

# A DEAD RECKONING.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Jules Picot had been carefully searched before being locked up in his cell, and it was an utter puzzle to the jail officials how he had contrived to conceal about him even so insignificant an article as the tiny phial of poison so as to evade detection. One of the wardens, however, of a more inquiring turn of mind than his fellows succeeded a day or two later, in solving the mystery. The mountebank wore very high-heeled shoes, as many of his countrymen make a practice of doing. The heel of one of his shoes had been so made that it could be unscrewed at will, while inside it was a cavity just large enough to hold the phial. Picot had evidently prepared himself beforehand for a contingency of the like of that which had at length befallen him. The letter had written a few hours before his death was in French, and was addressed to "Madame Brouke." The following is a translation of it:

Madame—When these lines reach you, the hand that writes them, will be cold in death. I am tired of life, and life is tired of me; this night we part company for ever. I take the liberty of addressing you because of your kindness to my little Henri, whom le bon Dieu has seen fit to take from me for my sins, and because you were so much in his thoughts when he was dying. I also address you for another reason, which I will explain presently.

It was in the first week of the new year that Henri met with the accident which proved fatal to him. He lingered for two weeks, and then died. He had not little pain; life faded out of him like a lamp that slowly expires for want of oil. As I said before, he often talked about his belle madame. He could not remember his mother, and it was your face that shone on him in his dreams, as it were the face of an angel.

After he was gone and I was alone in the world, I, too, began to have dreams such as I had never had before. Every night Henri came and stood by my bed, but it was always with an averted face; never would he turn and look at me. I used to try to cry out, to seize his hand; but I was dumb and motionless as a corpse. Then, after a minute or two, he would slowly vanish, with bowed head and hands pressed to his face, as though he were weeping silently. Night after night it was ever the same. Then a great restlessness took possession of me. I seemed to be urged onward from place to place by some invisible power and without any will of my own. When I rose in the morning I knew not where I should sleep at night; onward, ever onward, I was compelled to go. Last night I reached this place, and this morning I rose thinking to resume my wanderings; but a conversation I chanced to overhear led me to seek the court of justice. You, madame, know what look place there.

Even before I had spoken a word, I knew why my footsteps had been directed to this place, and that my wanderings were at an end. This afternoon, after all was over, I lay down on my pallet and fell asleep, and while I slumbered, Henri came to me; but this time his face was no longer averted; his eyes gazed into mine, and he smiled as he used to smile at me out of his mother's arms. Ah, how shining and beautiful he looked! Then a soft cool hand was laid on my brow, that had burned and burned for months, and all the pain went, and I knew nothing more till I awoke.

A word more and I have done. Madame, pray believe me when I say that never could a man be more surprised and astonished than I, Jules Picot, was to-day when I found that it was your good husband who was accused of the death of the Baron von Rosenberg. When I made my way into the court after hearing that some one had been arrested for the murder, I thought to see only a stranger, one whom I had never seen before. But even in that case I should have done as I did to-day, and have confessed that it was by my hand and mine alone that Von Rosenberg met his death. Conceive, then, my astonishment when in the accused I recognized M. Brouke, whom I had known in London under the name of "M. Stewart." I knew that when in London he was in trouble—in hiding—but never did I dream of the crime that was laid to his charge. Had I but known it you and he would long ago have been made happy by the confession of him who now signs his name for the last time, Jules Picot.

With what a host of conflicting emotions this document was read by her to whom it was addressed may be more readily imagined than described.

George Crofton sat alone in his cell devouring his heart in a bitterness too deep for words. All was over; all the bright prospects of his youth and early manhood had ended in this; his home for years to come would be a felon's cell, his only companions the lowest of the low, the vilest of the vile. "Facilis est descensus Averno," he muttered with a sneer. "Yes, in my case the descent has been swift and easy enough in all conscience." One gleam of lurid joy and one only, illumined the black cavernous depths in which his thoughts, like fallen spirits, winged their way aimlessly to and fro, finding no spot whereon to rest. Gerald Brooke, the man he hated with an intensity of hatred bred only in nature's such as his, was a prisoner even as he was, and it was his Crofton's hand that had brought him there! He had but spoken the truth when he said that the hour of his revenge would come at last. It was here now, although it had come after a fashion altogether different from what he had expected. Thanks to his folly, his own outlook was a dreary one enough; but what

was it in comparison with the grim prospect that stared his hated cousin so closely in the face! When he thought of this it was as the one sweet drop in the bitter cup which Fate had pressed with such unrelenting fingers to his lips.

