THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

There are many ups and downs in some lives, far more than are usually dreamed of by the few who, "born with a silver spoon in their mouth," pursue the even tenor of their path, unruffled by the cares and afflictions which crowd upon, and too often overwhelm the less fortunate. Hard as it is to grapple with and bear the troubles which are inevitable to us in the ordinary course of nature, those we induce by our own indiscretion and folly are still more galling. I am afraid my case must rank among the latter, as you shall presently hear.

I will not inflict upon you my antecedents; sufficient to state that I am the son of a gentleman in good, though not opulent, circumstances. My father gave me an excellent education, and afterwards a fair start in life by articling me to a neighbouring solicitor. I might have done well, for I liked the profession, and was an apt pupil; but, unfortunately—as is the case with too many intellectual young men—I fell into evil company. It is unnecessary to enumerate the steps, from bad to worse, which gradually led to my undoing; eventually, I so far disgraced myself that my indentures were cancelled. Ashamed to meet my father, I went out into the world an outcast, with scarcely a shilling in my pocket. Failing other employment, I was at last compelled—though bitterly repugnant to my feelings—to accept the humble occupation of a common bailiff; and here my narrative begins.

"Meredith," said my chief to me one bright May morning, when I waited upon him for instructions, "I wish you to run down to Briteleigh in the matter of Warley against Wintock, and take possession in the usual manner. You will be more than ordinarily careful, as we have to do with a very subtle customer. Jones has already been down in the neighborhood; but has returned unsuccessful and quite disheartened. I hope, however, you will have better luck. When once within the premises, you had better sleep with one eye open, or not at all, if you can so manage it."

Now, I rather prided myself upon my professional dexterity, and this my employer knew; but it would have been childish to boast before him. I therefore smiled, but said nothing. Some other directions followed, of no importance to my tale; and after packing a few necessaries in a carpet-bag, I started for Briteleigh. It was the dusk of evening when I arrived at my destination; and I forthwith proceeded to reconnoitre the premises in which I was for a time to domicile as the humble representative of the "majesty of the law," and take under my surveillance the goods, chattels, &c., of Arthur Wintock, Esq., until either the just claims of Warley Warley, Esq., of Warley Hall should be fully and duly satisfied, together with all legal expenses incurred; or the said goods, chattels, &c., should be publicly brought to the hammer.

On my arrival at the village of Briteleigh, I went at once to have a sight of the house intrusted to me. Briteleigh Hall was a large, gloomy, old-fashioned building of the preceding century, and stood at some distance from the high-road, and in the centre of a park of considerable extent. The original edifice seemed to have been added to at different periods; for the superstructure rose in a motley succession of triangular gabled ends from the outhouses to the principal roof, which, surrounded by a parapet, and crowned with enormous stacks of tall chimney-pots, capped the whole. It struck me at the first glance, that however strongly bolted and barred below, it would be easy for any burglar to scale the height and effect an entrance by one of the numerous garret casements which fronted the parapet, unless the same were strongly secured. However, as I had no thought of entering the house by this way myself, and as it was too late to hope to effect an entrance at all that evening, I returned to the village, and walked into the *Three Nags*, a comfortable road-side inn, about a hundred yards from the park gates. I entered the snug bar parlor and seated myself. It was occupied only by the landlord and two other persons, tradesmen of the village. The three were quietly sipping their glasses and having a friendly chat.

"Fine evening, sir," said mine host, as, noticing that I was a stranger, he saluted me respectfully. "What will you please to take?"

"Oh, a little rum-and-water, if you please.—Can I have a bed here to-night, landlord?"

"By all means, sir!—second-floor back.—Going to stay long?"

"Hum! That depends upon circumstances. At anyrate, I may require it for three or four nights at least."

I felt disposed to secure a night-lodging for a short time; for in our line we are by no means sure when or how we shall be able to obtain access to the premises of which we are to take temporary "possession." Besides, my inn expenses would be refunded; a few extra shillings were therefore of no consequence.

My entrance and the bustle of the landlord had interrupted the talk for a while; but after a few commonplace remarks, such as usually pass between strangers, I settled down quietly to my rum-and-water, and the conversation was resumed.

