A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER I.

Wilford Heaton is not my real name, nor why should I publish it to the world? The reason I do not give it is, first, because I have no desire to be made the object of idle curiosity or speculation, and secondly, although the explanation herein given will clear the honor of one of the most powerful of the Imperial Houses in Europe, I have no wish that my true name should be associated with it.

I have, however, a reason for writing this narrative—a very strong reason.

The story is an enthralling one; the adventures stranger, perhaps, than ever happened to any other living person. I have resolved to relate the plain unvarnished facts in their sequence, just as they occurred, without seeking to suppress or embellish, but to recount the strange adventures just as they are registered in the small leather portfolio, or secret dossier, which still, at this moment, reposes in the archives of a certain Ministry in one of the European capitals.

There have recently been stories afloat—strange stories. At first I laughed at all the absurd rumors, but very quickly I saw how seriously distorted the real facts had become, for ingenious paragraphers of certain Society papers, grasping the story eagerly, worked it up into a narrative which reflected very seriously upon the honor of one who is dearest in all the world to me.

Well, my tale—or exposure—is written here.

In order that those who read may clearly follow the curious chain of circumstances, it is necessary for me to go back some eight years or so—not a long period as far as time goes, but to me a veritable century. I was young, just turned twenty-five. I was decently well-off, having come into an income of nearly a couple of thousand a year left me by my father, a sum which put me beyond the necessity of entering business, pursuing the daily grind, or troubling about the morrow. My career at Brasenose had, I fear, been marked by a good many shortcomings and many youthful escapades, but I ended it by taking my degree of Bachelor of Medicine, shortly afterwards pursuing the fashionable habit of "going abroad." Within two years, however, I returned to London world-weary—like so many other young men who, being left comfortably off, commence to taste the enjoyment of life too early—and settled down in a suite of smoke-begrimed rooms in Essex Street, Strand, by courtesy termed chambers.

The place was horribly dingy, situated in that cul-de-sac which is quiet and almost deserted, even though only a stone's throw from the busiest, noisiest, and muddiest thoroughfare in the world. The ground and first floors of the house were occupied by several firms of solicitors, whose doors were covered with ragged and sadly faded green baize, while the second floor I rented as my abode. The baint, shabby, bizarre old place had been built at the end of the last century for family residence, in the days when Bloomsbury was an aristocratic quarter and great men lived in Leicester Square; but now, alas! smoke-stained and time-dimmed, it was given over to the dust which the law accumulates. From its exterior, like those of its neighbors, there protruded those great iron extinguishers used by the linkmen of the days bygone, while the broad, thin-worn stairs, easy of ascent, the solid mahogany doors, the great carved handrail, and the fine Adams ceilings, like those in the older houses of the Adelphi, told mutely of the prosperity of its long-departed owners.

I had taken over the furniture, a frowsy lot of faded horsehair, which had perhaps done duty there for half a century, together with the rooms, and even though they were so dismal and out-of-date, I must confess that they had one attraction for me, namely, that above, in the low-pitched rooms on the top floor, there lived and worked my old college chum, Dick Doyle, who had, after a good deal of wild-oat sowing, developed into a rising journalist and litterateur.

Curious though it may appear, I had returned from the Sunny South and taken up my abode in that dingy, dispiriting place with one sole idea, namely, to be near the man who was practically my only friend in the whole world. I was in sore need of him, for I was utterly heedless of everything past, present or future.

With the exception of old Mrs. Parker, who had served my family for twenty years, I was absolutely alone and helpless as a child. At the age of twenty-five I had ceased to interest myself in anything, and plunged in eternal gloom, all desire for life having left me, for knowing that its joys could no longer be mine, I was, even though in the full possession of all my youthful vigor, mental faculties, and bodily strength, actually looking forward to the grave.

