

DR. SPENCER'S CRIME.

I was sitting in my office, half-doing over an interminable article on nutrition in the last medical review. The fire in the grate was low, the night was stormy, and the clock was on the stroke of eleven. I was just about to turn off the gas and retire, for, being a bachelor, I sleep in the room connected with my office, when there was a pull at the bell. I started up suddenly, for this was something new. Middlebury was a decorous sort of a place, and the people usually managed to be taken sick at reasonable hours.

Old Mrs Jerome had been threatened to die for the past five years, and every time I visited her she solemnly informed me that when the decisive moment did come, she solemnly desired me present. But as nothing aided the old lady beyond now and then an indigestion from too much high living, I had never yet been called upon to be present at her death. Now, I thought, it must be old Mrs Jerome is going. I took up my night lamp and went to the door. A strong gust of damp, sleet wind nearly extinguished the light, but, shading it with my hand, I discerned the face of a woman.

"Come in," said I, holding open the door but she declined with a gesture of impatience.

"You must come out," she said, in a sharp, incisive voice, "and be quick about it."

I put on my overcoat without demur, locked the surgery door, and stepped into the storm. As I did so, the woman laid a firm hand on my arm, and putting her face close to mine, said:

"Dr. Lockwood, can you keep a secret?"

"I think so, madame."

"Swear it."

"Is this secret of yours of a professional character? That is, is it anything you wish to confide in me as a medical man?"

"It is."

"Very well, then, I swear it."

"That is right."

A man respects an oath, though why he should is a mystery, since men's mouths are running over with them.

"Whither are you taking me, and for what purpose?"

"To the Clifton House, to see my mistress."

I started. Clifton House was the old mansion recently taken by Dr. Spencer, a stranger to every one in Middlebury. Spencer was a tall, dark, rather distinguished-looking person, who had hung out his sign in the village only a few doors above mine, but as yet he had no practices.

He was unsocial in the extreme, avoiding his neighbors persistently, and when he did speak it was in such a curt, half-savage way, that no one was likely to prolong the conversation.

The doctor had a wife, it was said, but no one had ever seen her. She was an invalid, and Miss Melrose, a friend of the family, presided over the family and sat at the head of the table.

Miss Melrose was yet beautiful, and won the admiration of all who visited Clifton House, by her ease of manner and fascinating conversation.

"As we walk along," said my companion, "let me explain to you just what is necessary for you to know. My mistress is very sick."

"I beg your pardon, is it Mrs. Spencer or Miss Melrose?"

She laughed bitterly.

"Miss Melrose! I would stab her to the heart sooner than own her for a mistress. My mistress is a lady—noble, royal, and of gentle birth. It is an honor to serve my mistress."

"And is she ill? How long since?"

"Ever since she married him—curse him!" she muttered in a fierce tone; "but I must not be excited. I must tell my story, or rather hers. Two years ago, through the desire of a dying father, Alice Herdon became James Spencer's wife. Before that she was a healthy, blooming girl; immediately after their marriage she began to fail. Do you see anything strange in that?"

"Not necessarily."

"Let me enlighten you further. Dr. Spencer was at one time engaged to Miss Luilla Melrose, but she broke the engagement and married my mistress instead. Miss Melrose was as poor as Job's turkey. Miss Herdon was an heiress, and Dr. Spencer was deep in debt and hard pressed by his creditors. Do you see anything strange in that?"

"Perhaps so. Go on."

"When my mistress married Spencer she was only seventeen, and had been taught to obey her father in everything. She was a gentle, affectionate child, and it would have been easy for Spencer to have won her love. But he did not care for that. It was her money he wanted. It paid his debts and bought him fast horses; it set his table with nice and costly dishes and put it in his power to keep Miss Melrose robed like a queen. All this time my mistress had been slowly but surely sinking, and I look you, Dr. Lockwood, I believe she is not dying of disease, but of—she lowered her voice to a whisper as she spoke the word—"poison."

"Impossible! This is a grave charge."

