

# THE THREAD OF LIFE

OR  
SUNSHINE AND SHADE.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.—(CONTINUED.)

"Read me *Gambetta*," Winifred said with quiet imperiousness. "I'll see if I like that any better than all this foolish maudering Philosophy."

Hugh turned over his papers for the piece "by request," and after some searching among quires and sheets, came at last upon a clean-written copy of his immortal treatise. He began reading out the lugubrious lines in a sufficiently grandiose and sepulchral voice. Winifred listened with careless attention, as to a matter little worthy her sublime consideration. Hugh cleared his throat and rang out magiloquently:

"She sits once more upon her ancient throne,  
The fair republic of our steadfast vows;  
A Phrygian bonnet binds her queenly brows;  
Athwart her neck her knotted hair is blown.  
A hundred titles nestle in her lap,  
Girt round their stately looks with mural crowns;  
The folds of her imperial robe enwrap  
A thousand lesser towns."  
"Mural crowns" is good," Winifred murmured satirically; "it reminds one so vividly of the stone statues in the Place de la Concorde."

Hugh took no notice of her intercalary criticism. He went on with ten or twelve stanzas more of the same bombastic, would-be sublime character, and wound up at last in thunderous tones with a prophetic outburst as to the imagined career of some future *Gambetta*—himself possibly:

"He still shall guide us toward the distant goal;  
Calm with unerring tact our weak alarms;  
Train all our youth in skill of manly arms,  
And knit our lives in unity of soul;  
Till bursting iron bars and gates of brass  
Our own Republic stretch her arms agate  
To raise the weeping daughters of Alsace,  
And lead them home, Lorraine."  
"Well, what do you think of that, Winnie?" he asked at last triumphantly, with the air of a man who has trotted out his best war-horse for public inspection, and has no fear of the effect he is producing.

"Think?" Winifred answered. "Why, I think, Hugh, that if Swinburne had never written his *Ode to Victor Hugo*, you would never have written that *Funeral March* for your precious *Gambetta*."

Hugh bit his lip in bitter silence. The criticism was many times worse than harsh; it was true; and he knew it. But a truthful critic is the most galling of all things.

"Well, surely, Winifred," he cried at last after a long pause, "you think those other lines good, don't you?"

And when like some fierce whirlwind through the land.

The wrathful Teuton averted, he only dared to hope and not when every heart and hand, But his alone, despaired."

"My dear Hugh," Winifred answered candidly, "don't you see in your own heart that all this sort of thing may be very well in its own way, but it isn't original—it isn't inspiration; it isn't the true sacred fire: it's only an echo. Echoes do admirably for the young beginner; but in a man of your age—for you are getting on now—we expect something native and idiosyncratic. I think Mr. Hatherley called it *idiosyncratic*.—You know Mr. Hatherley said to me once you would never be a poet. You have too good a memory." Whenever Messinger sits down at his desk to write about anything," he said in his quiet way, "he remembers such a perfect flood of excellent things other people have written about the same subject, that he's absolutely incapable of originality." And the more I see of your poetry, dear, the more do I see that Mr. Hatherley was right—right beyond question. You're clever enough, but you know you're not original."

Hugh answered her never a single word. To such a knock-down blow as that, any answer at all is clearly impossible. He only muttered something very low to himself about casting one's pearls before some creature inadmissible.

Presently, Winifred spoke again. "Let's go out," she said, rising from the sofa, "and sit by the sea on the roots of the poplar."

At the word, Hugh flung down the manuscript in a heap on the ground with a stronger expression than Winifred had ever before heard fall from his lips. "I hate the poplar!" he said angrily; "I detest the poplar! I won't have the poplar! Nothing on earth will induce me to sit by the poplar!"

"How cross you are!" Winifred cried with a frown. "You jump at me as if you'd snap my head off! And all at just because I didn't like your verses.—Very well then; I'll go and sit there alone.—I can amuse myself, fortunately, without your help. I've got Mr. Hatherley's clever article in this month's *Contemporary*."

That evening, as they sat together silently in the drawing room, Winifred engaged in the feminine amusement of casting admiring glances at her own walls, and Hugh poring over a serious-looking book, Winifred glanced over him suddenly with a sigh, and murmured half aloud: "After all, really I don't think much of it."

"Much of what?" Hugh asked, still bending over the book he was anxiously consulting.

