

A DEAD RECKONING.

CHAPTER XV.

Gerald Brooke having relieved his "mate" Lucas at the signal-box, and having satisfied himself that his lamps were properly trimmed and set for the night, sat down in his box to read. The night duties at Cinder Pit Junction were not of a very onerous nature. The last passenger train from Cumberhays, which also carried the mail, passed at eight-thirty; and the last train to that place till the arrival of the morning mail, at a few minutes past ten o'clock. In the course of the night two or three trains of mixed merchandise and minerals passed through without stopping, and these, together with a train from the collieries bound for the South, comprised the whole of the nocturnal traffic. Thus it fell out that Gerald had plenty of spare time on his hands, and always brought a volume with him to help to while the long dark hours away.

The signal-box, the entrance to which was reached by a flight of eight or nine steps, stood on a small space of cleared ground by the side of the line. A little way back was a low embankment crowned by a hedge, overshadowed here and there by an umbrageous beech or elm, beyond which the open fields stretched far and wide. Few places could be more solitary and deserted; not a house, not a habitation of any kind was within ken; but by day a haze of smoke in the distance told of life and labor not far away.

The last train from Cumberhays had passed more than an hour ago, the next one would be the train going the reverse way. Gerald sat reading, but with his ear on the alert for the tinging of the telegraph bell which should tell him when the coming train had passed Mellingfield, the nearest station south, five miles away. All at once he was startled by the sound of someone coughing, evidently just outside his box. It was a sound so unexpected and surprising in that lonely spot and at that hour of the night that he sprang to his feet, while his nerves began to flutter strangely. Next moment there came a loud rapping at the door, as it might be with the handle of a walking-stick. Gerald opened the door at once, and then he saw a portly middle-aged man, dressed in black, with a white cravat and spectacles—to all appearance a clergyman—standing at the foot of the steps and gazing blandly up at him.

"My good man," said the stranger, in unctuous but well-bred accents, "I am a stranger in these parts, and am sorry to say that I have lost my way. I want to get to a friend's house at Overbarrow; no doubt you can put me in the right road for doing so?"

"You must cross the line—," began Gerald.

"My good man," interrupted the stranger, "I am somewhat deaf, and cannot hear what you say. I wish you would be good enough to come a little nearer. With my defective eyesight, I dare not trust myself up these steps of yours."

Gerald stepped down without hesitation. "You must cross the line," he began again in a somewhat louder key, "and about twenty yards farther on you will find a gap in the hedge."

"Yes, yes—a gap in the hedge, I understand," responded the other eagerly.

"And after that you will find a foot-path which will bring you to the highway. Then—"

Not a word more spoke Gerald. A soft heavy cloth of some kind was suddenly thrown over his head, while at the same instant his arms were pinned firmly from behind, and a cord with a running noose was drawn tightly round his legs. The attack was so sudden that he was powerless to make the least resistance, and in less than half-a-dozen seconds he found himself as helpless as a babe. Then a corner of the cloth that enveloped his head was raised, and the sham parson said in his most oily tones: "My friend, if you have any regard for life you will neither cry out nor attempt to make the least disturbance. Be obedient and good, and no harm shall befall you." As if to add emphasis to this warning, Gerald was lightly rapped on the knuckle with what he could feel to be the chilly barrel of a pistol. Then with a man on each side of him holding him by an arm, he was conducted to the background; and having been planted with his back to a tree, he was bound firmly to it with several folds of thin cord. The cloth which still enveloped his head was fastened loosely round his throat, so as not greatly to impede his breathing; but his voice would have been smothered in it had he even been in a position to call for help.

He had no means of ascertaining the number of his assailants, but as far as he could judge there must have been three or four of them. He was lost in a maze of the wildest conjectures as to what the object of the attack could possibly be. Apparently some of the gang had recognized him as Gerald Brooke, the man for whose capture so large a reward was still unclaimed. Yet why, then, had they made him a prisoner? What object was to be gained by his capture? Never in his life had he felt so utterly perplexed. He could hear an eager conversation going on a little distance away; but all sounds now came dull and muffled to his ears.

As already stated, the gang had previously separated into two parties. Three of the men, at the head of whom was Crofton, had made their way down the branch to a point close to where, as nearly as they could judge, the driver of the train would be able to

pull up as soon as he found himself on the wrong line of rails. The other three men, with the sham parson as their chief, had been detailed for the capture of the signalman, the result of which we have seen. After a little talk together, one of the three now started off down the branch to carry the news to Crofton and the others.

Slinkey at once took possession of the box, and proceeded to test the working of the various levers, in order that there might be no hitch when the critical moment should arrive. He was an ex-railway servant and thoroughly understood what he was now about.