"O! poison given her by her husband, who, at her death, will have sole control of her property and be free to marry Miss Melrose. There is no time to explain the details of the thousand and one circumstances which have led me to believe it, for we are almost at the door. It is never the case that Miss Melrose and Spencer are out at the same time, or I should have called a physician before; but to-night they are both called away by the death of Miss Melrose's sister, and will not be back until to-morrow. With the consent of my mistress, I came for you, and oh, Dr. Lockwood, I pray you to save my dear mistress. I nursed her when her mother died and left her a helpless infant; all through her innocent youth she was like an own child to me; and now to see her fading hour by hour before my eyes. Good heavens! If I knew beyond a doubt that he was guilty his life should pay the forfeit."

I was already beginning to feel a deep interest in Mrs Spencer, although I had never seen her, and like her old nurse I was beginning to feel a great animosity for Dr. Spencer.

Mrs. Spencer received me in her bed-chamber. It was on the second floor, and was furnished with exquisite elegance.

Everything in the room bespoke the delicacy and taste of the occupant. The warm air was fragrant with the faint odor of heliotrope; and glancing around I saw the purple blossoms and green leaves in an alabaster case on the edge of the south window.

She was a woman who, when once seen, could never be forgotten. I have met in my life many beautiful women, but never one so lovely.

She was tall and straight, with a purely oval face, liquid brown eyes, and a dash of hectic in her cheek, which is never seen in perfect health.

She received me, as I know she did everyone, gracefully, and though there was a slight embarrassment in her manner when I spoke of her illness, she answered my professional inquiries without hesitation.

As for myself, I laid aside all false delicacy and questioned her plainly as to her symptoms. Mrs. Hurd, her nurse, remained in the room, and added many important little items of information.

When she spoke of her husband, it was with a sort of hopeless sadness which distressed me greatly.

Not a breath of suspicion against him in her answers to my questions, and I felt sure that at present she knew nothing of what Mrs. Hurd had such serious apprehensions. I was glad it was so, for with her finely strung organization, it might have produced serious results. I made my examination of the patient as closely as I could, and drew my own conclusions. I could have sworn that Mrs. Spencer daily swallowed arsenic in small quantities, and the deadly drug was telling fearfully on her constitution.

She said, answering my question, that she had no physician except her husband. He thought himself better acquainted with her case, and therefore better qualified to treat her. He never left medicine with her to take; he always brought it fresh from his office, and administered it promptly.

There was little I could do in such a case. Anxious to do everything, the very circumstances of the affair left me nearly powerless.

A charge of such nature, of course, I could not make out against Dr. Spencer without the amplest proof. If I hinted a suspicion, everyone would set it down to my professional prejudice; and if I could not substantiate my statement the doctor could make me pay dearly for such slander uttered against him.

The only dependence seemed to be in Mrs. Hurd. To her I unbosomed myself freely. I told her without reserve that I thought Dr. Spencer was killing his wife by slow poison, and I besought her to constantly watch to save the victim, and discover some proof by which we could fasten the guilt upon him.

She smiled grimly and promised obedience, and I gave her a powerful antidote for the poison I suspected, and went home perturbed and anxious in mind. I did not sleep that night, and all the next day I was in a high fever of excitement. A ring at the bell made me tremble—a step on the gravel outside my office stopped my breath, and I hardly knew what I expected to hear. I felt sure before I slept I should hear something.

And now I must tell the story as it was told me.

Dr. Spencer returned home the morning after my visit to Clifton House. He looked wretchedly, the nurse said; appeared gloomy and depressed. Miss Melrose came with him and looked deviously sad over the death of her sister. Women of her stamp always do mourn to perfection. They neither overdo nor underdo the thing, as women of feeling are likely to do.

Dr. Spencer came at once to his wife's chamber. He thought she looked ill, and prescribed a cordial at once, saying he would go and fetch it.

"You are always ordering cordials for her," said Mrs. Hurd, musingly. "Why not take something yourself? You look like a ghost!"

