Diamond Cut Diamond

OR,

THE ROUT OF THE ENEMY.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

The dark eyes seemed to pierce him through and through, so intense and burning was their scrutiny. A stronger nerved man than was our friend Albert might have flinched a little under such an examination. He hesitated a little.

"Every soul was killed—not one survived!" he cried with a sort of desperation. "You saw yourself the reports in the papers—the butchery was wholesale—no one could be identified. You will excuse me, sir, but the recollection of that ghastly scene of mutilated and unrecognisable human forms always upsets me to this very day—it was horrible! But you know that I did what I could—that I searched in vain for the pocket-book amongst the debris of the train, and that I did succeed in recovering one packet, at least, of valuable bonds, and that I then hurried straight back to England to tell you what had taken place. You do not, surely, doubt my story now, after all these years, Mr. Dane?"

The great man had removed his eyes, probably out of a sentiment of pity, from the face of his clerk. He smiled slightly at the distress in his last words.

"No, I do not doubt you at all, Trichet," he said, not unkindly. "Be easy—I trust you, and I am grateful to you, the proof of it being that I am about to trust you again;" then, with a sudden, swift glance at him, "You are quite certain then that Leon de Brefour is dead?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Ah, then, I am not, at all. I believe him to be alive!"

"Sir!"

Mr. Dane pressed a call-bell upon his table, and the errand boy entered.

"Tell Mr. Trichet what you did this morning, Tom."

"I followed a lady as you bid me, sir—she didn't take a cab, but walked on into Cheapside, and down till she got into the Strand, and there she went into a bookseller's shop, and stopped a long time."

"Did she bring out any parcel?"

"No, but she bought something, because I saw her through the window."

"That will do, Tom, you may go,' and the boy left.

"Now, Trichet, you will go to that shop, and you will find out where that parcel has been sent—do you understand? That lady was Madame de Brefour—if her husband is alive still, she will occasionally see him—if he is dead, I shall be glad to know it for certain. I need say no more to you, you must be quite aware of what I want to know. Death is not always able to balk the ends of Justice with such beautiful facility as it is sometimes supposed. Your business is very plain and simple for the present. Find Madame de Brefour."

CHAPTER XIII.

A smart suburban villa, with a square garden at the back. There are hundreds of thousands of them within thirty miles of London. The villa is gabled, red-bricked, and pretentious, smiling at the road over a narrow strip of neatly mown turf, across a low iron railing, like a vulgar country-town beauty anxious to show off her charms. Close muslin draperies have been lately arranged before all the windows, but that does not alter the ineradicable pertness of striped red and white sun blinds, nor the smug self-assertion of the French window fames, and the brass-knockered front door. There are a whole row of these villas down Longway Road, as like one another as peas in a pod. And yet, in one respect, this particular villa differs widely from its fellows. Every one of them possesses at the back a small garden, empty of beauty, bare of trees enclosed by a low modern wall planted with a fringe of evergreens. But the garden behind No. 10 is of a totally different character. To begin with, it is four times the size of any of the others, it is surrounded by a very high brick wall, it is well shaded by trees—and oh, best charm of all, it is old!

What a magic in the very words! An old garden! Trim flower borders, wherein the columbines and lavender, the blue lupus and the yellow snap dragon of our grandmothers' days, bloom year after year in a fragrant and luxuriant wilderness — shaded shrubbery paths, moss-grown beneath the feet of a dead generation. A mulberry tree, old and crippled, resting its gnarled limbs upon artificial props, like an aged pensioner on crutches, and in the centre of the grass plot a broken sundial, overgrown with gold and brown lichens, and little soft velvet-like tufts, green as my lady's farthingale, as she leant against it, when she and it were young, a hundred years ago.

What breath, from a higher realm than had ever yet inspired his low-born nature, prompted the excellent man who built Longway Villas, to spare that old garden, and to adapt it to the needs of No. 10, rather than to follow the instincts of his race, and to sweep its tender beauties, for ever, off the face of the earth? Was it, perchance, some memory, far and faint, of his mother's cottage amongst the green Kentish lanes?—or some vague, reverent homage for a dead girl, who was laid, years ago, in a flower-encircled grave, in the home of his youth? Impossible to say! And yet there are gleams of poetry, sometimes, in the coarsest soul—green spots upon the most barren soil. Be this as it may, the old garden was spared. The house that had stood within it was pulled down; and, perhaps, as it was rat-eaten and no longer weather-tight, one must take no umbrage at our friend, the builder, for destroying it. Then the green acres on either side — once known as "The Paddocks,"—were laid out into trim and even-sized building plots. The villas arose simultaneously from the bosom of the earth, and No. 10 with them, with an additional £12 10s. per annum tacked on to its rent, in consideration of the high-walled garden to which it was annexed.

