

Not Guilty;

Or, A Great Mistake.

CHAPTER IV.

Gordon had never before felt so thankful for the independence of his position as when he opened the door of his home on that eventful night, and deposited his precious burden on the couch in the hall.

The house, a pretty two-storeyed building, standing in its own secluded grounds some distance from the street, had been his home and that of his parents from the days of his childhood. His parents had been dead some years, his only sister had married, and George had spent the later part of his life in many distant lands, but he had never sold or let the house, and when he had left the Army and decided to take up an idle life, he had returned naturally to the old home and "Mother" Crump, the old family servant, whom he had never wished to get rid of, and who had cared for the house and furniture with increasing watchfulness against the day when Master George should return.

The old lady was fast asleep when George hammered at her door, but she rose and dressed with wonderful speed, at his command, and soon made her way downstairs into the hall where she stood and gazed, speechless, at the senseless form on the couch.

"Lor, Master George, and you never even told me you was going to get married," she murmured reproachfully. "And she's asleep, poor young thing, tired out! Why, wherever have you come from?"

"Not far. But you're right, she's tired out. I'm even afraid she has fainted. You must get a room ready for her at once—Hem! she's not my wife, Mother Crump."

"Not your wife, Master George! And at this time of night? Why—what—ever?"

"It's all right, Mother; the poor girl's had—had an accident. She's in great trouble, and ill, too, I fear."

"Why, she do look ill, too, Master George! Poor young lady! What a sweet pretty, innocent, young thing."

"Innocent? Yes, she's innocent, Mother, I'm sure she is; but, bah, what am I talking about? We must get her upstairs quickly. Is the blue room aired and all right?"

"I always keep all the rooms aired, Master George, but the big front room would be the warmer."

"Very well, anywhere! but quick, can you help me to carry her?"

Mrs. Crump took the young girl's feet, and, George gently raising her head and shoulders, they made their way upstairs, and deposited their burden upon the bed in the front room.

As they lay her down, the unconscious girl moved restlessly, and her eyes opened slowly.

George bent over her, expecting her to speak, but she only gazed round her rather dazedly for a little, seemed to struggle with a great fatigue; and then with a gentle sigh appeared to fall to sleep.

"She has gone to sleep. It is the best thing that could have happened," said George quickly, "Get her to bed as soon as you can, Mother. I'll go downstairs and have a smoke."

"Hadh't you better go to bed, too, Master George? I will look after the young lady. I've had four hours sleep, and that's all I want at my age."

"I'll see; I'm not sure. But in any case, don't bother about me," returned George. "I'm going down now. It is just possible I may go out again."

"Go out again?" echoed the old lady. "Go out again? Why, it's nearly two o'clock! Why, whatever is happening?"

"Nothing much, the worst's over now. Don't you bother about me. Good night, Mother, I leave her in your care." And George, to avoid further questioning, hastily left the room, and made his way downstairs, where, after a moment's hesitation, he seized his hat, and, opening the door quietly, made his way out again into the street.

The truth is, he wanted to return to the mysterious house in Regent Street; or rather, he felt that he could not keep away from it. He knew that he had done a dangerous thing in bringing this young girl home with him, in sheltering her, in keeping her from the hands of justice, when even she herself accused herself of a terrible crime; he knew he was doing a still more dangerous thing in venturing back to the house where even now someone might have surprised that awful deed, but Gordon hardly knew what fear meant, and having once entered upon a course, was little likely to be turned from it.

"I have made up my mind to save her," he thought, as he made his way along Baker Street, "and unless she herself interferes to spoil my plans, I'll have a good try at doing so. But the great thing is to have time to look about me. If I am not careful now I shall certainly not have time. If the police were to get upon our track, and arrest HER in twenty-four hours, she would tell the same story—I am convinced she would; and then I should be powerless. The great thing is to make sure the police won't get on our track. By jove, my argument with the Major! Hu, ha!