"Why, of that gourd I brought home from town yesterday. You know Mrs. Walpole's got a gourd in her drawing-room; and every time I went into the vicarage I said to myself: 'Oh, how lovely it is! How exquisite! How foreign-looking! If only I had a gourd like that, now, I think life would be really endurable. It gives the last touch of art to the picture. Our new drawing-room would look just perfection with such a gourd as hers to finish the wall with.'" Well, I saw the exact counterpart of that very gourd the day before yesterday at a shop in Bond street. I bought it, and brought it home with exceeding great joy, I thought I should then be quite happy. I hung it up on the wall to try, this morning. And sitting here all evening looking at it with my head first on one side and then on the other, I've said to myself a thousand times over: 'It doesn't look one bit like Mrs. Walpole's. After all, I don't know that I'm so much happier, now I've

got it, than I was before I had a gourd of my own at all to look at."

Hugh groaned. The unconscious allegory was far too obvious in its application not to sink into the very depths of his soul. He turned back to his book, and sighed inwardly to think for what a feeble, unsatisfactory shadow of a gourd he had sacrificed his own life—not to speak of Winifred's and Elsie's. By and by Winifred rose and crossed the room. "What's that you're studying so intently?" she asked, with a suspicious glance at the book in his fingers.

Hugh hesitated, and seemed half inclined for a moment to shut the book with a bang and hide it away from her. Then he made up his mind with a fresh resolve to brazen it out. "Gordon's *Electricity and Magnetism*," he answered quietly, as unashamed as possible, holding the volume half-closed with his forefinger at the page he had just hunted up. "I'm—I'm interested at present to some extent in the subject of electricity. I'm thinking of getting it up a little."

Winifred took the book from his hand, wondering, with a masterful air of perfect authority. He yielded like a lamb. On immaterial questions it was his policy not to resist. She turned to the page where his finger had rested and ran it down lightly with her quick eye. The key-words showed in some degree at what it was driving: "Franklin's Experiment"—"Means of Collection"—"Theory of Lightning Rods"—"Ruhmkorff's Coils"—"Drawing down Electric Discharges from the Clouds."—Why, what was all this? She turned round inquiringly. Hugh shuffled in an uneasy way in his chair. The husband who shuffles betrays his cause.

"We must put up conductors, Winnie," he said hesitatingly, with a hot face, "to protect those new gables at the east wing.—It's dangerous to leave the house so exposed. I'll order them down from London to-morrow."

"Conductors! Fiddlesticks!" Winifred answered in a breath, with wifely promptitude. "Lightning never hurt the house yet, and it's not going to begin hurting it now, just because an immortal Poet with a fad for electricity has come to live and compose at Whitestrands. If anything, it ought to go the other way. Bards, you know, are exempt from thunderbolts. Didn't you read me the lines yourself, 'God's lightnings spared, they said, Alone the holier head, Whose laurels scorched it, or something to that effect? You're all right, you see. Poets can never get struck, I fancy."

"But 'Mr. Hatherley said to me once you would never be a poet,'" Hugh repeated with a smile, exactly mimicking Winifred's querulous little voice and manner. "As my own wife doesn't consider me a poet, Winifred, I shall venture to do as I like myself about my private property."

Winifred took up a bedroom candle and lit it quietly without a word. Then she went up to muse in her own bedroom over her new gourd and other diabolical inventions.

As soon as she was gone, Hugh rose from his chair and walked slowly into his own study, Gordon's "Electricity" was still in his hand, and his finger pointed to that incriminating passage. He sat down at the sloping desk and wrote a short note to a well-known firm of scientific instrument makers whose address he had copied a week before from the advertisement sheet of "Nature."

WHITESTRAND HALL,  
ALMUDHAM, SUFFOLK.

GENTLEMEN—Please forward me to the above address, at your earliest convenience, your most powerful form of Ruhmkorff Induction Coil, with secondary wires attached, for which cheque will be sent in full on receipt of invoice or retail price list.—Faithfully yours,  
HUGH MASSINGER.

As he rose from the desk, he glanced half involuntarily out of the study window. It pointed south. The moon was shining full on the water. That hateful poplar stared him straight in the face, as tall and gaunt and immovable as ever. On its roots, a woman in a white dress was standing, looking out over the angry sea, as Elsie had stood, for the twinkling of an eye, on that terrible evening when he lost her for ever. One second, the sight sent a shiver through his frame, then he laughed to himself, the next, for his groundless terror. How childish! How infantile! It was the gardener's wife, in her light print frock, looking out to sea for her boy's smack, overdue, no doubt—for Charlie was a fisherman.—But it was intolerable that he, the Squire of Whitestrands, should be subjected to such horrible terrors as these.—He shook his fist angrily at the offending tree. "You shall pay for it, my friend," he muttered low but hoarse between his clenched teeth. You shan't have many more chances of frightening me!"