The terrible truth must here be told. The reader will, I feel confident, sympathize. While living abroad, travelling hither and thither through the old Italian towns, where I delighted to roam in the big white piazzas and through the crumbling palaces, every stone of which spoke of a brilliant and historic past, I had been suddenly seized by disease, and for three months lay tossing upon my bed in an English pension in Florence, tended by two calm, sweet-faced sisters of charity, with their grey-blue habits and great white linen head-dresses, which in my hours of fever and delirium seemed always so clean and cool. The two great Italian professors who were called to me shook their heads, believing that, even if they managed to save my life, it would be at a loss of one of my senses. In this, alas! they were not mistaken. My eyes became affected by sclerottis, a severe inflammation of the sclerotic. Gradually my eyes, those most beautiful structures of the human body which manifest in such small compass the great, the unspeakable, the incomprehensible power of our Creator, grew dim. My sight was slowly but surely failing me. I was recovering from my bodily ailment to be attacked by the ophthalmic disease which the doctors had all along feared.

I implored of them to do something to preserve my sight, but they only dropped into my eye certain liquids from their little brown glass phials, and regarded the effect gravely. A great oculist from Rome came to give his opinion. I saw him but mistily, as though I were looking through a dense fog; and he, too, told me that all that could be done had already been done.

(To be Continued.)

A Man's Revenge

CHAPTER XXXI.

"And so that is settled, and everything is cleared up in a most satisfactory manner. Lady Cruse has her pearls, Eileen has come out trumps, for it must be true that she tried to clear you, and you are mine, for ever and ay," said Duncan, as an hour later he and Sunbeam stood on the balcony, watching the retreating back of the detective as he crossed the square, his satisfaction of the interview shown by his walk.

"And yet," she murmured, "I still feel anxious and—oh, Duncan, you know everything, you say, so I may tell you, my second self. For you will never, never mention it again, I know."

"Say on, sweetheart. Your secrets cannot be black, therefore I am safe in promising to keep them. Only look pleased, more pleased than that. See, I will bring the color to your cheeks."

She laughed as she drew back from his embrace.

"Some one will see you," she whispered. "And I want to be serious, now."

"I am your slave, and all ears. What is this fresh trouble? Do you still ache to give yourself up to justice to save Gentleman Dan?"

"He did not do it. And I feel that if any one ought to suffer unjustly that I am the one."

"Too late. No one would believe you now. No. You are safe, and as for Gentleman Dan, leave him alone. He deserves it for all you have suffered through him."

"But it is not fair, it——"

"Would you say who the real culprit is to save him?" he asked mischeviously.

She blushed and hung her head. Somehow it was difficult to say what she meant. And yet why should Dan be punished for what he did not do?

"No. I could not do that," she replied. "Only——"

"You would sacrifice yourself for him. My darling, you can put all that from your mind. He will be punished more for the bank robbery than for the pearls which are recovered. Besides he was not totally innocent of their theft, you may be sure, since they were in his house. Also, he may betray——"

"My father!" she whispered anxiously.

"But one never knows what such men will do. They have their own code of honor. Though in this case things seem peculiar. Evidently your father has got off—though he may still be in danger. But you must not trouble about that. You have shielded him most loyally—you would have continued doing so if we had not found a better way out of the difficulty. And I believe you are sorry you cannot make a martyr of yourself, eh?"

"Oh, no. I dreaded the trial with every fibre of my being. I cannot tell you how I dreaded it. But—I feel you are doing wrong—that you ought to give me up. You see, Eileen is not so bad as you make me think, and perhaps——"

"I am only thankful for that because I hated to think her so, not for any other reason. No, Sunbeam, I wanted you from the first. Nothing will alter my mind about that——"

"Not even if he—is found?" she asked nervously.

"Not even that. Though I sincerely hope he won't be. But here is Lady Cruse. She looks as though she wanted you. I have already monopolized you too long."

"Yes, I want you both!" exclaimed Lady Cruse coming towards them, new light in her face. "The most wonderful thing on earth has happened. Sunbeam, my little Sunbeam, I have just heard that you are my very own—my long-lost child!"