One peculiarity yet remains to be mentioned. At the further end, perched on the top of the wall, is a small, round summer-house, like a dove-cot—to which a flight of rusty iron steps spirally ascends from the path below. The railings are hidden from sight, beneath a wealth of honeysuckle and ivy; and when you have climbed up them, you find yourself in a little round chamber, from which, through a gap between the unlovely backs of tall, modern houses, just one straight slice was to be seen of the shining, moving waters of the Thames, as they flowed, ever silently, onwards, London-wards, and Sea-wards. Such a slice, it was, too! Greenest beauty from bank to bank. A tangle of wild flowers, for a foreground, along the edge of the towing-path—purple spikes of loose-strife, great yellow tufts of ragwort, star-like ox-eyed daisies, and long, waving grasses, of countless form and number. Then that strip of water—cool, and ever-moving—sometimes silvery grey as the winter skies, sometimes green as the summer woods—but always and ever flowing on, with the ever-varying human burden upon its tide. Then the further bank, wooded to the water's edge, with the great climbing woods, up the steep hill-side—such woods as only the banks of the Thames can show. Even so small a section of so lovely a thing, as was to be seen from the little round turret on the top of the old garden-wall, was a possession of priceless value to the dwellers of No. 10.

Here it was that, in that same summer in which Angel and Dulcie Halliday were tasting the sweets of London life to the full, a very beautiful woman was in the habit of sitting, hour after hour, during the long, hot July days.

She would sit just within the little summer-house door, on a low basket-chair, with her face to the river. Sometimes her eyes would fasten upon the book on her knee, and she would be so absolutely motionless that, but for the occasional flutter of the page as she turned it over, she might have been some beautiful old-world picture, framed into the open arch of the summer-house door.

At such times the birds would come, fluttering fearlessly about her, perch upon the back of her chair, or even the folds of her dress; or feast, with happy confidence, upon the lush honeysuckle berries, within a few inches of her shoulder. Tiny spiders, too, would weave their threads backwards and forwards about her, using the brim of her hat, or the lace upon her sunshade, as objects for their architectural designs; whilst a bright-winged butterfly would now and again poise his crimson and yellow wings almost upon her neck; or, a sleepy-voiced bumble-bee, boom stumblingly by, knocking himself clumsily against the knot of her bronze hair, as it gleamed in his path, in the flickering light.

But she was not always so still. Often the book failed to enthral her; often other thoughts—against which she vainly struggled—came betwixt her soul and the once dearly loved pages of her Montaigne, or her Bacon; and her eyes, half impatient at herself, half weary with the eternal struggle, would wander restlessly away to that glimpse of the great world, upon the bosom of the river, a couple of hundred yards away. Here she would watch the gay boat-loads of men and maidens flash suddenly into the picture, and then as suddenly vanish out of it. Between one ugly straight wall and the other the revelation came—the tiny prow would shoot swiftly into sight, then the whole boat and its occupants — three or four strokes of the flashing oars, then all would be over, and the boat have vanished away from her sight for ever. Sometimes it would be a steam-launch, puffing itself, noisily, into the panorama, with gay striped awnings, and a crowd of noisy, happy people on board. Sometimes a couple of lovers, floating slowly down stream. Sometimes a tiny outrigger shot swiftly through, with one silent man pulling long, swinging strokes, that carried him out of her picture with a lightning-like rapidity. And sometimes, again, it would be a vision of another sort; a rough barge, dirty, and smoke-begrimed, slowly and laboriously dragged along by the man on the towing-path—whilst a pale, hungry-looking woman, clasping a crying infant on her shoulder, stood, looking wistfully out at the cabin-door, with a couple of ragged urchins tumbling about at her feet.

"It is like life!" Rose de Brefour would say to herself; and on those days when the river's endless story fascinated her, her book always failed to claim her mind to its pages.

She could see the faces, too, as they passed by; hear their laughter, catch the ring of their voices—the, confused babel of their merry cries. Often there would be singing; the twang of the guitar, or the jingle of silver bells; but they none of them glanced her way, or caught a sight of the sad-eyed woman—with her beautiful, sorrowful face—who watched them from her lonely look-out on the old garden wall.

She did not spend her whole existence in these sad musings. Often she paced the old walks below, backwards and forwards, with the small white terrier following close at her skirts—or, oftener still, she sat within, by the crippled old man's chair, in the smart villa drawing-room—that she had softened and subdued, in a measure, to her own quiet coloring, with her shelves full of books, and her draperies of sober hue.

The old man had stood the move badly. He was more feeble since the journey up from the Hidden House—now two months ago. With a pang, she owned to herself, that he had never rallied from it. He was more silent than before; less inclined to gentle rallyings of his beautiful daughter-in-law—more given to prayer, and to frequent interviews with the Priest, who came to see him.

