

A DEAD RECKONING

CHAPTER XIV.

Varley's Cottage, which place George Crofton and his confederates had fixed upon as their rendezvous, was a spot of ill repute for miles around, and one which no inhabitant of the district would willingly go near by day, much less after dark. A grim tragedy centred round the spot. Some quarter of a century previously the cottage had been the home of a certain game-keeper, Varley by name, who had made himself specially obnoxious to the poachers of the district. One night he was shot dead on his own threshold and his cottage fired in two places. The crime was never brought home to any one, neither was the cottage ever rebuilt. But of all this neither Clara Brooke nor Margery, being newcomers in the neighborhood, knew anything.

The elder woman hurried feverishly onward, the younger leading the way. Scarcely a word passed between them. Presently they reached the stile through which Margery had followed the two men, and crossing it, took a winding footway through the fields. They went swiftly and silently, walking hot on the path itself, but on the soft grass which bordered it. Not a creature did they see or hear, and before long the path began to dip to a hollow, then came some straggling patches of brushwood, and presently they were in the spinney itself, with trees and a thick undergrowth on both sides of them. Margery led the way as by a sort of instinct, only pausing for a second now and again to listen. To Clara, the adventure, with its darkness, its silence, and its mystery, had all the complexion of a nightmare. Again and again she had to ask herself whether it were indeed a reality.

"We are nearly there now, mum," said Margery presently in a whisper. "Do you wait here among the trees, while I creep forward and try and find out what they are about." So saying the girl stole forward, and was at once lost to view.

The young wife waited with a heart that beat high and anxiously. The moments seemed terribly long till Margery returned, although in reality she was not more than three or four minutes. Clara trembled so much that she could not speak.

"There's four of 'em now, mum," said the girl, "I could see them quite plain through the crack in the shutter, and from what I could make out, there's more to come. O mistress, I wouldn't go near 'em if I was you; they're a desperate bad lot, and if they found you there, nobody can tell what might happen."

Of a truth Clara might well hesitate and it was only the thought that some new and unforeseen danger might possibly at that very moment be closing like a net round the husband she loved so devotedly that nerved her to the task she had set herself to do.

"Margery," she said after a brief silence, "where you can go with safety I can surely go. I must see and listen to these men for myself—Now, attend to this. Should I be discovered by them, or should anything happen to me, you will fly as for your life and warn your master."

"I understands, mum, never fear," was the girl's earnest response.

Then the two crept together through the trees, almost as silent as the shadows of which they seemed to form a part, and presently Clara found herself under the walls of the ruined cottage. Margery guided her to where a rickety shutter still guarded a small square window, from which, however, the glass had long since disappeared. Through a chink in this, the interior of the room, such as it was, was plainly discernible. Two old-fashioned lanterns threw a dim weird light over the scene. Clara's eyes sought instinctively for the face of Crofton before taking any note of the others; it may be that some faint hope had all along lingered in her breast that Margery had been mistaken. But if that were so, the hope at once died out. George Crofton himself was before her. He was the only one of the party that was seated, and his seat consisted of nothing more than a pile of loose bricks, with part of the stone shelf of the mantel-piece laid across them. He was smoking, as were also two of the others and seemed deep in thought. The rest of the party were utter strangers to Clara; they talked in low tones among themselves, and, much to her surprise, she saw that one of them was in the garb of a clergyman.

Scarcely had Mrs. Brooke noted these things, when a low whistle sounded from somewhere outside. Crofton sprang to his feet, and all were instantly on the alert. The whistle was answered by another from within and then one of the men left the cottage carrying a lantern. Clara and Margery sank noiselessly back into the undergrowth of bush and bramble by which the cottage on three sides was surrounded.

When two or three minutes later, Clara ventured to resume her post of observation at the window, she found that the party inside had been augmented by two fresh arrivals. The men had now grouped themselves round Crofton in various attitudes of attention, listening to the instructions he was evidently impressing upon them. Whatever the objects of this strange company might be, there could be little doubt that George Crofton was the leader of it. One man, who bent forward a little, had made an ear-trumpet of his hand, and a night by for his

benefit that Crofton now pitched his voice in a higher key than he had previously done. Clara hardly breathed as she strained her senses to catch the words that fell from his lips.