She threw her arms around the girl as she spoke. Duncan started forward, surprised.

"How did you hear?" he asked. "Has Miss Green come?"

"Aunt Hetty?" exclaimed Sunbeam. "I do not understand. I am Bill Green's child—the convict's kid' they called me, and——"

"No—no, you are my own little daughter. Surely my heart knew it when it taught me to love you," replied Lady Cruse, drawing the girl to her again. "And no one has been to tell me, only I have had a letter—I have only just opened it. It is from Bill Green, no longer your father, Sunbeam."

"I do not understand," repeated the girl, pushing her hair back from her face with a sigh. "And why did you think Aunt Hetty was here, Duncan?" she added, turning to her fiance.

"Because she herself told me that you were Lady Cruse's daughter, yesterday. That is why I stayed. Only my story is too long, let Lady Cruse tell us all she wants to, first."

"Yes—come and see the letter. Then Sunbeam you will know that what I say is true. Bill has written it in a hurry. They are on their way to Australia, now, he and his sister——"

"Oh! And I shall not see Aunt Hetty!" exclaimed Sunbeam, in a voice full of disappointment.

"You have me instead," answered her mother with a loving smile.

"Ah, yes—and it seems too wonderful to be true. Especially after all that has appeared. So wonderful that I cannot believe I am the same girl. Perhaps he has made a mistake; perhaps also," she added with a sudden twinge of fear, "he is only saying it because he knows your story and wants to get rid of me."

"Read this, Duncan, and let the child see that it is really true," interrupted Lady Cruse, holding out the illiterate scrawl Bill Green had posted to her the day before.

"Your Lidyship,

"Being as I'm leavin' the orspittle shores of England for an unlimited time I think it as well to tell you sumethink about Sunbeam wot is in trouble just now. Fifteen yers ago Sir Ralph Freer and me was chums of a sort. To oblidge him I with my sister Hetty took charge of a little maid of three or therabouts. He sed he would call fer her agin. Well he never did, cos of his losin' his memory. So as we loved the child we stuck to her. I'd occasion to know she was your lidyship's, but we didn't want to part wid 'er, I 'ave proofs, things she wore when she comed, a paper rote by Sir Ralph about 'er, but as she's bin a large expense, she's bin brought up like a lady, suitable for 'er station, so's not to shame you. I don't give up them proofs fir nothink. And a lady like your lidyship won't expect it. Bein' as in hexchange fir her I 'ave the pearls—she's worth double them—I won't ask more'n a thousand pounds for the proofs. The address at the bottom will find me. You see Australy's a big place. It's no good puttin' the perlice on to me, wot would be ongrateful after all we've done for Sunbeam. So I don't mind saying as I was the cove wot stole the perls. How, it don't matter, but she's as inocent as you are. Plese give our love to Sunbeam an' tell 'er we meant all for her good and that we're goin' to lead good lives now to please 'er. I knows she loves us, for we did ourn best for her.

"As fir the perls I know you'd willingly give them up for Sunbeam,

"Yours faithfully,

"BILL GREEN fir the last time.'

"And so you see, my darling, it is true. You are my child in reality," exclaimed Lady Cruse, as Duncan laid the letter down.

"But the proofs," said Sunbeam, still fearful that Bill was lying. "Won't you ask for them?"

"Yes. He shall get his money; for as he says, he was good to you. We will sift the matter as thoroughly as we can. But both Lord Cruse and I are satisfied. We feel they are not deceiving us. What do you think, Duncan?"

"For a long time I have thought there was a mystery about Sunbeam. Miss Green told me this is true. She was afraid to say more and disappeared. But the pearls are yours again! Bill does not explain that."

"No. Nor shall we say anything about it. For all those years of agony when they loved and tended my child, I have forgotten. They have been good to her, my little Sunbeam—Phyllis Aldine is her name—but Sunbeam, the name they gave her, must remain hers, for she has indeed been that to us all."