"They do say he used her most cruelly, poor young lady," said the stouter of the tradesmen, who sat nearest the fireplace, and who appeared to be indignant about some point which had been mooted.

"Cruelly! I should think he did," replied the other. "Ah! it was a sad affair for her when her poor papa died. How he could leave her in the guardianship of such an old curmudgeon beats my understanding."

"Well," replied the other, "he didn't show the black-feather so much while the old man was alive; and they say he was greatly disappointed that his brother did not leave him a good share of the property. It appears he bequeathed nearly all to Miss Maria, his only daughter, allowing, however, a handsome sum per annum to her guardian, to meet the expenses of bringing her up. It is said that the latter tried to force her into a marriage with her cousin, his son George, as unprincipled as himself, and as reckless a spendthrift and gambler as ever handled the dice."

"Ah! well, I suppose that was before I came into the village then, neighbour. You know I only left north last Christmas twelvemonth.—But where is the young lady now?

"That's a question neither I nor any one else in Briteleigh can satisfactorily answer. All we know is, that she *was* at the Hall. The Squire gave out about a twelvemonth after her father's death, that she had gone to Paris to complete her education; but no one ever saw her go, or has ever seen her since. There are never any letters in a female hand received at the Hall, either from France or elsewhere—at least so asserts Simmons the grocer, who keeps the post-office."

"But the servants—do they never speak of her? Surely they must know."

"He keeps none that are allowed to enter the house, except a big bully of an Italian fellow, whom he brought from abroad—for he was formerly a resident of Italy, and had only returned to England a year or two before his brother's decease—and a cross-grained old woman, who is as impenetrable as adamant, for no one can ever get anything out of her. Neither the gardener, nor the old man who jobs about the premises and looks after the horses, is allowed to intrude. A great part of the house is shut up as closely as if the whole were uninhabited. However, it is supposed to be full of real good furniture, for old Mr. Wintock lived in great style, and none has ever been known to be disposed of."

Hitherto, I had taken but little interest in the conversation; for I was busily employed in ruminating upon my plans for the morrow. Though they had spoken of the Hall, it had not fixed my attention. But when the name of Wintock was mentioned, it roused me at once, and I immediately asked: "Are you speaking of Mr. Wintock—up the way?" pointing with my thumb in the direction of his mansion.

"The very same, sir," replied the stout man, glad to have another interested auditor. "Ah!" he continued, "there's something exceedingly mysterious about the disappearance of that young lady. Some even go so far as to hint foul-play. I, for one, don't quite believe that. But certain it is, you wouldn't catch one of the village people crossing the park after dark."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Why, sir, you see I don't take any heed of such superstitious nonsense myself; but it is whispered among the poorer folk that a white face is sometimes seen at the windows at unearthly hours, and that fearful shrieks have occasionally been heard at midnight. You know what a country village is, and how easily a place obtains the repute of being haunted. Once upon a time, some of our fellows would steal up there after dark to catch a rabbit or two, for there is a warren on the far side of the house; but I'd venture a five-pound note that not one of them would be hardy enough to try now for all the rabbits in the county. There are reports, too, that old Wintock, or he and his son together, have outrun the constable."

"Oh! Is it true, think you?"

"I believe it to be so. They do say that the life Mr. George and his father led has involved both very deeply in liabilities which neither can meet. Drinking, horse-racing, gambling, and, if people are to be credited, swindling, are to be numbered among their accomplishments. The last dodge was a clever, though a rascally one."

"Hum! What might that be?"

"Well, it seems that old Wintock had run matters so close that he was daily threatened by one of his tradespeople with an execution. As he owed largely, he bethought himself that if this was once suffered to take effect, the rest of his creditors would be after him immediately. To save matters, he goes to a Mr. Warley of Warley Hall, in Downshire, of whom he had some knowledge, represents that he is staying in his neighborhood for a short time, and that, in consequences of expenses which young Wintock has incurred at college, he has occasion for a few hundreds; and so induced the old gentleman to advance him the money on a bill of three months at good interest. When the time expired, the bill was dishonored—not a rap to meet it, at least at the banker's."

"Then young Wintock was not at college?"