What she heard gradually piecing the plot together in her own mind as Crofton issued his final orders to the men, was enough to blanch the heart of any woman with terror and dismay. The train to Cumberhays was to be attacked and robbed; some great treasure—Clara could not make out of what nature—was to travel by it to-night, which these desperadoes had determined on making their own. As a preliminary step, the signalman at Cinder Pit Junction was to be seized, bound, and gagged, his box taken possession of, and the telegraph wires cut. A member of the gang who answered to the name of Slinkey, and who understood the manipulation of points and signals, would install himself in the box. Then, when the train came up on its way to Cumberhays, passing the box at a speed of about twenty miles an hour, by a reversal of the points it was to be turned by Slinkey on to the branch leading to the collieries. As a matter of course, the driver would bring his train to a stand as speedily as possible, and then would come the opportunity of the gang. It was well known that, except at holiday times, passengers and officials together by this train rarely numbered half a score people. It would be strange if half-a-dozen desperate men, armed with revolvers could not so far intimidate the driver, the guard, and a few sleepy passengers as to have the whole train at their mercy. Five minutes would suffice to successfully achieve the object they had in view, after which the train might go on its way again as if nothing had happened.

Such were the chief features of this audacious scheme, as gathered by Clara from Crofton's instructions to the others. Of course, each man had known beforehand what he was expected to do, and what passed at the cottage was merely a sort of final rehearsal of the scene that was to follow.

Crofton now looked at his watch and announced that it was time to start. The lanterns were extinguished, and the men filed silently out of the cottage, half of them taking one road and half another. Clara and Margery had but just time to draw their shawls over their heads and crouch on their knees amid the brushwood, when three of the men passed within a few yards of them. When all was silent again, they stood up. Never on any previous occasion when danger threatened her husband had Clara felt so helpless as she did now. What could she, one weak woman, do to confound the machinations of six armed and desperate men? "O Margery," she cried, seizing both the girl's hands in the extremity of her distress, "there seems no help either in heaven or on earth. We are lost!"

The faithful girl could only kiss with a sob the hands that held her own. "What be they going to do, mistress?" she asked a moment or two later. She had not been able to see and hear what had passed in the cottage, as Clara had done.

"They are going to seize and bind your master, and then they are going to stop and rob the train. O Margery, if there was but some way by which the train could be warned in time! Think, think: is there nothing we can do?"

"Why, o' course there is, mum," answered the girl with one of her uncanonically chuckles. "You just let me run home as fast as my legs'll carry me and get three or four singles—them things, you know, that Muster Geril used to fasten on the rails when the fog was bad in winter. I know how to fasten them, 'cos I watched Muster Geril do it one day when I took him some to the box. Then I'll take the short cut across the fields to where the line turns sharp round more'n half a mile away from the box, and I'll fix the singles there.—But what am I to tell the driver, mum, when he stops the train?"

"Tell him there are half-a-dozen men with revolvers who are going to stop and rob the train, just beyond your master's box. After that, he will know what it will be best to do." She could have flung her arms around Margery's neck and kissed her, such a weight had the girl's words lifted off her heart.

"But what about poor Muster Geril, mum?" urged Margery.

"Ah, what indeed! Clara shivered as though an icy wind had struck her. She had not failed to notice that her husband had never been mentioned by name by Crofton, who had spoken of him to the others as though he were an utter stranger. Could it be possible he was unaware that Gerald filled the position of signalman at Cinder Pit Junction? It was possible, but by no means probable; but in that faint chance lay her only hope of her husband's safety. In that case, should he and Crofton not encounter each other the rest of the gang would merely regard Gerald in the light of an ordinary railway servant; and although he might chance to be assailed and maltreated by them, that would be but a minor evil in comparison with the other, and one which an hour or two at the most would set right. These thoughts passed through her mind far more rapidly than she could have given them utterance in words. The only question now was, had she time to warn her husband before the attack took place? The gang were on their way after this; could she overtake them, pass them unseen, and reach the signal-box before they did? The chance was a desperate one, but she must attempt it—no other course was open to her.

"Come!" she said, grasping Margery by the hand. "Let us hurry—let us hasten! While you go and fix the signals I will go and warn your master, only pray heaven I may not be too late!"

With scarcely a word more they sped swiftly back along the starlit fields; but when they reached the stile, Clara said: "Is there no nearer way to the signal-box than going round to it by the high-road?"

"There's a way through the fields, that cuts off a big corner. I've walked it once; but I dunno, mum, as you could find it in the dark."

"I must try," answered Clara, desperately. Every second was precious.