He eyed her keenly, but replied composedly:

"I think I will take some of the cordial myself, for I do not feel quite well. Alice, dear, shall I bring it here and drink your health?"

Mrs. Spencer smiled in assent—she never disputed her husband—and he went out. Presently he returned with two glasses. Both contained liquor colorless and odorless. Mrs. Hurd was watching him with her heart in her throat, for she told me that she felt the decisive moment had come. There was something in the gray pallor of the doctor's rigid face told her of a desperate purpose in the man's soul.

He lifted the glass to the right of the tray and gave it to his wife.

"Drink it, dear," he said. "It's a panacea for all evils. I am also going to take a glass of it," and he pointed to the glass still on the tray.

Mrs. Spencer accepted it and was putting it to her lips, when Mrs. Hurd interrupted.

"If you will bring her a tumbler of water, doctor. Mrs. Spencer complains that the cordial leaves a bad taste in her mouth, and my old bones are so full of rheumatism that it nearly kills me to go down stairs."

The doctor turned and bent on her a look as though he meant to read her thought. But she kept her face passive. If he had any suspicions her manner quieted them; and putting down the glass he left the room. Then Mrs. Hurd changed the position of the glasses.

When he came back—and he was gone but a moment—the nurse stood exactly where he had left her, and Mrs. Spencer was lying back in a chair with her eyes closed.

Again he lifted the glass, this time it was the one intended for himself, and placed it to the lips of his wife. She swallowed the contents, drank a little of the water he brought her, and thanked him in her sad, sweet way.

"Now for my own cordial," he said, with affected gayety. "I indulge in something a little stronger," as he spoke he tossed off the mixture.

"It made me stone cold to my fingers' ends to see him do it," said Mrs. Hurd, relating the circumstances to me, "but as heaven is my witness I felt no conscience. I argued like this: 'If it was simply cordial, it would do no harm; if it was poison, his blood would be on his own sinful head.'"

He went to bed half a hour afterward, complaining of fatigue. In the morning they found him dead.

I was called to the post-mortem examination, and we discovered in the stomach of the deceased a sufficient quantity of a deadly poison known to modern science to kill half-a-dozen men.

My brother physicians agreed that the man was insane, and had probably taken the dose in one of his unsocial fits of mind. I did not dispute them, but even before Mrs. Hurd told her story, I had my own theory as to the cause of his death.

There was no public exposure, however;

Mrs. Hurd and I agreed that it would profit no one to make the wretched affair public, and so we kept our own counsel.

Miss Melrose, in spite of my conviction that she had an active part in the conspiracy against Mrs. Spencer's life, I could not help pitying her. Such a miserable, worn, and haggard face as hers I have never seen, and when they buried Dr. Spencer she was confined to her bed with brain fever.

I attended her in her illness, but though she recovered in health, she was never herself again. She was a harmless maniac, whose delight was in gathering flowers and decorating the doctor's grave with them.

She is living still, and still gathers flowers and lays them on that grave, singing to herself a low incantation, which no one ever pretends to understand.

Not until Mrs. Spencer had many years been my wife, and the faithful Mrs. Hurd slept under the violets, did Alice ever know the perfidy of her former husband.

And when I told her, after the first shock was over, she crept into my arms and whispered:

"But if it had not been for James' crime I should not have found you, Herbert. So good does sometimes come out of evil."

SHORT AND CRISP.

A GOOD EXCUSE.

Little Johnny Fizzlepot got a scolding for tearing his new pants. He fell while running and split them at the knee.

"Oh, you bad boy," said his mother angrily, "how did you come to be so careless as to tear your pants?"

"I couldn't help it, ma. I fell so quick that I didn't have time to take them off," replied Johnny.

ANSWERED.

"Will you miss me when I'm gone?" sang Alfonso in the parlor.

"No!" fiercely whispered the old man to himself around the corner of the house; "and I'll try not to miss you while you're gone," he added, as he cocked his gun.

OUTRAGEOUS.