CHAPTER XXIX.—ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN.

During the whole of the next week, the Squire and a strange artisan, whom he had specially imported by rail from London, went much about together by day and night through the grounds at Whitestrands. A certain air of mystery hung over their joint proceedings. The strange artisan was a skilled workman in the engineering line, he told the people at the *Fisherman's Rest*, where he had taken a bed for his stay in his kit bore out the statement—wired books of a scientific and diagrammatic character, chockful of formulae in Greek lettering, which seemed not unlikely to be connected with hydrostatics, dynamics, trigonometry, and mechanics, or any other equally abstruse and uncanny subject, not wholly alien to necromancy and witchcraft. It was held at Whitestrands by those best able to form an opinion in such dark questions, that the new importation was "summat in the electric way," and it was certainly matter of plain fact, patent to all observers equally, that he did in very truth fix up an elaborate lightning-conductor of the latest pattern to the newly thrown-out gable-end at what had once been Elsie's window. It was Elsie's window still to Hugh: let him twist it and turn it and alter it as he would, he feared it would never, never cease to be Elsie's window.

But in the domain at large, the intelligent

artisan with the engineering air, who was surmised to be "summat in the electric way," carefully examined, under Hugh's directions, many parts of the grounds at Whitestrands. Squire was going to lay out the garden and terrace afresh, the servants conjectured in their own society: one or two of them, exceedingly modern in their views, even opined in an off-hand fashion that he must be bent on laying electric lights on. Conservative in most things to the backbone, the servants bestowed the meed of their hearty approval on the electric light: it saves so in trimming and cleaning. Lamps are the bugbear of big country houses: electricity, on the other hand, needs no tending. It was near the poplar that Squire was going to put his installation, as they call the arrangement in our latter day jargon; and he was going to drive it, rumour remarked, by a tidal outfall. What a tidal outfall might be, or how it could work in lighting the Hall, nobody knew; but the intelligent artisan had let the words drop casually in the course of conversation; and the *Fisherman's Rest* snapped them up at once, and retailed them freely with profound gusto to all after-comers.

Still, it was a curious fact in its own way that the installation appeared to progress most easily when nobody happened to be looking on, and that the skilled workman in the engineering line generally stood with his hands in his pockets, surveying his handicraft with languid interest, whenever anybody from the village or the Hall lounged up by his side to inspect or wonder at it.

More curious still was another small fact, known to nobody but the skilled workman in *propria persona*, that four small casks of petroleum from a London store were stowed away, by Hugh Massinger's orders, under the very roots of the big poplar; and that by their side lay a queer apparatus, connected apparently in some remote way with electric lighting.

The Squire himself, however, made no secret of his own personal and private intentions to the London workman. He paid the man well, and he exacted silence. That was all. But he explained precisely in plain terms what it was that he wanted done. The tree was an eyesore to him, he said, with his usual frankness—Hugh was always frank whenever possible—but his wife, for sentimental reasons, had a special fancy for it. He wanted to get rid of it, therefore, in the least obtrusive way he could easily manage. This was the least obtrusive way. So this was what he required done with it. The London workman nodded his head, pocketed his pay, looked unconcerned, and held his tongue with trained fidelity. It was none of his business to pry into any employer's motives. Enough for him to take his orders and to carry them out faithfully to the very letter. The job was odd: an odd job is always interesting. He hoped the experiment might prove successful.

