A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER I.—(Continued).

I arose from my bed a fortnight later stone blind.

With this terrible affliction upon me I returned to London with Dick Doyle, who came out to Florence to fetch me home. For me, life had no further charm. The beauties of the world which had given me so much pleasure and happiness were blotted out for me for ever. I lived now only in an eternal darkness which by day, when the sun shone upon my eyes, seemed to assume a dull dark red. At first it struck me that because my sight had been destroyed my personal appearance must have altered, but Dick assured me that it had not. No one, he declared, could tell by looking at my eyes that they were actually sightless.

And so I, Wilford Heaton, lived in those dull old chambers in Essex Street, in rooms that I had never seen.

You, who have sight to read these lines, can you imagine what it is to be suddenly struck blind? Close your eyes for a brief five minutes and see how utterly helpless you become, how entirely dependent you are upon others, how blank would be your life if you were always thus.

Dick gave to me the time he could spare from his work, and would come and sit with me to chat, for conversation with him was all that was left to me. He described my rooms and my surroundings with the same minuteness with which he wrote, and tried to interest me by relating scraps of the day's news. Yet when he was absent, away or at work in his rooms above, I sat alone thinking for hours, counting time by the chiming of the clock of St. Clement Dants.

So heavily did time hang upon my hands that at last I engaged a teacher from the Blind School over in Lambeth, and with his books of raised letters he used to visit me each day and teach me to read. I was an apt pupil, I suppose, yet there was something strangely grotesque about a man who had already graduated recommencing to learn his alphabet like a child. Still, it saved me from being driven mad by melancholy, and it was not long before I found that by the exercise of pains I could read slowly the various embossed books, standard works manufactured for the recreation of those unfortunates like myself, who would otherwise sit eternally idle with their hands before them. And not only did I learn to read, but also to make small fancy baskets, work very intricate at first, but which, on account of the highly developed sense of touch that I had acquired in reading, soon became quite easy.

The long months of winter darkness went by; but to me, who could not see the sun, what mattered whether the days were brilliant August or black December? Sometimes I went out, but not often. I had not become proficient in finding my way back by aid of a stick. I had practised a good deal in my rooms; but for a blind man to go forth into the busy Strand he must have perfect confidence, and be able to guide himself among the bustling throng. Therefore, on my airings I usually went forth upon Dick's arm, and the extent of our wanderings was the end of the Embankment at Westminster Bridge, or around those small ornamental gardens which extend from the Charing Cross station of the Underground Railway up to Waterloo Bridge. Sometimes, on rare occasions, he would take me to dine with him at the Savage Club, in Adelphi Terrace; and men, easy-going Bohemians, whom I could not see, would warmly shake my hand. I heard their voices—voices of artists and literateurs whose names were as household words—sat charmed by their merry gossip of artistic "shop," laughed at their droll stories, or listened to one or other of the members who would recite or sing for the benefit of his brother Savages. Those evenings, spent amid the tobacco-smoke and glass-jingling of the only Bohemian still existing in London, were the happiest in all that dull, colorless, dismal life of sound and touch.

They were the only recreations left to me. Truly mine was a tristful life.

In April, after I had lived in that dingy den six months or more, Dick came into my room one morning and made an announcement. It was that he had been commissioned by the Daily Telegraph to go as its correspondent with a British punitive expedition on the North-West Frontier of India.

"You'll go, of course," I said, reflecting that such an offer meant both advancement and profit. He had long ago told me that a commission as war correspondent was his greatest ambition.

"No, my dear old fellow," his deep voice answered in a tone more grave than usual. "I can't leave you alone."

"Nonsense!" I ejaculated. "I'm not going to allow you to fling away such a good offer to remain with me. No, you must go, Dick. You'll be back in three months at most, won't you?"

"Perhaps before," and his voice sounded low and strange. "But really, old fellow, I can't go and leave you helpless like this."

"You'll go," I said decisively. "Mrs. Parker will look after me, and three months will soon pass."

