

THE CRIMINAL'S CONFESSION

OR, SYBIL BERNER'S
VINDICATION

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued).

"Yes, certainly," said Mr. Berners, taking back his pocketbook.

"Me! me make purchases for you, my lamb? La! whatever can you want in this awful—There I go again!" exclaimed Miss Tabby, in dismay.

"You have too much curiosity, you good old soul. But here, come with me, and I will tell you what to buy for me—after you have instructed me as to what I shall want," said Sybil, laughing archly, as she led the way to a rude arbor at a short distance.

"Now, Tabby, what I want you to buy for me, is everything in the world that is needed for a bran, spic and span new baby!"

"La! Miss Sybil; whose baby?" inquired the astonished housekeeper, with her mouth and eyes wide open.

"Tabby, don't be a goose!"

"But, Miss Sybil, I don't know what you mean!"

"Tabby, I'm not 'Miss Sybil' to begin with! I'm Mrs. Berners, and have been married more than a year, and you know it, you stupid old Tabby!"

"But, Miss Sybil, or—rather—Mrs. Berners, if I must be so ceremonious with my own nurse-child, what has that to do with what you've been a-asking of me to buy?"

"Nothing at all," answered Sybil, half-provoked and half-amused at the dullness of the old housekeeper. "Nothing whatever. But you must go out and buy everything that is required for the wardrobe of a young child; and you must find out what is necessary, for I myself haven't the slightest idea of what that is."

The housekeeper looked at the lady for a moment, in questioning doubt and fear, and then, as the truth slowly penetrated her mind, she broke forth suddenly with:

"Oh, my good gracious! Miss Sybil, honey! you don't mean it, do you?"

"Yes, I do, Tabby; and I thank Heaven every day for the coming blessing," said the young wife, fervently.

"But, oh, Miss Sybil, in such a place as this—There I go again!" exclaimed the housekeeper, breaking off in a panic, and then adding, "I ain't fit to come to see you; no, that I ain't. I'm always forgetting, especially when you talk so sensible!"

"What's the matter with you, Tabby? Are you crazy? You never thought I was going to stay here for such an event, did you? In a public resort like this? Tabby, I'm shocked at you! No! I shall be at home at Black Hall to receive the little stranger, Tabby," said Sybil, making the longest and most connected speech she had made since her reason had become impaired.

"Ah, Lord! ah, my Lord!" cried the old woman, on the verge of hysterics again.

"Now, Tabby, don't begin to whimper! You whimper over everything though I know. You whimpered when I was born, and when I was christened, and when I was married; and now you whimper when I am going to be crowned with the crown of maternity. Oh, you old rebel!" cried Sybil, contradicting all her sarcastic words by caressing her old friend.

"No, I don't mean to! but if you knowed! Oh, if you knowed!" exclaimed Miss Tabby, suppressing and swallowing her sobs.

"Now, then, let us go back to Lyon. Lyon will give you what money you may need for the purchases; and I beg that you will make them as soon as possible, and bring them to me here," said Sybil, as she arose and walked back to the spot where she left her husband and her friend.

After a little general conversation, in which Sybil sometimes joined naturally, and from which she also sometimes wandered off at random, Mr. Berners proposed to call in Joe to pay his respects to his mistress.

Sybil sprang at the proposal, and Joe was duly summoned from his seat on the box of the carriage before the door.

He came into the garden, hat in hand, and bowed gravely before his unfortunate mistress.

And when she asked him many questions about that department of the domestic economy of Black Hall that fell under his own supervision, he answered all her questions satisfactorily, without ever once falling into the unlucky blunders that had marred Miss Tabby's communications.

"Your favorite mare, Diana, is in prime order, ma'am, and will be so whenever you come home again to take your rides in the valley. And your coach horses, Castor and Pollux, ma'am, couldn't be in better trim. I shall take pride in driving of you to church behind them, ma'am the first Sunday after you come home, which we all at Black Hall hopes, as the waters of this here celebrated spring may soon restore your health, and send you back to us strong and happy," said Joe, at the conclusion of a very long address.

"Thanks, Joe! I know that you are very sincere and earnest in your good wishes. Many thanks! But, dear old soul, how came you to be so lame?"

Joe was taken by surprise, and stood aghast. He knew, of course, that his mistress was slightly insane; but he was utterly unprepared for such a lapse of memory as this. He looked at his master in distress and perplexity.

"Oh!" answered Lyon Berners for his man. "Joe was thrown from his horse, and had his ankle sprained."

"Poor Joe! You must be very careful until it gets quite well," said Sybil, compassionately.

And soon after this her visitors, master and servants, took their leave.

CHAPTER XIX.

