

THE TRUTH OF IT,

Some months after this conversation with my extraordinary clerk, Sir William Jarvis, an old client of mine, died. I was summoned to attend his funeral, and to read the will afterward. The day before I went down to his country-house, I thought it would be as well if I looked through the draft of his will, in order to be familiar with its provisions. His box was brought in, and I soon put my hand upon the document I wanted. It was dated in 1867—the year Wilson came to me—and the draft was in my clerk's handwriting. It was a voluminous document, consisting of a good many sheets of paper, joined together at the corner. To the front page was affixed a slip of white paper, bearing sundry memoranda—also in Wilson's handwriting—suggesting, most likely, a few alterations to be made if I approved of them.

As I bent this piece of paper back, to read the words concealed, I saw writing on the other side of it, and my heart stood still as I knew that the writing was identical with the writing of those words which had been stamped upon my brain since the day of Roland Northwick's death.

With trembling hands I detached the slip of paper, opened my secretaire, and laid it side by side with the note of warning. I had been deceived by no fancied resemblance, the writing was the same, and so peculiar was the penmanship that I felt convinced that no chance could have produced these two specimens from different persons. True; the writing on the newly-found paper was better and firmer than on the other; but I compared letter for letter and found them exactly alike in their formation. The hand that wrote one wrote the other: and as the two slips of paper lay before me I felt that the murderer of Roland Northwick had had his day. Then, with professional instinct, I sat down to think calmly over my discovery. The paper which I had so unexpectedly found contained what appeared to be a portion of Byron's "When we two parted." Probably the writer was an admirer of the poet, and had transcribed it for her own pleasure. The paper had been torn, lengthways, down the centre: so that only the first halves of the lines were left. But this was more than enough—I could have sworn to the identity of the writing had only two letters appeared.

Now came the difficulty. How could I connect the two papers? What theory could I form? Here, through an extraordinary chance, was the clew starting from my very office. Here it had been lying for five years. Now that it was within my hands, whither would it lead? Could it be possible that Wilson was in any way mixed up in the affair? I shuddered at the thought, and felt inclined to dismiss it as preposterous. At first I even contemplated asking him point-blank whose writing it might be on the back of the slip of paper he had used; but recognizing the necessity for extreme caution, I decided not to do so. I endeavored to throw my memory back to the time when Sir William's will was made. Looking through my old diaries, I found that about that date we had a press of business in hand; but I could recollect nothing more than taking Sir William's instructions, and, afterward, seeing him execute the will. I felt I must endeavor to get some more information before I took any decisive steps; so, pinning the two pieces of paper together I placed them in my pocket-book and sent for Mr. Wilson. I was quite composed when he entered, and running over the sheets of the draft, asked:

"Do you remember the circumstances under which you drew this up? I ask, as there are several little things in it I should have worded differently."

Wilson took the paper in his hand, looked at the date and replied:

"It was one of the first things I did for you, before I had quite caught your style. I remember, as we were very busy, I drafted it at home, and you altered a good deal of it before it was fair copied."

Then this fact was pretty well established; the paper, whoever wrote it, came from Wilson's house. I saw clearly that my first proceeding was to ascertain everything I could respecting his antecedents and private life. I looked up my letters of 1867, and found from them that Wilson had been recommended to me by Forbes and Thwaites, of Bristol, a firm of high standing. Having ascertained this much, I went in search of a private inquiry agent. I hated the idea of having to spy on one of my household, as it were, but the serious nature of the case gave me no option.

"Can you attend to a bit of business for me?" I said. "A few private inquiries I want made."

"Certainly, sir," replied the agent, producing his note-book; "we are rather slack just now."

"I want you to go to Bristol to-night. Inquire there of Messrs. Forbes and Thwaites solicitors, from what part of the world James Wilson came. He was bankrupt in 1866, I believe, and they were concerned."

The heads of my instructions were rapidly jotted down.

"Then you will go to the place at which he originally lived, and find out all you can about him. His connections, private life, etc."

The agent nodded.

"Then you will ascertain his private address in London, and get all particulars you can of his history since he came to town. As soon as you know enough, write me, and I will call for your report."

"Case of defalcation, I suppose?" said the man, closing his note-book.