"No," he said. "It's all very well, but you can't sit here month after month, helpless as you are. It's impossible."

"I shall amuse myself with my books and my basket-making," I answered. Truth to tell, this announcement of his had utterly crushed me. His society was the only bright spot in my life. If he left me I should be entirely alone, cheerless and melancholy. Nevertheless when the sight is destroyed the mind is quickened, and I reflected all that this offer meant to him, and admired his self-denial and readiness to refuse it on my account.

Therefore I insisted that he should go. In the end he was persuaded, and three days later left Charing Cross for India.

When he had gone I became hopelessly depressed. In vain did I try to interest myself in the embossed books, but they were mostly works which I had read long ago, and in vain I toiled at basket-making until my finger-tips were sore and aching. Sometimes at evening Mrs. Parker, herself a sad scholar, would try and read a few of what she considered the choicest morsels of the "extra special." She read very slowly and inaccurately, poor old soul, and many were the words she was compelled to spell and leave me to solve their meaning. Indeed, in those long hours I spent by myself I sank lower and lower in dejection. No longer I heard Dick's merry voice saying—

"Come, cheer up, old chap. Let me tell you all I heard to-day over at the club."

No longer could I lean upon his arm as we descended that steep flight of steps leading from the end of Essex Street to the Embankment; no longer did I hear those playful words of his on such occasions—

"Take care, darling, or you'll fall."

Dear old Dick! Now, when I reflected upon it all, I saw how in my great affliction he treated me as tenderly as he would a woman. Forlorn, hypped, and heart-sick, I lived on from day to day, taking interest in nothing, moping doleful and unmanned.

A single letter came from him, posted at some outlandish place in the North-West. It was read to me by old Mrs. Parker, but as Dick was a sad scribbler, its translation was not a very brilliant success. Nevertheless from it I gathered how deep were his thoughts of me, and how eager he was to complete his work and return. Truly no man had a more devoted friend, and certainly no man was more in need of one.

As the days grew warmer, and I sat ever with the tædium vitæ upon me, joyless and dispirited in that narrow world of darkness, I felt stifled, and longed for air. Essex Street is terribly close in July, therefore, finding the heat intolerable, I went forth at evening upon the Embankment with Mrs. Parker, and, with my stick, practised walking alone upon that long, rather unfrequented stretch of pavement between the railings of the Temple Gardens and the corner of Savoy Street.

Try to walk a dozen paces as one blind. Close your eyes, and tap lightly with your stick before you as you walk, and see how utterly helpless you feel, and how erratic are your footsteps. Then you will know how extremely difficult I found my first essays alone. I walked full of fear as a child walks, stumbling, colliding, halting, and even waiting for my pitying old womanservant to take my arm and guide me in safety.

Yet evening after evening I went forth and steadily persevered. I had, in the days before the world became shut out from my gaze, seen men who were blind guiding themselves fearlessly hither and thither among the London crowds, and I was determined, in Dick's absence, to master the means of visionless locomotion, so that I might walk alone for health's sake, if for nothing else. And so I continued striving and striving. When Mrs. Parker had served my dinner, cutting it up for me just as one places meat before a helpless infant, we went forth together, and for an hour each evening I went out upon that wide expanse of the Embankment pavement which formed my practice-ground.

Gradually, by slow degrees, I became proficient in guiding myself with that constant tapping that marks a blind man's progress through the black void which constitutes his own narrow joyless world. At last, after several weeks of constant practice, I found to my great delight that I could actually walk alone the whole length of the pavement, guiding myself by intuition when encountering passers-by, and continuing straight on without stumbling or colliding with any object, a fact which gave me the utmost satisfaction, for it seemed to place me beyond the need of a constant guide. With this progress I intended to astound Dick upon his return, and so gradually persevered towards proficiency.

CHAPTER II.