The Whitestrands labourers, who passed by the poplar and the London workman, time and again, with a jerky nod and their pipes turned downward, never noticed a certain slender unobtrusive copper wire which the strange artisan fastened one evening, in the gray dusk, right up the stem and bole of the big tree to a round knob on the very summit. The wire, however, as its fixer knew, ran down to a large deal box buried in the ground, which bore outside a green label, "Ruhmkorff Induction Coil, E. Iott's Patent." The wire and coil terminated in a pile close to the four full petroleum barrels. When the London workman had securely laid the entire apparatus, undisturbed by loungers, he reported adversely, with great solemnity, on the tidal outfall and electric light scheme to Hugh Massinger. No sufficient power for the purpose existed in the river. This adverse report was orally delivered in the front vestibule of Whitestrands Hall; and it was also delivered with sedulous care—as per orders received—in Mrs. Massinger's own presence. When the London workman went out again after making his carefully worded statement, he went out clinking a coin of the realm or two in his trousers' pocket, and with his tongue stuck, somewhat unbecomingly, in his right cheek, as who should pride himself on the successful outwitting of an innocent fellow-creature. He had done the work he was paid for, and he had done it well. But he thought to himself, as he went his way rejoicing, that the Squire of Whitestrands must be very well held in hand indeed by that small pale lady, if he had to take so many cunning precautions in secret beforehand when he wanted to get rid of a single tree that offended his eye in his own gardens.

The plot was all well laid now. Hugh had nothing further left to do but to possess his soul in patience against the next thunderstorm. He had not very long to wait. Before the month was out, a thunderstorm did indeed burst in full force over Whitestrands and its neighbourhood—one of those terrible and destructive east-coast, electric displays which invariably leave their broad mark behind them. For along the low, flat, monotonous East Anglian shore, where hills are unknown and big trees rare, the lightning almost inevitably singles out for its onslaught some aspiring piece of man's handiwork—some church steeple, some castle keep, the turrets on some tall and isolated manor-house, the vane above some ancient castellated gateway.

The reason for this is not far to seek. In hilly countries the hills and trees act as natural lightning-conductors, or rather as decoys to draw aside the fire from heaven to the towns or farm-houses that nestle far below among the glens and valleys. But in wide level plains, where all alike is flat and low-lying, human architecture forms for the most part the one salient point in the landscape for lightning to attack; every church or tower with its battlements and lanterns stands in the place of polished knobs on an electric machine, and draws down upon itself with unerring certainty the destructive bolt from the over-charged clouds. Owing to this cause, the thunder-storms of East Anglia are the most appalling and destructive in their concrete results of any in England. The laden clouds, big with electric energy, hang low and dark above one's very head, and let loose their accumulated store of vivid flashes in the exact midst of towns and villages.

This particular thunderstorm, as chance would have it, came late at night, after three sultry days of close weather, when big black masses were just beginning to gather in vast battalions over the German Ocean; and let loose at last its fierce artillery in terrible volleys right over the village and grounds of Whitestrands. Hugh Massinger was the first at the Hall to observe from afar the distant flash, before

the thunder had made itself audible in their ears. A pale light to westward, in the direction of Saude, attracted, as he real, his passing attention. "By Jove!" he cried, rising with a yawn from his chair, and laying down the manuscript of "A Life's Philosophy" which he was languidly correcting in its later stanzas, "that's something like lightning, Winifred! Over Saude way, apparently. I wonder if it's going to drift towards us?—Whew—what a clap! It's precious near. I expect we shall catch it ourselves shortly."

The clouds rolled up with extraordinary rapidity, and the claps came fast and thick and nearer. Winifred covered down on the sofa in terror. She dreaded thunder; but she was too proud to confess what she would nevertheless have given worlds to do—hide her frightened little head with sobs and tears in its old place upon Hugh's shoulder. "It's coming this way," she cried nervously after a while. "That last flash must have been awfully near us."

Even as she spoke, a terrific volley seemed to burst all at once right over their heads and shake the house with its irresistible majesty. Winifred buried her face deep in the cushions. "O Hugh," she cried in a terrified tone, "this is awful—awful!"

As Hugh could not resist that unspoken appeal. He drew up the blind hastily to its full height, so that he might see out to watch the success of his deep-laid stratagem; then he hurried over with real tenderness to Winifred's side. He drew his arm round her and soothed her with his hand, and laid her poor throbbing aching head with a lover's caress upon his own broad bosom. Winifred nestled close to him with a sigh of relief. The nearness of danger, real or imagined, rouses all the most ingrained and profound of our virile feelings. The instinct of protection for the woman and the child comes over even bad men at such moments of doubt with irresistible might and majesty. Small differences or tiffs are forgotten and forgiven: the woman clings naturally in her feminine weakness to the strong man in his primary aspect as comforter and protector. Between Hugh and Winifred the estrangement as yet was but vague and unacknowledged. Had it yawned far wider, had it sunk far deeper, the awe and terror of that supreme moment, would amply have sufficed to bridge it over, at least while the orgy of the thunderstorm lasted.