Good heavens, though, I don't feel by any means so sure of myself as I did at dinner, or so certain of their lack of brains. The Major! Good old Major! How strange, how unutterably strange, that I should find myself opposed to Scotland Yard like this within half a dozen hours of our chat. Awful strange! And I wouldn't like the Major to know it, but I'm in a deuce of a funk, too. However, it's too late to funk now. The only thing is to go straight through. Let me think what to do first. I oughtn't to go to that house again—but I must. I don't like leaving that knife there, in the first place. The girl is so mixed up with this affair, innocent or guilty, that the knife might be really hers. I was so keen on getting her away, too, that I did not make absolutely certain that neither I nor she had left anything behind us in that room. I must, yes, I must have another look round. Besides, who knows that half an hour's examination may not put me on the real truth of the affair, and that's what I've got to get at, if I want to give this girl more than a temporary sanctuary. By jove, if I am a fool all along; if she really did murder that man, what kind of a maniac shall I look? And where shall I find myself? Accessory after the fact. What's the penalty, I wonder? I am beginning to wonder if I didn't drink too much at dinner. Yet, if she were innocent—if this was, as I think it is, some terrible misunderstanding, how well worth the risk is that girl! I have never seen one lovelier, or one who looked more pure, more innocent. Mother Crump's remark must have been a good omen, I feel sure. . . . but here we are at the Circus! I must be careful now."

Gordon halted for a moment by Jay's and looked about him. It was past two o'clock, and the fog had commenced to fall again; the streets were entirely deserted now, save for an occasional cab, and the only footstep was that of a policeman who paced leisurely along on the other side of Oxford Street.

Gordon waited until the heavy tread died away in the direction of Stratford Place, and made his way quickly down Regent Street.

Nearing the spot where the pin had fallen, he slackened his pace again; but this time no sound of any kind came to his ears. For a moment even the few belated vehicles had ceased to run, and he might have been in a city of the dead. He walked boldly towards the house of the tragedy, as if he meant to pass it gave a quick look around, and turned in.

At the time he left the house he had had no intention of returning to it, yet he had not troubled to shut the doors behind him, and as he mounted the stairs, he was thankful for the fact, for a latched front door would have been a serious obstacle to his task. On entering the flat he hesitated for a second whether to close the entrance behind him or not. "I can hear better if anyone should chance to come up if I leave the door open," he decided, and he entered the apartment, turning on the electric light as he did so.

The room was exactly as he had left it. The glare of the brilliant globes shone down again on the rich furniture, on the silk-covered walls, on the pale face of the dead man, who lay staring up at the ceiling with glazed impassive eyes. By his side, where the girl had pointed it out to Gordon, lay the knife with which he had been killed, a plain horn-handled weapon with a catch which kept the single blade from closing until released—a nasty-looking weapon, made more disagreeable now by the blood which dried upon its pointed blade.

Gordon took the weapon up and put it in his pocket after a hasty glance at it. "Possibly traceable, probably not," he said, "for it is by no means a new one. Certainly not the kind of knife a girl would be likely to carry about with her. However, there's nothing in that." He turned and looked round the room. "I wonder who this man was?" he thought.

An examination of the room told him little. The mantelpiece and walls were covered with pictures and costly china, but none of the pictures were portraits, and—a very unusual thing in a young man's rooms—there were no photographs anywhere to be seen. "Yet there have been some," thought George, gazing at several harked impressions in a slip of salmon-colored plush which was let in to the mantelpiece, and lately, too. "Where have they gone?"

Quickly and carefully he made an investigation of the apartment. There were three rooms: a bed-room, a drawing-room, and another room, apparently a smoking-room. Here again there were no photographs in evidence, though also there had been some, and that recently.

He turned to the drawers and cupboards. In the bed-room there was a wardrobe full of clothes with the name of a well-known tailor on their buttons, a name which Gordon made a careful note of. There were letters in some of the pockets, he felt sure, but he also felt that there were limits beyond which

his investigations could not go, and he continued his search for the photographs which he felt sure existed, and which he hoped would tell him something of the owner and his friends.

