

A GREAT SECRET.

OR,
SHALL IT BE DONE.

CHAPTER IV.

It is the end of March, 1883—ten years and eight months since the long forgotten disappearance of the English stock-broker, Mr. Staunton. After a mild winter the weather has suddenly changed, the air has become keen and cold, and the north wind sweeps over the flat country round Calais and St. Omer, biting more sharply than frost, bending low the bare branches of the poplar-trees that border the roads, and nipping the cold faces and fingers of the few peasants at work in the fields.

It had been a hard winter for the poor about there, both in town and country. The lace factories of Calais and St. Pierre had not been in full work; there had been sickness in the villages, press of poverty among the unemployed. The poor of St. Pierre, and of the district lying for some miles to the east of the town of Calais, found especial cause for complaint; for the old cure of the former place, a man whose devotion to his parishioners during the cholera plague of 1866, had made him their idol, was ill himself; and the little country-house where the peasantry of the barren sandy sea-coast had been always sure of a draught in time of sickness or a dinner in time of want, was half shut up, its invalid master, Mr. Beresford, having spent the winter at Nice.

Yet one more trouble, more vivid, more ghastly than the rest, had made the months of darkness and cold terrible to the unfortunate country people. Every afternoon, as the weak winter sunlight faded out of the sky and the mist rose higher and higher from the ground, the solitary worker in the fields, the man walking by himself along the high-road, would cross himself if he was religious, and would, in any case, keep a sharp lookout if he had to pass a bit of hedge, a clump of trees, or any object which might afford a hiding-place; and he would turn quickly round from time to time to glance behind him and make sure that he was not followed. For there was an enemy about, whose shape no one knew. Some said it was a wolf that the winter had brought from the far-off Cévennes, which attacked lonely travellers by night, and prowled round farmhouses and round the staring white buildings with perpendicular roofs and symmetrically shuttered windows, where retired tradesmen lived with their families. And the more stubbornly ignorant and unprogressive minds thought that it was the devil, with traditional panoply of horns and hoofs and tail, that had been seen, always at night, lurking in the vicinity of houses which the morning light showed to have been entered and robbed. But others argued that neither wolf nor devil would find a use for the money which seemed to be the sole object of the unknown marauder; and it was these cooler-headed reasoners who laid stress upon the fact that, with very sound human judgment, these attacks were always made upon persons whose pockets repaid the trouble of plunder. But no one could make anything better than a wildly speculative guess as to what rogue it was who living in their midst and having an intimate acquaintance with their affairs, had turned his knowledge to account in this audacious and discreditable manner; and as the victims declared unanimously that it was no man that, with burning eyes and white fangs, had pulled them down, and blinded them, and growled over them, and held them fast, until they heard a faint whistle and suddenly found themselves free, no supporter of either opinion could bring convincing proof of the truth of the one he held.

In the towns these petty robberies excited little attention until a victim of superior position to the rest, a notary, who had been attacked while returning in his carriage to his home in Ardros, after drawing some money from a bank in Calais, clamoured loudly at his loss and raised an outcry against the supineness of the police in the matter. He wrote and he talked until people were forced to read and forced to listen, and a spice of warmer interest was imparted to the affair by his mysterious hints that he could give more than a guess at the identity of his assailant; so that within four or five days after the attack, M. Dupont's appearance in any public place became an event of interest, and his innuendoes, which grew daily clearer, concerning young men with expensive tastes and niggardly parents, stimulated public curiosity and gave rise to much speculative controversy.

It was on the sixth day after his loss that in the buffet of the Hotel de la Gare in Calais, M. Dupont went so far as to give a description of his assailant which, whether from memory or unconsciously assisted by imagination, recalled vividly to the minds of the majority of his half-dozen listeners the form and features of the only son of one of the best known and most respected residents in the town.

"He was tall and slight and well-dressed, had well-cut features and gray eyes, and a slight dark moustache, and was altogether, as one would say, distinguished looking, not like a common thief at all," said M. Dupont slowly, in a voice just lowered to the pitch of suggestive mystery.

There was a pause. The hearers, with the feeling that they were being drawn into a conspiracy fascinating but dangerous, got gradually a little nearer to the speaker, with eyes greedy for more of this interesting scandal, yet loth to own that they recognized the portrait.

