him by making use of it."

"Dwyer is a noble-hearted fellow, I know, but—"

"But me no buts," broke in her impetuous ladyship. "There is no reason why you should not end this mean and sordid way of life at once. There are plenty of charming nooks on the Continent where you and Clara might live with everything nice about you while waiting for better days; and really you would be doing Algy a great kindness at the same time."

But this was a point on which Gerald was not to be moved. He combated Lady Fanny in about the same terms that he had combated Karovsky when the Russian had made him an almost identical offer. He would never leave England, he said—on that he was determined—till the mystery that en-

shrouded Von Rosenberg's death should be cleared up and his own fair fame vindicated before the world. (There was within him a hidden faith that, like an altar flame, sometimes burnt high and anon died down to a mere spark, but was never altogether extinguished, that one day his long waiting would be rewarded.)

Lady Fanny fumed and lost her temper, and then recovered it again with equal facility, but in no wise shook Gerald from his purpose. The striking of the hour startled them both.

Eight o'clock and Sir Williams' horses waiting for me all this time!" exclaimed Lady Fanny. "And I'm a quarter of an hour late," said Gerald to his wife. "Lucas will begin to think something has happened to me."

Lady Fanny's last words to her friend were: "To-day is Tuesday. I'll come again on Thursday, when we will have a good long talk together, by which time I hope that obstinate and wrong-headed husband of yours will have come to his senses."

Gerald Brooke had kissed his wife and had gone off to his duty at the signal-box, leaving her alone in the cottage. But not long would she be left in solitude. Margery, who had gone to Overbarrow, a village about two miles away, to purchase some groceries would be back in a little while.

But half an hour passed after her husband's departure without bringing Margery, and Clara began to grow seriously uneasy. Never had she been so late before. When the clock struck nine and still the girl had not come, Clara could contain herself no longer. Putting on her bonnet and shawl and locking the door, she hurried down the lane, and turning into the high-road in a direction opposite that which led to the railway, she went quickly forward along the way by which she knew Margery must come. The night was dark and moonless, but the stars shone clearly, and by their faint light Clara could just discern the black outlines of the hedge which bounded the road, and thereby keep herself to the line of narrow turf-bordered footway which ran by its side. She had not gone more than a quarter of a mile when her heart gave a throb of relief. She heard foot-steps advancing towards her, and her fine ear recognized them as those of Margery, even while the latter was some distance away. "Is that you, Margery?" she called, so that the girl might not be startled by coming suddenly upon her in the dark. A moment later they had met. Margery had been hurrying home at such a rate as to be nearly breathless.

"O, mum, he's here! I've seen him, and heard him speak," were the girl's first incoherent words.

"Who is it that you have seen and heard?"

"Muster Crofton, mum—Master Geril's cousin, him as the Frenchy tied up in his chair."

"George Crofton here!" murmured Clara, her heart seeming to turn to ice as she spoke. "Surely, surely, Margery, you must be mistaken."

"I only wish I was, mistress," responded the girl, fervently; "but he only need speak for me to pick him out of a thousand men in the dark. Besides, I saw his face with the cut in his lip and his teeth showing through."

For a little while Clara was so dazed and overcome that she could neither speak nor act. In that first shock her mind had room for one thought and one only: George Crofton was on the track of her husband! No other purpose could have brought him to this out-of-the-world place. Gerald must be warned and at once; but first she must hear all that the girl had to tell. She had turned mechanically, and was now retracing her way to the cottage.

"I suppose, Mr. Crofton, saw you at the same moment you saw him?" she said anxiously.

"I saw him, but he never set eyes on me."

"How could that happen?"

"I'll tell you all about it, mum, I had got my groceries and had left the village, and was coming along pretty fast, 'cos I was a bit late, when just as I was getting near the end of a lane I hears two men coming along it talking to one another. I was not a bit afraid; but still I thought I might as well keep out of their sight; so just before they turned out of the lane, I slipped into the dry ditch that runs along the ledge-bottom and crouched down. They passed me without seeing me, still talking, and then I knoed at once that one of 'em was Muster Crofton. 'We are before our time,' says he to the other one; 'we shall have nearly an hour to wait.' Then says the other: 'Better be afore our time than after it.' After going a bit up the road, they crossed it, and passing through a stile, got into the fields. I making bold to skulk after 'em, first taking off my shoes so as they wouldn't hear me. On they went, following, till they came to a hollow where there's a lot of trees, and in the middle of the trees a small house that seems, as well as I could make out, as if somebody had pulled it half to bits and then left off. When they were well inside, I followed on tiptoe; and then I heard one of 'em strike a match, and then I saw a light through the broken shutter of a little window. Going up to the window, I peeped in. Two lanterns had been lighted, and by the light of one of 'em I could see Muster Crofton's face quite plain. I couldn't make out much of what they talked about, only that they were waiting for somebody, and once the other man said: 'We shall be quite time enough if we leave here by half-past ten.' Then Muster Crofton, he swore, and said that he never could a-beat waiting."