So saying Lady Cruse drew her daughter to her again.

. . . .

What more is there to say? For Bill's proofs arrived, and with them a letter from Hetty. Sunbeam Green became Phyllis Aldine but only for a short time. For ere another season drew the fashionable world to town, Duncan Sinclair had claimed his bride.

As for Gentleman Dan, penal servitude for twenty years seemed so light a punishment for one so accomplished in evil doings that they all decided that Bill Green might be left undisturbed in the new life he had chosen. Luckily for him so little was said about the pearls that Dan's betrayal of him had no effect, especially as he seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. As Sunbeam changed her name, so did he and Hetty change theirs, and as he had written, Australia is a big place.

THE END.

BURIAL PLACE OF KINGS

BEAUTIFUL CATHEDRAL OF ST PICENTE DE FORA.

Bodies of the Sovereigns of Portugal Lie in the Splendid Royal Pantheon.

An unusual mode of burial in Portugal induces many a traveller to visit the cemeteries of Lisbon. Instead of the headstones and monuments of the graveyards of other countries, rows and rows of tiny chapels are to be seen ranged in long avenues bordered by cypress trees.

The Portuguese are reluctant to bury their dead out of sight, and these chapels serve as mortuaries for the coffins, which are placed on shelves within. Through the iron grilles the eye discerns small altars and flowers gleaming through the subdued light of the interiors.

Still more curious, and fraught with strangely mixed interests, is the method of burial, preserved from very ancient customs, for the monarchs of the ruling house of Braganza.

Their resting-place is not difficult to find, for the church to which the Royal Pantheon is attached is conspicuous from many parts of the city.

In fact, the cathedral of St. Yicente de Fora, with its majestic facade decorated in the Jesuit style of the sixtenth century, is looked upon by residents as the handsomest church in Lisbon.

The edifice stands high upon a slope. The present building was erected by Philip II. of Spain, and, though greatly injured by the earthquake of 1755, still preserves in the restoration its original appearance. St. Vicente de Fora is the gathering point for great religious festivals such as the centenary of St. Anthony a few years ago and the International Catholic Congress.

BURIAL-PLACE OF KINGS.

There is an exit into the adjacent cloisters, which, curiously enough, are lined with blue and white tiles illustrating the fables of La Fontaine.

The only sound that stirs the silence of the enclosed garden is the murmur of running water as we turn towards a doorway at the end of the arcades. A dim, low chapel lies beyond, and within its walls there broods a spirit of unutterable quietude and mystery.

Here is the Royal Pantheon of the Kings of the House of Braganza. Here rest the mortal remains of Dom Joao IV. (eighth Duke of Braganza and the King of the Restoration) and his successors—Dom Pedro III., Dom Joao V., Dom. Jose, Dom Joao VI., Dom. Pedro IV. (the liberating King, who gave Portugal her Constitution), Dona Maria Gloria, Dom. Pedro V., and Dom Pedro II., who was the last Emperor of Brazil.

There is something more than ordinarily solemn and awe-inspiring about the manner in which these defunct monarchs repose in this house of the dead.

The bodies have all been embalmed like effigies, and until quite recently the faces were visible, as though composed in trance-like slumber, through glass apertures in the coffin lids. The bier of Dom Luis, the father f the late murdered King, occupies the chief position in the crypt.

The mortal remains of the genial King and his promising young heir, Dom Luis Filippe, are now in the awesome companionship of those embalmed monarchs in the Royal Pantheon, and it is there that the once smiling and gracious lady, Queen Dona Amelie, kneels in mourning for her dead.

WOODEN-HEADED.

The prosecuting counsel had been very scathing in his treatment of the witnesses for the defence. So much so that one of these, a young doctor, determined to retaliate.

"You claim to be acquainted with the various symptoms attending concussion of the brain?" asked the lawyer.

"I do."

"We will take a concrete case," continued the counsel. "If my learned friend, counsel for the defence, and myself were to bang our heads together, should we get concussion of the brain?"