The near cut in question was through a second stile somewhat farther on. At this point, after a few last words, the two parted, each going a separate way.

Clara's way led through more fields; but the track was so faint that she was utterly unable to distinguish it, and had to trust to her vague local knowledge that she was going in the right direction. In a little while she surmounted a rising ground, and then to her utter dismay, she saw, from the position of the signal lamps in the valley below, that she had wandered a full quarter of a mile too far to the right of them. It was a thousand chances to one now that Crofton and his crew would be there before her.

Anguish lent wings to her feet, and she flew down the slope like a creature pursued by the Furies. She could see the lighted window of the signal-box shining in the distance, a faint yellow disc. The next thing she knew was that she had reached the boundary of the line, but at a point still some distance from the box. It now became needful to exercise more caution that she had hitherto done, lest she should be seen by any of the gang, who were doubtless somewhere near at hand. The line at this point was bounded by a wooden fencing put up to prevent the straying of cattle, close to which, on the field-side, grew a thin straggling hedge. Under the shelter of this hedge Clara now stole softly and cautiously forward, with eyes and ears preternaturally on the alert. Step by step she drew nearer without being disturbed by a sight or a sound, till at length she faced the box with its lighted window where it stood on the opposite side of the line. Then with a heart, the pulsing of which sounded like a low drumming in her ears, she parted the bushes and peered through.

For a moment or two a mist dimmed her eyes and all she could discern was that there was some one inside the box. Then the mist cleared away, and she saw that the man standing there with one hand resting on a lever was not her husband, but the man Slinkey, whose sinister face she had seen through the broken shutter. Gerald was nowhere to be seen. She had come too late!

To Be Continued.

ELECTRICAL INFLUENCE.

A New Machine That May Revolutionize the Power to Project Light.

A machine has just been made that has exactly what people are very fond of securing—influence. It is the science of mind reduced to practical mechanics. So great is the influence of this machine that it can throw an electric spark a distance of thirty-four inches—that is, the spark starts at one terminal and lengthens out until it reaches the other terminal, a distance of thirty-four inches.

This strange machine—for nothing like it has ever been invented—is one of the principal objects of interest at the Victoria Era Exposition, at Earle's Court, London. Oddly enough, it does not seem to have attracted the attention which it really merits, for in its way it indicates as great a stride in electrical progress as the Roentgen ray. At first sight it seems rather complicated, but really it is nothing of the sort, as machinery goes.

The machine contains twenty-four discs, each three feet in diameter, and of course it has the usual paraphernalia, consisting of what are technically known as sectors, collecting combs, brushes, etc. To the non-mechanical mind this is all Greek, but it is simple enough in reality when one considers that all these things means simply the apparatus for guiding the force of the electrical fluid.

The influence of this machine is, therefore, confined to electricity and its effect upon men and matter. It is designed so that it gives two separate streams of electricity. There are not two streams at the same time, but electricity may be drawn from either terminal at the will of the person who is operating the machine and directing its influence. The tremendous improvement this machine is in the matter of procuring an electric current can best be understood by contrasting conditions. In the earlier years a dry atmosphere, much warming and heavy labor were required to show only small changes, while now, with three marvellous machines, no warming is needed, even when the atmosphere is bad, and with only little labor torrents of electricity may be obtained.

It is with the old and new in electricity just as it is with photography. Years ago it was considered impossible to photograph anything unless the sky was unobscured. Nowadays pictures can be taken if it is raining ever so hard. So it is with electricity. The atmosphere had to be brought up to just such a temperature before it was possible to bring about the generation of a current. Now the same sort of atmosphere is useful, but nothing has to be done to it to change its temperature.

The present machine is the most powerful ever invented, when its size is taken into consideration. Think of what it means when a machine throws a spark thirty-four inches—almost three feet.

INNOCENT.

My husband, said Mrs. Innocent to her neighbor, is going to shave himself after this.

Is that so? said the neighbor.

Yes; he hasn't told me so, yet, but I found a shaving mug in his coat pocket this morning. He brought it home last night, and his friends Tom and Jerry gave it to him, for their names are on it in gold letters.

HER POISE.

Mr. Richman—Here comes Miss Stately. I so admire her poise.

Rival Belle, very slender—How cruel you are. You shouldn't poke fun at the poor girl's poise—you mean, of course, avoirdupois.

THE CAUSE.