August was dusty and blazing in London, and I felt it sorely in Essex Street. The frontier war dragged on its weary length, as frontier wars always drag, and Dick was still unable to return. His brilliant descriptions of the fighting had become a feature in the journal he represented. On one of my short walks from end to end of that long even strip of pavement a hand was suddenly placed upon my shoulder, and the voice told me that it was Shadrack Fennell, a charming old fellow, who had been a popular actor of a day long since past, and was now a prominent "Savage," well known in that little circle of London Bohemia. He walked with me a little way, and next evening called and spent an hour over cigars and whiskey. He was the only visitor I had in all those months of Dick's absence.

A blind man has, alas! very few friends.

Once or twice, when the heat became insufferable in my close stuffy rooms, I contemplated going to the country or to the sea. Yet, on reflection, I told myself bitterly that, being unable to see the beauties of God's earth, I was just as well there moping in that gloomy street, and taking my evening airing beside the Thames.

Therefore with all desire for life or enjoyment crushed from my soul, I remained in London, going out each fine evening, sometimes with Mrs. Parker, and at others, with a fearlessness acquired by practice, I carefully guided myself down the steep granite steps leading from Essex Street to the Embankment, and then paced my strip of pavement alone. But how tristful, dispiriting, and soul-sickening was that monotonous world of darkness in which I eternally existed, none can know, only those unfortunate ones who are blind themselves.

About half-past eight o'clock one breathless evening in mid-August, Mrs. Parker being unwell, I went forth alone for my usual stroll. The atmosphere was close and oppressive, the pavement seemed to reflect the heat, and even along the Embankment there was not a breath of air. Alone, plunged in my own thoughts—for the blind think far more deeply than those whose minds are distracted by the sights around them—I went on with those short steps that I had acquired, ever tapping with my stick to discover the crossings. I was afraid of no street traffic; only of cycles, which, by reason of their silence, are veritable orgres to the blind.

Almost unconsciously I passed beyond the limit of my regular track, beneath the railway-bridge which I knew led from Charing Cross station and then straight on, with only a single crossing, until I came to what seemed the junction of several roads, where I hesitated. It was an adventure to go so far, and I wondered where I was. The chiming of Big Ben, however, gave me a clue. I was at the corner of Bridge Street, for I felt the wall of the St. Stephen's Club. The turning to the left would, I knew, take me over Westminster Bridge; to the right I could cross Palace Yard and Broad Sanctuary, and so gain Victoria Street. Before my affliction I knew well that portion of London around the Houses of Parliament. I decided, therefore, on keeping to the right, and some one whom I know not kindly piloted me over the dangerous crossing from the corner of Parliament Street, for such I judged it to be from the cries of men selling the evening papers. Again, three times in succession, did sympathetic persons, noticing my helplessness as I stood upon the kerb, take my arm and lead me across, but in these constant crossings I somehow entirely lost my bearings. I was, I knew, in a long straight thoroughfare, and by the iron railings before the houses guessed it to be that road of flat-dom, Victoria Street.

Amused at my intrepidity, and congratulating myself upon having gone so far alone, I kept on, knowing that even if I lost myself I had only to call a passing hansom and be driven back to Essex Street. Thus for perhaps three-quarters of an hour I wandered on. From a lad who helped me over one of the crossings I learnt that I had passed Victoria Station, and now appeared to be traversing several large squares—at least, such was the impression conveyed upon my mind. It was useless to stop passers-by every moment to inquire where I was, therefore, laughing inwardly at my situation, lost in London, the great city I had known so well, I went on and on, down long straight thoroughfares that seemed endless, in enjoyment of the first real walk I had taken since my crushing affliction had fallen upon me.

Suddenly, in what seemed to be a quite deserted street, I left the kerb to cross the road alone, but ere I became aware of impending danger a man's voice shouted roughly, and I found myself thrown by violent concussion upon the roadway, struggling frantically beneath a horse's hoofs. I clutched wildly at air to save myself, but next second received a violent kick on the left side of the head, which caused sparks to appear before my sightless eyes, stunned me, and rendered me almost instantly insensible.