"Dark moustache, did you say?" hazarded one man at last, affecting a rather careless tone. He was a draper, and the family of the young gentleman to whom the description pointed were customers of his.

"Yes; dark moustache, and not much of it," said M. Dupont, with importance.

"Then he was young, perhaps?" suggested another.

"Quite young. About two-and-twenty, I should say."

Another pause. Then a third listener, clearing his throat, suggested: "You— you have no idea who he was, I suppose, monsieur?"

There was a slight rustle of relief and of expectation among the rest, who felt that the crisis of their interest was approaching at last.

"Well," said M. Dupont, more slowly than ever, feeling that he must eke out the flattering excitement which his words

inspired, "there are ideas which it is best to keep to oneself, M. Perrin."

But he had kept so very little to himself that this sudden caution roused a feeling of irritation, and a slight change of attitude in each man denoted the common feeling that they had been tricked.

"Come, now, among friends you might surely use a little confidence, M. Dupont," said a big man who had not spoken yet, laying his large hand, with sledge-hammer force, which was meant to be persuasive, on the thin, bent shoulders of the little notary.

"Yes, and after all you are bound to state what you know; and certainly you would be the last person—in fact, we should all be the last persons—to say a word that could be considered disrespectful to M. Fournier— began the most talkative of the group. And he stopped short, suddenly conscious of what he had done as all the rest turned upon him: M. Dupont with indignation at having his revelation forestalled, the others delighted that the subject had at last been brought within the realms of practical discussion.

After a moment's silence they all began to talk at once in low tones, and with abundance of expressive gesticulation. M. Fournier was a lace manufacturer, well off, respected, but not popular, and an opportunity of a surreptitious peck or two at his high reputation was generally appreciated.

"That is what comes of keeping a young man short of money," said M. Perrin, a florist, to whom Victor Fournier owed some fifty or sixty francs. "If his father would let him have an allowance for his little private expenses, he must get what he wants somewhere else."

"On the contrary, I think it is the mistaken indulgence of his parents, and especially of his mother, which makes young Fournier think he is a prince who can do nothing wrong," said a gentleman, who had tried in vain to arrange a match between his plain daughter and the self-willed handsome Victor.

"Who would have expected such an escapade from the son of that thrifty old ramrod Fournier?" said the big man, who could afford an independent opinion as he was socially beneath the manufacturer's had no notice, and business dealings with him.

"But you are not sure that it was M. Victor Fournier," observed the only man in the group whose face showed a little intelligence. "After all, there are plenty of tall, well-dressed young men with slight moustaches about. There is Dr. Lesage's new assistant at the other end of the town, for instance; and it is not easy to see how a gentleman so well known about here as M. Victor could have carried on this game for such a long time without detection. Let me see, it was in December that these robberies first began to be talked about, and now we are in the last days of March. It would require very strong proofs to convince me that your suspicions are well founded, M. Dupont."

"I have the proof of my own eyes," retorted the hero of the adventure, opening them very wide, as if to demonstrate his remarkable oracular power, and throwing off the last pretence of mystery on hearing a doubt cast upon his interesting secret, "and I can swear that it was young M. Fournier who robbed me of seventeen hundred and twenty-three francs as I lay half-stunned on my back in my carriage, after I had been attacked and thrown from my seat by some huge creature, whether man, wolf, or fiend, I do not pretend to say."

"Then of course, you will give information to the police, and make a statement, on the strength of which young Fournier will be arrested, and the charge gone into?" said the big man.

But the little notary's eyes grew small again at this suggestion, and his tone became milder.

"Not so fast, monsieur; I am a father myself, and I can feel for the young man's parents; beside which, the recognition of a man's face in dark would not be proof of identity in a court of law."

"Nor anywhere else," said the sceptic curtly. "Who has ever seen young M. Victor in company with a mysterious familiar which has been variously described as a wolf, a man dressed in skins, and the devil? Now, if this evil genius had taken the form of a pretty grisette—or of an elegant lady of the grand monde with military connections, shall we say?—I might have seen something in the story."