My brother died last week; he was blown up.

Ah! Wife to boiler!

THE AGE OF THE EARTH.

OPINION OF LORD KELVIN, THE EMINENT SAVANT.

The Earth Has Only Been Habitable for Thirty Million Years—Absolute Events Which Are Susceptible to Proof.

At last we know exactly how old the earth is, for Lord Kelvin, the eminent British savant, has, after the calculation of years, reached the definite conclusion that this terrestrial sphere has been such for 30,000,000 years. This is not the chimerical assertion of theorist, but the result of long and laborious study by perhaps the man best qualified of all to make an authoritative statement to humanity.

It is of the utmost importance to geologists, many of whom have doubted whether there was any data on which a definite calculation could be based. This doubt Lord Kelvin has removed, and he gives absolute events of different periods of the world's history which he states are perfectly susceptible to proof sufficient to satisfy the most carping critic.

Lord Kelvin has just issued a formal statement in the matter which outlines his belief and the reasons therefor. In support of his statement that there must have been a definite beginning of the world just as surely as there will be a definite end, he referred to his refutation of the doctrine of uniformity in geology, with its accompanying proof that if heat had been uniformly conducted out of the earth at its present yearly rate the globe twenty million years ago would have been a molten, if not a gaseous mass.

RELATION OF MOTION AND AGE.

Another argument against the huge lengths of time required by the older geologists is sought from the constantly diminishing velocity of the earth's rotation, owing to the tides. It is shown that a thousand million years ago the earth was revolving faster than at present, and consequently that the centrifugal force was greater. If the globe had become consolidated when travelling at this faster rate, it would have possessed greater oblateness, and the length of its equatorial radius would have been six and a half kilometres more than at present. To judge by the properties of rocks and by underground temperatures, the date of the solidification of the earth was most probably twenty or thirty million years ago.

The origin of the atmosphere is then discussed. At the time of solidification there could have been no free oxygen, so far as can be seen, and no chemical reaction by which it could be liberated. Vegetable life and sunlight must have come into play to prepare our atmosphere in the course of a few hundred or thousand years.

DEPTHS OF THE OCEAN.

A serious geological question is the mode of production of the ocean depths and the eminences of the continents. Many phenomena are doubtless due to strain on cooling, but that does not afford a sufficient explanation in this case. Lord Kelvin thinks the cause is to be found in change of density, by crystallization. Perhaps the strongest argument against unlimited geological time is afforded by consideration of the heat of the sun, which, according to the most recent researches and corrections, may have illuminated the earth for somewhere about twenty million years.

Professor Foulton wanted time to find invertebrate ancestors for the vertebrates on the Cambrian rocks, and Professor Perry had attempted to relieve biologists of the burden put upon them by physicists, and once more provide them with an endless "bank of time" on which to draw. But the latest geological estimate of the time required for the formation of all strata since the beginning of the Cambrian rocks was seventeen million years, and he can scarcely be described as merely a malicious physicist, trying to curb the aspirations of the biologists, when he says that this earth could not have been a habitable globe for more than thirty million years.

A BIKE FOR THE WATER.

Shaped Like a Car, and Its Inventor Believes It Will Beat All Others.

Men of an inventive turn of mind have for a long time enjoyed a rare subject for experimentation in the bicycle, and many weird and wonderful have been the creations. Bicycles for the land have sprung into being, and the end of the list is not yet reached.

A water bicycle has been invented, patented and constructed by an English genius, who claims that it is superior in every respect to all water bicycles yet put forth. To look at it you would say that it would roll over at once. So it would, perhaps, if it did not have a deep keel beneath the revolving hull. The whole affair is built of aluminum. In shape it is like a cigar. It is ten feet in length, but in consequence of the material of which it is built it is very light.

Regular bicycle machinery is mounted upon the cylindrical shaped hull. A large sprocket wheel, a gear case for the chain, and a simple driving mechanism all correspond closely with the every day bicycle. The pedals turn the sprocket wheel, which is turn, so to speak, causes the aluminum hull beneath to revolve. It is pretty hard to get started, but once under way scorching is easily possible.

THEIR TRUMPS.

With the policeman, clubs are always trumps; with the lovesick youth, hearts; with the society belle, diamonds, and with the grave digger, spades.

PERSONAL POINTERS.

Notes About Some of the Great People of the World.

During Queen Victoria's reign the taxes in Great Britain have doubled, and trade has increased sevenfold.