"The chain of evidence against the prisoner is very strong, and it is thought, will hang him," read Mrs. Fogg to her husband.

"Gracious me!" responded the old man, "I never thought the poor fellow would be chained to death; and they call this a century of progress."

DETECTED.

"What do you think of the new man?" asked the managing editor of a reporter.

"Well, I don't know. I should be inclined to say he wasn't much of a newspaper man."

"Indeed, what do you base your opinion on?"

"He told me to-day he'd just been measured for an overcoat."

NOT EXACTLY A FAVORABLE STRIKE.

"Did the audience strike you favorably?" was asked of a young orator who had come home from a political meeting in the next county.

"Not very. It would have struck me more favorably if I hadn't had on my best suit!"

"How's that?"

"Well, you see, I can't wash the egg off."

PRAYING EVERYTHING AWAY FROM HIM.

Little Johnny Fizzlepot has got the idea into his head from attending Sunday school that he could get anything he wants simply by praying for it. A few evenings ago, while engaged in his devotions, he prayed for a baseball, a pony, a new suit of Sunday clothes, a shotgun, a quarter of a dollar and various other articles which he needed. While Johnny was thus praying, his brother Tommy burst into tears and said in an agonized voice:

"Mamma, please make Johnny stop. He is praying everything away from me."

TOOK THE HINT UPON THE SPOT.

She—"What a lovely night it is! If you feel like smoking, George, light a cigar. I do not object."

He—"Thank you, but I will not take advantage of your generosity. The fact is, there is no satisfaction smoking in the dark."

She—"How strange!"

He—"It is rather odd, but it is a fact that a cigar is not a luxury unless one can see to smoke."

She—"Smoking is different from kissing, isn't it?"

He took the hint.

HE WOULD GET PREPARED IF SHE WOULD LET HIM.

"Little boys should always be prepared for the consequences of their acts," said the mother sternly, as Johnny tearfully protested against the use to which she was going to put her supper.

"I didn't think about it," wailed Johnny, "but I'll get prepared if you'll let me."

"How is it possible now?" asked the mother, a little puzzled.

"I'll put the dustpan where I know you always hit."

HE HAD GROWN.

A father was very much annoyed by the foolish questions of his little son.

"Johnny, you are a great source of annoyance to me."

"What's the matter, pa?"

"You ask so many foolish questions. I wasn't a big donkey when I was of your age."

"No, pa, but you've grown a heap since."

THE TREACHEROUS EMPRESS.

The Truly Spirit of the Elephant Continues and Ship's Hawsers are Used to Restrain Her.

The love of Keoper Cooley for the fierce female elephant so fitly named Empress is the only thing which may prevent her being killed. She has already crushed to death two men outright, and named for life an unknown number of her former admirers.

"She will never be murdered while I am her keeper," was Cooley's answering boast to the fans of Mr. Forepaugh.

Despite the well-known fact that Empress is both able and willing to prod, snort and stamp the life out of everybody except Cooley without the formality of any provocation, there is no falling off in the great crowds that come every day to see her.

Naturally her imperial temper is not improved by the close and galling bondage in which she is confined.

Judging from the iron-bound captivity of this ex-queen of the African jungles Mr. Forepaugh fully realizes the possibility of some such bloody climax to his career as a showman. The prodigious strength of the Empress, wrought to the highest pitch of nervous energy by her gladiatorial greed for human life, makes sport of the ordinary chain, padlocks and posts before which even Jumbo knelt in abject submission. Iron and steel is too brittle to withstand a sudden strain from those prodigious limbs, and at present Empress is tied up with great ships' hawsers, for all the world like a Titanic pa-poose wrapped in swaddling clothes of rope.

She is barely able to stand in one position and when tired she topples over on one side like a tenement house in an earthquake. Keeper Cooley loves her so tenderly that it is only Forepaugh's strict orders that restrain him from cutting her bands and letting her gambol on the sawdust.