"Something of the sort," I replied, and wished him good morning.

I did not choose to take anyone into my confidence this time. I would get all the links together before I put the chain into other hands.

In five days' time the agent sent me word that his report was ready. I had been anxiously awaiting it, so hastened to hear what he had discovered.

There was a good deal in it that was of no consequence whatever; but the detective had done his duty in getting the fullest information. Sifting out all extraneous matter, I learned as follows:

James Wilson was of respectable family. He had been well educated, then articulated to a firm of solicitors. Afterward he set up in practice at a rising watering-place on the Bristol Channel, where, as I have already stated, he became involved in some unfortunate building transactions, failing in consequence. He had married, whilst in practice, the daughter of a well-to-do retired tradesman; but as several members of his

wife's family lost considerable sums of money by his failure, they became completely estranged. Wilson came to London in 1867, taking lodgings at Chelsea. His wife died on February 22nd, 1870. They were apparently a happy and much attached couple. They had no children, and since her death Wilson had continued to occupy the same rooms.

"And," added my informant, with a lurking smile, "I find that since he has been in London he held the post of confidential clerk to Mr. Maitland, solicitor, of Bedford Row."

"Thank you," said Mr. Maitland. "I am much obliged to you. It has been painful to me to institute these inquiries, but I was bound to set my mind at rest about Mr. Wilson."

Although I had gained little direct evidence, my suspicions gathered strength. Impossible as the idea seemed, the testimony of the handwriting proclaimed that James Wilson must in some way be connected with the perpetrator of the foul crime. At least, he would be able to identify the writer of the message. My agent had ascertained that his wife had died on February 22nd, 1870—two days after the blow was struck. As I thought the matter over, the fact of Wilson not having mentioned his wife's death at the time, and his misleading words to me on a recent occasion, which had made me conclude he was unmarried, tended to make it appear possible that the writer of the warning note was Mrs. Wilson herself. Even the tremulous nature of the handwriting would be accounted for, as she must have been at that moment lying on her death-bed. How Roland Northwick became entangled with James Wilson's wife was a matter of little consequence now. Detective skill must unravel all that, and no doubt drag a painful scandal to light. For me, at present, it was sufficient to know that could I prove the writer of these two papers lying in my pocket to be James Wilson's wife, I had enough ground to justify his arrest as the murderer.

This identification must be my first task. I determined to make no delay. The thought that for years I had been in daily contact and communication with the cold-blooded murderer of one of my dearest friends was to me horrible. With this dreadful suspicion hanging over him, I felt it almost impossible to breathe the same air with Wilson, much less to transact my usual business matters with him. I felt that I might betray myself in his presence, and, with the acute suspicion which such a crime must engender, he would guess what was passing through my mind, and fly from justice. I left the office, stating that I should not return that day, and the next morning sent Wilson a letter, saying that an urgent private matter had called me into the country. The link that joined the two others I must have before proceeding any further. I knew the name of the church in which Wilson had been married; the object of my journey was to visit it. I inspected the register of marriages, and, knowing the date of the ceremony, had but little difficulty in lighting on the signatures of Adelaide Fletcher and James Wilson. The resemblance in the writing here was even closer to the warning message than that of the lines of poetry I had so fortunately found. Perhaps, from the emotion natural to a young girl when signing her maiden name for the last time, the strokes were tremulous, even as from another cause they were tremulous in those fatal words that now lay side by side with the bride's signature—"My husband knows all. I couldn't help it. Beware!"

With all my lingering doubts—with all the hopes I cherished as to Wilson's innocence dispelled, I hastened back to town, nerving myself to perform a harrowing duty the next day—the duty of denouncing as the murderer of Roland Northwick the man who for eight years had been my constant companion and trusted associate in business.

Late as the hour was when I reached Paddington, I drove straight to Inspector Sharpe's house. Accustomed to surprises at all hours, the astute gentleman expressed no astonishment at seeing me, but awaited patiently any communication I had to make for his benefit. Yet for once, at least, in the course of his checkered career I believe he was taken aback.

"If you will be at my office at eleven o'clock precisely to-morrow morning, I will point out to you the man who murdered Roland Northwick."

The inspector stared.

"Tell me where to find him," he said, "and the handcuffs shall be on his wrists to-night."