While he sat brooding over these and other matters, just as daylight was deepening into dusk, a warden unlocked the door of his cell. "You're wanted in the waiting-room," said the man. "Your uncle, Colonel Crofton, has called to see you. It's past the hour for visitors; but as he's brought a magistrate's order, and as he says he's obliged to go back to London to-night, the governor has agreed to relax the rules for once."

Crofton started at the man in stupefaction. To the best of his belief he had no such relative in the world as the one just named. "Ah, you didn't expect to see him, I daresay," continued the warden. "A nice affable gent as ever I see; but I wouldn't keep him waiting if I was you."

Crofton followed the man without a word; and after being conducted through a couple of corridors, was ushered into a sparsely furnished white-washed room, where a middle-aged, well-built man of military carriage, who had been perusing through his eyeglass the printed rules and regulations framed over the mantel-piece, turned to greet him. He had close-cut grizzled hair and a thick drooping grizzled moustache. He wore a lightly buttoned frockcoat, gray trousers and straps, and military boots highly polished. He carried his hat and a fasselled mace in his hand, and one corner of a bandana handkerchief protruded from his pocket behind.

"My dear nephew—my dear George!" he exclaimed with much effusion as he advanced a step or two and held out his hand. "This is indeed a dreadful predicament in which to find you. What, oh, what can you have been about that I should have to seek you in a place like this! Your poor aunt will be heart-broken when she hears of it. I must break the terrible news as gently as possible; but really, really, in her delicate state of health I dread the effect such a disclosure may have upon her." His voice trembled with emotion, he brushed away a tear, or seemed to do so.

George Crofton had undergone many surprises in his time, but never one that left him more dumfounded than this, for in his so-distant uncle his quick eye recognized at a glance no less a personage than Lady Bill. At the moment his eyes fell on him he had been in the least doubt of the fact, that would have been dispelled by the expressive wink with which his friend favored him an instant later. The man's audacity fairly took Crofton's breath away.

"The first question, my dear boy," resumed the sham colonel, so as to give the other time to recover himself, "of course is whether anything can be done for you, and if so, what. I need not say that my purse is at your service; for, shocked as I am to find you in this place, I cannot forget that you are my brother's son. I leave for London by the first train, and immediately on my arrival I will take the advice of my own lawyers in the matter, which will, I think, be the best thing that can be done under the painful circumstances of the case."

"I suppose that's about the only thing that can be done," answered Crofton, who was still utterly at a loss to divine the motive of the other's visit.

The warden, who had conducted Crofton from the cell, was present at the interview, ostensibly for the purpose of seeing that none of the jail regulations were infringed either by the prisoner or his visitor; but a sovereign having been pressed into his reluctant palm at the moment he ushered the latter into the waiting room, he now discreetly turned his back on the pair and stared persistently out of the window.

A little further conversation passed between uncle and nephew, the chief part of it falling to the lot of the former, then the colonel looked at his watch and rose to take his leave. The warden turned at the same instant.

"As I remarked before, my dear George," said the uncle, as he clasped both the nephew's hands in his, "however pained—most deeply pained—I may be, everything shall be done for you that can be done. I refrain from all reproaches—at present I can only grieve. But your poor aunt, George—your aunt! You are her godson and favourite nephew. Ah me—ah me!"

He walked out of the room with both hands outspread and slowly shaking his head, like a man whose feelings were more than he could control.

The jail officials, at an early hour next morning, in addition to making the discovery that in the course of the night their French prisoner had taken leave of them after an altogether illegal and unjustifiable fashion, were further astounded by finding that the inmate of cell No. 5 had also relieved them of his presence, but in a mode altogether different from that which had found favor with the mountebank.

Crofton, unheard by any one, had contrived to file through the middle bar of his cell window and then to squeeze himself through the aperture thus made, after which there was nothing but a high wall between himself and liberty. Beyond this wall were some market gardens, the jail being situated in the outskirts of the town, and then the open fields. Outside the wall, a coil of rope with a strong steel hook at each end was found; and the footsteps of two if not of three men were plainly traceable for some distance in the soft mould of the garden. As to how Crofton had become possessed of the file, and by whose connivance and help he had been able to climb the wall and descend safely on the other side, there was no evidence forthcoming. The only fact the jail officials could affirm with certainty was that their prisoner was nowhere to be found.

At as early an hour as possible on the morning following his capture, Crofton had obtained permission to send a telegram to his wife, and before noon, Stephanie was speeding northward by the express in response to his summons. When she reached Cu-

visit her husband that night; so, carrying her little handbag, she walked from the station to the inn nearest to it and asked to be accommodated with supper and a bed. She had ascertained from a constable in the street that the earliest hour at which visitors were admitted to the jail was ten o'clock.

