

THE CRIMINAL'S CONFESSION

OR, SYBIL BERNER'S
VINDICATION

CHAPTER XXV.

A week after Lyon Berners went away Captain Pendleton resigned his commission in the army, placed the management of his estate in the hands of Lawyer Sheridan, and, accompanied by Miss Pendleton, left the neighborhood for Baltimore, whence he sailed for Liverpool.

After this departure the secret of Sybil's escape was known but to two persons in the valley—to Mr. Sheridan, whose very profession made him reticent, and to Miss Tabby, who would have died rather than have divulged it. Mr. Sheridan managed the manor, Miss Tabby kept the house, and both guarded the secret.

But great was the wonder and wild were the conjectures among the people of the valley on the subjects of Sybil's mysterious disappearance, Lyon's sudden voyage, and Clement and Beatrix Pendleton's eccentric conduct in following him.

Opinions were as various as characters.

Some came near the truth in expressing their belief that Sybil had been rescued on the night of the flood, secreted for a while in the neighborhood, and then "spirited" away by her friends; that she was safe in some foreign country, and that her husband and her two friends had gone to join her.

Others whispered that Sybil had been drowned in the flood; that Lyon Berners, finding himself a widower, had proposed for Beatrix Pendleton, with whom he had always been in love, and that he had been accepted by her; that they had been anxious to marry immediately, but ashamed to do so, so soon after the tragic death of Sybil, and in her own neighborhood; and so they had gone abroad to be united, and to spend the first year of their wedded lives.

These and many other speculations were rife among the neighbors, and the "Hallow Eve mystery," deepened by recent events, formed the subject of conversation of never-flagging interest at all every country fireside that winter.

In the midst of all this, Miss Tabby Winterose lived her quiet, dull, whimpering life at Black Hall, carefully keeping the house, waited on by Aunt Mopssa, guarded by Joe, and solaced by little Cromartie, who had been left in her care.

Dilly, Sybil's own maid, had been taken abroad by Miss Pendleton, which fact gave additional scandal to the gossip.

"The impudence of her!" they said, "to take the late Mrs. Berners' very maid, before she even had fairly married the widower."

All this, when it came to Miss Tabby's ears, made that faithful, but desponding, soul, whimper all the more.

Miss Tabby had but few recreations at Black Hall. Going to church every Sunday in the old carryall, with little Cro' by her side and Joe on the box, was her "most chiefest."

Then, once a month or so, she went to take tea with her parents and sister; or she walked over to spend an afternoon at the cottage occupied by Robert Munson, who had married Rachel, the pretty daughter of that Norfolk innkeeper who had been Lyon's and Sybil's host at the time of their second flight.

And sometimes Miss Tabby had both these families up at Black Hall, to pass a day with her.

But, wherever Miss Tabby went, she always took little Cro'; and whoever came to the house had to make much of the child, or get little favor from his "aunty."

As for Joe, Robert Munson, and other of Sybil's devoted friends, they felt in their secret hearts, that Sybil was safe in foreign parts, and that her husband and friends had gone to join her; but, as no one had actually imparted this intelligence to them, they never talked over the subject except among themselves.

Thus passed the winter; but, with the opening of the spring, an event occurred that for a while even superseded the "Hallow Eve mystery," in the fever of curiosity and interest it excited in the valley.

The great Dubarry manor, so long held in abeyance, was claimed—claimed by a gentleman in right of his wife—claimed by no less a person than Mr. Horace Blondelle, once the husband and after the widower of that beautiful Rosa Blondelle, who had been so mysteriously murdered at Black Hall, and now the bridegroom of Gentiliska, the great-granddaughter and only lineal descendant and heiress of Philip Dubarry and Gentiliska, his wife.

During the investigation of this claim, Mr. and Mrs. Horace Blondelle occupied a handsome suite of apartments at the Blackville Hotel, and made themselves very popular by the elegant little dinners and suppers they gave, and the like of which had never before been seen in that plain village.

When their case came on for a hearing there was but little opposition to the claimants, whose legal right to the

manor was soon proved by the documents they held in their possession, and firmly established.