Neither the bed-room nor the drawing-room gave him any results, though he searched everywhere with care. He was about to conclude that a large safe, which he had seen in the corner of the bed-room, and which he assured himself was locked, contained what he sought, when he discovered that there was a drawer left which he had not examined, in a small table in the smoking-room. He had not noticed it at first as a cloth covered the knobs in front, but as soon as he opened it, he congratulated himself upon his penetration for the receptacle was crammed with photographs.

They had evidently been taken down from their positions and shoved hastily away pell-melle, for some of their corners were doubled up, and here and there the frames were marked with scratches, assuredly recent.

Gordon looked them quickly through, only to give a sigh at the result. Actresses, ballet-dancers, professional beauties, ladies of dubious quality, there were plenty of these, with here and there a picture which might have been that of some member of the owner's family, but Gordon knew none of them, none of them were written on, and of their former possessor they told nothing.

"That fellow—Carlton, I suppose he was—was handsome, rich, and evidently a bachelor. That accounts for the photographs, I suppose," Gordon thought. "Evidently a pretty rapid character. But why were they all put away?" And then he thought of the girl he had found there. Was it because of her? Had the dead man been awaiting her that night, and had these dumb evidences of former loves, of former fancies, been smuggled hastily away lest they should offend her eyes? And what was she to him? Gordon sighed as he pondered. Innocent of the murder, perhaps; but what was she doing in these rooms at that hour?

A sentiment of jealousy, which he felt was absurd, but which he still could not conquer, touched him as he recalled the pale, handsome features of the dead man, and remembered the girl's piteous cry of "Claude! dear Claude!"

And then he shrugged his shoulders. After all, what was it to him? He had not fallen in love with this beautiful, but mysterious girl, or so he told himself; his wish had simply been to help her in misfortune, as he would have helped her had she been as ugly as she was lovely. It was not love which had made him take the risk he felt he was taking, and return to the house that night. It was curiosity, love of adventure, fate, blind fate, which had led him on, which was still leading him on, in a road whose end he could not see, but it was not love, he repeated to himself; he had never known love: it could not be love.

Suddenly a sound made him start violently and, in spite of his excellent nerves, turn pale. He listened eagerly, remaining motionless, hardly daring to breathe. "For a moment he doubted, for a moment he hoped wildly that he had been mistaken and that his ears had deceived him; but no, his senses were too acute, too highly trained to fail him especially now in the stillness of that solemn house.

He was right. Someone was coming slowly and cautiously up the stairs from the street.

Moving his arm only, Gordon reached out and turned the button of the electric light behind him. The light went out and he was alone in the smoking-room hidden by the darkness.

Like the room where the dead man lay, and where he had first seen the beautiful girl, the panels of the smoking-room were of glass, and they faced directly on to those of the drawing-room.

With breathless anxiety, as the footsteps came along the passage, Gordon listened and wondered. Was it the police already, and was he trapped? or was it someone else, who might enter the always brightly lighted drawing-room, and leave him a chance to escape now that his task was finished? Who was it?

The steps drew nearer, growing slower and more cautious, as they approached; and Gordon peered out of the darkness of his room.

It was not the police, at all events, he thought, with gratitude, as he caught the first glimpse of the new-comer, clad in evening dress, covered by a well-cut black overcoat, and wearing a glossy silk hat. Certainly not the police, but perhaps as bad, for the new arrival had gone straight into the drawing-room. In another moment he would discover the dead body, raise the alarm, and Gordon himself would still be caught.

Should he make a rush for it while there was still time, while he had only one man to deal with. But it was already too late: the new comer had walked round the table and seen the corpse at his feet.

And then Gordon renounced all idea of flight and set himself to watch him as closely as a spider watches a fly approach its web: for this strange man had passed by the dead body as if it had been a rug upon the floor, hardly even deigning to cast an eye upon it, and after a quick glance round the room was leaning up against a corner of the mantel-piece biting his fingers as if in deep perplexity.

Gordon looked at him full for the first time, and instantly took a violent dislike to him.

He was a man about forty, tall and well-made, and as the dead man on the floor had been handsome, this man was handsome too, still handsomer, perhaps; yet Gordon felt that no woman could have loved him as he could have well imagined women loving the other;

feared him, perhaps cringed to him if once mastered, hated easily.