The sham parson was known familiarly among the "profession" which his eminent talents adorned under the pseudonym of "Lardy Bill," a title conferred upon him in the first instance by reason of his fondness for swart clothes, flash jewelry, and scented pocket-handkerchiefs. He was one of the most clever and unscrupulous rogues of which the great Babylon could boast; but it is pleasant to be able to record that despite his cleverness, a considerable portion of his knavish existence had already been passed in an enforced seclusion where board and lodging had been provided him free of charge. His appearance was eminently in his favour. He was a well-built, ruddy-cheeked man, with a hail-fellow-well-met air. He had the suggestion of a man who could tell a good story and appreciate a good glass of wine. He looked equally at home when made up as a staid City magnate, or a poor tradesman who had fallen upon evil days. He had always less than a voice at command when the occasion needed them, and he could choke a sob in his throat as cleverly as any low comedian on the stage.

As soon as the two men were left alone, with their prisoner in the background, Lardy Bill lighted a cigarette—he liked to follow the fashion in everything—and began to stroll up and down the narrow clearing on which the box was built. Slinkey was too nervous to follow his companion's example. "As I calculate," he said, "we ought to have had that signal from Mellingfield three minutes afore now. Can anything have happened?"

"Pooh, man—what is likely to have happened?" said the other coolly. "These beggarly branch trains are nearly always late."

Half a minute later they heard the welcome tinging announcing that the train had just passed Mellingfield.

"She'll be twelve minutes or more yet afore she's here," remarked Slinkey as he again ascended the steps and entered the box.

Presently Lardy Bill tossed away the end of his cigarette, and crossing to his prisoner, examined his bonds and satisfied himself that they were still intact. On going back to the box he was rejoined by Slinkey, who now proceeded to go down on one knee and rest his ear on the rail. "She's coming," he said, "I can hear her quite plain," he said after a few moments. "Another five minutes and she ought to be here."

"Then I'll hurry off to the others," said Lardy.

"I shall be wanted there when the shindy comes off, and you'll manage here by yourself all right."

"Right you are," responded the other. "As soon as ever the train's past, I shall cut the wires, and then make a bolt of it, and wait for you fellows at the cottage."

Nothing more was said. Lardy Bill started at a quick pace down the branch, while Slinkey re-entered the box.

Neither of them had the slightest suspicion that for the last ten minutes or more all their actions had been watched by an unseen witness; but such was the case. When Clara Brooke, to her intense dismay, discovered that not her husband, but a stranger, was the occupant of the box, she felt a little while as if her heart must die within her. Then she became aware of two dusky figures standing a little distance away, whom she rightly concluded to be the other members of the gang; but still her husband was nowhere to be seen. She had arrived on the spot almost immediately after Gerald had been bound to the tree; but the night was too dark to admit of her seeing him from that distance. She felt at once that she must get around to where the signal-box stood, on the opposite side of the line, and if it were possible, approach near enough to the men to overhear their conversation, and by that means discover what had become of her husband. No sooner was the thought formulated in her mind, than she began to put it into practice. Still keeping in the shelter of the hedge that ran parallel with the line, she sped as fast as her feet could carry her to a point some forty or fifty yards farther down the line, far enough, as she judged, to be out of the range of vision of any one who might be on the lookout at the box. Here, after drawing her shawl over her head—she had discarded her bonnet some time before—she broke through the hedge, was across the line in three seconds; and then, after pushing through the hedge on the opposite side, she turned back in the direction of the signal-box, she and it being both now on the same side of the line. Creeping forward foot by foot and yard by yard, she presently found herself a little way behind the box, and within a dozen yards of her husband, had she only been aware of it.

While this was happening, one of the men had gone off to join the others down the line. Clara, peering through the interstices of the hedge, could see the two remaining men walking and talking together, but was too far away to distinguish what they said. Not long had she watched and waited when she heard the tinging of the telegraph bell. She knew that it was a signal of some kind, but not what its precise meaning might be. Then one of the men disappeared into the box, while the other—it was the one, she could now make out, who was dressed like a clergyman—turned, and seemed as if he were marching directly towards her. Terror-stricken, she dropped completely out of sight behind the hedge bank, expecting every moment to feel a hand laid upon her shoulder. But nothing coming, she breathed again; then her head went up; her eyes were on a level with the top of the bank; then to her surprise, she saw that the man seemed to be carefully examining the trunk of a

tree some little distance away. She strained her eyes in the endeavor to see what he could possibly be about, and then suddenly her heart gave a great bound. The trunk of the tree was defined like a faint silhouette against a background of star-lit April sky, but it was a silhouette which in one portion of its outline bore a startling resemblance to a human figure. As by a flash of divination, Clara knew that it was her husband she was gazing upon. Her breath fluttered on her lips like a bird trying to escape, and she set her teeth hard in the flesh of her arm, to stifle the cry that rose involuntarily from her heart.