I hesitated. Something restrained me from telling him to whom my suspicions pointed. It was not mercy; but I wished to give Wilson one chance of explaining the thing which had led me to accuse him of the crime.

"No," I replied. "I cannot even tell you his name at this moment. I must manage matters in my own way. He will come to my office to-morrow, utterly unsuspecting. I will then point him out to you, and you can take the proper course."

Inspector Sharpe promised obedience to my instructions, so I left him to dream, no doubt, of the reward he might claim to-morrow.

Tired as I was with the day's work, I slept but little that night. I was drawing mental pictures of the painful proceeding of to-morrow. Then, between sleeping and waking, a wild thought took possession of me. I fancied that for some reason or other Wilson had divined my suspicions, and that on the morrow he would be absent. So strongly did this idea impress me, that I actually rose, determined to go to the detective at once, reveal all I knew, and let the arrest be made at once, so that justice should not be defeated. Then, as my senses returned to me, I saw how utterly impossible it was that Wilson could suspect anything, and, lying down once more, I resolved to let matters follow in the train I had designed.

Still it was not without relief I saw, upon entering my office in the morning, my confidential clerk at his usual post. He saluted me with his invariably calm politeness. For the life of me I could not return the greeting; but, averting my face, hurried into my room, the entrance to which lay through his. I opened my letters in a mechanical way, in the present excited state of my mind giving little heed to their contents. I could think only of one thing—was I not wrong, after all? Could that quiet, self-possessed, gentle-spoken man, now sitting within a few feet of me, be guilty of one of the foulest and most dastardly crimes ever perpetrated? I began now almost to wish that my fear of the preceding night had

been well founded, and his flight had given me assurance of his guilt.

In a few minutes the door of my office opened and Wilson entered. He had a number of papers in his hand, and running them through, said:

"If you are at liberty now, Mr. Maitland, there are several things about which I should like to consult you."

I shuddered as he spoke; but he stood there with his impassable exterior—his mind, evidently, bent only on business—it seemed absurd to suppose that this was the being who, with hellish vengeance in his heart, crept up the staircase to Roland's bedroom; that those white fingers, holding now a harmless pen, were the same which pierced round the handle of the knife that clored my poor friend's bosom.

But the time for hesitation and uncertainty was gone by. In an hour Sharpe would be here, eager for his prey; and until he came I determined that Mr. James Wilson should not be a moment out of my sight.

I rose and walked to the office door, locked it, and placed the key in my pocket. Then I resumed my seat; and motioned Wilson to one near me. My unusual proceedings, I fancied, troubled him—he turned a shade paler if that were possible, but he said nothing.

Many a time afterward, in cold blood, I have wondered at my folly at thus, of my own free will, cooping myself up with a man whom I suspected to be a murderer; a man who might have made preparations against a surprise of this nature, and to whom my life might be as nothing. But I was the stronger, although the older, man of the two. Wilson, although tall, was slim, almost to thinness, and I was certain that in a hand-to-hand struggle I could overpower him. I felt disgust and horror at my companion, but not fear. He looked at me inquiringly.

"Mr. Wilson," I said, "some time ago you led me to understand you were unmarried. I have since ascertained that your wife died in February, 1870."

Wilson, whose acuteness told him that I did not make this assertion with the primary object of reproaching him for concealing the true state of his domestic affairs from me, made a simple gesture of assent.

"I find," I continued, "that your wife died on the 22d of February—two days after the murder of Roland Northwick."

As I spoke the last words he knew what was coming—I could see it in the man's face.

"And," I concluded, "from certain facts which have come to my knowledge, I have decided that you, even if you did not strike the blow yourself must know the murderer."

Wilson rose. He was perfectly calm, and speaking in his usual quiet voice, said:

"You must be mad, Mr. Maitland, to make such an accusation—against me, of all men in the world? Without troubling to deny it, I ask you, as a lawyer and a man of business, what possible motive could I have for committing such a crime?"

"The day before he was killed, Roland Northwick received a letter of warning from a woman—a woman whose husband he had doubtless wronged. Till a few days ago her name was unknown. Now, from the similarity of the curious writing to that of another specimen which I have ascertained was written by your wife, I know that the warning was sent by her. James Wilson, you wretched murderer! Your hour has come! I have already denounced you, and in a short time the officers will be here."