How long I remained ignorant of things about me it is impossible to tell. I fancy it must have been a good many hours. On my first return to consciousness I heard strange confused sounds about me, low whispering the words of which were utterly unintelligible to my unbalanced brain, and the quick rustling of silk. I remember wondering vaguely where I was. The blind quickly develop a habit of extreme caution, and with my senses dulled by the excruciating pain in my skull I lay reflecting without speaking. The throbbing in my head was frightful. When the recollections of my long walk which had ended so disastrously surged through my brain, it struck me that I must have been taken to a hospital after the accident, and that I had most probably remained there some days. Yet in hospitals there is no perfume of peau d'Espagne, nor do the nurses wear silken flounces.

I tried to catch the words uttered by those about me, but in vain. It may have been that they were spoken in some foreign tongue, or, what is much more likely, the terrible blow I had received from the horse's hoof had utterly disarranged my sense of hearing. This single thought appalled me. If my hearing had really been injured, then I was rendered absolutely helpless. To the blind the acoustic organs become so sharpened that they can detect sounds where those in full possession of sight and hearing can distinguish nothing. It is the ear that acts for the sightless eye. Therefore the fear that even this had failed me held me appalled.

I stretched forth my hand, and to my surprise felt that I was not in a hospital bed, as I had at first believed, but upon a silken couch, with my head resting upon a soft pillow. The covering of the couch was of rich brocade in wide stripes, while the woodwork had a smoothness which caused me to believe that it was gilt. I raised my hand to my head, and found it bandaged with a handkerchief and some apparently improvised compresses.

(To be Continued.)

ROBBERY BY HYPNOTISM.

The Marquis of Townshend Makes an Odd Accusation.

A remarkable case of hypnotism and blighted affection is occupying the attention of a London court, in which the Marquis of Townshend is one of the principals. The other is the Rev. Arthur Robins, one time curate of the fashionable Holy Trinity Church.

The Marquis is the plaintiff in the case, and he charges the curate with having hypnotically wheedled from him various large sums of money and valuable heirlooms, and also the love of his beautiful wife, which the curate has deprived him of by slander.

The Marquis wept so hysterically when he related his woes on the witness stand that he could scarcely be understood.

The plaintiff's story is that he studied hypnotism with the defendant, who found the Marquis so plastic a subject that he put him under hypnotic control and in that state secured many of the Townshend paintings, works of art and jewels, and also the Townshend ready money—all under the simple scheme of making the Marquis think he didn't need any of the possessions.

The affairs of the Marquis of Townshend have had many strange phases. In 1905 he married Gladys Ethel Gwendolen Eugenie, the beautiful daughter of Thomas Sutherst, a lawyer. The Marquis is a little, insignificant man, and not particularly bright, while the Marchioness is a woman of great wit and intelligence.

After the honeymoon, which was a farce, there were legal entanglements over money matters, which were brought to a topsy-turvey end by the declaration of wife and father-in-law that the Marquis was mentally incapable. Some sort of reconciliation was patched up, and since then quiet has brooded over the Townshend menage.

FIFTY YEARS OF CRIME.

A Vast Improvement in the Last Half Century.

An interesting comparison given in the criminal statistics for England and Wales for the year 1906, issued recently, enables a contrast to be made for the first time of the prevalence of crime today with fifty years age. Generally speaking, it may be said that a vast improvement has taken place. The number of persons tried on indictable offences—that is to say, the more serious crimes—totalled 59,079 in 1906, as compared with 54,667 in 1857. There is thus a slight increase in the number of criminals, but when it is remembered that the population has increased from nineteen and a quarter millions to thirty-four and a half millions in the fifty years, it becomes evident that, proportionately to the population, serious crime has decreased by some 40 per cent. The chief comparisons are as follows:—

	1857.	1906.
Serious offences	113,330	82,264
Drunkenness	75,859	211,493
Education offences	None	53,399
Police regulations	38,633	132,504

It isn't necessary to mention your lawyer in your will, he's sure to get his share.

