One of the Garrison;

Or, A Mysterious Affair.

CHAPTER V.—(Cont'd)

I avoided the subject of the Heatherstones for fear of exciting her, and she did not recur to it of her own accord. I was convinced, however, from what I had heard from her that she had for some time back been making her own observations upon our neighbors, and that in doing so she had put a considerable strain upon her nerves. I could see that the mere fact of the Hall being illuminated at night was not enough to account for her extreme agitation, and that it must have derived its importance in her eyes from being one in a chain of incidents, all of which had left a weird or unpleasant impression upon her mind. That was the conclusion which I came to at the time, and I have reason to know now that I was right, and that my sister had even more cause than I had myself for believing that there was something uncanny about the tenants of Cloomber.

Our interest in the matter may have arisen at first from nothing higher than curiosity; but events soon took a turn which associated us more closely with the fortunes of the Heatherstone family. Mordaunt had taken advantage of my invitation to come down to the laird's house, and on several occasions he brought with him his beautiful sister. The four of us would wander over the moors together; or, perhaps, if the day were fine, set sail upon our little skiff and stand off into the Irish Sea. On such excursions the brother and sister would be as merry and as happy as two children. It was a keen pleasure to them to escape from their dull fortress, and to see, if only for a few hours, friendly and sympathetic faces round them. There could be but one result when four young people were brought together in sweet forbidden intercourse. Acquaintanceship warmed into friendship, and friendship flamed suddenly into love. Gabriel sits beside me now as I write, and she agrees with me that, dear as is the subject to ourselves, the whole story of our mutual affection is of too personal a nature to be more than touched upon in this statement. Suffice it to say that, within a few weeks of our first meeting, Mordaunt Heatherstone had won the heart of my dear sister, and Gabriel had given me that pledge which death itself will not be able to break.

I have alluded in this brief way to the double tie which sprang up between the two families, because I have no wish that this narrative should degenerate into anything approaching to romance or that I should lose the thread of the facts which I have set myself to chronicle. These are connected with General Heatherstone and only indirectly with my own personal history. It is enough if I say that after our engagement the visits to Branksome became more frequent, and that our friends were able sometimes to spend a whole day with us when business had called the general to Wigtown, or when his gout confined him to his room. As to our good father, he was ever ready to greet us with many small jests appropriate to the occasion; for we had no secrets from him, and he already looked upon us all as his children.

There were times when on account of some peculiarly dark or resless fit of the general's it was impossible for weeks on end for either Gabriel or Mordaunt to get away from the grounds. The old man would even stand on guard at the avenue gate, or pace up and down the drive, as though he suspected that attempts had been made to penetrate his seclusion. Passing of an evening I have seen his dark, grim figure flitting about in the shadow of the trees, or caught a glimpse of his hard angular face peering out at me from behind the bars. My heart would often sadden for him as I noticed his uncouth nervous movements, his furtive glances and twitching features. Who would have believed that this slinking, cowering creature had once been a dashing officer, who had fought the battles of his country and had won the palm of bravery among the host of brave men around him?

In spite of the old soldier's vigilance, we managed to hold communication with our friends. Immediately behind the Hall there was a spot where the fencing had been so carelessly erected that two of the rails could be removed without difficulty, leaving a broad gap, which gave us the opportunity for many a stolen interview, though they were necessarily short, for the general's movements were erratic, and no part of the grounds was secure from his visitations.

How vividly one of these hurried meetings rises before me! It stands out clear, peaceful and distinct amid the wild, mysterious incidents which were destined to lead up to the terrible catastrophe which has cast a shade over our lives. I can remember that as I walked through the fields the grass was damp with the rain of the morning, and the air was heavy with the smell of the fresh-turned earth. Gabriel was waiting for me under the hawthorn tree outside the gap, and we stood hand-in-hand looking down at the long sweep of moorland, and at the broad blue channel which encircled it with its fringe of foam. Far away in the northwest the sun glinted upon the high peak of Mount Throston. From where we stood we could see the smoke of the steamers as they plowed along the busy waterway which leads to Belfast.

"Is it not magnificent?" Gabriel cried, clasping her hands round my arm. "Ah, John, why are we not free to sail away over these waves together, and leave all our troubles behind us on the shore?"

"And what are the troubles which you would leave behind you, dear one?" I asked. "May I not know them, and help you to bear them?"

"I have no secrets from you, John," she answered. "Our chief trouble is, as you may guess, our poor father's strange behavior. Is it not a sad thing for all of us that a man who has played such a distinguished part in the world should skulk from one obscure corner of the country to another, and should defend himself with locks and barriers as though he were a common thief flying from justice? This is a trouble, John, which it is out of your power to alleviate."