"Not he. It was all a scheme to rid them of present difficulties. But I suppose old Warley is down upon them at last rather sharp."

All this I knew before, but was not aware that it was also known at Briteleigh. The old proverb says, "Ill news travels apace." It is astonishing how rapidly the misfortunes or crimes of even the most wary get noised abroad, in spite of the most strenuous efforts to keep them concealed. I did not, however, enlighten my friend as to my foreknowledge, though I could not help thinking that he partly guessed the import of my visit to the village. But I did not deem it expedient to satisfy his evident curiosity, lest in some way it might embarrass my movements. I accordinly took an early opportunity of changing the subject; and after spending a very comfortable evening in social chat, retired to rest.

I rose early next morning, and sauntered carelessly into the part, making a circuit, to examine the house more thoroughly. If possible, it appeared more sombre and uninviting by daylight than on the previous evening. Not that I attached much importance to the tale of my informant about its being haunted; but its heavy closed windows and its general dilapidated look gave it altogether a chilling appearance, which jarred dismally with the fresh spring scenery around. I cautiously neared the house and made a careful reconnaissance. Apparently, no one was stirring. The front-door I found was fastened. I went quietly round to the yard at the back and tried the latch of the kitchen door. It was fastened also.

"Hullo, guv'ner, what do 'ee want?"

I fairly started, and looked up, for I had thought myself unperceived. I could for the moment see no one.

"Wants to rob the house, do 'ee?" the voice continued. "Wait till I calls the measter to 'ee. Thieves, thieves!"

At the same moment the barking of a large dog broke forth within the house. I grasped my heavy walking-stick more tightly; it had a loaded handle. I did not feel altogether comfortable. The voice was that of the gardener. He came into the yard through a small gateway which I had not observed, and which led into the garden. He held a long sharp three-pronged fork in his hand. I saw at a glance that move the first was defeated. Supposing the inmates to be ignorant of my arrival, my plan had been to cower quietly by the door until opened for egress, which I had calculated would be early in the morning, by one of the domestics—either for water, as there was a pump in the yard, or for some other purpose—and then slip in with a dash. Once in, I did not despair of holding my ground, for I had on me a couple of very pretty "persuaders," in case of attempted violence—a pair of pocket pistols.

"There!" I said quietly; "stop that confounded noise. You know better than that. Is Mr. Wintock in?"

The man grinned. "Can't 'xactly say. Dunno. Which on 'em?"

"The elder Mr. Wintock. I want to see him on particular business"

"Do 'ee?"

"Here; come this way a minute," I whispered, at the same time holding up a sovereign between my finger and thumb and stepping under cover of the eaves of an outhouse. "Now, don't you think you can get me speech with Mr. Wintock this morning for this little bit of yellow stuff? You don't pick up sovereigns every day, I dare-say."

I had hastily determined to secure the fellow as an ally if possible, and felt that a bribe was the only means of doing so.

He scratched his head, grinned, and looked wistfully at the coin. "Oi dares to say I could—out of doors;" and he stretched out his hand for it.

"Not so fast, my man. You must earn it first. It must be inside. You are not such a flat but that you guess my business here. Let me only put one foot within the doorway, and it is yours."

The gardener gave me a peculiar look, and burst into a loud haw-haw! as he turned away. "No use, measter! T'other chap tried that little game."

I saw my scheme was fustrated, and that there was no help for it. Nevertheless, I hung about the premises for some time, but to no purpose. I went away for a while, and returned again as stealthly as I could. I watched the house for days, and from every available corner that I could use as a hiding-place. The inmates were too much upon their guard. It appeared there was a pump in the scullery as well as in the yard, and plenty of coal in the cellars. The place seemed victualled for a siege. Not a soul ever passed or repassed the door, at least with my cognisance. What orders were issued, were given to Hodge from an upper window, inaccessible by me. At last I determined to give up watching, and try if I could not accomplish my purpose in some other way. I withdrew, foiled, but not defeated.

Thus matters remained for some time, until I began to think I should fare no better than my predecessor, and to grow dispirited; when a lucky accident turned up, which aided me not a little.