This reference to current gossip about young Fournier's social successes in various ranks of life, raised a laugh against Dupont, who, getting blue and angry, asked the scoffer if he doubted his veracity.

"Not at all, not at all, mon cher Dupont. I believe that you have been robbed of seventeen hundred and twenty-three francs, that you don't quite know how, and that a bad guess in these cases is better than none to the guesser, provided he has the wit not to call it a certainty. If I were you, I would keep my suspicions to myself, but make inquiries, and you will then find out, sooner or later, whether you have ground enough to bring a distinct accusation against the person you suspect."

It was not bad advice, and coming as it did from the mouth of a humble hanger-on at the skirts of the law—for the sceptical M. Guerlin was an attorney who earned his living by gleaming those dirty little cases which more reputable or more wealthy practitioners refused to take up—it had weight even with the irritated notary. The rest were enthusiastic in their agreement, and encouraged M. Guerlin to expose his views further.

"If," he continued, "it is really this young Victor Fournier who, with the assistance of an accomplice, either man or beast—for I think we may spare Old Nick the blame of this—has kept the whole neighborhood in a state of terror throughout the winter, it ought not to be difficult to track such a series of crimes home to him. He lives in our midst, his way of life is known, such frequent absences as these robberies would entail must have been noticed by somebody. Keep your eyes open, wait and see whether we shall hear of more thefts of the same kind, and don't make a noise before you are ready to strike your blow."

M. Guerlin's dry manner was impressive, and in the buzz of comment which followed his speech, all the rest tried clamorously to prove that what he said was just what they were about to say. They grew so loud during this discussion, that nothing but the fact that they all spoke at once

prevented the secret they were unanimous in agreeing to conceal from becoming the common property of everybody else in the room. But as it was, only one or two people sitting at a small table near to the excited speakers paid much attention to them.

The room was filled with people who had just come from Dover by boat. Most of them were absorbed in swallowing, in a few minutes as possible, as much food as the sea-voyage had left them appetite for. The only two exceptions were a lady and gentleman who had excited much comment on the journey, the former by her beauty, the latter by his unmistakable devotion to her. Before sea-sickness had damped their ardor, half a dozen British tourists had used their exuberant zeal in finding out the name of the beauty who had been so fortunate as to meet with their approval, and whether she was the wife or the daughter of the erect old gentleman who accompanied her. And they discovered with a little peeping and a little prying that the lady's name was Madame de Lanory, and that M. le General de Lanory, who travelled with her, was her husband. And then they made bets as to whether she was French or English, and would have tried to decide the point by crowding round her as she came out of her deck-cabin on arrival at Calais to listen to the words she might utter, had not a rough passage by that time taken the curl out of their amiable vivacity.

Madame de Lanory now sat with her husband at a table near the buffet, looking perfectly unruffled by the sea-journey, which had not affected the delicate tints of her complexion, nor disordered the simple travelling dress, which set off to perfection her tall, massive, but still youthful figure. She was young; men would have said "quite young," and women "still young," but it would have been difficult to tell her exact age. There were tiny little thread-like lines in her fair skin about the mouth and eyes; she had the manner of a woman who has been far too long used to excite general admiration to notice if it is given or even if it is withheld, while the expression of her face told plainly that she had been long enough in the world to be heartily tired of it. She was not hungry, and after trying vainly to take sufficient interest in the wing of a chicken, which her husband had carefully chosen for her, to eat it, she gave up the attempt; and without noticing that he also was eating nothing, she was attracted at first by the noise, and afterward by the substance of the conversation of the men at the buffet, until her whole attention was absorbed in trying to catch every word they uttered.

It was not until they had moved away, recalled to a sense of their own indiscretion by finding the eyes of the unknown lady fixed in fascinated interest upon them, that she discovered, on glancing at her husband, he was looking very ill. For some minutes he had sat with his elbow on the table and his head on his hand, in an attitude of carelessness which he had affected in order to conceal from his wife the indisposition which she had been too much occupied to notice.

"Did you hear what those men were saying, Gustave?" she asked, with unusual interest in her voice.

He raised his head and tried to answer her; but not even a spoilt woman could fail to see that he was very ill, and Madame de Lanory asked, "What is the matter, Gustave?" with a little natural impatience.