After a few seconds the man went back; and after saying a few words to his confederate, he apparently took leave of him, and starting down the branch, was quickly lost to view; then the other at once went back into the box. Now was Clara's opportunity.

Half a minute later she was by her husband's side, laying a hand softly on his arm, she said in a low voice: "Gerald, it is I—Clara." Some soothing sounds came back to her, and then she discovered, what the darkness had hitherto hidden, that her husband's head and face were closely muffled. Her trembling but skillful fingers quickly untied the knots and removed the covering. Gerald gave a great gasp of relief, as he drew a deep inspiration of the cool night air. Then he whispered: "You will find a knife in my outside pocket." In a minute from that time he was a free man.

Slinkey, waiting alone in the signal box, had tried the lever again and again by means of which the points were opened that would turn the train on to the branch, and had satisfied himself that everything was in working order. Both the distance and the home signal-lamps showed the white light, so that the train would speed on unsuspectingly with unslackened pace. Slinkey at the best of times was a nervous timid creature—a man who walked ever in trembling dread of the hand which he knew would some day be laid suddenly on his shoulder—but now that he was left alone, now that he had no longer Lardy Bill's audacious bulldog courage to help to animate his own, his craven heart sank lower and lower, and he would have given a year of his life to be well out of the adventure into which he had allowed himself to be seduced.

The low deep hum of the oncoming train grew palpably on the ear, instinctively, Slinkey's hand closed on lever No. 3, while his heart began to beat a sort of devil's tattoo after a fashion that was far from comfortable. Suddenly, a great start, and for a moment or two the tattoo came to a dead stop. He had heard a sound that he remembered full well; it was the noise caused by the explosion of a fog-signal. At the same instant the engine began to whistle its shrillest. Then came the explosion of a second signal, and then the whistle ceased as suddenly as it began. And now he could faintly hear the soft rhythmic pulsing of the engine, as it might be that of some antediluvian monster which has been racing till it was scant of breath; and Slinkey knew that the train had slackened speed and was feeling its way forward slowly and cautiously. What could be the matter? What could have happened? By whom and with what intent had fog-signals been placed on the line on a night so clear and beautiful?

Such were a few of the queries that flitted through Slinkey's puzzled brain. And now not even the faintest pulsing of the engine could be heard. Could it be possible that treachery was at work, and that the driver had been warned and the train brought to a stand? Slinkey ran lightly down the steps and, kneeling, laid an ear close to the rail. Not a sound came more to him; the train and those in charge of it might have vanished into space, so unbroken was the silence. He got on his feet again, his tongue and throat as dry and constricted as those of a man who had been athirst for days. Instinctively his eyes turned to the tree to which the captured signalman had been bound; but he was too far away to be able to discern whether the man was still there. With a heart that misgave him, he hurried up to the tree, only to find that the prisoner had escaped. The cords were there, but the man was gone. Evidently, treachery was at work somewhere. Would not the wisest thing he could do be to decamp while he had a chance of doing so? He was asking himself this question but had not answered it, when up came Crofton, Lardy Bill, and one of the other men at double-quick time. They, too, had heard the fog-signals, and had been as much at a loss to account for them as Slinkey had been. But when the latter told them that by some mysterious means their prisoner had contrived to escape, it was evident both to Crofton and Lardy that their carefully planned scheme had met with some dire mishap. "They had been betrayed, but by whom? A traitor had been at work, but who was he? Each of them stared suspiciously at his fellows."

"If I only knew who it was that had sold us," said Lardy Bill with a fierce imprecation, "I'd scatter his brains with a bullet, though I had to swing for it after!"

"That's all very well," said Crofton; "but the question is, what are we to do now?"

"Do!" exclaimed Lardy, whom danger always made reckless. "Why, do what we intended from the first. The train's waiting there, ain't it, not five hundred yards away? Instead of its coming to us, we must go to it—this is all. Is there any one here," he demanded, fiercely, "who would rather not go?"

Slinkey would fain have answered that he for one would very much prefer to keep in the background only that Lardy Bill was a man of whom he stood in mortal fear.

"Now, mates, come along," added Bill. "We are only fooling away our time standing here. One bold stroke and the prize is ours."

Scarcely had the last words passed his lips, when some half-dozen dark-coated figures burst suddenly through the hedge and made a dash into the midst of the gang.