When the case was decided in their favor, Mr. Horace Blondelle rented the Pendleton Park, which had been to let ever since the departure of its owner.

And in that well-furnished mansion on that well-cultivated plantation, he settled down, with his pretty young bride, to the respectable life of a country gentleman.

His residence in the neighborhood gave quite an impetus to the local business.

The very first thing that he did, after his settlement at Pendleton Park, was to advertise, through the columns of the Blackville Banner, that he intended to rebuild the Dubarry mansion, and was ready to employ the necessary artisans at liberal wages.

This gave great satisfaction to the laboring classes, who were half their time pining in idleness, and the other half working at famine prices.

But such a "reconstruction" was a gigantic undertaking. There was a wilderness to be cleared, a desert to be reclaimed, a mansion to be rebuilt, and a chapel to be restored.

All the carpenters, stone-cutters, bricklayers, plasterers, painters and glaziers, upholsterers and decorators, as well as ornamental gardeners and agricultural laborers that could be found, were at once employed at generous wages.

And the work went on merrily, and the people blessed Horace Blondelle.

But during the progress of the work a discovery was made that changed the whole plan of the proprietor's life.

In the course of clearing the grounds, the workmen found a spring, whose water was so particularly nasty that they at once suspected it to possess curative qualities of the greatest value, and so reported it to the proprietor.

Horace Blondelle invited the local medical faculty to taste the waters of the spring, and their report was so favorable that he bottled up a gallon of it, and sent it to an eminent chemist of New York, to be analyzed.

In due time the analysis was returned. The water of the spring, it showed, was strongly impregnated with a half dozen, more or less, of the most nauseous minerals known to the pharmacologists, and therefore was of the highest medicinal virtue.

The recent discovery of this invaluable spring on the home grounds, together with the long-known existence of the magnificent cavern, or chain of caverns, in the adjacent mountains, determined Mr. Horace Blondelle to alter his whole scheme—to abandon the role of country gentleman, which a very short experience proved to be too "slow" for his "fast" tastes, and to adopt that of the proprietor of a great watering place and summer resort.

And so, instead of rebuilding the family mansion, he built a large hotel on the Dubarry manor, and instead of restoring the chapel, he erected a pavilion over the spring.

This was not only at the time a very popular measure, but it eventually proved a very great success.

That summer and autumn saw other changes in the valley.

First old Mr. Winterose, the overseer of the Black Valley manor, died a calm and Christian death.

Young Robert Munson succeeded him in office.

Next, Lawyer Sheridan received an appointment from the President as consul at a certain English seaport; and, no doubt with the consent of the proprietors, he transferred the management of the Black Valley manor to old Lawyer Closeby, of Blackville. And then, with his sister, he went abroad.

Then, on the thirty-first of October of that year, old Mrs. Winterose and her eldest daughter, Libby, received an order to remove from their cottage and take up their residence with Miss Tabby at Black Hall.

The next spring Mr. and Mrs. Horace Blondelle removed to the "Dubarry Hotel," at the "Dubarry White Sulphur Springs," as the place was now christened, and there they commenced preparations for the summer campaign.

Mr. Horace Blondelle was much too "sharp" not to understand the importance of advertising. He advertised very largely in the newspapers, and he also employed agents to distribute beautiful little illustrated books, descriptive of the various attractions of the "Dubarry White Sulphur Springs," the salubrious and delightful climate, the sublime and beautiful scenery, the home comforts of the hotel, and the healing powers of the water.

All these were so successfully set forth that even in the first season the house was so well filled with guests that the proprietor determined that, before another season should roll around, he would build a hundred or so of cottages to accommodate the great accession of visitors he had every reason to expect.

Another brisk season of work blessed the poor people of the place. And by

the next summer a hundred and fifty white cottages were here and there on the rocks, in the woods, by the streams, or in the glens around the great hotel; and the "Dubarry White Sulphur Springs" grew to look like a thriving village on the mountains.