Next morning, which was that of Saturday, Stephanie rose betimes. While she was eating her breakfast the landlady bustled in, carrying an open newspaper. "Here's the weekly paper, ma'am," she said. "The boy has just brought it; and as it contains a long account of the doings at the justice-room yesterday, about which you may have heard, I thought that perhaps you would like to read it over your breakfast."

"Thank you very much; I shall be glad to do so," said Stephanie quietly. She had given no name at the inn, and the landlady had not the slightest suspicion that her guest had any reason for being more interested than any stranger might be supposed to be in the news contained in the paper. Nor, in fact, had Stephanie any knowledge of what had happened. Her husband's telegram had been of the briefest; it had merely said: "I am in trouble. Come at once. Bring money. Inquire for me at the jail." But from what she knew already, she guessed, and rightly, that the enterprise on which Crofton was bent when he left home had failed, and that by some mischance he himself had come to grief.

The moment she was left alone Stephanie opened the paper with eager fingers. Her quick eyes were not long in finding the particular news of which they were in search. She read the story of the attempted robbery, as detailed in the evidence, with ever-growing wonder—a wonder that was intensified twenty-fold when she read now Gerald Brooke had been arrested at the same time as her husband, and by what strange chance the two cousins had once more been brought face to face. But when, a few lines lower down, her eyes caught sight of another well-known name, all the color ebbed from her face, leaving it as white as the face of a dead woman. She read to the end, to the last word of Picot's strange confession before the magistrates, and then the paper dropped from her hands.

"My father the murderer of Von Rosenberg, and I—the cause of it!" she murmured in horror-stricken accents. For a little while she sat like a woman stunned and stupid, her eyes staring into vacancy, her mind a whirling chaos, in which thoughts and fancies the most bizarre and incongruous came and went, mixing and mingling with each other in a sort of mad broken dance, all the elements of which were lurid, vague, and elusive.

How long she sat thus she never knew; but she was roused by the entrance of the landlady, who had come to reclaim the newspaper, there being three or four people in the taproom who were anxious to obtain a glimpse of it. Fortunately, the good woman was somewhat short-sighted, and perceived nothing out of the ordinary in her guest's demeanor. But her entrance broke the spell and served to recall Stephanie to the realities of her position.

For a little while all thought of her husband had vanished from her mind. This second blow had smitten her so much more sharply than the first that the pain caused by the former seemed deadened thereby. But now that her waking trance was broken, the double nature of her calamity forced itself upon her mind. My father and my husband shut up in one prison! she said to herself; and it was all she could do to refrain from bursting into laughter. For are there not some kinds of laughter the sources of which lie deeper than the deepest fountain of tears?

Suddenly she started to her feet and pressed both hands to her forehead. "But why—why should my father have gone to Von Rosenberg to demand from him tidings of me, when I wrote to him from London telling him all that had happened to me and where I was? Can it be possible that my letter never reached him? Had he received it there would have been no need for him to seek Von Rosenberg. Even after so long a time I could almost repeat my letter word for word. In it I told my father how I had left home with Von Rosenberg, but only after he had given me his solemn promise to make me his wife the moment we set foot in England. I told him within an hour after our arrival in London, I had claimed the fulfillment of his promise, and how he had laughed me to scorn, thinking that he had now got me completely in his power. I told how I flung all Von Rosenberg's presents at his feet and left him there and then, and going out into the rainy streets of the great city, fled as for my life. I told how I hid for weeks in a garret, living on little more than bread and milk; and how at last, when my money was all gone, I found my way to the nearest circus, and there obtained an engagement. All this I told my father in my letter, and then I prayed him to forgive me, and told him how I longed to get back to him and my mother. Weeks and months I waited with an aching heart for the answer which never came. Then I said to myself: 'My father will not forgive me. I shall never see him or my mother again.' But the letter never reached him. Had it done so he would not be where he is to-day." Tearful sobs shook her from head to foot.

At this juncture in burst the landlady with an air of much importance. "As you have read the paper, I thought maybe you would like to hear the news that one of the warders just off duty has brought us from the jail. Such times as we live in, to be sure!" "News—what news?" asked Stephanie faintly.

"John Myles has brought word—and he ought to know, if anybody does—that one of the prisoners—Croiton or Crofton by name—managed to break out of his cell in the night, and has got clear away. But that's not all by any means. The foreigner—him-as accused himself in open court of the murder—was found dead this morning, poisoned by his own hand. The news is all over England before night-fall—Gracious me, ma'am, whatever is the matter!—Mary, Eliza,—quick, quick!"

