

THE CRIMINAL'S CONFESSION

OR, SYBIL BERNER'S VINDICATION

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued).

"Oh, no! There is a great deal of talk, to be sure. Malcontents complain that he has exceeded his prerogative, that he has overstepped the law, that he has tried to establish a dangerous precedent, and so on, and so on."

"And what does Judge Ruthven say to all this?"

"Nothing, nothing whatever! Do you suppose for an instant he is going to condescend to defend himself to such asses? He says nothing."

"But his friends! his friends! surely they defend him?"

"They do. They tell the donkeys that a judge has certain discretionary powers to modify the severity of the law when justice requires it; that these modifications become precedents for other judges to follow, and finally they become laws that none may dispute; that in this case Judge Ruthven has followed the spirit of the law, if not its letter; that he based his act upon the fact that the accused lady, being perfectly safe from the officers of the law at the time, voluntarily came forward, delivered herself up, and challenged a trial; and that therefore she was a worthy object of the privilege of bail."

Honest Clement Pendleton was no lawyer, and he had spoken a trifle unprofessionally; but it was no matter—Lyon Berners understood him, and was satisfied.

Sybil and Beatrix came down to join them; and then they all adjourned to the dining-room, where they had luncheon.

Then Captain Pendleton went home, leaving Beatrix with Sybil.

A few days after this the court adjourned, and Sybil knew that she would not be brought to trial until the spring term. In that long interval, what discoveries might not be made to save her? Her hopes rose high.

"But, oh!" she thought with a shudder, "if these months had to be passed in prison!" And in the depths of her grateful heart she again thanked Providence and Judge Ruthven for her restoration to home and friends.

Then Christmas came. Under the circumstances they preferred to spend it very quietly. Beatrix was still with them, and Clement was invited to come and dine on Christmas Day.

Sybil took great delight in delighting. And if good taste forbade her now to indulge in the lavish hospitality and gay festivity that had always been customary in Black Hall at this season, she determined to indemnify herself by making unusually handsome presents to her servants and her dependents, as well as the most liberal donations to the poor—and so to be happy in the happiness she should bestow.

With this intention she put a small fortune in her longest purse, and went in her roomier carriage to Blackville, intending to empty the purse and fill the carriage before her return.

The day being Christmas Eve the village was full of people, come there to shop for the holidays, and poor Sybil was brought to a sense of her condition by the treatment she received—sudden glances, or injurious whispers greeted her as she passed. But they were only pin thrusts, which she soon forgot in the interesting errand upon which she had come.

She loaded her carriage with bundles, boxes and baskets, and returned home in time to separate the treasures, and write upon each one of them the name of the person for whom it was intended.

The next morning Captain Pendleton arrived early, to assist in the distribution of the presents. No one was neglected; everybody was made happy with several valuable gifts.

Little Cro' went to paradise in the corner of the room, with his cap full of toys.

That day also Sybil's dependents enjoyed as good a dinner as was set for herself and her friends. So, after all, in spite of fate, they kept their "Christmas, merry still."

When it was generally known that Sybil Berners had returned to Black Hall, there was much discussion among the ladies as to whether they should call on her.

Some declared that she was a murderer, whose face they never could bear to look on, and therefore of course they never would go near her. Others, who said that they believed her guiltless and wished her well, added that they felt the same delicacy in going or in staying away—as in the first case Mrs. Berners might consider their call an intrusion from motives of curiosity, and in the second case she might construe their absence into intentional neglect. And between these two extremes there was every shade of opinion as to Sybil's culpability, and every sort of reason for not going to see her just yet.

And so it followed that Sybil passed a whole, good, peaceful fortnight in the company of her husband, her three devoted friends, her servants, and her little pets.

But at length, early in January, sympathy on the one hand and curiosity on the other prevailed over every other

feeling and reason, and Sybil's neighbors, both detractors and defenders, began to call on her.

But Mrs. Berners had penetration enough to know her friends from her foes, and so she felt no hesitation and made no mistakes when she welcomed the visits of the first and declined those of the last mentioned.