"But why does he do it, Gabriel?" I asked.

"I cannot tell," she answered frankly. "I know only that he imagines some deadly danger to be hanging over his head, and that this danger was incurred by him during his stay in India. What its nature may be I have no more idea than you have."

"Then your brother has," I remarked. "I am sure from the way in which he spoke to me about it one day that he knows what it is, and that he looks upon it as real."

"Yes, he knows, and so does my mother," she answered; "but they have always kept it secret from me. My poor father is very excited at present. Day and night he is in an agony of apprehension, but it will soon be the 5th of October, and after that he will be at peace."

"How do you know that?" I asked in surprise.

"By experience," said she gravely. "On the 5th of October these fears of his come to a crisis. For years back he has been in the habit of locking Mordaunt and myself up in our rooms on that date, so that we have no idea what occurs; but we have always found that he has been much relieved afterward, and has continued to be comparatively in peace until that day began to draw round again."

"Then you have only ten days or so to wait," I remarked, for September was drawing to a close. "By the way, dearest, why is it that you light up all your rooms at night?"

"You have noticed it, then?" she said. "It comes also from my father's fears. He does not like to have one dark corner in the whole house. He walks about a great deal at night, and inspects everything, from the attics right down to the cellars. He has large lamps in every room and corridor, even the empty ones, and he orders the servants to light them all at dusk."

"I am rather surprised that you manage to keep your servants," I said, laughing. "The maids in these parts are a superstitious class, and their imaginations are easily excited by anything which they don't understand."

"The cook and both housemaids are from London, and are used to our ways. We pay them on a very high scale to make up for any inconvenience to which they may be put. Israel Stakes, the coachman, is the only one who comes from this part of the country, and he seems to be a stolid, honest fellow, who is not easily scared."

"Poor little girl," I exclaimed, looking down at the slim, graceful figure by my side. "This is no atmosphere for you to live in. Why will you not let me rescue you from it? Why won't you allow me to go straight and ask the general for your hand? At the worst he could only refuse."

She turned quite haggard and pale at the very thought. "For God's sake, John," she cried earnestly, "do nothing of the kind. He would whip us all away in the dead of the night, and within a week we should be settling down again in some wilderness where we might never have a chance of seeing or hearing from you again. Besides, he never would forgive us for venturing out of the grounds."

"I don't think that he is hard-hearted man," I remarked. "I have seen a kindly look in his eyes, for all his stern face."

"He can be the kindest of fathers," she answered. "But he is terrible when opposed or thwarted. You have never seen him so, and I trust you never will. It was that strength of will and impatience of opposition which made him such a splendid officer. I assure you that in India every one thought a great deal of him. The soldiers were afraid of him, but they would have followed him anywhere."

"And had he these nervous attacks then?"

"Occasionally; but not nearly so acutely. He seems to think that the danger—whatever it may be—becomes more imminent every year. Oh, John, it is terrible to be waiting like this with a sword over our heads—and all the more terrible to me since I have no idea where the blow is to come from."

"Dear Gabriel," I said, taking her hand and drawing her to my side, "look over all this pleasant countryside and the broad blue sea. Is it not all peaceful and beautiful? In these cottages, with their red-tiled roofs peeping out from the gray moor, there live none but simple God-fearing men, who toil hard at their crofts and bear enmity to no man. Within seven miles of us is a large town, with every civilized appliance for the preservation of order. Ten miles farther there is a garrison quartered, and a telegram would at any time bring down a company of sildiers. Now, I ask you, dear, in the name of common sense, what conceivable danger could threaten you in this secluded neighborhood, with the means of help so near? You assure me that the peril is not connected with your father's health?"

"No, I am sure of that. It is true that Dr. Easterling, of Stranraer, has been over to see him once or twice, but that was merely for some small indisposition. I can assure you that the danger is not to be looked for in that direction."

"Then I can assure you," said I, laughing, "that there is no danger at all. It must be some strange monomania or hallucination. No other hypothesis will cover the facts."

"Would my father's monomania account for the fact of my brother's hair being turned gray and my mother wasting away to a mere shadow?"

"Undoubtedly," I answered. "The long-continued worry of the general's restlessness and irritability would produce those effects on sensitive natures."

"No, no," said she, shaking her head sadly, "I have been exposed to his restlessness and irritability, but they have had no such effect upon me. The difference between us lies in the fact that they know this awful secret and we do not."