The profits justified the expenditures; that second summer the place was crowded with visitors; and the lonely and quiet neighborhood of the Black Valley became, for the time, as populous and as noisy as is now Niagara or Newport.

In fact, from the advent of Mr. Horace Blondelle, and the inauguration of the "Dubarry White Sulphur Springs," the whole character of the place was changed.

All summer, from the first of June to the first of September, it would be a scene of fashion, gayety, confusion and excitement.

But all the winter, from the first of October until the first of June, it is happily true that it would return to its aboriginal solitude and stillness.

Mr. Horace Blondelle was making money very fast indeed.

The life suited him. Many people called him a gambler and a blackleg, and said that he fleeced his guests in more ways than one.

The haughtiest among the old aristocratic families cut him, not because he was a gambler—for, oh dear! it too often happened that their own fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons were gamblers—but because he kept a hotel and took in money!

Notwithstanding this exclusion from companionship with certain families, Mr. Horace Blondelle led a very gay, happy and prosperous life.

We see and grieve over this sort of thing very frequently in the course of our lives. We fret that the wicked man should "flourish like a green bay tree," and we forget that the time must come when he will be cut down and cast into the fire.

That time was surely coming for Mr. Horace Blondelle.

Meanwhile he "flourished." The third season of the "Dubarry White Sulphur Springs" was even more successful than its forerunners had been.

People were possessed with a furor for the nasty waters, and flocked by thousands to the neighborhood.

But the autumn of that year was marked by other events of more importance to this story.

First, in the opening of the fall term of the Blackville Academy for young gentlemen, Lawyer Closeby came to Black Hall, armed with the authority of Mr. Lyon Berners, and straightway took little Cromarty, now a lad of seven years of age, out of the hands of Miss Tabby, and placed him in those of Dr. and Mrs. Smith, dominie and matron of the academy, for education.

Miss Tabby mourned over the partial loss of her favorite, but was consoled on the very next Hallow Eve, when a beautiful babe was left at her door.

And now that years have passed, we approach the time when the great Hallow Eve mystery was destined to be a mystery no more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Time does but deepen the gloom that hangs over an old mansion where a heinous crime has been committed, an awful tragedy enacted.

As the years darkened over the Black Hall, the house fell to be regarded as a place haunted and accursed.

But as there is a certain weird attraction in the horrible, the old Black Hall came to be the greatest object of morbid interest in the neighborhood, greater even than the magnificent caverns, or the miraculous springs.

The crows of visitors who came down to the "Dubarry White Sulphur Springs" every summer, after tasting the waters of the spring and exploring the beauties of the caverns, invariably drove down the banks of the Black River, to where it broadened into the Black Lake, from whose dark borders arose the sombre wood that shadowed the mountain's side, and from whose obscure depths loomed up the gloomy structure now known as Black Hall, the deserted home of the haughty Berners, the haunted and accursed mansion.

Here, on the murky borders of the lake, the visitors would draw up their carriages, to sit and gaze upon the fatal edifice, and listen to the story of that awful Hallow Eve, when the fiery-hearted young wife was driven by jealousy to desperation, and her fair young rival was murdered in her chamber.

"And on every Hallow Eve," their informant would continue—"on every Hallow Eve, at midnight deep, the spirit of the murdered guest might be seen flying through the house pursued by the spirit of the vengeful wife."

Visitors never penetrated into the wood that surrounded and nearly concealed the mansion, much less ventured near that mansion itself.

The place was guarded by three old women, they were told, weird as Macbeth's witches, and who discouraged all approach to their abode.

So solitary and deserted were the house and its inmates that every path leading through the forest towards its doors was overgrown and obliterated, except one—a little narrow bridge path leading from the house through the woods, and out upon the Blackville road. This was kept open by the weekly rides of old Joe, who went every Saturday to the village to lay in the groceries for the use of the family; by the three old women, who, seated on their safe old horses, went in solemn procession every Sunday to church; by the young Cromarty, who came trotting on his fiery steed once a month to visit his old friends; and by old Lawyer Closeby, who came ambling on his sedate cob

every quarter-day to inspect the premises and pay the people.