Summer ripened into autumn. Sybil and her faithful friend employed the golden days of September and October in the graceful and pleasing work of making up garments for the expected little stranger.

But meanwhile, outside the prison walls, a cloud, black as night, was gathering over the young prisoner's doomed head.

The rumor got abroad that the governor meant to follow up the long respite with a full pardon.

His course in this matter was canvassed and commented upon severely in every barroom, grocery, street corner, political meeting, and elsewhere.

The press took up the matter, and vindictively reprobated the course of the governor, putting his conduct upon the motives of partially for the aristocracy.

Had the murderess been a woman of the people, it said, her life would have paid the forfeit of her crime.

But she was a lady of the county aristocracy, a daughter of the house of Berners; and, however notoriously that house had been cursed with demoniac passions, and however deeply dyed with crime, its daughter, however guilty, was not to be held amenable to the laws!

Was such outrageous worship of the aristocracy by partial judges and venal governors to be endured in a country of freemen?

No! the voice of the people would be heard through their organ, a free press! and if not listened to, then it would be heard in thunder at the polls in the coming autumn elections!

Such was the spirit of the people and the press in regard to Sybil.

It was strange how the people and the press clamored for the sacrifice of Sybil Berner's life—the "female fiend."

It was because they honestly ascribed to her a nature she did not possess, and committed, thus making her innocently suffer for the sins of her forefathers.

Of course there were honorable exceptions to this general and unmerited reprobation of a guiltless young creature, but these exceptions were mostly among Sybil's own set, and were too few to have any force against the overwhelming weight of public sentiment.

And it was the general belief that, if the Governor should outrage public opinion by pardoning Sybil Berners, he would be politically ruined. Sybil Berners could not be permitted to live. She must die before the Government could be re-elected by the people. And the election was coming on in the ensuing November.

Would he purchase success by the sacrifice of this young sufferer's life? Ah! her best friends, asking themselves this question, were forced to answer "Yes!"

This state of affairs had a most depressing effect upon Sybil's husband, especially as he had sustained a great loss in the departure of her zealous advocate, Ishmael Worth.

The young lawyer, soon after he had brought down Sybil's respite from the Governor, had been called away on business of the utmost importance, and had eventually sailed for Europe. He had gone, however, with the most confident expectations of her liberation.

How these expectations were destined to be defeated it was now plain to see. It required all Mr. Berners' powers of self-control to wear a calm demeanour in the presence of his unsuspecting wife. He had carefully kept from the cell every copy of a newspaper that contained any allusion to the condemned prisoner and her circumstances, and he did this to keep Beatrix, as well as Sybil, ignorant of the impending doom; for he wished Beatrix to preserve in Sybil's presence the cheerful countenance that she never could wear if she should discover the thundercloud of destruction that lowered darker and heavier, day by day, over the head of her doomed companion.

But Sybil herself was losing her good spirits. The autumn had set in very early; and though now it was but October, the weather was too cool and often also too damp to make it prudent for the poor prisoner to spend so many hours in the prison garden, as she had lately been permitted to do. She sat much in her cell, sad, silent, and brooding.

"What is the matter with you, my darling?" inquired Beatrix Pendleton one day, when they sat together in the cell, Beatrix sewing diligently on an

infant's robe, and Sybil, with her neglected needlework lying on her lap, and her head bowed upon her hand.

"What is the matter with you, Sybil?" "Oh, Beatrix, I don't know. But this autumn weather, it saddens me. Oh, more than that—worse than that, it horrifies me so much. It seems associated with—I know not what of anguish and despair. And I want to leave this desolate and gloomy place. It is so lonely, now that all the visitors have gone but ourselves. How can you bear it, Beatrix?"

"Very well, dear; so long as I have your company," answered Miss Pendleton, wondering that Sybil should miss the throng of visitors that had existed only in her own imagination.

"But I am homesick, Beatrix. Oh, Beatrix! I am so—so—homesick," said Sybil, plaintively.

"Never mind, dear. Try to be patient. It would not do for you to undertake the journey now, you know," said Miss Pendleton, soothingly.

"Oh, but, Beatrix, I do so want to be at home to welcome my first dear child! There was never a Berners born out of Black Hall since the building was first erected," she pleaded.

"Never mind, dear. Everything now must give way to your health, you know. We could not endanger your health by taking you over all these rough roads to Black Hall just now," said Miss Pendleton, gently.

"Ah, well, I will try to content myself to stay here in this gloomy place. But, oh, Beatrix, after all, I may die, and never see my home again. My dear home! Oh, if I should die here, Beatrix, I should be sure to haunt my home!"

"But you will not die. You must put away such gloomy fancies."