"My dear girl," said I, "the days of family apparitions and that kind of thing are gone. Nobody is haunted now-a-days, so we can put that supposition out of the question. Having done so, what remains? There is absolutely no other theory which could even be suggested. Believe me, the whole mystery is that the heat of India has been too much for your poor father's brain."

What she would have answered I cannot tell, for at that moment she gave a start as if some sound had fallen upon her ear. As she looked round apprehensively I suddenly saw her features become rigid and her eyes fixed and dilated. Following the direction of her gaze, I felt a sudden thrill of fear pass through me as I perceived a human face surveying us from behind one of the trees—a face every feature of which was distorted by the most malignant hatred and anger. Finding himself observed he stepped out and advanced toward us, when I saw that it was none other than the general himself. His beard was all a-bristle with fury, and his deep-set eyes glowed from under their heavily veined lids with a most sinister and demonical brightness.

CHAPTER VI.

"To your room, girl!" he cried in a hoarse, harsh voice, stepping in between us and pointing authoritatively toward the house. He waited until Gabriel, with a last frightened glance at me, had passed through the gap, and then he turned upon me with an expression so murderous that I stepped back a pace or two, and tightened my grasp upon my oak stick.

"You—you—" he sputtered, with his hand up to his throat, as though his fury were choking him. "You have dared to intrude upon my privacy! Do you think I built this fence that all the vermin in the country might congregate round it! Oh, you have been very near your death, my fine fellow! You will never be nearer until your time comes. Look at this!" He pulled a squat, thick pistol out of his bosom. "If you had passed through that gap and set foot on my land I'd have let daylight into you. I'll have no vagabonds here! I know how to treat gentry of that sort, whether their faces are black or white."

"Sir," said I, "I meant no harm by coming here, and I do not know how I have deserved this extraordinary outburst. Allow me to observe, however, that you are still covering me with your pistol, and that, as your hand is rather tremulous, it is more than possible that it may go off. If you don't turn the muzzle down I shall be compelled in self-defense to strike you over the wrist with my stick."

"What brought you here, then?" he asked in a more composed voice, putting his weapon back into his bosom. "Can't a gentleman live quietly without your coming to peep and pry? Have you no business of your own to look after, eh? And my daughter? how came you to know anything of her? and what have you been trying to squeeze out of her? It wasn't chance that brought you here."

"No," said I boldly, "it was not chance which brought me here. I have had several opportunities of seeing your daughter and of appreciating her many noble qualities. We are engaged to be married to each other, and I came up with the express intention of seeing her."

Instead of blazing into a fury, as I had expected, the general gave a long whistle of astonishment, and then leaned up against the railings, laughing softly to himself.

"English terriers are fond of playing with worms," he remarked at last. "When we used to bring them out to India they used to trot off into the jungle and begin sniffing at what they imagined to be worms there. But the worm turned out to be a venomous snake, and so poor doggy paid the penalty. I think you'll find yourself in a somewhat analogous position if you don't look out."

"You surely don't mean to cast an aspersion upon your own daughter?" I said, flushing with indignation.

"Oh, Gabriel is all right," he answered carelessly. "Our family is not exactly one, however, which I should recommend a young fellow to marry into. And pray how is it that I was not informed of this snug little arrangement of yours?"

"We were afraid, sir, that you might separate us," I replied, feeling that perfect candor was the best policy under the circumstances. "It is possible that we were mistaken. Before coming to any final decision I implore you to remember that the happiness of both of us is at stake. It is in your power to divide our bodies, but our souls shall be forever united."

"My good fellow," said the general, in a not unkindly tone, "you don't know what you are asking for. There is a gulf between you and any one of the blood of Heatherstone which can never be bridged over." All trace of anger had vanished now from his manner, and given place to an air of somewhat contemptuous amusement.

My family pride took fire at his words. "The gulf may be less than you imagine," I said coldly. "We are not clodhoppers because we live in this out-of-the-way place. I am of noble descent on one side, and my mother was a Buchan of Buchan. I assure you that there is no such disparity between us as you seem to imagine."

"You misunderstand me," the general answered. "It is on our side that the disparity lies. There are reasons why my daughter Gabriel should live and die single. It would not be to your advantage to marry her."

"But surely, sir," I persisted, "I am the best judge of my own interests and advantages. Since you take this ground all becomes easy; for I do assure you that the one interest which overrides all others is that I should have the woman I love for my wife. If this is your only objection to our match, you may surely give us your consent, for any danger or trial which I may incur in marrying Gabriel will not weigh with me one feather-weight."