No other passengers but these ever disturbed the stillness of the forest path; no other forms than these ever darkened the doors of Black Hall. A gloomy place to live in! gloomy enough for the three quiet old women—too gloomy for the bright young girl who was growing up to womanhood under its shadows.

And never was the place darker, drearier, or more depressing in its aspect than on a certain Hallow Eve, some fifteen years or more after the disappearance of Sybil Berners and the self-expatriation of her devoted friends.

All day long the sky had been overcast by low, dark leaden-hued clouds; the rain had fallen in dull drizzle, and when the veiled sun sank beneath the horizon the darkness of night was added to the darkness of clouds.

A dismal night! dismal without, and even more dismal within.

The three old guardians of the premises lived in the left wing of the house, which corresponded exactly with the right wing, once occupied on the first floor by the unfortunate Rosa Blondelle, with her child and nurse, and on the second floor by Sybil Berners and her maid.

The old women had chosen the left wing, partly because it had always been occupied by Miss Tabby, who used the lower floor for housekeeper's room and storeroom, and the second floor as a bedchamber and linen closet, but chiefly because it was the furthest removed from the right wing, the scene of the murder, and now the rumored resort of ghosts.

On this dismal but eventful Hallow Eve of which I now write, the three old women, their early tea over, were gathered round the fire in the lower room of this left wing.

It was a long, low room, with a broad fireplace in the lower end. It was furnished in very plain country style. The walls were colored with a red ochre wash somewhat duller than paint. The windows had blinds made of cheap, flowered wallpaper. The floor was covered with a plaid woollen carpet, the work of old Mrs. Winterose's wheel and loom. A corner cupboard, with glass doors, through which could be seen rows of blue delf dishes and piles of white teacups and saucers, occupied the corner on the right of the fireplace; the old-fashioned, coffin-like, tall, eight-day clock stood in the corner on the left-hand side. Flag-bottomed wooden chairs flanked the walls. At the upper end of the room stood an old-time chest of drawers. On the right-hand corner of this end a door opened upon a flight of stairs leading to the floor above. On the left-hand corner a door opened into a back room, with a little porch, vine-covered.

There was a large spinning wheel near the stair door, and at it the young ward of Mrs. Winterose stood spinning.

Before the fire stood a plain deal table, and on it a brass candlestick but a dim light to the three old ladies but a dim light to the tree old ladies who sat before the dull, smouldering, green wood fire and worked. Old Mrs. Winterose occupied her armchair, between the end of the table and the fire-side, near the corner cupboard. She was carding rolls of white wool for the spinner.

Mrs. Libby sat at the other end of the table, reeling off blue yarn from bobbins that had just been drawn off the spindle.

Miss Tabby was squeezed into the chimney corner next her sister, knitting a grey stocking.

There was a deep silence, broken only by the sighing of the wind through the leafless trees without, the pattering of the rain against the windows, the whirr of the spinning-wheel at the foot of the stairs, the simmering of the green logs that refused to blaze, and the audible snivelling of Miss Tabby.

The silence grew so oppressive that Miss Tabby, like the child in the Quaker meeting, felt that she must speak, or sob, or suffocate.

"Hallow Eve again," she sighed; "it have come around once more since that awful night, which I shall never be rid on seeing it before me—no, not if I live to be as old as Methuselah! And, oh, what gloomy weather! How the wind do moan and the rain do pour round the old house! Just like heaving sighs and steaming tears! And as for me, I never feel like nothing but sighs and tears myself whenever this most doleful night comes round again."

And, suiting the action to the word, the speaker drew a deep breath and wiped her eyes.

"Tabby, you're always a whimpering. When 'tain't about one thing, 'tis about another. Seems to me a woman of your age, turned fifty, ought to have more sense!" sharply commented old Mrs. Winterose, as she took a roll of wool from her card and placed it softly on a pile of others that lay upon the table.