So the winter slipped away peacefully enough, and Sybil seldom remembered what her friends tried to make her forget—the heavy cloud that still hung over her fate.

She was reminded of it only when her counsel came to consult with her; but then they always wore cheerful countenances, and spoke hopeful words that inspired her with confidence and courage.

Sometimes, indeed, the recollection of the awful crisis that could not be shunned, that must be met, would come to her in the middle watches of the night, and fill her soul with horror; but with the first beams of the morning sun this darkness of her spirit, like the darkness of the hour, would pass away.

It was in all the reviving life and budding beauty of early spring that the Criminal Court resumed its sittings at Blackville.

The case of Sybil Berners, charged with the murder of Rosa Blondelle, was the very first upon the docket.

It was a day as bright, beautiful, and glorious as any day that ever dawned, when the summons came that called Mrs. Berners up to the court to be put on trial for her life.

CHAPTER XIII.

It is not necessary here to dwell upon the trial. It all passed like a dream to Sybil. Mr. Ishmael Worth was summoned from Washington for the defense; but nothing he or Mr. Sheridan could say was sufficient to put aside the all too-convincing evidence.

The venerable Judge Ruthven, in summing up, palpably leaned to the side of the prisoner; and to no purpose, for the jury, after retiring for only a short time, returned to the courtroom and announced that they had unanimously agreed upon a verdict of "guilty."

Sentence of death was passed and Sybil fainted away.

Her recollection afterward of what followed was that she was being conveyed home when a violent storm broke out and she was obliged to seek shelter in a cottage.

The storm was a reality, but Sybil was borne through it, not to her home, but to the county jail, where she was to remain till the death sentence was executed.

Fortunately, the warden was a kind-hearted man, and the cell to which he consigned his new prisoner was more like a pretty room, and the willing hands of Miss Pendleton and Lyon Berners still further helped out the hallucination by adorning the walls with pictures and knick-knacks.

Lyon was himself compelled to return to his desolate home each night, and who shall describe the awful torture that he endured?

Gradually Sybil sank deeper and deeper into apathy. Her hallucination was now complete, and she constantly expressed regret that her husband and her friends were obliged to so long encroach upon the hospitality of the owner of "the cottage." As the days passed she lost all count of time, and always thought that she had arrived "last Sunday," and was going home "to-morrow!"

Miss Pendleton was permitted to remain with her, and Mr. Berners was allowed to visit her every day.

So some weeks had passed, when one day a terrible event occurred.

It was early in the morning; the prison doors were just opened for the admission of visitors, and Lyon Berners had just entered the lower hall, on his way to the warden's office, to get that old man to conduct him to Sybil's cell, when he was overtaken and accosted by Mr. Fortescue, the sheriff.

"What is the matter?" inquired Lyon Berners, hurriedly, and in great alarm.

"For Heaven's sake, compose yourself now! You will need all your self-possession, for her sake, as well as for your own. Come into the warden's office with me. He also must go with us to her cell."

In great distress of mind, Mr. Berners followed the sheriff into the warden's office.

Old Mr. Martin, the venerable warden, who was at his desk, came to meet the visitors.

"One moment, Martin. I will see you in one moment. Just, now I wish to speak to Mr. Berners," said the sheriff, as he drew Lyon Berners aside.

"What is it now?" inquired Sybil's husband, in an agony of alarm for her sake.

"Can you not surmise?" compassionately suggested the sheriff.

"I—oh, great Heaven! I dare not!" he exclaimed, throwing up his hands and clasping his head.

"You must know that the petition sent

up to the governor for her pardon has been returned with an adverse decision."

"I feared it! Oh, heaven!"

"Oh, try to be firm! I must now tell you the worst. The petition did not come down alone—"

The speaker paused an instant, and then added gravely and compassionately:

"There was another document come down with it—a document that I must read to her."

"The death warrant!" Lyon Berners uttered these words with such a groan of anguish and despair as seemed to have rent his soul and body asunder as he reeled and crouched at the window frame for support, and then dropped into a chair by its side.