"Nothing, Madeline. If you will allow me, I will go outside on to the platform and smoke a cigarette before we start; I suppose the passage must have upset me a little."

He pushed back his chair and tried to rise; but he staggered and sat down again, for the room seemed to be spinning round him. Madeline rose to go to her husband's assistance, but his valet, who had been seated with madame's maid in a smaller room which opened into the large one, was at his master's side before her. As curious eyes were being turned from all directions upon him, his wife addressed one of the waiters who had come up to see what was the matter:

"Have you a room to which this gentleman can be taken to? We will have to spend the night here."

The general was too ill to protest as he was led out of the room and up-stairs to a rather sparsely decorated apartment overlooking the quay, with two big wooden bedsteads placed back to back against one of the walls. He refused to let her stay with him, saying simply: "My dear child, it is bad enough to have to put up with an old man; you shall not be troubled with an old invalid." But when after a little rest he felt better, he sent Joseph to ask if madame would kindly come to him.

Madame came at once; she was very kind, and she meant to be very sweet as she walked up to the bedside and took his hand in hers, and looking into the fine face which was still handsome in spite of his sixty years, asked him gently if he was better.

"Yes, my dear, I am much better, thank you; it is very good of you to care so much. I know how annoying it must be to you to have your journey interrupted in this way, and I wanted to suggest that you should go on to Rome with your maid and I will follow in a few days. You see you will be all right when you are once in Rome, since the Comtesse your friend is already there; and I am afraid that if you wait for me you may miss the carnival. For in my impatience to be in Rome I can see now that I got up too soon, and I don't think I can continue the journey for several days."

The general had been suffering from an old wound and rheumatism together, and his wife felt contrite as she listened.

"It was I who was impatient, not you, Gustave, and you came away so soon to please me. Why will you spoil me like this? If you were to be a little less indulgent, you have no idea what a much better wife I should be. But you still treat me as if we were in our honeymoon, instead of your having been a slave to my caprices for four whole years."

The feeling she showed brought a little color to his face, and he raised her hand gratefully to his lips.

"I will take your advice, then, and treat you as hardly as I can. You shall stay here with me until I am well enough to travel again, and we shall see whether my selfishness really is the best plan, or whether you will be bored to death."

"Oh, no, there is no fear of that," said she quickly. "I am on the track of a most delightful mystery which would keep me amused for a whole week, I feel sure. When we were sitting at the table down-stairs, some men were talking of a robbery which occurred near here last week, and I heard

them mention the name of the man they suspected. Just now I asked the chambermaid some questions, and found out that all through the winter most mysterious robberies have been going on about this part of the country; but she said that no one knew who committed them. Then I asked her who M. Victor Fournier was, without telling her that he was the man I had heard was suspected. And she told me he is the handsomest man in Calais, a gentleman only two or three and twenty, the son of a lace manufacturer, who is said to be very rich and very mean. And, of course I am dying to see this supposed Claude Duval, and I am going to call upon the consul and ask him to get me permission to go over M. Fournier's factory on the chance of seeing his son; I shall go as early as possible to-morrow. Isn't it quite an exciting adventure?"

"Yes," said her husband, who felt too jealous of her curiosity to see the "handsomest man in Calais" to share her interest in the story.

They spent the night at the hotel, and on the following afternoon the British Consul himself accompanied Madame de Lanory to M. Fournier's factory at St. Pierre, where, to her great disappointment, old M. Fournier himself showed her over the building, having come there, on receipt of a note from the consul, on purpose to do honor to the beautiful lady.

They passed from room to room, Madame de Lanory scarcely able to conceal that her strong interest in revolving sheets of twisted threads had grown singularly half-hearted and unintelligent, until they came to a corridor, at the end of which a young man was standing. Feeling sure that this must be the hero whom she was so anxious to see, Madame de Lanory looked straight into his face as she passed him. He was neither short nor tall, neither very broad nor very slight, dark-haired and dark-skinned, with a face in which there was nothing to attract particular attention, except the gentle expression of his brown eyes. He glanced shyly at the handsome lady, the expression of whose face suddenly changed from curiosity to horror as she looked at him. Only the young fellow himself noticed the look, which greatly confused and astonished him. Madame de Lanory walked on, and smiled mechanically in answer to some remarks made to her by the two middle-aged gentlemen, but for a few minutes she did not speak. When she had recovered her self-command, she turned to M. Fournier.