To Be Continued.

# WHAT UNCLE SAM IS AT.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST ABOUT THE BUSY YANKEE.

Neighborhood Interest in His Doings—Matters of Moment and Firth Gathered from His Daily Record.

Oats six feet high in the stalk are reported in Lane county, Or.

At Clinton, Ky., an acre of wheat yielded 108 two-bushel sacks.

A resident of Skidmore, Mo., boasts of having put up twenty-two three-ton stacks of hay in one day.

Near Brunswick, Md., a cow which last summer dropped twin calves has done the same thing again.

It took half an hour for a mother in Bristol, Tenn., to recover a watch wheel which her small boy had swallowed.

One of the lazy farmers of Utica, Neb., has a rocking-chair attachment connected with his harvesting machinery.

Only the would-be saloon keeper and one non-resident signed a petition for the establishment of a saloon at Monroe, Neb.

Manhattan, Kan., with three women's clubs in a population of 3,500, is said to have more culture than any other town of its size in that State.

What is known as the young married set of Carthage, Mo., society entertains itself in these hot times with wading parties in the Spring River.

J. I. Taylor, living near Cottage Grove, Or., touched a match to scum over a stagnant pool on his place, and the whole surface of the pool ignited and blazed as a kerosene pond might blaze.

That there are vigor and hardihood in Brooks, Or., can hardly be doubted after publication of the information that Brooks is the home of John Stammer, the Stagger twins, and Bud Waddle.

Portland, Or., is expecting the arrival of a 2,500-ton, 4-masted British bark, the Springburn, the largest sailing vessel but one ever in that port. She is 296 feet long, 45.6 feet broad, and 25.7 feet deep.

Five million bushels is the expected harvest yield of the Walla Walla Valley, Wash., and at present prices on the crops the farmers will realize enough to lift a number of mortgages on their places this fall.

It does not necessarily take gold to arouse people to energetic activity in a new country. The people who made up the first rush to Oklahoma country only a short time ago gathered in one day 1,000 bushels of plums.

In the neighborhood of Jamestown, N.D., the barley crop has increased 18.3 per cent. in acreage over that of last year, the corn crop 139 per cent., the wheat crop 27.3 per cent., the oat crop 9.8 per cent., and the flax crop 8 per cent.

The Rev. Dr. Hancher of the Grand Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church of Kansas City has established not only a bicycle check room in the basement of his church but also a room where mothers may check their babies while they attend divine service.

Electricity in the operation of the farm is to become a factor presently on the far Pacific slope. Jesse Kilgore of Weston, Utah county, Or., has employed an electrician and is to install a 32-inch dynamo to supply light and power for harvest work.

Most Kansas counties pay a bounty on wolves killed. Yet wolves in that State have in a year killed 1,150 sheep, according to statistics collected by a member of the State Board of Agriculture, while the 155,570 dogs owned there have killed 1,294 sheep.

While a business man of Newport News and his family were sitting at table wondering why the cook was so long in getting breakfast, a tramp, who had come along just as it was to be served, sat in the kitchen eating what he wanted of it, and keeping the cook quiet with a revolver.

The ever active desire of newspapers to give the public more than the worth of the public's money, had a manifestation lately in the case of a paper at Juniata, Neb., which put in so modest a bill for country printing that the Supervisors voluntarily increased the amount of it and paid it.

By the tomb of Henry Ridgely, who died in 1699, in Anderson county, Md., Isaac C. Anderson, of the Second district of that county recently found a coin of the date 1695, marked on the obverse "VIII. Skilling Danske." The reverse, which is well worn, bears a capital C, over which is the figure, 5.

Scorn must be felt by New York gripmen and Brooklyn motormen for the motormen of Mechanicsville, Tenn. According to local newspaper plants these actually stop in one part of the town because children are so thick upon the track. "The cars have to be stopped," one paper says, "to avoid an accident!"

On the spur of the moment Charles J. Kaufman of Newport News offered to bet with Miss Zella M. Hendrick, of Fairville, Mo., that she would not marry him while they were in Norfolk on a visit with her cousin. She took him up and surprised him by not backing him out during his quest for a license and a clergyman.

Tom Morgan of Eureka, Kan., is of opinion that a hoarse shout at a steer fattening for market has as bad an effect on the animal as an impatient word may have on a very ill person, which recalls a remark of Rarey, the horse trainer, who said that he had known an angry word to accelerate the pulse of a high-spirited horse many beats to the second.