"Did you hear them mention your master's name?" asked Clara anxiously.

"No, mum, not once."

Clara was puzzled. To her wifely fears it seemed impossible that Crofton's presence should not bode danger to her husband. It was almost incredible that he should be there unless he were on the track of Gerald. Yet, on the other hand, what could be the nature of the business which took him at that late hour to a ruined cottage buried among trees? It almost looked as if he were concerned in some dark and nefarious scheme of his own. Suddenly a fresh thought struck her, and as it did, so she came to an abrupt halt.

"Margery," she said, "you shall show me the way back to the cottage among the trees. I will go and endeavour to find out for myself what it is that has brought Mr. Crofton so far away from home. Come."

"O mistress!" said Margery with a gasp. It was her only protest; with her to hear was to obey.

To be Continued.

A Princess in Disguise.

"Hello! there's Mag Ryan. She's lots of fun. You c'n tease her about her red hair, 'n she gets fightin' mad, 'n throws bricks. Hey, Redtop!" and Rowdy Jack dropped the howling dog he had been tormenting.

But the girl suddenly disappeared in the doorway of a miserable tenement, leaving disappointed Jack toshy stones after the dog, which had taken the opportunity to escape.

Reaching the wretched garret she called home, she pushed the door back on its creaking hinges and entered.

A rough wooden bench, which served as table, near it a little cracked, rusty stove; a box covered with a dirty mattress and a ragged quilt; a set of dusty shelves, on which stood a water-pail, a candle-stick, and a few greasy tin plates and spoons—these, with two rickety chairs, made up the entire furniture. And the girl, in her untidy dress, her tangled hair falling over her face, was what might have been expected from such surroundings.

She did not seat herself in either of the broken-bottomed chairs—they were the property of Dad and Granny, and she was not allowed to use them. The edge of the mattress was good enough for her.

"She said they're 'King's Daughters.' That means they do things to help other people and don't look for pay—I know, 'cause she told me. And she said I can be one, 'r the King himself was so poor he didn't have a place to lay his head, and he wasn't afraid to keep company with low-down folks. I don't care 'f the boys do call me Mag Spitfire, I'm goin' to be a King's Daughter, I am."

She took out from the bosom of her dress something that gleamed like silver, and fondled it with reverent fingers.

"A king's daughter," she mused, "that 'ud be a princess—Mike O'Finnegan said it was. That's what I'll be, then. Now, remember, and don't go to disgracin' the King with doin' anything mean and dirty." She kissed the silver cross with its tiny purple bow, and then fastened it back in its safe hiding place.

"Tain't a very likely room for a princess, now, is it? Well, 'twould be fitter if 'twas clean. I can see to that right away, if Granny got good luck, and stays out all mornin'."

The result of her labor in this direction was quite satisfactory to Maggie, although you would still have thought the place a dingy, gloomy hole. But, at least, the floor was free of dust, and the shelves and table showed the effects of vigorous scouring. The only ornament of the room was a highly colored representation of a group of horses, taken from a circus bill posted on some old fence—for Maggie thought there ought to be something in the way of pictures.

But as she gazed admiringly, she remembered that it was about time for Granny to be home. If the old woman had met with poor success, among the ash-barrels and rag-piles, the changes in the appearance of the room would only serve to increase her ill-humor.

Bad, indeed, Granny's mood proved to be. She scolded because she couldn't find her pipe, and then because the tobacco was out. She abused Maggie because the butcher gave so small a piece of pork for six cents, and almost beat her when the green wood in the little cracked stove refused to burn. Finally she maliciously tore a piece out of "the picture," with which to light her pipe.

"People don't always know when you're a princess," sighed Maggie to herself, "but you've just got to go on and be one all the same."

It was queer, Granny thought; things didn't seem to have the same effect on Maggie that they used to have. She tried, sometimes, to see how provoking she could be, but Maggie was slower to "flare up" or answer saucily, as she once would have done. And sometimes she would catch the girl slyly cutting the largest piece of corn bread for her or Dad; or punching up the straw mattress to make it more comfortable for old bones; or stuffing some of her own scant clothing into a crack, to ward off a draft. Granny didn't really object to having the room cleaned up a little, either. No, on the whole she was not sorry Maggie had turned into a "good girl."

One day Maggie, coming suddenly into the room, had a surprise. There, hanging on the wall in place of the unlucky circus poster, smiled a radiant child's face. It was only an advertising card, stating that "My papa uses Khron's cigars," but Maggie couldn't read that, and if she could, I doubt if it would have disturbed her. Where had it come from? A glance at Granny, apparently very much occupied, but unconscious of the lurking smile about the corners of her mouth that betrayed her, told the story. And although Maggie was rather roughly bidden to "go along and get the plates washed," I think it was not long afterwards that grandmotherly love prompted an order to "stop perchin' on that mattress, 'n take Dad's cheer! what's cheers fur, 'n not to set in!"

"If you just keep on trying, somebody's sure to find out after a while," confided Maggie joyfully to the Khron's cigar girl, after Granny had gone out.