As Miss Pendleton spoke, the cell door was opened, and the warden appeared, bearing in the tray containing the supper service for the two ladies. It was not usual for the warden to wait on them in person; and so, to Miss Pendleton's silent look of inquiry, he answered:

"You must excuse my daughter 'or this once, ma'am, as she has gone to a merry-making in the village—this, you know, being Hallow Eve."

"Hallow Eve!" echoed an awful voice. Both the warden and the young lady started, and turned around to see whence the unearthly sound came.

They beheld Sybil fallen back in her chair, pallid, ghastly, and convulsed.

Beatrix seized her vial of sal volatile and flew to the relief of her friend.

"What is it, dear Sybil? can you tell me?" she anxiously inquired, as she held the vial to the nostrils of her friend.

"Hallow Eve! Hallow Eve!" she repeated, in a terrible tone.

"Well, dear, what of that? That is nothing!"

"Oh, yes, yes, it is horrible! it is horrible!"

"Hush, hush, dear! try to be composed."

"Black night! fire! blood! Oh, what a terror!"

"It was only a dream, dear. It is over now, and you are awake. Look up!"

"Oh, no! no dream, Beatrix! An awful, an overwhelming reality!" exclaimed the awakened sufferer. Then suddenly, with a shriek, she threw her hands to her head and fell into spasms.

"For Heaven's sake, run and fetch a doctor!" exclaimed Beatrix, in the utmost distress, appealing to the terrified warden.

He immediately hurried from the room to procure the necessary medical attendance.

Beatrix ran after him, calling loudly: "Send for her husband, and her old nurse from Black Hall, also. I know it is after hours, but I believe she is dying."

The warden nodded assent, and hurried away, leaving Miss Pendleton in attendance upon the agonized woman, who recovered from one convulsion only to fall into another and severer one.

It was midnight, and a sorrowful and anxious group were gathered in Sybil's cell. She lay upon her bed, writhing with agony, and upon the very verge of death.

Near her stood her old family physician, Dr. Hart, her old nurse, Mrs. Winterose, and her faithful attendant, Miss Tabby.

In the lobby, outside the cell door, sat her husband, with his face buried in his hands, wrestling in prayer with Heaven.

What was he praying for? That his idolized young wife should be spared in this mortal peril? No, no, and a thousand times no! With all his heart and soul he prayed that she might die—that she might die ere that dread warrant, which had arrived from Richmond only that morning, and which fixed her execution for an early day, could be carried out!

This agony of prayer was interrupted. The doctor came out of the cell, and whispered:

"It is over. She is the mother of a little girl."

There was no expression of parental joy or thankfulness on the father's part. Only the breathless question:

"And she? Can she survive?"

CHAPTER XX.

"Can she survive?" repeated Lyon Berners, perceiving that the physician hesitated to reply. "If she must die, do not fear to tell me so. I who love her best, would say, 'Thank God!' Can she survive?"

"Mr. Berners, I do not know. Her situation is very critical. She has had convulsions. She is now prostrated and comatose," gravely answered the doctor.

"Then there is good hope that the

Angel of Death may take her home now?"

"There is strong hope, since you choose to call it hope instead of fear."

"Ah, Dr. Hart, you know—you know—"

"That death in some cases might be a blessing—that death in this case certainly would. Yes, I know. And yet it is my bounden duty to do what I can to save life, so I must return to my patient," said the physician, laying his hand upon the latch of the door.

"When may I see my wife?" inquired Lyon Berners.

"Now, if you please; but she will not know you," said the doctor, shaking his head.

"I shall know her, however," muttered Mr. Berners to himself, as he raised his hat and followed the doctor into the cell leaving Beatrix alone in the hall.

It was near midnight, and Miss Pendleton, having been very properly turned out of the sick-room, and having been then forgotten, even by herself, had no place on which to lay her head.

When Mr. Berners, following the doctor, entered the cell, he found it but dimly lighted by one of the wax candles with which his care had supplied his wife.

In one corner sat Miss Tabby, whimpering, with more reason than she had ever before whimpered in her life, over the new-born baby that lay in her lap.

Near by stood old Mrs. Winterose, busy with her patient.

"How is she?" inquired the doctor, approaching.

"Why, just the same—no motion, no sense, hardly any breath," answered the nurse.

"Sybil, my darling! Sybil!" murmured her heartbroken husband, bending low over her still and pallid face.

She rolled her head from side to side, as if half-awakened by some familiar sound, and then lay still again.

"Sybil! my dearest wife! Sybil!" again murmured Lyon Berners, laying his hand on her brow.

She opened her eyes wide, looked around, and then gazed at her husband's face as if it had been only a part of the wall.

"Sybil, my dear, my only love! Sybil!" he repeated, trying to meet and fix her gaze.