"Mr. Berners, for her sake! for Heaven's sake! bear up now! Martin, a glass of brandy here! quick!"

The warden, who always kept a bottle on his desk, hurriedly filled a tumbler half full of brandy, and hastened up with it.

"Drink it! drink it all!" said the sheriff, putting the glass into Mr. Berners' hand.

Lyon Berners drank the strong and fiery spirit, feeling it no more than if it had been water.

A few moments passed, during which Mr. Berners struggled hard for self-control, while the warden in a low voice inquired:

"What is it?"

"The death warrant!"

As the sheriff whispered these awful words, the warden clasped his hands, saying fervently:

"Now may the Lord help them both!"

Then the sheriff turned to Mr. Berners, who had again sank upon a chair, and was still striving to recover himself, and he kindly inquired:

"Are you ready now to go with us to her cell? She will need your support in this trying hour."

"Heaven give me strength! Yes, I am ready!" said Mr. Berners.

And the ministers of fate went to take the death warrant to the cell of Sybil Berners.

CHAPTER XIV.

The warden unlocked the door and entered the cell, followed by the sheriff and Mr. Berners.

Sybil was dressed, and Beatrix was sitting beside her, engaged in some light needlework.

"She is very feeble both in mind and body to-day," said Beatrix, in answer to an inquiring look of Mr. Berners, as she arose to give him her seat by the bedside.

"How are you this morning, love?" inquired Mr. Berners, tenderly taking her hand.

"Oh! I am better! Shall we go home to-morrow, Lyon?"

"If it please Providence, dear," answered her husband, putting a strong constraint upon himself. But he saw that though she had asked the question, she scarcely heard his answer; her attention had wandered from the point, and she was idly pulling the curly-haired ears of her little dog, who lay coiled up beside her.

Meanwhile Mr. Fortescue had shaken hands with Miss Pendleton, and was now saying:

"Beatrix, my child, you had better retire from this scene for a few moments."

"Why?" inquired Beatrix, looking her old neighbor firmly in the face.

"Because I have a very painful duty to perform, which will be very distressing to you to witness."

"What is it?" inquired Miss Pendleton, without removing her eyes from his face.

The sheriff stooped and told her in a whisper.

She turned pale as death, caught her breath, and leaned for an instant on the table near her. Then, with a supreme effort, she stood up and said:

"You have known me from my childhood. Do you think me such a dastard as to desert my friend in the hour of her utmost need? No, Mr. Fortescue; I will stand by Sybil to the last. So do your duty! Thank Heaven, you cannot hurt her much!"

"Thank Heaven, indeed, if that is so, Beatrix," answered the sheriff, as he made a sign to Mr. Berners, and approached the bed with the death warrant in his hand.

"Sybil, darling," whispered her agitated husband, "here is Mr. Fortescue come to see you."

"Has he? that is kind," she answered, looking curiously at her own fingers, and then forgetting the presence of her visitors.

"How are you, Mrs. Berners?" inquired the sheriff.

"I am better. I am going home to-morrow, and then you must come and—"

She broke off suddenly, and began to feel about with her fingers over the white counterpane.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the sheriff, looking up into Mr. Berners' face.

Lyon Berners gravely bent his head. The sheriff hesitated, as if uncertain how to proceed.

Mr. Berners came to his side and whispered:

"If you must read that document to her, be merciful and read it now, when her mind is dodded to its meaning."

The sheriff nodded, and then said:

"Mrs. Berners, I have something to read to you. Can you listen?"

"Yes. Is it interesting?" inquired Sybil, rousing herself.

Without answering that last question, the sheriff proceeded to read the awful instrument of doom. Lyon Berners sat down on the side of the bed, and drew his wife's head upon his bosom.

Miss Pendleton sat pale and stiff as a statue.

The old warden stood with his eyes bent upon the floor.

Sybil roused herself to listen, and she heard the first few lines of preamble

addressed to the sheriff, but after that her attention wandered beyond control; and at the conclusion, she slightly smiled, and turning to her husband, said:

"Lyon, be sure to come early to-morrow. I want to go home in the cool of the morning."