One afternoon, disgusted with my ill success, I had taken a walk round the park, and had nearly reached the side remotest from the Hall, when I was startled by hearing sounds of altercation and loud screams for help. I did not hesitate an instant; but in two minutes had scaled the park palings and leaped into the lonely by-road which bounded them on that side. It was well that I did so; for I was just in time to render efficient aid to an elderly female vainly attempting to hold her own against two villainous-looking tramps. The old dame was a carrier from Briteleigh to a neighboring town, whither she went three times a week with her cart and blind pony, to fetch and carry for the villagers, packages and parcels of all descriptions, from a lady's dress to half a pound of tea. The rascals attempted to help themselves to some of the numerous provisions in the vehicle; and being resisted by her, were just on the point of using violence when I rushed unperceived to the rescue, and caused the fellows to beat a hasty retreat.

The dame was profuse in her thanks for my timely assistance, and earnest in her way to make me some recompense. The poor old creature had been terribly alarmed, and shook like an aspen. In assisting her to repack her things, and in trying to reassure her, I very naturally inquired where she was going.

"Deed, an' I be goin' on to the Hall."

The mention of the Hall arrested my attention, and an idea immediately occurred to me. This time, however, I determined to experimentalise, without taking my ally into my confidence.

"Going to the Hall, mother, are you?" I said carelessly. "Ah! I suppose you take parcels there very often, of course?"

"Why, yes, I do, and I don't, now. I go every fortnight for the linen. The family don't wash at home; they send it all to Mrs. Biggs at the village. Them clothes-baskets you see there," she added, nodding to them, "are for the Wintocks; I'm goin' to leave 'em as I go along."

"Well, dame," I said, "I am only out for a stroll. Perhaps those scamps may be lurking about somewhere, to give you another turn as soon as I am fairly out of sight. Suppose I ride a little way with you for protection. What say you?"

The dame willingly assented; and I mounted the cart beside her. It was pretty closely packed with sundry parcels, besides the baskets in question, and well secured behind with a coverlet, tied down to the hinder part of the cart. The blind pony started at a shambling trot. Mrs. Stokes and I got into conversation.

"How do you contrive to get these great baskets out of the cart and into the house?"

"Oh, that's easily done. I untie the cloth behind; and Martha—that's the old woman at the Hall—or else the Italian servant, helps me in with 'em."

And so we jogged on, chatting, round the exterior of the park, until within a few dozen yards of its gates.

"Dame!" I said suddenly, "I did you a good turn a little while back; now I want you to do one for me in return."

Mrs. Stokes was taken at a disadvantage, and looked at me with a perplexed expression upon her countenance. She clearly did not know what to make of my observation.

"I see that your cart is well filled behind," I continued, "so as to screen any one in front from observation, while you are unloading the baskets, if he crouches in this spare place by the seat. Now, I have a fancy just to ride up close to the Hall, so as to get a peep at it unperceived, and which I can easily do through this small hole in the side of the cart. I have heard a great deal of talk about the old place during the short time I have been in this part of the country, and feel a little curious; but, for a certain reason of my own, I don't wish to be seen by the inmates."

"Mercy me! man!" ejaculated the old lady, with a pull at the reins which brought the blind pony to a sudden stand, almost flinging him upon his haunches, "what can you want such a thing as that for? I hope you mean no harm. Surely your face is too honest for a ——"

"Burglar," said I, finishing the sentence for her. "Now, that's very complimentary indeed, after the assistance I gave you just now. I never heard of a thief interfering to *prevent* a robbery." I spoke as if offended, and could see the poor old creature's feelings were hurt.

"Na, na! I didn't mean *that*. But it seems such an odd thing like."

"Dame! I suppose they pay you pretty regularly up there?"

"Humph! Wish I could say they did. Owe me a matter of a dozen shillings. Always behind. Promise to pay. Get a little by dribs and drabs. It's hard lines, though, for an old body like me."

"Ah, now! let me do as I say, and here's a sovereign for you: that will clear the debt and leave you a little balance besides."

The old lady looked at me hard in the face, and then at the coin. "I understand," she said; "a friend of the family—wants to see without being seen, before making yourself known. Just come from abroad, perhaps, eh? No! young man; put up your money. One good turn deserves another. It shall never be said that old Sally Stokes was too greedy to return a favor without being paid for it, so you may just do as you please."