Wilson sat silent for some time. I was on the alert, expecting that my accusation would be the signal for an attempt to escape. But nothing seemed further from his thoughts. After a while he raised his eyes to mine, and said quietly:

"Your knowledge of common law cannot be very great, Mr. Maitland, if you think that any English jury will convict a man upon the fancied resemblance between two scraps of writing. By your deductions are better than your law—I did kill Roland Northwick."

The audacity of this full confession, spoken as if he were mentioning an incident in his career of little moment, so surprised me that I could only stare at him and ejaculate:

"Villain! Ruffian!"

"Yes," continued this strange man, "I killed him—I will tell you why I killed him—that is, if you care to listen to the tale, and if there is time before the warrant arrives."

"The information will be sworn at eleven o'clock," I stammered, marveling at his extraordinary composure, and by it compelled to give him an answer to his question, "Till then," I added, "I shall not lose sight of you for an instant."

He smiled faintly, almost contemptuously. He might really have been an uninterested spectator of the scene. He began to speak, and, in a moment, his whole manner changed. He was transfixed, and I knew that at last I was face to face with the true man. His brows contracted, his deep-set eyes burned with fierce light, his cheek flushed, and the veins on his forehead stood out with emotion. His speech was rapid, and his language eloquent. His gestulation was striking; his thin, lithe fingers clasped each other, or were extended to give due influence to his powerful words; and as I watched his actions and listened to his words, I comprehended that under the cold surface of reserve, under that well-fitting mask of suave politeness, beat a heart shaken by the strongest passions and capable of the deepest feeling. As I stood face to face with him, I could scarcely realize that this was the same man whom I had seen daily for eight years.

"I will be brief, Mr. Maitland," he said, "I killed Roland Northwick because he seduced my wife. I had loved her as a boy—I loved and married her as a man. If I had no wealth to give, I gave her such love as man has never yet given woman. I believed her to be the most pure, as well as the most beautiful, of women. To me she was simply my life. Every hope, every thought of mine was for her happiness. Oh, how I loved that woman! I loved her, worshipped her, trusted her, slaved for her! And that night when, stricken with the illness which she knew would be fatal, when I hung over her pillow and tended her with loving hands, she whispered that cursed confession to me, my life was at an end for ever. As, trembling at death, and the judgment she feared after that death, she sobbed out her shame to me, praying for my forgiveness, so that the God whom she dreaded might, perhaps, forgive her, then I laid my lips beside her ear and whispered:

"When I have killed him, I will forgive you. Not till then."

"Had you ever loved a woman as I loved her, you would pity even whilst condemning me for what you call the crime. I cared not which was to blame, the man or the woman; but I said, 'That man shall die.' The details of their intrigue were of little interest. They had first met outside this very office, where she would frequently wait to accompany me home. How their acquaintance ripened, or what arts he used, I know not. She was a beautiful woman, and he was a gallant handsome young man. Yet the day has been when I could have shown as gay and gallant a front as Mr. Roland Northwick! He had made an end of my life, and his own should pay forfeit."

"The next morning I was outside his house, but found no means of gaining an entrance. I knew all his habits well, and several times had been to his rooms on business."

"To-morrow," I whispered to my wife, who now lay almost speechless and insensible—and 'to-morrow' it was! You know the rest."

"I reached home in the evening, and leaning over my dying wife whispered:

"He is dead—I forgive you now."

"She spoke no more. The next day she died, and that look of horror which settled on her face when I whispered those words of forgiveness never left it."

He was silent.

"You wretched man!" I cried. "Do you feel no remorse?"

"I feel no remorse. My life became a blank. Love passed out of it with me wife's death. Hate left it when I drove that knife through her seducer's heart. Since then I have cared nothing for life—nothing for death."

"But the hereafter—beyond death!" I cried, appalled by such callousness.

Wilson had again seated himself, and resumed his usual mask. His recent excitement had vanished, and left no trace. His ordinary quiet smile passed over his features.

"Intellectual men with my views," he said, "trouble little about the future, and fear it less."

In spite of my horror and disgust, I could not help feeling a certain amount of curiosity.