"Yes, dear; I shall be here very early," answered Mr. Berners as steadily as he could speak, with his heart breaking.

Then laying her gently back on her pillow, he touched the sheriff on the shoulder and beckoned him to follow to the window.

"You see?" said Mr. Berners, as they stood side by side, looking out.

"I see. I am very much shocked. This should be looked into. A medical examination should be made. Another appeal should be sent to the governor. Has Mr. Worth returned to Washington?"

"No; he has been waiting the issue of the petition to the governor."

"Then I advise you to see and consult him without loss of time. Do it now, this morning," urged the sheriff as he took up his hat and gloves to leave the cell.

He went to Sybil's bedside to take leave of her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Berners," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Fortescue. Thanks for your call. When you come again—" she began, smilingly, but lost the connection of her ideas, and with a look of distress and perplexity she sent her fingers straying over the counterpane as if in search of something.

With a deep sigh the sheriff left the cell.

And at the same time Lyon Berners quietly kissed his wife and withdrew.

Mr. Berners went at once to the hotel where Ismael Worth lodged.

In inquiry at the office, he found that Mr. Worth was in his room. Without waiting to send up his name first, he desired to be immediately shown up to Mr. Worth's presence.

He found the young lawyer sitting at a table, deeply immersed in documents. He was about to apologize for his unceremonious intrusion, when Mr. Worth arose, and, with grave courtesy and earnest sympathy, informed his visitor that he had already heard, with deep sorrow, the adverse decision of the governor.

Mr. Berners covered his face with his hand for a moment, and then sank into the chair placed for him by Mr. Worth.

As soon as he had recovered himself he entered upon the subject of his visit—the insanity of Sybil, and the use that might be made of it in gaining a respite that should prolong her life for some months, until perhaps she might be permitted to die a natural death.

"Her state, as you represent it, gives me hopes of obtaining not only a respite, but a full pardon," said Ismael Worth, when Mr. Berners had finished his account.

"I scarcely dared to hope as much as that," sighed Mr. Berners.

"I must speak now from the law's point of view. You and I believe that, sane or insane, Mrs. Berners never committed that murder. But the jury says she did. Now if she can be proved to be insane at this time, her present insanity will argue a foregone conclusion, namely that she was insane at the time she is said to have committed the crime; and, if insane, then she was therefore irresponsible for her action, and unamenable to the law. Let this be satisfactorily proved, and properly set before the governor, and I have little doubt that the result will be a full pardon."

"You give me hope, where I thought hope was impossible. If we can only obtain this pardon, and get my dear wife out of her horrible position, I will take her at once to some foreign country, where, far from all these ghastrous associations, she may live in peace, and possibly recover her reason, and where she may have some little share of earthly happiness even yet," sighed Lyon Berners.

"And if it can be shown that there has been insanity in her family, it will make our argument much stronger. Has such ever been the case?" earnestly inquired Ismael Worth.

"Ah, no! unless the most violent passions roused at times to the most un-governable fury, and resulting in the most heinous deeds, can be called insanity, there is none in her family," said Mr. Berners, sadly, shaking his head.

"That is also insanity, certainly," said the philosophical Ismael Worth, "but scarcely of the sort that could be brought forward in her favor."

"Nor is it the type of her present mental malady, which is very, very gentle."

"However, we have ground enough to go upon. Our case is very strong. We must lose no time. The first step to be taken will be to procure an order to have the lady examined by physicians competent to form a judgment, and make a report upon her condition. Their report must go up to the governor. And now, Mr. Berners, if you will go home and seek the rest you need and leave this business in my hands, I will set about it immediately," said Ismael Worth, kindly.

"Thank you! I thank you from my soul! I will confidently leave her fate in your hands. I know I could not leave it in any better under heaven! But, tell me, when shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow morning, after your visit to the prison, you can call here if you please, and I shall be able to report some progress," said Mr. Worth, rising from his chair.