"Is that one of your sons, Monsieur?" she asked, glancing back to where the young man stood.

"No, madame; I have only one son, whom I hope to have an opportunity of presenting to you, if you will allow him that honor."

"I shall be delighted, monsieur, to know your son. And that gentleman is—"

"One of my clerks, a young Englishman, introduced to the firm by my English partner, Mr. Beresford."

"I seem to know his face. May I ask you his name?"

"Gerald Staunton."

Out of the mists of the past a face rose before Madeline de Lanory, and a voice called to her. For one instant long-forgotten memories blinded, stunned her; the next she was thanking M. Fournier for his courtesy, and inventing excuses to hurry away from the building.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Building Sites and Choosing Houses.

A writer in a recent number of *Chambers Journal* makes the following good suggestions to persons about to build or purchase a house. In selecting a house, or a site for a new one, remember that where the sun will shine on the house for some hours a day, one element of good is secured, especially if the sunshine enters at the windows of the living rooms or rooms most used during the day time. After the aspect has been found to be suitable, and that a plentiful supply of sun and air is insured, attention should be given to the general position and construction of the house. If the ground is at all porous, a layer of concrete not less than six inches thick, and composed of cement or lime and broken bricks or gravel, should be spread over the whole of the ground covered by the building. This will prevent the passage of ground air up through the floors.

Air will travel through the ground for some distance, and as it invariably becomes contaminated by taking up carbonic acid gas in its passage, is not suitable for inhaling. The house acts as a sucker on the ground, and if, unfortunately, the site is one on "made" ground—that is, composed of all the refuse of a town—the ground air becomes the medium of disease. No houses should be built without a well-ventilated air space between the earth and the ground floor, especially if the layer of concrete on the surface be omitted. The walls should be built of good hard-burnt bricks or non-porous stone set in lime or cement mortar. Common underburnt bricks or porous stones hold moisture, which evaporates with a rise in the temperature, and so chills the air in the house. If the bricks or stones of the walls are suspected of holding moisture, the whole of the external surfaces should be covered with cement, or tiled or slated above. The foundations of the walls should rest on thick beds of concrete bedded in the earth; and to prevent the ground damp rising up the walls, a damp-proof course of slates in cement or a bed of asphalt should be laid in the full thickness or width of the wall just above the ground line. Dryness in this climate is so essential to health that any building which in its floors, walls, or roof sills by admitting moisture should be rejected as a place of residence by those who value their health. In tropical climates buildings are constructed to keep out the heat; but here, we build to retain the heat and keep out the cold.

The Fishing Maiden.

She was full of cunning crinkles, little tricks and wily wrinkles to catch crabs and periwinkles in the waters of the bay. She knew all the leading jobbers in fish tackle, reels and bobbars, and she always caught the robbers that would steal her bait away. She could see without her glasses how to catch her trout and basses, and she gathered in by masses victims of her wily skill.

Only one thing was the matter—she could fish but couldn't flatter; and that made the young men scatter—she could never fill the bill.

SCIENTIFIC.

A CHINESE INDUSTRY.—Rev. B. C. Henry states that the fan palm of China grows only in the San Yu district, some twenty miles long by ten miles wide. The trees do not yield leaves suitable for fans until six years old. Some trees are said to be over 100 years old, but the tallest measure only about twelve feet. From April to November the leaves are cut monthly, from one to three being taken from each plant. From 10,000 to 20,000 people are employed.

BRAIN GROWTH IN INFANCY.—A striking fact deduced from observations recorded by the late Dr. Parrott is the rapid brain growth in the first half year of life as compared with the increase in height and the growth of other organs. Taking the total growth between birth and six years of age as 100, the weight of the heart increases 11.43 in girls and 11.88 in boys during their first six months of life; the height increases 20.8 in girls and 11.4 in boys; while the weight of brain increases 27.41 in girls and 23.51 in boys.