A terrible self-reproach would come upon her, at times, when she realized all this. He was all she had to live for she would say to herself, in bitterness. Her one duty, her one trust—and in that trust, perhaps, been unfaithful.

"I will never move him again!" she would say to her heart. "I will so live that it need never be gone through again. I will watch my every action—so that the danger may never arise again—and I will never leave him till he dies, never for one hour."

So she parted with her little brougham, and her horse—as a self-indulgence unworthy of the life of sacrifice she had laid down for herself—so that she could devote herself more entirely to the old man.

"I have always my books!" she told herself; "they should be sufficient for me."

Other occupations, too, had been added to her simple and uneventful life. She was now within reach of London—and often, deeply veiled, she would go up by train, and spend a few hours in adding to her store of beloved volumes. Some rare old edition, or some improved new one, advertised in the papers, would catch her eye, and she would go up to an old book shop well known to her in the Strand, and purchase the treasure, bringing it home with her, herself, so that she need leave no address behind her. And once or twice, whilst there, she had ordered some pleasant old standard work which she loved, and knew well, to be sent to a direction in London, which was still written faintly, in pencil, upon her ivory tablets.

It was on one of these occasional visits to London that, instigated thereto by the prayers and entreaties of the old man, she had presented herself at the offices of Dane and Trichet; and, sending in her card, had requested an interview with the head of the firm..

It was not without great reluctance that she had consented to humor her father-in-law in this.

"There will be danger in it; I might betray myself, and there is nothing to be gained by it," she had urged.

"Ah, mon Dieu, it is so many years ago! He cannot be made of stone, this man! Surely he will have forgiven and forgotten, and then the truth might be known, and this terror of discovery be removed from us."

She shook her head sadly.

"I know him better," she said, "he will never forgive either the living or the dead. No good will come of it."

But she went, all the same, just to satisfy him.

No good did come of it. Only, had she known it, the seeds of unmixed evil to come.

For, a week later, she was attracted once more up to the old bookseller's in the Strand, by one of those tempting little notices that used to prove so irresistible to her: "A bargain.—Rare and unique copy of Montesquieu's works, very little damaged, in the original French, earliest edition known. No reasonable offer refused." So ran the notice in the Book Lovers' Gazette. And Rose de Brefour found her way that very afternoon to the friendly bookseller in the Strand, with whom she had had many dealings already.

"You must make an offer for that for me, Mr. Poyntz," she said, holding out the paper to him. "What will it go for, do you suppose?"

He was a grey, bent old man, who must have spent his life in poring over the volumes in his long, low-ceilinged shop, so intimate was his knowledge of them all. He was quite used to the sight of the beautiful woman who was so fond of musty old books; he used to say to his wife, who was a dull, commonplace old lady enough, that she made a radiance in the place when she came in, with her beauty and her sweetness. Mr. Poyntz would have smiled at her from sheer pleasure at the sight of her, only that he was a prim old man who seldom gave way to his feelings, and that, as he would have put it, he knew his place too well to unbend to his customers. So he only gravely put up his double glasses at the paper she held out to him, and shrugged his shoulders.

"There's no demand for that class of literature now, ma'am! it will go for a mere song. It is in bad condition, too. I have been to see it. I half expected," he added, with something like a sly smile hovering at the corners of his thin lips, "that you would be coming up about it. Can I send it to you?"

"No; I will call again next week for it." And just at that very minute a young man sauntered into the low doorway, and stood by the counter turning over the books that lay in dusty piles upon it, with an aimless air of not exactly knowing what he wanted.

Rose was just taking her leave; she glanced carelessly at the man who had just entered, she could not see his face, but it seemed to her that he turned his back to her with a somewhat curious persistency. She had no desire to look at him, she only noticed him because he studiously avoided looking at her. As Mr. Poyntz followed her up to the door, he added:

"By the way, ma'am, that copy of Congreve you wished me to have bound in calf will come back to-night. Am I to send it?"

"Please, Mr. Poyntz."

"To the address you gave me the other day, I suppose? G. Dane, Esq., Avenue Chambers."

She nodded assent, and was gone.

The young man by the counter turned round sharply.

"That lady's name is de Brefour, isn't it?"

Mr. Poyntz gave a shrewd look at the questioner from under his grey brows, with a little wrinkle of enquiry at the bridge of his nose, as of one who would say, "And pray what business is it of yours, young man?" He did not, on principle, like customers who asked questions about each other. He rubbed his hands softly one over the other, and bowed.

"Did you wish to speak to the lady, sir?"

"Oh, no," with a slight embarrassment that was not lost upon the bookseller. "I only thought I knew her. Her name is de Brefour, is it not?"