"I can't help it, mother. I can't, indeed. Whenever this most doleful night do come around again, I feel that low-sperreted I don't know what to do. And it is just such a night as that night was. Everything so miserable outside and in. The wind moaning and the rain drizzling out there, and in here the fire not burning, but just smouldering and smoking as if it was low-sperreted too!" sighed Miss Tabby.

(To be continued.)

FOOLING HIM.

Casey—"Ye're a hard worruker, Dooley. How many hods o' morthor have ye carried up that ladder th' day?"

Dooley—"Whist, man! I'm foolin' th' boss. I've carried this same hodful up an' down all day, an' he thinks I'm worrukin'!"



"For heaven's sake, help me quick!" Absent-minded Doctor—"Why certainly—let's see—tongue coated, rather feverish, take one of these powders every two hours and I'll call again in a day or two."

KING EDWARD'S FINE TACT.

Wins Golden Opinions by Gracious Acts During His Continental Visit.

The King charmed everybody by his gracious ways while on the Continent and returned to England with new triumphs in diplomacy. Many stories are told of his tact and good sense, among them the following:

King Edward has probably enjoyed nearly every experience that falls to the lot of man. There is scarcely an emotion in the whole gamut that has not, at some time or other, fallen to his share. He has just added a new sensation to his long catalogue—that of saving a life. A few days ago, while toiling up hill on their laborious walk which is always prescribed by Dr. Ott for those patients capable of the task, his attentions were arrested by the movements of a little girl who was riding a bicycle. The machine seemed to have got out of control, and it came rapidly towards his Majesty, making pace with every yard. At the foot of the hill was a sharp turning, at the other side of which reared a high wall. The dreaded result seemed inevitable. Rapidly the machine whirled on, and at last reached the King. Quick as thought he thrust his walking-stick between the spokes of the front wheel, bringing the cycle to a sudden stop and catching the child before she fell to the ground. Then the King asked the little girl many solicitous questions, but, beyond the fright and a slight shaking, she appeared to have escaped unscathed. Later in the day the King received the child's parents, who personally tendered their thanks.

Still another story of the King's Marienbad visit. Visitors to the fashionable Spa were astonished one morning by finding divers placards attached to trees and other places instructing them not to worry his Majesty in his walks abroad by following him closely or unduly staring at him. They were equally astonished next day at finding that the whole of the printed matter had disappeared as mysteriously as it came. The cause has just leaked out. The well-meaning Burgomaster, who was responsible for the innovation, was suddenly surprised by seeing his Majesty's carriage draw up and stop before his office entrance, and the next moment the King entered. "Come, Burgomaster," said his Majesty, "it is very good of you to look so closely after my comfort, but I can't allow my comfort to be guarded at the cost of my reputation. The people will take me for a tyrant," he said smilingly, "and, after all I do not object to their kindly interest in me, but, on the contrary, appreciate it." With a genial handshake the King left the Burgomaster and drove away, and in an hour the walls and trees were being stripped of the notices.

SEVEN YEARS' WALK.

Man of Seventy-eight Trying to Cover 60,000 Miles.

Mark All, the old man of 78 who is attempting to walk 60,000 miles in seven years, called at the London Express office recently, after tramping during the day from Canterbury, a distance of 56 miles.

All, who started his task on August 6, 1900, has been promised \$2,500 if he completes it. Up to the present he has walked 51,750 miles.

His travels have been by no means devoid of incident. He has been lost in snowdrifts five times, he was struck down by lightning at Marseilles, and stoned and shot at in Germany. All wears a Union Jack tied round his arm, and to it he attributes his ill-treatment in Germany.

He has not got on so well since he lost his bulldog Business three years ago. The dog walked 21,000 miles with him, and the old man felt his loss keenly. "I lost my best friend when Business died," he said simply. "I carried him a day before I could bring myself to bury him. That was in Marseilles."

All has earned \$875 at his trade in various places while on his walk, and has also received \$225 in gifts. He has worn out 39 pairs of boots.

He has toured the British Isles seven times, and has also been through France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Switzerland, Italy and Germany, whither he returns after three days' rest in London. He hopes to be allowed to walk through Russia.

Many a man loses out in trying to take a short cut to success.