"Here's a young bantam!" exclaimed the old soldier, smiling at my warmth. "It's easy to defy danger when you don't know what the danger is."

"What is it, then?" I asked hotly. "There is no earthly peril which will drive me from Gabriel's side. Let me know what it is and test me."

"No, no. That would never do," he answered with a sigh, and then, thoughtfully, as if speaking his mind aloud. "He has plenty of pluck, and is a well-grown lad too. We might do worse than make use of him." He went on mumbling to himself with a vacant stare in his eyes as if he had forgotten my presence.

"Look here, West," he said presently. "You'll excuse me if I spoke hastily a little time ago. It is the second time that I have had occasion to apologize to you for the same offense. It shan't occur again. I am rather over particular, no doubt, in my desire for complete isolation; but I have good reasons for insisting on the point. Rightly or wrongly, I have got it into my head that some day there might be an organized raid upon my grounds. If anything of the sort should occur I suppose I might reckon upon your assintance?"

"With all my heart."

"So that if ever you got a message such as 'Come up,' or even simply 'Cloomber!' you would know that it was an appeal for help, and would hurry up immediately, even if it were in the dead of the night?"

"Most certainly I should," I answered. "But might I ask you what the nature of the danger is which you apprehend?"

(To be continued.)

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Sold in sealed lead packets to preserve its goodness.

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063

On the Farm

Depth to Plant Potatoes.

The depth at which potatoes should be planted is a matter of considerable importance, and one upon which much difference of opinion exists, writes Mr. E. Sandsten. Some growers advocate shallow planting, and others just as strongly favor deep planting. That there must be a depth at which the highest yield may be obtained seems reasonable. This depth will undoubtedly vary with difference in weather conditions, consequently any investigation along this line should be carried on for several years in order to obtain reliable data. An experiment was made at Iron River, Wis., on sandy soil of rather open texture, to get some information on this point.

The ground was plowed in the fall and given a dressing of manure at the rate of ten loads per acre in the spring. This was disked into the ground thoroughly before planting. The land was nicely leveled before planting by means of a drag. Twenty-one rows running north and south, were planted, each row three feet apart. The potatoes were planted with a planter in order, as follows:

At four inches deep, four rows.
At six inches deep, four rows.
At eight inches, four rows.
At four inches deep, three rows.
At six inches deep, three rows.
At eight inches deep, three rows.

In this way any possible lack of uniformity of soil was to a great extent neutralized. The same general slope obtained for all the field, making the conditions similar for all the rows. The potatoes planted at four inches came up first, those at six inches second, while the rows planted at eight inches came up last. There was a difference of about two days between each set. The set planted at four inches grew fastest and produced somewhat stockier vines. The deepest planting was not quite as good a stand, although the difference was not very great.

Exactly the same treatment as to cultivating, spraying, etc., was given to all the rows. No weeds were allowed to grow, and the beetles were killed before they did any material damage. The crop was dug the latter part of September, with the following results: the potatoes planted four inches deep yielded at the rate of 140 bushels per acre; the six-inch depth yielded at the rate of 124 bushels per acre, and the eight-inch depth, 102 bushels per acre.

From this it would seem that six inches would be the maximum depth at which to plant potatoes.

Liming the Soil.

Nothing in agricultural science or practice may be mentioned with more assurance than the beneficial effect of lime on easily puddled, stiff clay soils. This is so nearly a matter of common knowledge, the wonder is that anyone will worry along with such soils year after year, and even from one generation to another, while the possible increase in yield in a single year will often pay for the necessary lime.

Lime may improve loose sandy soils by making them more compact and more retentive of moisture. For this purpose some form of carbonate of lime is usually recommended, and in much smaller quantities than for clay soils. Clay soils will stand more lime and, for almost every purpose, require more lime than sandy soils. The improvement of sandy soils will often be much greater if the lime is applied to a green crop turned under. Lime hastens the conversion of the vegetable matter into humus, and this with the lime helps to fill the open spaces between the sand grains. It is claimed by those who have given much attention to light sandy soils that there are no other types of soils that will respond quite so readily to liming, provided the necessary vegetable matter is supplied.

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A word to the wise is sufficient, unless the man is too wise.

It Kept on Ringing.

He was not a very rapid wooer, and she was getting a bit anxious.

A persistent ring came at the front door.

"Oh, bother!" she said, "who can be calling?"

"Say you're out," he suggested.

"Oh, no, that would be untrue," she protested.

"Then say you are engaged," he urged.

"Oh, may I, Charlie?" she cried, as she fell into his arms.

And the man kept on ringing the front door bell.

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