RAPID COMMUNICATION.—When the first electric telegraph was established, according to the British postmaster-general, the speed of transmission was from four to five words a minute on the five-needle instruments. In 1849 the average rate for a number of newspaper messages was seventeen words a minute. The present pace of the electric telegraph between London and Dublin, where the Wheatstone automatic instrument is employed, reaches 402 words a minute; and thus what was regarded as miraculous sixty years ago has multiplied a hundredfold in one half-century.

PREHISTORIC MINES.—An account of some interesting ancient flint mines discovered near Muf-de-Barrez, France, has been given by M. Marcelin Boule. The flints formed a bed underlying some twenty feet of chalk, in which narrow shafts and galleries, still bearing the marks of the rude deer-horn picks, were excavated. The roofs of the galleries were supported by pillars and props as in modern mining, but the results of cave-ins are still to be seen in tools crushed between fallen rocks. Near the shafts are the remains of ancient workshops, where the flint was worked into various articles used in the age of polished stone.

FORMATION OF MOUNTAIN CHAINS.—M. Faye, the well-known French astronomer, has drawn attention at a recent meeting of the French Academy of Sciences to the apparent geological law that the cooling of the terrestrial crust goes on more rapidly under the sea than with a land surface. Hence he argues that the crust must thicken under oceans at a more rapid rate, and so give rise to a swelling up and distortion of the thinner portions of the crust, in other words, to the formation of mountain chains.

DRIVING A SPIKE UNDER WATER.—In mill work, especially when making repairs, it is often necessary to drive large spikes in water to the depth of two, three, and even four feet. The *Manufacturers' Gazette* says one of the neatest and also the best ways of effecting the desired object is to get a piece of steam pipe of sufficient size to permit the spike to drop easily through it. Place one end of this pipe upon the spot where the spike is to be driven, drop the spike into the pipe, point first, and then follow it with an iron rod just large enough to slide easily in the pipe. By using the iron rod as a battering ram, or like a churn drill, the spike can be easily and quickly driven home without splattering the person with mud and water.

Know One Thing Well.

It has been remarked that the farmers who best succeed are those who devote their chief attention to some one product which is favored by their special soil and climate.

By concentrating his attention upon a single product or class of products, and that product favored by nature, the farmer surpasses competitors in other places. There is a world of secrets involved in the raising of a fine field of cabbages. Try one row of fifty plants, and you will wonder that any man ever succeeded in winning the victory over the acute, numerous and unslumbering rivals who dispute with you the possession of every leaf.

The special farmer must of necessity possess all the erudition of his specialty, and he succeeds because he does. A man became rich on the Hudson by raising one variety of apples, the Newton pippin, which brought the best price in Europe and India. There are farmers in Virginia who gain a large revenue by the raising of peanuts.

Is it not precisely the same in all the avocations of mortals? An English lady, who has been struggling for life in New York and Boston for six years as a writer, failed because she did not know how to do any one thing well enough.

She has barely lived, she and her children, while seeing chance after chance glide by which she could not improve because she had not the special skill or special knowledge required.

But she has learned wisdom, which she has utilized in the education of her children. Each of them, "knows one thing well," and both have good prospects of success because of this.

There is one key, only, which will open the door to the bread-winning, and that key is thorough knowledge of and training for the work selected, whether it be making a button-hole or writing a treatise on philosophy. The days of amateur work in any department are over.

How Horses Rest.

"Horses can get some rest standing," said an old trainer, "provided the position be reasonably easy, but no full rest except recumbent. It is known of some horses that they never lie down in the stall, though if kept in pasture they take their rest habitually in a recumbent position. It is well to consider whether the habit has not been formed upon the horse by some circumstance connected with the stall he was made to occupy, in that it had a damp earth floor, or one made of dilapidated plank, uncomfortable to the horse that had been accustomed to select his own bed in the pasture.

"If the horse can have the privilege of selecting his own position for resting on his feet he can sleep standing; but while his muscles may be to a certain degree relaxed, and get rest in that position, what can be said of the bearings at the joints? Without relief through the recumbent position the joint surfaces are forced continuously to bear a weight of from 1,000 to 1,800 pounds. This must act unfavorably, especially upon the complicated structures within the hoofs, which nature intended should have periods of rest each day."