"But how could you avoid detection?" I asked.

"Simply by not trying to escape it. I cared little whether I was discovered or not. Some strange instinct induced me to take the watch and chain, which now lies a shapeless mass, buried in one corner of the cellar beneath this house. I only wanted access to the room. Having done what I had resolved to do, it mattered little whether I came out again or not. By some strange chance no one saw me; so I walked down the stairs and reached the office as usual. My glove was on my hand when I struck the blow. It was stained with blood, so I burnt it. That was all. Had I been arrested that day—as, indeed, I fully expected to have been—I should have made no defense paying the penalty of my act as carelessly as I shall now."

"But how could you meet me? How could you go about your business as usual, with this awful crime on your conscience?"

"I tell you, Mr. Maitland, I neither felt nor feel remorse, regret, or even wish to evade justice. My life, as I understand life, ended. I simply waited, never doubting but all would some day be known."

I felt it was too horrible to hear this man discussing his crime and approaching a shameful end as coolly as though he were speaking of some client's ordinary business matters.

"Now you see, Mr. Maitland," he continued, "why I refused your kind offer of a partnership. It will matter very little your clerk being arrested for murder; but had I been your partner it would not have improved the standing of your firm."

I thanked him mentally for his consideration, but said nothing. I was determined to speak no more. It was too painful, and I longed for Sharpe to arrive and terminate the interview.

Wilson, as though reading my thoughts, glanced at his watch.

"I see that my time is short," he said, "I have one letter I wish to write before the handcuffs are on my wrists. Would it be asking too great a favor if I requested you to leave me alone for a few minutes?"

I told him he was at liberty to write what he liked; but I should not quit him. He slightly shrugged his shoulders, and saying, "As you will," took a sheet of paper and commenced writing.

His letter was a very short one. He placed it in an envelope, laying it on the table with the address downward.

The minutes stole on, surely it must now be eleven o'clock. I would have looked at my watch, but a kind of feeling of delicacy restrained me. I waited some time longer and then glanced at Wilson. I was sitting nearest the door, with the idea of cutting off any attempted escape. Wilson was in my usual seat at the table which was littered with letters and legal documents. This table, I should add, was between us. As he finished his letter he took up a brief and commenced perusing it. Even at this awful moment he appeared to be interested only in the work which had done so well for so many years. His left hand held the sheet he was perusing near his eyes; the remainder of the document hung down, hiding his right hand as well as the greater portion of his body. As I sat waiting until the hour sounded from the neighboring church tower and wondering at the self-command displayed by the remorseless murderer, he looked across and met my gaze. There was an expression in his eyes, which I had never before noticed there.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Maitland," he said in his gentle voice, "that, after all, I should like to escape the gallows. As there are only two ways of escaping—one over your body, and another—I choose that other one."

And before I could comprehend the hidden meaning of his words I heard the loud report of a pistol, and James Wilson fell forward across my office-table, deluging it and all it held with his heart's blood.

Before I could call for assistance, Inspector Sharpe, who was waiting outside, burst open the door and rushed to the dying man. He sighed once, and then we knew that all was over with him.

The letter he had just penned was addressed to me. It contained only these words:

"The reason of my rash act is extensive defalcations, which, sooner or later, you must discover."

At the inquest held on my ill-fated clerk I

had to appear. I stated truthfully enough, that our conversation that morning had been upon a matter of business which had conducted much to my dissatisfaction. The letter which I produced apparently explained all. The verdict was—"Suicide whilst in an unsound state of mind."

I never looked for any defalcations, well knowing that none would be found. The detective, no doubt, formed his own conclusions as to the identity of the man he came to arrest, for he asked me nothing more about him; but I—and I only—knew the whole truth why Roland Northwick was murdered, and why James Wilson shot him—if in my office. And the truth is the narrative above written.

THE END.

European Cavalry.