Probably the greatest bibliophile among peers at the present time is Lord Crawford, the well-known Scottish nobleman.

The jubilee visit of the colonial Premiers has led to the discovery that the Prince of Wales pronounces Premier as in French, *Premi-ay*.

King Oscar of Sweden has had the honorary degree of doctor conferred upon him by the faculty of philosophy at the University of Vienna.

The late Sir Augustus Harris, the theatrical manager, who was supposed to be poor, has left an estate worth a quarter of a million dollars.

Miss Wilcox, of the University of Melbourne, has received the silver medal of the Cobden Club, being the first woman to win the prize.

Samony, the most powerful chief in the French Soudan, is reported by French authorities to be dead, and to have been succeeded by his son.

Four large and important pastels by Rosa Bonheur were exhibited recently at the George Petit Gallery, in Paris. They are said to be admirable examples of her work.

Mr. Cecil Rhodes has bought Saurdale, near Bulawayo, South Africa. It consists of ten farms, which he intends to cultivate. He will build the largest dam in South Africa.

Miss Helen Gladstone will undertake the opening ceremony in connection with the Hotel for Women Students, which has been erected at Bangor, near Belfast, Ireland.

Mr. Ralli, the Greek premier, is said to be very attractive socially. He knows the ancient Greek classics well and speaks several languages fluently—notably English, French and German.

Empress Augusta Victoria has sensibly insisted that the money subscribed for a statue to her father, the late Duke Frederick of Schleswig-Holstein, shall be used for charitable purposes.

Miss Ethel Rebecca Benjamin, LL. B., aged 25, of Dunedin, New Zealand, having passed the bar examination, is the first woman admitted to practice as a barrister and solicitor in Australasian courts.

Prince de Joinville is spoken of in Paris as the probable successor of his brother, the late Duc d'Aumale, in the French academy. The prince is 79 years of age, and has been stone deaf for some time.

The Emperor of Austria has conferred on the Khedive the Grand Cross of the Imperial Order of Leopold. The bestowal of the order has no political significance, but is merely an act of Imperial courtesy.

Miss Kate Helmke, of St. Louis, is totally blind, and yet she rides about the streets on her bicycle unattended and meets with no accident. Her acute sense of hearing warns her of the approach of vehicles.

Mme. Diaz, the wife of the Mexican President, is a woman of progressive ideas. She has founded a home where girls can always find employment, a nursery where working women's children are cared for, and a Magdalen home for repentant sinners.

Sir John Kirk, once British consul general at Zanzibar, whose name is associated with African discovery from the days of Livingstone, Burton, Speke and Grant, to those of Stanley, has received the degree of doctor of science from Cambridge university.

Queen Victoria during the jubilee made an exception regarding the acceptance of gifts from private persons. Mr. Villiers, the "doyen" of the house of commons, now in his 96th year, received permission to send a gift to her majesty. It was a beautiful parasol.

Gen. Rebillet, a retired army officer, 75 years of age, has just fought a duel in Paris with a young journalist who had offended him by an article in *La Petite Republique Francaise*. The old gentleman insisted on fighting with swords, and wanted to keep on after receiving a gash over his eyebrow.

Thomas Hussey, bell-ringer, of Leigh in Lancashire, 85 years of age, rang the church bell in honor of Queen Victoria's long reign. He had rung the mourning peal for George IV., and also rang for the coronation and death of William IV., and for the accession, coronation, wedding, and fifty-year jubilee of Queen Victoria.

John I. Blair, of Blairstown, N. J., now in his 95th year, laughed heartily the other day when he heard the report that he was dying. "I feel stronger and better now than I have for some months past," he said, "I have been ill, but am getting stronger and stouter now. You see, I can scarcely span my wrist. A couple of months ago my fingers lapped over. I am picking up and hope to live many years yet."

Queen Victoria has commanded Mr. W. Quiller Orchardson to paint a jubilee picture containing portraits of herself, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York and Prince Edward. It is not known by what extraordinary accident it came to pass that long-established traditions should have been overcome to such a degree that a British painter and a true artist should have been employed to paint a royal portrait.

HOW HE FEELS NOW.

Of course, said Ghazi Osman Pasha, Ancient Greece produced some remarkable Generals, Miltiades, Leonidas, Alexander—

Oh, pshaw! interrupted the Sultan, impatiently; how can we tell what would happen to them if they had run up against me!