For next instant a sheet of liquid flame seemed to surround and engulf the whole house at once in its white embrace. The world became for the twinkling of a cyeen one sarging flood of vivid fire, one roar and crash and sea of deafening tumult. Winifred buried her face deeper than ever on Hugh's shoulder, and put up both her small hands to her tingling ears, to crush if possible the hideous roar out. But the light and sound seemed to penetrate everything: she was aware of them keenly through her very bones and nerves and marrow; her entire being appeared as if pervaded and overwhelmed with the horror of the lightning. In another moment all was over, and she was conscious only of an abiding awe, a deep-seated afterglow of alarm and terror. But Hugh had started up from the sofa now, both his hands clasped hard in front of his breast, and was gazing wildly out of the big bow-window, and lifting up his voice in a paroxysm of excitement. "It's his the poplar!" he cried. "It's his the poplar! It must be terribly near, Winnie! It's hit the poplar!"

Winifred opened her eyes with an effort, and saw him standing there, as if spellbound, by the window. She dared not get up and come any nearer the front of the room, but, raising her eyes, she saw from where she sat, or rather crouched, that the poplar stood out, one living mass of rampant flame, a glaring beacon, from top to bottom. The petroleum, ignited and raised to flashing-point by the fire which the induction coil had drawn down from heaven, gave off its blazing vapour in huge rolling sheets and forked tongues of flame, which licked up the crackling branches of the dry old tree from base to summit like so much touchwood. The poplar rose now one solid column of crimson fire. The red glow deepened and widened from moment to moment. Even the drenching rain that followed the thunder-clap seemed powerless to check that frantic onslaught. The fire leaped and danced through the tall straight boughs with mad exultation, hissing out its defiance to the big round drops which burst off into tiny balls of steam before they could reach the red hot trunk and snapping branches. Even left to itself, the poplar, once ignited, would have burnt to the ground with startling rapidity; for its core was dry and light as tinder, its wood was eaten through by innumerable worm-holes, and the hollow centre of mouldering dry-rot, where children had loved to play at Hide-and-seek, acted now like a roaring chimney flue, with the fierce draught that carried up the circling eddies of smoke and flame in mad career to the topmost branches. But the fumes of the petroleum, rendered instantly gaseous by the electric heat, made the work of destruction still more instantaneous, terrible, and complete than it would have proved if left to unaided nature. The very atmosphere revolved itself into one rolling pillar of fluid flame. The tree seemed enveloped in a shroud of fire. All human effort must be powerless to resist it. The poplar dissolved almost as if by magic with a wild rapidity into its prime elements.

A man must be a man come what may. Hugh leaped towards the window and flung it open wildly. "I must go!" he cried. "King the bell for the servants." The savage glea in his voice was well repressed. His enemy was low, laid prone at his feet, but he would at least pretend to some spark of magnanimity. "We must get out the horse!" he exclaimed. "We must try to save it!" Winifred clung to his arm in horror. "Let it burn down, Hugh!" she cried. "Who cares for the poplar? I'd sooner ten thousand poplars burned to the ground than that you should venture out on such an evening!"

Her hand on his arm thrilled through him with horror. Her words stung him with a sense of his meanness. Something very like a touch of remorse came over his spirit. He stooped down and kissed her tenderly. The next flash struck over towards the sandhills. The thunder was rolling gradually seaward.

Hugh slept but little that eventful night; his mind addressed itself with feverish eagerness to so many hard and doubtful questions. He tossed and turned and asked himself ten thousand times over—was the tree burnt through—burnt down to the ground? Were the roots and the trunk consumed beyond hope—or rather beyond fear—of ultimate recovery? Was the hateful poplar

really done for? Would any of the barrels that had held the petroleum any relic be left of the Induction Coil? What jot or tittle of evidence of design would now be left on tray and convict him? What reasonable suspicion would Winifred the fire was not wholly the result of dent?

But when next morning's light dawned the sun arose upon the scene of conflagration. Hugh saw at a glance that all his fears indeed been wholly and utterly groundless. The poplar was as though it had never existed. A bare black patch by the mouth of the Char, covered with ash and dust and cinders alone marked the spot where the famous tree had once stood. The very roots were burnt deep into the ground. The petroleum had done its duty bravely. Not a trace of design could be observed anywhere. The Ruhmkorff Induction Coil had melted into air. Nobody ever so much as dreamed that human handiwork had art or part in the burning of the celebrated Whitestrands poplar. The "Times" gave it a line of passing regret; and the Trinity House deleted it with pains as a lost landmark from their sailing directions.