These hawsers were obtained at considerable expense from the Navy Yard and will only be utilized until Mr. Forepaugh's order for the forging of a gigantic chain cable of wrought iron be completed.

The other elephants seem to regard Empress as their queen by divine right and imitate her moods with wonderful fidelity. She, however, gives them very little notice, but roars and trumpets and snaps fire from her wicked little eyes only when there are human auditors near.

Keeper Cooley treats her exactly as a henpecked husband would cajole and humor a wifely shrew. He is always racking his ingenuity to discover some new panacea for the tropical temper of his mastadonic sweetheart. Empress recognizes his devotion to the extent of letting him live, perhaps for no other reason than because if Cooley were sacrificed she would necessarily starve to death. No other employe of Forepaugh would dare feed her.

It was only the other day that a foolhardy citizen, of more powerful physique than brains, offered Empress from what he considered a safe distance a big ginger-cake. Empress saw the cake, put out her trunk and like a flash twined that mobile prehensile integument around the man's arm. He was saved from being drawn under her feet only by the combined efforts of half a dozen men. The man nearly fainted from fright.

Cooley says that Empress has marked two men for death and will kill them yet.

MIRTHFUL RIPPLES.

Sheet music—snores.

It is nearing time for the turkey to be down in the mouth.

Is the crow a musical bird?—the farmer is always reminded of the corn-crat when he sees him.

Printers, as a rule, are not fond of pi. Whoever it is furnished by the foreman it is always cut—ard.

The ghost of a show that we hear so much about may possibly have been the spirit of Hamlet's father.

When you spill soup on the tablecloth, set your tumbler on it when your wife is not looking, and trust to Providence for the thereafter.

Always look upon the bright side of life. Remember that a red hair shows much plainer on a black coat than a dark one.

There is more joy in the breast of the average street car passenger in beating the company out of his fare than in finding a dollar in the street.

This is the glorious season of the year when you wear an overcoat one day, a thin coat the second, a porous plaster the third and a doctor's bill the fourth.

Emerson, it is said, rarely sought twice the society of a person who made him laugh out loud. Writers on London humorous papers were always his favorite companions.

It now turns out that the flute was invented by the Lydians about 1200 B. C. This is too long to hold resentment, and we shall accordingly draw the slugs from our horse-pistol.

A swell young clergyman, who is well up in the social vernacular, made an awful mistake last week and christened a boy "Ah There," when the family intended it should be Arthur.

"Are you going to perform your ablutions?" asked the High School girl, as Amy moved toward the washstand. "No, Milledred," was the reply, "I am going to wash my hands and face."

An exchange says that at least one ton of gold is buried in the graves of the dead every year. It is strange that editors will persist in forgetting to have the gold taken from their pockets before they are buried.

Agent—"I have one lady 20 years of age who has \$30,000 in her own name." Customer—"Is she good looking?" Agent—"No; but she has got the consumption." Customer—"Just the kind of a wife to make me happy. Trot her out."

"Tiberius, at his death, left £23,624,000, which Caligula spent in less than twelve months." Humph! This is the first intimation we have had that Caligula attempted to establish an eight-page daily paper in a one-page town.

A man must have a pretty hard reputation when a simple little paragraph in the local paper says that he has quit drinking leads every acquaintance in the village to go around asking just when the funeral services are going to be held.

A society paper, in describing the order in which a bridal party passed down the aisle, says: "The bride walked on the arm of her father." This may be all right, but it seems to us that a church was hardly the place for her to display her acrobatic accomplishments.

"On the top and surface, brethren," said a minister last Sunday, "things are often clean and right, but it is when we look below and explore the depths that we appreciate the meanness and deceptions of our fellow creatures." He had been buying a barrel of apples evidently.

A man who had been convicted of stealing horses and whose penalty was assessed at twenty years' imprisonment was asked the usual question by Judge Noonan, of San Antonio who was on the bench. "Prisoner do you know of any reason why sentences should not be pronounced on you according to law?" "Why, Judge, of course I do. It would break me up in business."

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