Among the military nations of the Continent it is recognized that, so far from the time for the efficacious employment of cavalry either on the battlefield or in enterprises against the flanks or rear of an enemy being past, a glorious future is dawning for that arm, and that opportunities will arise when well disciplined, well-trained, and well-commanded cavalry may, through its power of securing for itself comparative immunity from the dangers to which other arms are in a higher ratio exposed, take a leading part in the conflict and perhaps decide the fate of a campaign. Among other high authorities, Field-Marshal Count Moltke has recorded his opinion that because in future the destructive fire of artillery will necessitate a scattered formation, the role of cavalry will be most important. Greater skill will no doubt be required in handling it so as to bring it into action decisively at the critical moment, *cito parare victoriam*, for only by rapidity in manoeuvring can the effect of the breech-loader be paralyzed. History proves that without cavalry a victory is rarely brilliant. If cavalry is beaten, according to Montecuculi, the battle is entirely lost; if, on the other hand, it is victorious, the victory is complete. From the day when Hasdrubal destroyed the Roman host at Cannæ, until that on which, 2,000 years afterward, the British squadrons, charging the flanks of the old guard at Waterloo, "prevented all rallying" after the annihilation of the French cavalry, this axiom has been true. In the last great war cavalry on both sides were on several occasions nobly sacrificed in order to gain time for the infantry, or in heroic effort to avert disasters already irreparable, but neither in the "death rides" of Worth or Rezonville, or in the terrible slaughter of Sedan, were the losses as heavy as those incurred by cavalry in the days of muzzle-loaders. That the effect of the fire of modern weapons, requiring as they do in their use considerable skill and a correct judgment of distance, would be very destructive to cavalry moving rapidly outside the zone of 400 yards remains to be proved. In a trial which took place in India between 4 Gardner guns and a detachment of 60 picked shots firing at 6 stationary targets at 585 yards, the distance being unknown, the latter made only 24 hits out of 411 rounds, and at 900 yards volley-firing, the distance being known, only 36 hits out of 630 rounds. The Gardner guns were even less successful, a result highly encouraging to cavalry.—[The Fortnightly Review.]

A Little Virginia Girl.

Joaquin Miller, the poet and novelist, has been down in the West Virginia mountains and he writes to the New York Star:

"A little Virginian climbed up the steps like a little pet squirrel; she was just as frisky; her hair as black, bushy and abundant; her eyes as bright and many times as large and beautiful. Ah, me! my heart went all to pieces at once. She was only a dozen years old, and yet she was a woman. But she didn't know it at all; she didn't dream of such a thing. And that is what made her so ten-fold formidable. I gave her my seat in the packed car, and she thanked me with such promptness and grace, such precision of silent, good taste, that I wanted to stand there before her and wait all the days of my life for her to speak. But she never spoke. Her hair was all tumbled about, her dress was torn badly, her small, dimpled hands were brown and brier torn. Pretty soon she dived her left hand into her pocket, threw back her black hair with the right hand, and so began to crack a lot of chestnuts with the whitest set of teeth and the reddest lips you ever looked at. Dear, lovely little girl. She was the quaintest bit of nature I have seen this side of Oregon. And although I shall never see her again I venture my life that she is of the best blood in the land, one of the ruined families of the war; a pitiful little waif, whose valiant people went down to battle and never came back to her mother and her mother's mother any more. And when I contrast her wild refinement with the big-footed vulgarity in lace and diamonds constantly encountered in New York I again fall to thinking, and thinking of the strange mutations of life in this up and down land of ours."

Oriental Wood Carvers.

The East Indians are naturally free hand-carvers. Long before the Christian era the Hindus beautified the interiors of their temples and homes with the most intricate work of the kind. The facility of carving has not left them, and a block of teak wood under their chisels soon became the bed of the most beautiful traceries and reproduces the flora of the East in all its variety of forms. The Oriental wood carvers in one respect are unequalled—they have originality of conception united with a power of execution which is wonderful. They receive simply the suggestions of the artists on draughting paper with none of the hundred minutiae of background supports and the like, which are necessary to the workmen here. There they in truth use their chisels as brushes, for their hands are firm. They are acquainted simply with the idea which is conveyed, and with one or two scoops of the chisel a lily or a passion flower or a pomegranate lies imbedded in the wood as though it had been waiting simply to be picked and enjoined. But while they are unsurpassed in what is known as emotional carving, they are at a loss at the broad sweeps which are required in the decoration of large apartments or halls.—[N. Y. Commercial Advertiser.]

It seems like the irony of fate when a milkman gets drowned in his own well.