His features were regular and rather heavily formed: his hair was black and parted in the middle—a thing Gordon felt he had always disliked—his skin was very white, not precisely pale, but as if it had never been anything else but white; his jaw was strong, and his mouth sneering and savage. As he stood there biting his fingers he seemed to remind Gordon of nothing so much as the black panther at the Zoo. There was the same savage curl at the corners of the mouth; the same strong jaw and green eyes with yellow lights in their depths; there was the same sense of sinewy strength, the same instinctive feeling of a necessity for being upon one's guard, for constant watchfulness. Involuntarily he found himself measuring his strength, in his mind, with this man, and calculating the result of the first spring and grapple.

Yet the man had never looked in his direction—could not have seen him had he done so. He stood there still biting his fingers, and giving an occasional doubtful glance into the corners of the room; and Gordon, with the quick observation which was his, seemed to read at least something of his thoughts.

He had taken no notice of the corpse upon the floor, therefore he had known that it was there. It was not for that that he had come, yet his first anxious glance around the room, his perplexity, told that he had expected to find something or someone in the room, and had been disappointed, puzzled, anxious. It was the girl he was looking for!

Suddenly he started, looked at the Lady at his feet, and then commenced to search furiously upon the floor, lifting her ugs, flinging the cushions from the chairs, and even shaking the curtains in his task.

"I know what you are after now, my man," thought Gordon. "You are looking for the knife, your knife? By jove, if it was your knife!"

The man ceased to search with a gesture of impotent rage; and for a moment his fingers went to his mouth again. Then apparently arriving at a conclusion, he nodded, and turned to the door. Gordon drew back further into the shadow, and the man passed the smoking-room again, and closing the front door after him, went out.

"My business here is done," thought George. "I have a fancy to follow that gentleman and see where he makes for. If I am not mistaken in my ideas, I shall know now where my lovely guest lives, when she is not sheltering under my own roof."

And quickly and noiselessly he followed the man into the street.

(To be continued.)

THE PASSING OF EMPIRES.

(By a Banker.)

From time to time, in the long and varied history of the world, epochs have come and gone when for a period, more or less prolonged, certain races of mankind have attained to a high state of civilization, and gifted, talented ability, afterwards relapsing again into a state of comparative barbarism. Looking back down the long, dim vista of time, we find first in order the Egyptians, apparently the pioneers of civilization, who excelled all other races down even to the present day, in the massive grandeur of their buildings, temples, and palatial tombs. Then the Jews, who produced the most magnificent and most costly structure ever erected on this earth, Greece, whose statuary by far excelled that of any other nation before or since, down even to our own times, the fabricator too of the most perfect architecture the world has ever seen, and the cradle of poetry, of refined oratory, and of the higher drama; and Rome, mistress for a time of the world, a mighty empire whose code of laws constituted the basis of the laws of the present time. And yet all these great and wealthy states, one after the other, were broken up by anarchy and vice, barbarism and poverty taking the place of contentment, law, and order.

And then ensued a long, murky period, those dark ages when a miasma of superstition stifled all advance, condemned science as witchcraft and heresy, and would even condemn a Galileo to the horrors of the rack for teaching the rudimentary elements of astronomy. And so it continued, century after century, on the same dead level of shallow knowledge, illiteracy and crushing demoralization and iniquity; until at length by slow degrees the dawn of advancing light and progress faintly illumines the darkened horizon, ever gaining augmented vigor and lustre, until, with the glorious Victorian age, knowledge, especially of the means of utilizing the mighty forces of nature, advanced with leaps and bounds; in a few decades the subjugation of those forces, and the ability to make them subservient to our requirements having made greater strides than during the entire course of all the long ages preceding.

Let us hope that, like those bygone empires, we, too, shall not also be swept away by anarchy and vice. But if, both as a nation and as individuals, we honor and obey the Almighty, succouring these in need and sickness, and accepting His great gift of salvation through the expiation for our misdeeds wrought for us by His Son on the cross, then shall prosperity and stability without any doubt be our certain and lasting inheritance.