"Thank 'ee, mother. I knew you'd oblige me. If ever I have the chance, I'll repay you with interest; but I shall insist upon your accepting this at least," at the same time slipping a crown into her palm. "Now, don't speak to me, or take any more notice of me than if I was a young sucking-pig for the Squire's table." So saying, I crouched down in the coveted corner, and disposed a few of the parcels so as to effectually screen me from observation. In a few seconds more we had entered the park Jog, jog, up the long avenue, through the wicket gate, and up to the back-door. The dame alighted, rang the bell, and commenced unfastening the coverlet behind. An upper window was opened. "Oh, it's only Mrs. Stokes with the linen," said a female voice. "Wait till I chain up the dog;" and the window was immediately closed again.

I began to feel nervous for the success of my plan. Soon the door was opened; and with a passing observation, the female servant of Mr. Wintock commenced assisting Mrs. Stokes with the first and largest basket of linen. I waited till I saw them enter the house and turn up a long passage; then, hastily alighting from the cart, I slipped in softly after them.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

One of Many.

"Are you goin' along this way? What's your name, anyhow?" Officer Baggs asked suddenly.

"Why my name's Miss Central; don't you know me? I have charge of the main telephone office."

"Oh, do you?" Officer Baggs asked, and then fell in a deep reverie. He soon took to biting his lips and crimson spread over his face. At the same time he looked askance at the pretty girl.

"Look here," said he presently; "I didn't know that they had girls in that office."

"But they do—in all the offices."

Officer Jim Bagg's confusion visibly increased. "Did you chance to be in that office," he asked, "the other day when a burst of profound swearing mingled with the wail of a strong man's anguish floated over the wires?"

"Well, now," said the lovely girl, "it happens so frequently; really you must be more particular. Perhaps I was there."

"I'm sorry," said Jim Baggs earnestly, "but on one of them frequent occasions I was the depraved monster at the off end of the wire. I tackled the hellociuation you have charge of one day in the stationer's, an' I made a modest request to be switched into Johnson's restaurant. The restaurant set up a hello-ing, an' I requested 'em to do up a beefsteak thick an' rare with Loynaise pertaties, coffee, (milk separate) and Injin cakes. The reply came, 'I am the pastor of the Baptis' Church, and there mus' be some mistake.' I got the eatin' house a helloing once more, an' I started in again on my little bill of fare. I had got far enough to describe the shade of brown I'd like to put on both sides of the pancakes when my astonished ear caught the remark, 'Central, shut off that case of famine, will yer, an' let me hear from my friend Biles?' The people in the stationer's set up a laugh at me as I began a third time with the outlines of the supper I wished to have ready when I should get down to the restaurant. I got to where the milk came separate from the coffee, when I was advised that I had left that much of the order in a law office. Well, Miss, I landed that bill of fare first in one corner of the town an' then—an' then—an' finally you or somebody else said wouldn't I 'please settle on who and what I wanted, and not be interrupting the whole business of the city.' Then for a moment, Miss, my reason fled, and if you'll remember I asked you if you wouldn't kindly tell the eating house to plug up their machine, and I'd drop around an' tell 'em what I wanted, and ended, as you remember, Miss, by asking you if you wouldn't oblige me by going to Florida with your Central office and be hanged to you, or words to that effect."

"Oh, yes," said the beautiful woman, "I do remember that. Oh, you needn't apologize; that was nothing to what I catch every day; positively nothing. Here's my corner; good-day."

Didn't Understand.

"What makes the men go out between acts?" asked a pretty country girl at the theatre.

"Oh, they want fresh air, that is all."

"But I can't understand it."

"Understand what?"

"Why, I don't see what they want to come back wiping the fresh air off of their mouths for. Cincinnati fresh air must be very thick and heavy."

She was left in ignorance.—*The Drummer.*

GARNERED WITTICISMS.

The dynamite fiend is the man who goes on a "bust."

The Egyptian's little oil pun: When was Cairo seen in darkness?

After missing your bird, claim the ammunition to be poor and charge the gun with it.

When she admitted feeding the boarders fourteen times per week on cutlets, she revealed too much.