"We are sold!" screamed Crofton with an oath. "Every man for himself!" and with that he fired his revolver at the nearest of his assailants and then turned to flee. But he was too late. He was tripped up, seized and handcuffed all in a breath as it seemed. A like

ate befell Slinkey and the other man; but Lardy Bill, slipping as an eel, after felling two of his assailants, vanished in the darkness. The remaining two men, who had been left behind when Crofton and the others hurried to the signal-box, also contrived to escape. Crofton's shot had taken effect. The man he fired at staggered forward a pace or two and then fell on one knee. Now that the scuffle was over, his companions had time to attend to him. They helped him to his feet; he was evidently suffering great pain, but was perfectly cool and collected. As the light of the bull's eye which one of the men produced fell upon his face, Crofton, who was close at hand, staggered back with a cry of amazement. Next moment he had recovered himself. "I denounce this man as Gerald Brooke," he exclaimed, "the murderer of Baron von Rosenberg, for whose capture a reward of three hundred pounds is offered."

(To be Continued.)

CURING THE DEAF.

An Ingenious Contrivance on the Lines of a Telephone.

The "Microphonograph" is the name given to a machine recently made in France and which applies in a new way the principle of the photograph as now in common usage. The idea of the French device, is, within certain limits, to make the deaf hear. In this respect it certainly comes nearer to fulfilling its mission than does Edison's much-talked-of application of the Roentgen rays to making the blind see.

As a matter of fact, the microphonograph does make the deaf hear—that is all such persons generally classified as deaf, yet in whom the hearing mechanism is not wholly destroyed or in whom nature has supplied even rudimentary hearing apparatus. The microphonograph does for sounds which under ordinary conditions would be indistinguishable to a deaf person exactly what the microscope does to objects which without its aid would be invisible. It magnifies them.

Mr. F. Dussaud is the inventor of this new aid to the afflicted. He was moved to it by his pity for a particular deaf and dumb person in whom he was interested, and the result of his labors promises to work a great change in the method of treating those who cannot hear or speak.

As is well known, the inability to speak on the part of those deaf from infancy arises from their having no knowledge of sounds. Their vocal organs may be perfect, yet they are totally ignorant of how to use them. At present they are taught by an elaborate study of the lip movement until they at last reach very fairly intelligible speech.

The microphonograph by enabling them to hear the sounds directly, will enable them to take a short cut to a point which heretofore has been reached by a long and tedious road and will at the same time render their speech much clearer and natural in tone.

Two instantaneous photographs recently taken in Paris illustrate the use of the microphonograph. One of them represents Mr. Dussaud and a deaf and dumb boy who is holding to his ear the telephonic receiver, which is connected with the machine. The microphonograph is not in operation, although the deaf-mute does not know it and is straining his ear in vain to catch the sounds.

The other instantaneous photograph was taken at the instant when Mr. Dussaud started up the machine, which played the "Marseillaise," the deaf-mute hearing it distinctly and beating time to the stirring measure.

THE MODERN STEAMSHIP.

The Immense Cargo Which Can Be Stowed Away in One of These Leviathans.

The famous steamship, Great Eastern, historically associated with the first efforts to lay Atlantic telegraph cables, has hitherto been regarded as the largest vessel ever launched. Its laurels as a sea leviathan, however, are of late endangered. The new ocean freighter, Pennsylvania, although scarcely attaining the external measurements of the former celebrated ship will carry far more cargo. The capacity indeed, of these new freight ships is a matter for astonishment to a landsman.

The Pennsylvania, for example, is rated at twenty thousand tons burden and will carry loads such as may be briefly itemized thus:

- 100,000 bushels of wheat in bulk, equal to three hundred and twenty cars, or sixteen trains of twenty cars each.
- 1,000 tons of flour, eighty car-loads.
- 4,000 boxes of bacon, seventy-five car-loads.
- 3,000 tierces of lard, forty-eight car-loads.
- 1,300 bales of cotton, forty car-loads.
- 1,200 head of live cattle, eighty car-loads.
- 3,600 quarters of dressed beef.

In addition there will probably be a thousand tons of miscellaneous merchandise, say eighty car-loads more; in all not less than seven hundred and eighty car-loads, or thirty-nine long trains of twenty cars each.

Nor is the above by any means the entire load of this modern ark. The Pennsylvania will have accommodations for from eight hundred to one thousand steerage passengers, as also for a crew of one hundred and fifty men and fifty cattlemen, with food and fodder for all.

In the fuel bins, too, there will be carried a burden of 1,300 tons of coal or more than one hundred car-loads. If we were to say that the entire agricultural product of twenty counties could all be stowed away in this mammoth ship, we should not exceed the facts.