Since then a great many people have been "finding out," for grown up Maggie is now a mission worker among the very tenements where she and Dad and Granny once lived. And wherever she goes, she wears pinned to the front of her dress the tiny silver cross and bit of purple ribbon that sealed her first resolution to be a princess.

DISINFECTING TELEPHONES.

A newly designed mouthpiece for telephones has a shell with an absorbent lining, which lining is saturated with antiseptic liquids, whose evaporation is to prevent the accumulation of disease germs in the mouthpiece.

FOR UNITY OF SEA TIME.

Canadian Scientists and Many Shipmasters Would Like to See a Change.

A scheme for what is called "the unification of time at sea" emanates from the Royal Society of Canada, the Astronomical and Physical Society of Toronto and the Canadian Institute, which for the good of navigation and commerce generally, have invited chambers of commerce and scientific societies to co-operate with them in bringing about a change for which there is much to be said.

The council of the Royal Colonial Institute has taken the matter up and has sent a memorial to Lord Salisbury urging the government to take the necessary measures, and Mr. Sandford Fleming, an ex-president of the Canadian Royal Society, has written a letter to the Times, in which he states the case as follows:—

"At present there are, nominally, three different reckonings of time at sea—civil, nautical and astronomical. The civil day is measured from midnight to midnight, the nautical day and the astronomical day from noon to noon, but the latter is twenty-four hours behind the former. For instance, to-day is January 14 by civil reckoning, and noon is midday, but by nautical reckoning, January 14 began at noon yesterday and ends at noon to-day, while by astronomical reckoning January 14 does not begin until noon to-day and ends at noon to-morrow, speaking in terms of civil time. Practically, however, nautical time reckoning has fallen into disuse, and it only remains to reconcile civil and astronomical time by putting on the astronomer's clock (assuming it to have a twenty-four hours' dial) twelve hours. The two interests chiefly involved, are, of course, the nautical and astronomical. The Canadian reformers say that out of 500 representative masters of British and foreign steamers and sailing ships canvassed ninety-seven per cent have declared themselves in favor of the change.

"A large majority of the astronomers, so far as it has been possible to obtain an expression of their views, are willing that the change should be made, 'provided it go into force at a time epoch which would easily fix itself on the memory.' Otherwise, they fear errors might arise in future astronomical calculations. Such a time epoch would present itself at Midnight on December 31, 1900, when the nineteenth century passes into the twentieth, and the present urgency of the matter lies in the fact that the Nautical Almanac, which would have to be corrected in accordance with the new reckoning, is usually prepared nearly four years in advance. The opportunity which now presents itself will, therefore, not occur until another century has elapsed."

ENGLISH DEATH RATE LOWERED.

Remarkable Preservation of Life During Victoria's Reign.

The Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London held a meeting in the Guild hall the other day to prepare an address to the Queen on the subject of the improvement in the state of public health which has been brought about during her reign. The facts and figures brought forward were interesting, and almost startling. In 1864, when Macaulay investigated the mortality of London, the death rate was 25 per 1000. In 1865, not a sickly year, 1 in every 23 in London died, a death rate of between 43 and 44 per 1000. At the present moment the London death rate is 14.9 per 1000. So that in spite of the enormous increase of the population and the difficulties which such an increase always places in the way of sanitary administration, the mortality of London is less than one-third what it was a third of a century ago.

Equally striking are the facts with regard to the mortality of the whole of England and Wales during the last sixty years. During the ten years from 1838 to 1847 the mean annual death rate for England and Wales was 22.16 per 1000, while for the ten years from 1881 to 1890 it was 19.1 per 1000. This implies, on an estimated population of 29,000,000, that 7,000,000 persons were kept alive in each year of the latter period who would have died in each year of the former.

Dr. Thorne, in order to guard against the liability of a people to overestimate its own achievements, appealed to the testimony of Henri Monod, an official of the Ministry of the Interior for France. Monod was dissatisfied with the waste of life in France, and came to England to investigate the results of English sanitary administration. He found that if the English death rate prior to 1881 had been maintained during the ten years from 1881 to 1890 no fewer than 800,000 persons would have been lost who were preserved alive. Following this calculation upon the same lines, it appears that in the fifteen years between 1880 and 1895 the saving amounted to nearly a million and a half—1,424,712.

Special reference was made to two diseases, typhus and tubercular phthisis. Typhus, once one of the scourges of the country, is now practically banished. Comparatively few of the present generation of doctors have seen an example of it, while as to phthisis, within a comparatively short period its prevalence has been diminished by one-half. Reference was, of course, made to smallpox, and the wonderful result of Jenner's discovery. Nowadays a pock-marked face is a rarity. Less than sixty years ago "He died of England's scourge," carved on a tombstone in Lancashire, was sufficient to tell every passer-by that he was at the grave of a victim of smallpox.

CAIRO'S MUSEUM.

Cairo's new Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, which will cover 13,000 square meters and cost \$550,000 has been begun, the young Khedive laying the corner stone.