An old printer who played his first game of nine-pins and knocked them all down, said, "Pi'd, by jingo."

If ever a blind man feels happy over his affliction it is when a sight draft is presented to him for payment.

"Such is mules," exclaimed an original man when he heard the death of a neighbor by one of those quadrupeds.

A scientific journal has discovered that leather is a great fertilizer. For raising welts, it is almost as good as a knotted rope.

Always give the facts of a case plain and straight to your lawyer. He can mix them up for you when they come before the jury.

A travelling printer, for want of employment at his trade, went to work on a farm. He came one day to ask his employer if a hen should be set solid.

The man who never saw a railroad train died again recently in Wakefield, N. H., aged 100 years. Ignorance of railway travelling appears to be conducive to longevity.

"Will you have some beer?" said the host to his visitor. "Yes," said the visitor, "I believe I'll bear a little." It is reported that he was carried out on a bier when the host got through with him.

A Williamsport man went to bed the other night with eyesight as good as any man. When he awoke he could not see the least thing in the world. Come to think of it, however, it would take a microscope to do that.

An exchange heads an article of crime as follows: "A successful burglar and his subsequent capture!" We suppose that is the reason that there are so many unsuccessful burglars in this country when they are not captured.

It gives a New York man an awful start to suddenly observe a clipping from a Chinese newspaper which has been left lying on his table by some mischievous friend. His first thought, of course, is that it is a wash bill.

An ingenious music compositor who had a piece of his music knocked into pi, squared it up, took off a few impressions, cut them into strips, and collected $17.42 from neighbors who accepted them as the regular weekly Chinese wash bill.

A Kentucky rural editor, whose paper is published on Wednesdays, makes the request in a recent issue: "Parties who contemplate getting hurt, getting out of jail, killing somebody, running off with somebody's wife, or getting kicked by a mule, will please do so on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, as that will give us time to write it up in the fullest details while it is fresh and savory."

HISTORICAL ITEMS.

Nearly 3,000 persons perished by the Manila earthquake in 1645.

William III. brought tan into England in 1689 for the purpose of raising orange trees.

Jan. 1 was made the beginning of the New Year in France in 1564; in Scotland in 1599; and not in England until 1752.

The Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim was built in 332 B.C., by Sanballat, and destroyed by John Hycranus, 130 B.C.

In 1707 it took in winter two days, and in summer one day to travel from London to Oxford, a distance of fifty-five miles.

The invention of tapestry hangings belongs to the Netherlands. The Saracens were the first to weave the cloth in the well-known peculiar manner.

The oldest system of shorthand extant was written about 1412, but the art is said to have been practised by the Greeks, and by Ennius the Latin poet.

Epaminondas was killed at Matinea, 362 B.C., in a battle between the Thebans and the combined forces of Lacedæmon, Achaia, Elis, Athens, and Arcadia.

The wars of the roses lasted from 1455 to 1485, and in them perished twelve princes of the blood, 200 nobles, and 100,000 gentry and common soldiers; closing at the marriage of Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward IV., with Henry VII.

At the dissolution of the monasteries Westminster Abbey was valued at £3,997 a year. It was made a deanery in 1539 and a bishopric in 1540. Elizabeth displaced the abbot, who had been restored by Mary, and made the abbey a collegiate church of a dean, and twelve prebendaries, which it still remains.

Queen Elizabeth's method of keeping up an efficient civil service was by ordering the Chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge "to bring her a just, true, impartial list of all the eminent and promising students; to set down punctually their names, their college, their standings, the faculties wherein they did excel or were likely to. Therein her Majesty was exactly obeyed, and the use she made of it was that if she had an embassador to send abroad then she would nominate such a man of such a college to be his chaplain, and another to be his secretary When she had any places to dispose of, fit for persons of an academic education, she would herself consign such persons as she judged up to the business." Sir William Boswell had papers in which these names were listed and marked in the Queen's own hand.

Let us accept different forms of religion among men, as we accept different languages wherein there is still one human nature expressed. Every genius has most power in his own language, and every heart in its own religion.

Hume the historian, has left on record his opinion that the disposition to look on the bright sides of things and to mark the best of everything that is good is equivalent to a large fortune to its happy possessor.