Lyon Berners then shook hands with him and left the room.

(To be continued.)

ON THE FARM

IMPORTANCE OF THE SILO.

Evidently the silo is increasing in popularity. I became interested in the use of silage as a feed a number of years ago, writes Mr. G. Lafimer. When two years later I started in the dairy business, I fully made up my mind to have one as soon as possible. Previously I had fed corn stover and mixed hay with corn and oats mixed as a grain ration. I am now using the silo a third season. It is 14x26 feet and is located at the end of the barn and connects directly with a feed alley in front of the cows. It cost \$188 above the foundation.

Silage kept perfectly the first season, and was all good after removing about 8 inches of black silage on top. The second season the corn was badly frosted, eight or ten days before being put in the silo, and did not make as good feed as the preceding season. It kept well, however, except the first 4 or 5 feet at the top, where there were small spots here and there, 4 or 5 inches in diameter and 2 or 3 inches thick, held together with a white mold, while all around would be free from mold. I had a similar experience last year; small spots continuing down a little farther than the previous year.

The corn was about the right stage of maturity, or perhaps a little riper in the parts where the spots were found than where they were absent. I have been told by several men who used the same power and cutter just preceding or following me, that they found similar spots in their silage. None of these spots was within a foot of the walls, where the silage had been tramped down more than elsewhere.

My method of feeding is to give each milking cow 20 to 25 pounds feed, according to the appetite, and the amount of milk given. I feed three to four quarts bran in the morning when milked, feeding silage after milking. Cows are turned out for water and exercise one to three hours, according to the weather in the afternoon, and they are under cover if necessary. The same amount of silage in the evening, sprinkled with one to one and a half quarts old process oil meal—is ready for the cows when they are turned in to be milked. A ration of clover or mixed hay is given at noon and sometimes a few stalks or oat straw when out for a change.

My former method was to feed corn stover in a manger or, when the ground was frozen, in the barnyard or field near by, using the ear, either whole or chopped, with oats as a grain ration. This was never a satisfactory way of using our most valuable forage crop. More recently the huskers and shredders have come into use and left the fodder in a condition to be fed with less waste and to better advantage. But even with this improvement, there were seasons when it was impossible to get the shredded fodder dry enough to prevent molding in the mow. Now, with the silo, there are two weeks more or less, according to the season, in which the corn crop can be secured in the right condition. Then it contains the highest percentage of digestible matter of any stage of its growth and can be fed without any loss whatever.

FARM NOTES.

One good ear to each stalk and two stalks in each hill will make corn yield more than 100 bushels per acre. Many people try to have from three to five stalks per hill and get much less than 100 bushels per acre.

The whole point of forest management is to have new trees of the most useful kind take the place of the old just as soon as possible after they are cut. One thoughtless stroke of the axe will get rid of a fine sapling half the size of a man's wrist, and a dozen years of growth is lost. On the other hand, the cutting of a good tree may simply open room for worthless trees.

A light application of manure will benefit all crops. Some soils will take more manure than others. Care should be taken to put the manure on the land when fresh. It should not be left too long in small piles in the fields before spreading.

Although the farmer may often be crowded with work, a little leisure time ought to be had in which to cut those weeds in the fence corners and along the road. This will add to the appearance of the farm, and keep the weeds from ripening their seeds.

Weeds and bugs claim much of the attention of the farmer at this season; but if he be master of his business, he will destroy the former as soon as they germinate, and the latter during the earliest stages of their growth; to neglect the destruction of either for but a few days will often reduce the crop one-half and may cause its entire destruction.

LIVE STOCK NOTES.

If one has profitable cows, it won't pay to allow them to get out of condition by economizing on feed, and if they are not all profitable, now is the time to do some effective culling, and thus save feed for the paying animals.

During the heated season the animals should have an opportunity to drink late in the evening. This prevents excessive thirst in the morning and consequent overloading with water. Evening watering also gives the caretaker the necessary opportunity for a general inspection of the animals and stables, which is necessary for the best care.