Friend: "One of your clerks tells me you raised his salary and told him to get married, under penalty of discharge." Business Man: "Yes; I do that to all my clerks when they get old enough to marry. I don't want any of your independent, conceited men about my place."

About the Farm

REGULATING THE HOG SUPPLY.

I note the statement in your late issue that packers are now receiving too many over-fed hogs, writes F. S. W., in Farming World. I cannot explain this in view of the high prices prevailing throughout the spring and early summer, except it be that farmers, not fearing either a decline in prices or discrimination against over-weights, held their hogs as long as it seemed profitable to feed them. Or it may be the price on light hogs had the effect of making some hold back from marketing longer than was necessary.

Packers could do a great deal toward overcoming this difficulty of an over-run of unsuitable weights coming at any time, if they would go about it in the right way, but I do not altogether like the harsh means suggested in your letter above referred to, becoming the rule. Such discrimination might be all right occasionally when other means fail. But since we are all glad to see the good feeling now apparently existing between packer and farmer, any sudden action taken that could be termed unfair to either party would be unwise.

Farmers generally seem to be well suited (as we think they should be) with the prices and treatment accorded them for the past year and a half. The discussions of two years ago which at one time threatened to seriously affect the production of hogs, seem to have resulted in bringing about a better understanding between hog raiser and packer. Both understand now more fully that the one cannot exist without the other, and that they are really partners, between whom it is necessary that a feeling of friendly confidence should exist. It would be a mistake if that feeling of confidence should again be shaken. And I would suggest that some channel for the free interchange of information be established, whereby the packer can acquaint the farmer of the condition in which hogs are arriving, the class of hogs, and the weights that must command the highest price at different seasons. And impress, if necessary, the fact, that if other than the right kind is shipped, they will have to be discriminated against in price to the extent necessary to cause their discontinuance. This, with other information, which could be given, would, I think, have a good effect from the standpoint of the packer alone, and also do a great deal towards stimulating the interest of farmers in the hog industry.

The proper medium through which to convey this information is the agricultural press, as some paper of this class enters almost every farmer's home. If this plan were adopted farmers would also communicate their side of the subject through the same medium, and give the packers much information, which they at present do not appear to obtain. As things are and have been, about the only channel of information existing between the packer and farmer is the drover, who, very often, cares absolutely nothing for the interests of either party, or for the future of the industry, his only anxiety being to take as much profit as he can off both the producer and packer.

Many farmers as well as the packers will agree with me when I say that if a proper understanding between packer and farmer is to be maintained, and the best interests of both served, it is high time that new methods be adopted for conveying information from the packing house to the hog producer. If the packer finds it necessary to encourage, or discourage the breeding of certain classes of hogs, the marketing of the unit, or the actual state of the market, he can be sure that his wishes will be expressed as desired, and the farmer will know that he is receiving the same.

CHEESE AND SOIL FERTILITY.

In answer to a correspondent Hoard's Dairyman deals with this subject as follows:

A cow that gives 4,000 pounds of milk a year is perhaps a fair average. That amount of milk contains nitrogen in the form of casein, which has a fertilizing value of over \$4,000; that is, you should have to pay that amount for the same amount of nitrogen if you bought it in the fertilizer. If you made butter you would end away only the butter fat, which has no fertilizing value. By feeding the skim milk to calves or pigs, you retain at least 75 per cent. on the farm in the form of manure. So it has been found that sections of country where butter is made and young stock is grown, constantly increases in fertility. Sections where cheese is made or the milk is shipped out, gradually decreases in fertility. Some of the old cheese-making sections of New York and Ohio will not produce to-day more than fifty per cent. of the forage and grain they did fifty years ago. What has caused this? We answer, constant sending away from the farm of nitrogen and phosphate and no adequate effort to put it back. Following on this policy is the robbing of the soil of humus so clover will not grow.

ACTIONS VS. WORDS.

"Actions speak louder than words," quoted the moralizer. "Yes," rejoined the demoralizer, "but they don't speak so often by a whole lot."