SOME SILVER STANDARDS.

HOW IT EFFECTS THE CREDIT OF A NATION.

Countries Where the Basis of the Currency is Silver and They Have Some Flighty Debts to Pay.

Mexico is a silver standard country. She has a large national debt. The interest of £20,687,660 is payable in London. It is not even payable in Mexico. The London indebtedness is greater than the Mexican indebtedness.

Guatemala is a silver standard country. Of her debt, £887,700 is owed abroad.

Honduras is a silver standard country. Practically the whole of her debt is owed abroad, and not a cent of interest has Honduras been able to pay since 1872.

Nicaragua is a silver country. She owes £285,000 in London, on which she has been obliged to default payment of the interest.

Salvador is a silver country. She owes £254,000 in London.

Paraguay is a silver country. She declared herself bankrupt to her foreign creditors in 1885 and issued new bonds in exchange for old ones at just about 50 cents on the dollar. Paraguay has just defaulted the interest on the half of her debt which she had not previously repudiated. She owes now in Europe £836,550, with defaulted interest amounting to over £76,500.

PERU-BOLIVIA-CHINA.

Peru is a silver country. She had a foreign debt of £31,579,080, with arrears of interest amounting to £22,998,651. Being utterly unable to pay, the European bondholders had decided to them in exchange all the states' railways, guano deposits, mines and lands for a period of sixty-six years.

Bolivia is a silver country. Her "external" debt to foreign corporations is 2,000,000 bolivianos. The debt owed at home is 4,428,705 bolivianos. Forty per cent of the customs dues at Arica are by law seized by the foreign bondholder.

China is a silver country. It is a matter in the memory of every citizen that the money to pay China's war indemnity was raised by a loan in Europe. The Japanese commission has just gone to London to collect it. Her February loan of 1895, was £3,000,000 payable in gold, and her customs revenue is to-day mortgaged in terms to foreign syndicates. The United States pays in gold and borrows at 3 per cent. China's foreign loan of December, 1894, of \$8,000,000, payable in silver, cost 7 per cent. in interest.

JAPAN-INDIA-RUSSIA.

Japan, the most prosperous of the silver countries, is paying at the rate of 7 per cent for a foreign indebtedness of 2,110,112 yen. The bulk of her debt loaned her in silver by her own citizens cost her 5 1/2 per cent. per annum. Japan's financiers favour the adoption of a gold basis.

India is on a silver basis. Of a total debt funded and unfunded, of 27,354,398 rupees, 108,113,792 is foreign debt owed to England. Sixteen million pound sterling a year must be paid in England. This is paid in gold, while the taxes raised in India are silver. Is it extraordinary that India has stopped the coinage of silver in order to get upon a gold basis and relieve herself of a heavy yoke that was yearly growing heavier.

Russia is on a silver basis, but she has been forced into an indebtedness of gold rubles of 1,998,307,496. Russia was forced to ask permission of foreign bankers before she went to war. Russia is about to adopt the gold basis.

WOULDN'T TRUST JONAH'S.

A Wrecked Boat's Crew Who Refused to be Rescued.

A remarkable story of coincidence and sailor superstition was told by the survivors of the John Carey on their arrival the other day at Auckland, New Zealand. The John Carey, a trading brig, ran into dirty weather and sprang a leak, which at last forced the captain and five others to take to the only boat left uninjured. They were picked up by the Ladybird, another trader, which next day went ashore a total wreck. Two days later, a third trader, the Brightwell, hove in sight, and being signalled by the castaways, sent a boat to take them off. The John Carey's men were the first to embark, and going through the surf, the Brightwell's boat was upset and the occupants were drawn on board half drowned. At this disaster, the Ladybird's crew set up a cry of "Jonah." The J.C.'s people, they said, had been twice wrecked, and to embark with them again was certain death. And so firm was their faith in the old superstition that when the Brightwell sent a second boat, they actually refused to be rescued, preferring to stay where they were and take their chance of another ship coming that way, to sailing in company with a crew of Jonahs! Accordingly the Brightwell sailed away with the six survivors, who must have experienced lively and varied exertions when the very next day, a heavy sea broke on board, stove one of the boats, and carried away a portion of the bulwarks! However, the weather cleared, and the much-harassed and luck-tormented John Careytes were eventually landed in safety at Auckland.

MOURNING OVER FIDO.

Faithful Domestic—Please, mum, you'll have to get another dog, or I won't stay.

Mistress—I mourn the loss of poor Fido as much as you do but I don't think of leaving the house on that account.

Faithful Domestic—But, mum, you don't have to wash the plates.