To work on the sympathies of a den-

tist who was at first hardhearted, a tramp at St. Joseph, Mo., asked him to pull out two of his teeth which were filled with gold; for, he asked, of what use were gold-filled teeth if one had nothing on which to use them? This appealed so to the dentist that he gave him some money instead of drawing his teeth.

Dr. W. A. Roberts, of Minneapolis, in the interest of a society which aids consumptives to find a locality where they may get relief or be cured, has been looking about in Kittitas county, Washington, for a site for a home. It does not appear that the people of that section have as yet tried to discourage hopeless invalids, from coming there, to raise the mortality figures, as some Western places have recently done.

At Terre Haute, Ind., there is a Methodist church, on Maple avenue, of which the Rev. Frank Gee is pastor, where it has been the practice for the minister to announce on each Sunday the midweek run of the church bicycle club. Deacon James A. Dixon, who objects to this practice and had protested in vain, one Sunday sent up a request that the person read a notice of the meeting of a card club to be held on a coming week day evening. The pastor refused to read it and the deacon forsook the church. The matter is not yet settled.

By the last steamer in July from Japan a Japanese resident of Los Angeles, Cal., received a circular from the Japanese State Department telling him that he was directed by the imperial Government to collect forthwith the information asked for in some accompanying questions. The circular asked for information as to the number of Japanese in the county, the number of them who were American citizens, the number of the women, the nearest seaport, and the various means of reaching it, together with the time in which it might be reached, and the cost of transportation to it, and the names and addresses of the chief Japanese in the county.

## FREAKS OF FORTUNE.

Some Windfalls That Came Unexpectedly to Those Who Needed Them.

While most people find it very hard to acquire even a modest competency, others are more lucky, and to them fortunes come without even the asking. Several such instances have occurred of late years, some of them of an interesting character. It was only a short while since that a poor ragpicker in Birmingham suddenly found himself a man of wealth. By dint of working from dawn till late at night he had been in the habit of making the not very exorbitant income of \$2.50 per week. One morning he heard from a firm of solicitors in London, who requested him to call when he would learn something to his advantage. He found that a long lost brother, who had made money in Australia, had recently died there, leaving him a sum of £8,000.

At Tamworth, England, a tobacco-merchant has unexpectedly found himself the heir to a baronetcy. For some time past he has been in receipt of 25s. 6d. a week, having served as a sergeant in the Suffolk Regiment; but finding this sum inadequate he took a tobacco-merchant shop at Tamworth, and was apparently contented with his lot, when he awoke to find himself a baronet of the United Kingdom.

A schooner which went ashore off the American coast with 1,200 tons of coal, being abandoned by her owners, was sold for \$70. Some 400 tons of coal had been got out of the hull, when suddenly the vessel slid off the rock and sank in deep water, only, however, to float again the next morning, and drift with the tide right into port. It seems that sufficient coal had rattled through the holes in her bottom to let the hull come again to the surface with some 300 tons of coal still in it. As the vessel then stood she was worth \$3,000 or more to those who bought it for \$76.

A couple of lucky domestics have lately come into possession of a considerable sum of money through the death of their mistress, an old lady of eighty-five, who left them her entire fortune. The sum to be divided is \$120,000, and it is bequeathed to them in recognition of their long and faithful services, one of them having been twenty-five and the other eighteen years with the lady in question.

The effects produced by suddenly acquired wealth are sometimes startling in the extreme. A suburban Parisian, who lately inherited £16,000 from an elderly aunt, at once began to look about for some outlet for spending the money quickly. At length the craze for building speculation seized him, and he built houses wherever sites were obtainable. He went on in this way for some time, when his mind became unhinged, and he was found one day walking around his newly built houses, firing shots from a navy revolver at imaginary enemies. He was thereupon arrested and placed in an asylum.

## THE RULING SPIRIT.

The story is told of a housewife who was extremely neat, that she woke one night at the sound of her husband creeping softly out of bed and toward the light-stand.

"What's the matter, William?" she whispered.

"Sh! he whispered, there's a burglar coming up the front stairs, and I'm getting my revolver."

All was silence again, in the midst of which William crept noiselessly to the head of the stairs. Presently there was a loud report followed by a mad scurrying of feet; then the husband came back, lighted a lamp, and returned to the stairway.

O William, William, did he—  
Yes, he got away, said the husband. Oh, I don't care so much about that the woman said, but William did he—  
Did he what?  
Did he wipe his feet before he started up the stairs?