Hugh set his workmen instantly to stub up the roots. And Winifred, gazing mournfully next day at the ruins, observed with a sigh: "You never liked the dear old tree, Hugh; and it seems as if fate had interposed in your favour to destroy it. I'm sorry it's gone; but I'd sacrifice a hundred such roots any day to have you as kind to me as you were last evening."

The saying smote Hugh's heart sore. He played nervously with the button of his coat. "I wish you could have kept it, Winnie," he said not unkindly. "But it's not my fault.—And I bear no malice. I'll even forgive you for telling me I'd never make a poet; though that, you'll admit, was a hard saying. I think, my child, if you don't mind, I'll ask Hatherley down next week to visit us.—There's nothing like adverse opinion to improve one's work. Hatherley's opinion is more than adverse. I'd like his criticism on *A Life's Philosophy* before I rush into print a leaf with the greatest and deepest work of my lifetime."

That same evening, as it was growing dusk, Warren Reif and Potts, navigating the *Mud Turfs* around by sea from Yarmouth Roads, put in for the night to the Char at Whitestrands. They meant to lie by for a Sunday in the estuary, and to walk across the fields, if the day proved fine, to service at Saude. As they approached the mouth they looked about in vain for the familiar landmark. At first they could hardly believe their eyes: to men who knew the coast coast well, the disappearance of the Whitestrands poplar from the world seemed almost as incredible as the sudden removal of the Bar Rock or the Pillars of Hercules. Nobody would ever dream of cutting down the glory of Suffolk, that time-honoured sea-mark. But as they strained their eyes through the deepening gloom, the stern logic of facts left them at last no further room for syllogistic reasoning or a priori scepticism. The Whitestrands poplar was really gone. Not a stump even remained as its relic or its monument.

All the way up to the "Fisherman's Rest" he repeated again and again below his breath: So much the worse in the end for Whitestrands."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Dr. Mackenzie's Book.

Public interest in the Whitechapel murders was speedily, if but temporarily overshadowed by the excitement due to the appearance of Dr. Mackenzie's Book of Defence of himself and his treatment of the late Emperor against the attacks of the German physicians. According to this book of his the famous Scotch specialist was a grievously persecuted man against whose professional skill the jealous hosts of professional Philistines rose up in wrath but fortunately for him and the Emperor, rose up in vain. The book has of course received no end of attention, hostile and otherwise. The German police have done it the very stupid honor of seizing all copies of it on which they could lay their hands. It has been the occasion of tremendous enterprise on the part of one New York newspaper, and of humiliating disappointment to at least another because of the terribly awkward slip between the cup and the lip of which it was the victim. Then there has been mourning and lamentation in the camp of a publishing firm because of the bad faith of somebody which has made their commercial venture anything but the success it might have been had things gone in the way they expected. All Europe and America has been turned into a battle ground of conflicting professional opinion in which learned doctors not only disagree, but give the lie to one another in a way which does not encourage the merely lay mind to place that reliance on scientific knowledge and skill which might be desirable. The unprofessional mind enjoys the fight, but wonders more and more why science can persist in sneering in so consciously superior a manner at the *Odium Theologicum*, which has so long been the object of its wonder and contempt.

The Yellow River.

It is reported from China that the whole of the new embankment of the Yellow River, which was commenced last autumn at the spot where the old embankment gave way, has been completely swept away by the summer floods. It is said to have cost about 2,000,000 sterling (9,000,000 taels). As the flood rose, it was seen that the strain was becoming dangerous, and Li Hang-tao, the high official in charge of the work, was sent for in hot haste, but before he could arrive the whole bank went down before the flood, and of the 8,000 feet of river-wall lately completed not an inch remains, and the waters are pouring unchecked through the immense gap into the Honan province. From 800 to 1,000 labourers who were on the bank were also swept away and drowned. It is reported from Peking that all the officials concerned are being severely punished. Li Hang-tao and the governor of the province are being dismissed and degraded; another high official is being banished to Mongolia, and the late High Commissioner of the Yellow River is to be banished to the Amoor. The disasters can scarcely stop as they are now, because the volume of silt-laden waters will create shallows which will still further increase the inundated area, and may cause an overflow into the Yangtze which will make the conservation of that great water-way a matter of urgent importance.