The young physician smiled slightly.

"The probabilities are," he replied, "that counsel for the defence would."

ON THE FARM

THE PLAGUE OF POOR COWS.

It grieves us to think as we write of the very large per cent. of the dairy farmer's feed and time being wasted every day, every week and every month of this 1908 because he is undertaking to make money from cows which on the average are giving only about one hundred and forty pounds of butter fat per year, just enough to pay for the feed and labor, but furnishing no real profit to the farmers.

There is no necessity for a continuance of this state of affairs, but it seems almost impossible to induce the farmer to take measures to protect himself from this constant loss. All that is necessary is to use the scales and the Babcock test to ascertain the actual yield of the cows during the year. It is not necessary for him to weigh and test every day. Professor Erf, of the Kansas station, who has given the matter especial study, is our authority for the statement that weighing and testing the milk three days in the week will be accurate to the extent of 96 per cent. of the amount of milk produced and 94 per cent. of the butter fat as compared with the record taken every day during the period of lactation.

There is scarcely an eighteen-year-old boy on a farm who could not be induced to weigh and test the milk three days in the week, in case his father will not do it, and thus determine what cows are dead beat boarders, mere manure factories and hence unfit to use in a dairy herd.

This, however, does not solve the whole problem, for it does not tell us how we can breed cows of dairy quality. By buying the best cows that are available and testing them the farmer can in time develop a herd that will produce two hundred and fifty pounds of butter fat a year. He might safely take two hundred pounds as the minimum, and he can reach this in the course of two or three years. If one hundred and forty pounds will pay the cost of labor and feed then the sixty extra pounds will be profit and surely this is sufficient to induce the farmer to ascertain the facts with reference to his herd, now that means have been furnished him in the shape of the Babcock test.

This having been done, and a herd of two hundred pound cows being secured, a more difficult problem remains, namely, how to secure bulls of better potency that will enable him to breed up his herd. Under present conditions, this is an exceedingly difficult matter. The farmer buys a bull, uses him for two or three years, and then to avoid inbreeding he sells him and buys another. He does not know and he cannot know at that date the value of that bull for dairy cows. Another year must pass until the first of the heifers comes in and he cannot determine the value of those for still another year ,really not for two years. Hence in the matter of breeding he is simply going it blind.

What is the remdey? We know of none except an organization among farmers in the neighborhood, or among patrons of a creamery who use the same breed of cattle by which they will be enabled to keep track of cows that are heavy butter producers, say three hundred to three hundred and fifty pounds, and buy from each other, calves from these cows and when their merits as dairy sires are ascertained sell them to each other or exchange with each other. This involves co-operation, for which farmers, as a rule, are not yet prepared, but for which they will have to prepare themselves if they are to get the real value of the feed that they are now wasting on inferior dairy cows.

Creamery companies could be very helpful in this, if they would, and to their own great benefit. Many of them are passing out of existence for the simple reason that the supply of milk is running short, partly due to the centralized creamery and partly to the fact that the cows that are producing their cream are not yielding more than half their capacity.

These creameries could afford to employ by the year some bright young fellow who understands how to handle the Babcock test and good practical judgment in the way of preparing balanced rations, to ascertain for the farmers just what their cows are doing and to suggest better methods of feeding. This in time would lead to an organization of the patrons among themselves by which they would be able to select sires worthy of a place at the head of their dairy herds. This is the method followed in Denmark, the most up-to-date butter producing country in the world. We know of no other way which will enable the farmer to get the value of the feed that he now wastes upon his dairy cows.—Canadian Thresherman.

HER ONLY CHANCE.

A clergyman twice refused to marry a couple who came before him, because on both occasions the bridegroom was intoxicated.

The clergyman said to the bride:

"I cannot understand why you come to church with a man who is to be your husband in a state like this."

The young woman burst into tears and said: "I cannot help it, sir. He won't come when he's sober!"