But her eyes glanced off and wandered around the room, and finally closed again.

"I told her she would not know you," sighed the doctor.

"So best, so best, perhaps. Heaven grant that she may know nothing until her eyes shall open in that bright and blessed land, where

"The wicked cease from troubling, And the weary are at rest!"

said Lyon Berners, bowing his head.

But he remained standing by the bedside, and gazing at the pale, still face of his wife, until at length Miss Tabby came up to him, with the babe in her arms, and whimpered forth:

"Oh, Mr. Lyon, won't you look at your little daughter just once? Won't you say something to her? Won't you give her your blessing? Nobody has said a word to her yet; nobody has welcomed her; nobody has blessed her! Oh! my good Lord in Heaven! to be born in prison, and not get one word of welcome from anybody, even from her own father!"

And here Miss Tabby, overcome by her feelings, sobbed aloud: for which weakness I, for one, don't blame her.

"Give me the child," said Mr. Berners, taking the babe from the yielding arms of the nurse. "Poor little unfortunate!" he continued, as he uncovered and gazed on her face. "May the Lord bless you, for I, wretch that I am, have no power to bless."

At this moment Mrs. Winterose came up, and, addressing the doctor, said:

"Sir, I have done all I can do in this extremity. Tabby is fully equal to anything that may happen now. But as for me, sir, I must leave."

"Leave? What are you thinking of, woman?" demanded the doctor, almost angrily.

"Sir, I left my poor old husband at

the very point of death! I would not have left him for any other cause on earth but this. And now I must go back to him, or he may be dead before I get there."

"Good Heaven, my dear woman, but this is dreadful!"

"I know it is, sir. But I couldn't help it. My child here ill and in prison, and I called to help her in her extremity, and my husband on his deathbed. Well, sir, I couldn't help my poor old man much, because he was so low he didn't know one face from another, and I could help my poor imprisoned, suffering child; and so I left my dying husband to the care of my darter Libby, and I come to my suffering child! But now she's over the worst of it, I must leave her in the care of Tabby, and go back to my dying husband. Please God I may find him alive!" said the poor woman, fervently clasping her hands.

"My good soul, here is, indeed, a most painful case of a divided duty," said the doctor, in admiration.

"Yes, sir; but the Lord fits the back to the burden," sighed Mrs. Winterose, resignedly.

"Have you two backs?" wickedly inquired the doctor.

"What was it, sir?" asked Mrs. Winterose, doubling her own ears.

"Nothing. But just see what a storm is coming up. You'll be caught in it if you venture out."

"Law, sir, I'm not sugar, nor likewise salt, to get melled in a little water. And I must go, sir, please, if I am ever to see my old man alive again," said the nurse resolutely, putting on her bonnet and shawl.

"But how are you going six miles through night and storm?"

"Mr. Lyon will not begrudge me the use of the carriage and horses and driver as brought me here, to take me back to my husband's deathbed, I reckon," said the old woman, confidently.

"No, indeed; nor any help I can give you, dear Mrs. Winterose," said Mr. Berners, feeling himself appealed to.

"Thanky, sir; I knowed it. And this I say: When the breath is buten my poor old man's body, I will come back to my child, holding it always more dutiful to attend to the living as can suffer, rather than to the dead as are at rest. And, now, if you please, Mr. Lyon, to see me into the carriage, and order Joe to drive me home, I will be obliged to you," said the old woman.

Lyon Berners gave her his arm, with as much respect as if she had been a duchess, and led her from the room.

When they reached the outer door, which the warden, in consideration of the necessity, ordered to be opened at this unusual hour, they found the rain pouring in torrents from a sky as black as pitch.

"A wild night to take the road, Mrs. Winterose," said Mr. Berners, as he hoisted a large umbrella over her head.

"I don't know as I remember a wilder one, sir, since the flood of ninety, and that was when I was a young woman, which wasn't yesterday. And you'll hardly remember that, sir?"

(To be continued.)

TO SCARE AWAY THE DEMON.

Chinese mothers are, as a rule, loving to their children, but superstition often makes them cruel. For instance, a fortune-teller will inform a mother that her child—usually a girl—is inhabited by a devil. Then it becomes the duty of the mother to beat, starve, and even to put her hapless little one out of doors. Its little face may be blackened, and its hands cut off, in order to scare away the demon. The child is left to die outside the dwelling, for the mother, believing in the transmigration of souls, fears that this demon-child may be born to her.

NOT FOR HIM.

He—"I believe you are ready to marry the first fool who comes along."

She—"You have no right to say so." And she threw a strong accent on the "you."



THE TRUTH DIS COURTEOUS.

The Mistress of the House—I should like to know what you would have been if I hadn't been for my money.
The Mere Man—A Bachelor!