ON THE FARM

PURE AIR FOR COWS.

Hoard's Dairyman has repeatedly asked its readers this question: Is there any reason why a cow should not have as pure air in winter as in summer?

Of course, no one has ventured to answer to the contrary. Milk is secreted primarily from blood. All the elements of growth are carried and deposited by the blood. Think of the wonderful action of the heart that conveys finally 50 pounds of milk to the udder so we can get it. But the blood is kept pure by the air in the lungs and is vital by these things. It goes out on its hidden and mysterious journey to the farthest extremity, carrying with it for deposit what is needed for each bit of tissue for all different purposes. Then it gathers up on its return journey a lot of impurities and comes to the lungs for purification.

These impurities are taken out by the oxygen of the air in the lungs. When the blood comes to the lungs it is of a dark liver color. As soon as it feels the effect of oxygen taken from the air the color is changed to bright crimson. Right here do we see necessity of providing the cow in her stable just as nature does in the field with a full supply of pure oxygen in order that the blood may be vitalized. Many a farmer who is ignorant of these principles shuts his cows up in a foul, close stable, reeking with the fumes of manure and urine, and never thinks how he is beating himself in the face all the time. He is doing all he can to prevent his cows from yielding an abundance of good milk for he is robbing them of their supply of oxygen without which the blood cannot help the udder to secrete.

This matter of milk secretion is a wonderful thing. It has claimed the attention and deep study of thousands of the world's brightest minds since the day that Aristotle the Greek wrote of the human mother. And still it is a mystery. But we may know some thing about it if we wilk. Among them is the ever-pressing importance of water and pure air. Ignorant men can own cows and can shut them up in foul, disease-breeding stables, but nature punishes them for their refusal to know the laws. Again was asked:

Is there any reason why the cow should not have just as pure air in winter as in summer?

COW STALLS AND TIES.

There was never a time in the history of dairying when so much attention is given to the building of comfortable ties for the dairy cow.

The rigid stanchion is giving away to the swinging stanchion, to the chain-tie stalls where the cows do not have to be tied, and many other new and more comfortable arrangement for fastening cows.

While the cows seem to thrive and do well in the rigid stanchion, yet the new devices for tying dairy cows must be more comfortable. It has always seemed to us that any stall which permits the cow to move her head to her side is preferable to a tie which keeps her head in a nearly straight position.

The modern methods of hitching cattle not only gives the cow more freedom and therefore more comfort, but they invariably give the cows a better opportunity to keep clean. This is a strong argument in favor of some of the more modern ties, for everywhere there is a pressing demand for cleaner milk, and everyone knows that it is easier to produce clean milk from clean cows than from dirty ones.

Give each cow a small stall by herself and she is fastened in it by stretching a chain from post to post or from partition to partition at the rear end of the stall. This arrangement gives the cow considerable freedom as she is at liberty to move her head to her side when lying down and to lick herself when standing up. The movable gate is front of her lines her to the gutter and prevents her to a large degree from dirtying her stall.

One of the chief objections to this form of stall is the posts which are necessary for building it, but many of the users do not consider this objection at all serious.

It is not possible for us to say what kind of stall another man should build or buy, but every dairyman should aim to make his cows comfortable and keep them clean.

THOSE MANURE PILES.

Regardless of the fact that in agricultural papers, farmer's institutes and from other sources the teaching of correct methods of handling manure is taught, we still find great piles from the stables accumulating under the eaves where much of fertilizing properties will be washed out before it reaches the soil. It is not practicable to haul it every day to the field it should be placed under cover. By mixing the different kinds, giving the loose stock a chance to tread it down there will be little loss from firefang.

Mrs. Brown—"I have such a lovely present for my husband!" Mrs. Smith—"What is it?" Mrs. Brown—"A pair of slippers. Won't he be pleased?" Mrs. Smith—"Yes. What do you expect to get from him?" Mrs. Brown—"Oh, nothing much—a diamond ring, I suppose, or a sealskin jacket."