Mr. Poyntz could not deny it. He quickly changed the subject by enquiring what he could do for the gentleman. The gentleman mentioned a book, a new and extremely frivolous volume of social sketches lately published. Mr. Poyntz mentally became as buckram. Such works were not in his line of business, he replied, and there was an unmitigated contempt in his mind for the rash youth who had ventured to mention the book in question within the sacred and austerely learned precincts of his shop:

"Ah, I forgot! Nothing modern, of course, you only smell of mustiness, here!" replied his visitor, with careless insolence as he took up his silver-mounted cane from the counter.

Mr. Poyntz literally shook with rage.

It is an odour, let me tell you, sir, that is not unpleasing to great students and learned men all over the world," he replied with heat.

The offensive young gentleman laughed, and tilted his hat down over his eyes.

"Oh, indeed! Madame de Brefour likes the smell, I suppose? And Mr. Geoffrey Dane? Does he like it, too? Ah! love lurks under strange bindings occasionally."

"Mr. Geoffrey Dane is not a customer of mine, sir," replied the old man angrily. "I do not even know him, save by name. But as I do not care for your remarks, young man, I'll trouble you to walk out of my shop."

'All right, I'm off. Tata, old cock."

In the whole course of a long and honourable career, Mr. Poyntz had never been called "old cock" before! He gasped and fell back with closed eyes, clutching at the back of a chair. For a few moments it seemed as though he was about to have an apoplectic seizure, so fearful was the effect upon him of those terrible words.

As to Albert Trichet, he went down the street, twirling his stick round and round in a state of uncontrollable ecstasy. He drew long breaths of delight, he laughed for joy.

"My eye! What a piece of news for the Governor!" he cried to himself in his glee. "That's his little game is it! What a kettle of fish! I think I've got you now, my young friend, and your little hash will soon be settled. Oh law! what a rage the Gov' will be in! I wouldn't be in your shoes, friend Geoffrey, for a good bit. Sends him books, does she? This is real jam, and no mistake! What a precious young fool! Now's my time and if I don't make something out of this my name's not Albert Trichet!"

And he snapped his fingers so merrily, and tripped along with so gay and jaunty a step, to the tune of such little guffaws of laughter and delight, that more than one passer-by turned in amazement to look after him, muttering, "mad, or drunk!" as they went by.

Madame de Brefour had forgotten him. She went back to Longway Road, a little freshened up and strengthened for her lonely life, by her short visit to the shadowy old shop, with its low celling, and with that mu[illegible]dour of ancient calf-bindings, which Albert Trichet had derided, and which is as dear to every true book lover as is the fragrance of myrtle and orange-blossoms to a maiden—and no disturbing memories of the strange young man by Mr. Poyntz's book-stall, who had not looked up at her as she went by, troubled her peace, as she ministered as usual to her father-in-law, chatted to old Martine, gave a few directions concerning her garden to Jacques, and then took her way, with Montaigne as a companion, to the little summer-house on the top of the wall.

(To be continued.)

INCREASE OF CANCER.

Too Much Meat Said to be Especially Harmful.

In England four and a half times as many people die now from cancer as half a century ago, and no other disease can show anything like such an immense increase, W. Roger Williams says in the Lancet. "Probably no single factor is more potent in determining the outbreak of cancer in the predisposed than high feeding. There can be no doubt that the greed for food manifested by modern communities is altogether out of proportion to their present requirements. Many indications point to the gluttonous consumption of meat, which is such a characteristic feature of this age, as likely to be especially harmful in this respect. Statistics show that the consumption of meat has for many years been increasing by leaps and bounds, till it now has reached the amazing total of 131 pounds per head per year, which is more than double what it was half a century ago, when the conditions of life were more compatible with high feeding. When excessive quantities of such highly stimulating forms of nutriment are ingested by persons whose cellular metabolism is defective, it seems probable that there may thus be excited in those parts of the body where vital processes are still active such excessive and disorderly cellular proliferation as may eventuate in cancer. No doubt other factors co-operate, and among these I should be especially inclined to name deficient exercise and probably also deficiency in fresh vegetable food."

THE LOCAL PAPER'S HOLD.

The attachment of subscribers to a well-conducted newspaper is fully confirmed by publishers. So long as a paper pursues a just, honorable and judicious course, says the Springfield, Vt., Reporter, meeting the wants of its customers in all respects, the ties of friendship between the subscriber and the paper are as hard to break up by an outside third party as the links which bind old friends in business or social life. Occasional defects and errors in a newspaper are overlooked by those who have become attached through its perusal for years. They sometimes become displeased with it on account of something which has slipped into its columns, and may stop taking it, but absence of the familiar sheet at their homes or offices for a few weeks becomes a privation, and they conclude to take it again. No friendship on earth is more constant than that contracted by a reader for a journal that makes an honest and earnest effort to merit continued support.