

Not Guilty ;



Or, A Great Mistake.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued).

"Of course," the Major continued, "it will begin to look fishy if they don't turn up very soon, but, on the other hand, why on earth could one suppose they had any hand in this affair. The girl's letters, and the father's, too, are most friendly. There was certainly, up to the last moment, no quarrel on. Besides Carlton was very rich, the girl was about to marry him, the father was agreeable—why on earth should they murder him? No, my idea is that the blow came from some other direction. You can guess what I mean—what do you think?"

Gordon nodded. "Another woman?" he said. "If you are right, if this man Carlton was leading a fast life, a double life, as you suggest, certainly there might be another woman who was jealous of this marriage, and certainly she might have done, or instigated, this murder."

The Major nodded with a relieved expression.

"I am glad you agree with me," he said. "I think that way will lie our chance. But why the deuce have those people disappeared, and why don't they turn up again now that every paper has an account of this murder? However," he continued, taking a pull at the whisky and soda, "in worrying myself like this I am unjust to my men, who really are pretty smart fellows after all. You shan't have a laugh at our expense, Gordon, over this affair, I promise you. We'll soon unearth these Gaunts, and if they won't tell us anything, why we'll try another track, that's all!"

Gordon left the Major's quarters with rather a heavy heart. He was sure he had been frank with him, but it was equally probable that he had not by any means told him all the police knew. He could not resist a feeling of anxiety, or even worse, as he realized that the authorities already had the Gaunts on their list, and were engaged in trying to trace them. How quickly, in reality, they had put their finger on the right place, in spite of the Major's apparent depression. But it was a relief to Gordon to feel that they did not at present suspect the Gaunts of the crime. Yet Gordon knew that, if they had the knowledge he himself possessed, and were aware that the young girl was present that night in the Regent Street rooms, they would not refuse, as he had done, to accept her confession, but would at once believe her guilty.

For a moment Gordon had hoped that he saw a glimmer of light himself in the Major's theory of the jealous woman, but he could not convince himself. He already fancied that there had been three persons present at the murder of Miss Gaunt's fiancé; how was it possible to imagine that there had been a fourth, the jealous woman, and that she committed the deed in their presence, and why, if this had been the act of a rival, should the young girl accuse herself of it?"

Yet in spite of the ideas which ran through his mind, and made him depressed and anxious, Gordon still stubbornly refused for a moment to credit Miss Gaunt's story. She was innocent, he was sure, and he would prove it in spite of herself, in spite of every one; but the police were on the scent; he must act, and quickly too, if danger was to be averted, and where to turn first he hardly knew. However, it must be nearly time for the gambling house to open, and he decided to go there, and, before doing anything else, to see if there were not a chance of discovering something more concerning Mr. Usher, who, deep in his own mind, he believed to hold the key of the mystery.

He experienced no difficulty on this occasion in passing the portals of the house off Park Lane. His name had been "put up" by Billy, his nominal entrance fee of a pound had been paid, the porter recognized him, and he found the way clear.

He was, however, rather too early for the bacarat, which had not yet commenced. Indeed, when he entered he found that he was the only guest who had put in an appearance, and the proprietor, awaiting them, was warming his back before the fire, and contemplating affectionately his gilded walls.

The fat Jewish individual saluted him courteously, but without enthusiasm, and invited him to a share of the fire.

"Good evening, Captain," he said, with a glance at Gordon's bronzed forehead, where the forage cap had left its mark. "A little quiet to-night, but things will look up very soon. This is about the time when our members begin to come. Are you going to have a flutter?"

"Certainly," returned Gordon; "but to tell you the truth I came rather with the intention of meeting someone I saw here the other night."

"Ah, yes, you had a little bit of luck that evening, I recollect you. I congratulate you on your initiation, Captain, eh? Oh, yes, Colonel. We don't mind, bless you. Someone's got to win, and why not you, eh?"

"Why not?" returned Gordon. "But as I was saying, I hoped to meet someone to-night in whom I take an interest. I fancy I must have known some of his people; but, perhaps, you can give me some information about him—a Mr. Usher?"

The proprietor granted. "Well, you may have known his people," he said, "that's very likely. I believe they are

swells; but him! I wouldn't make too friendly with him, if I might offer you a tip."

Gordon's eye brightened, but he affected a mild curiosity only.

"Why?" he asked. "Is there anything wrong with him?"

"Wrong? Well, he's done for, that's all. He's just about broke. He may come here to-night, or he may not. It depends on if he can raise a few pounds to try his luck with. But if he does, take my word for it, he'll lose. You see? He's done."

"But his luck may change."

The proprietor shook his head solemnly.

"Not it," he said. "He's done. We know that kind here. Not that we care. He's welcome to win all we've got if he can; but he won't."

"You are quite a prophet then," said George, amused at the man's tone.

"Been at it all my life—I mean this business, not the prophetic one—and we get to know something. Take my word for it, Captain, when a man comes to where Usher has come, he had better go out and hang himself—or else give up the cards. And he won't give them up. I shouldn't be sorry if he did, but if he will come, we can't help ourselves, you know. He's a member, and he's free to punt so long as he pays his money down."

"Do you know anything of him besides his bad luck?" asked Gordon, seeing that a little curiosity under the circumstances was not likely to create a bad impression.

"No. We don't bother about members' private concerns so long as they play the game. I did hear his people had been rich once, and swells, as I said. He was going to get married just lately, I heard, but whether it'll come off or not, I don't know. She's got some money, I believe. Poor girl. A Miss Gaunt her name was."

"Miss Gaunt!" Gordon felt himself change color.

"Yes, that was the name. He wanted to do a little loan on the strength of the engagement, you know, but the security was not good enough, Major, though I'm always glad to accommodate any of our members who want a little 'ready' on a good note. But, you see, there's many a slip between the cup and the lip and I don't know Miss Gaunt—never heard of her. No, no, I don't do that kind of business; eh? What? But that's all I know about your man. However, he'll perhaps be here soon, or some of our other members may be able to tell you something more. Friend of yours, you say?"

"I was interested in him because of his name," said Gordon, after a moment's hesitation. "I don't know him."

At that moment two men in evening dress strolled into the room, and, taking the proprietor's attention, saved Gordon from further embarrassment. He had evidently got to the bottom of the proprietor's information, and he did not wish to be questioned in his turn.

CHAPTER X.

The room commenced to fill up, and soon the game of bacarat was in full progress; but Gordon did not hasten to take a hand in it. He was very little of a gambler, and his attention was, besides, fully occupied in watching the door for Mr. Usher; but as the night drew on he almost commenced to despair of that individual's arrival, and to fear that it would have been too much fortune to chance upon him at the first attempt.

Fortune, however, was upon his side that evening, and, by and by, looking up from the table where the play had become high enough to attract his attention, he found himself face to face with the object of his pursuit.

A quick glance assured him that things were not so bad with Mr. Usher, on this night at least, as the proprietor had suggested. His white, handsome face wore for him quite a cheerful expression, and by the pile of chips which he had purchased and placed before him on the table, it was evident that from somewhere at all events he had succeeded in obtaining quite a handsome amount with which to tempt his fortune.

Almost involuntarily, Gordon followed his example, purchased a quantity of counters, and took his place at the table. But he seated himself at the side opposite to the gambler. There was to be a struggle between him and the man from that time forth he felt, and some instinct made him desire to commence the battle in this manner. The way the struggle went; whether fortune inclined to his side or to the other, he felt must be a sign of future victory or defeat; and he commenced to play with almost as much eagerness as was evinced by the sparkling eyes and nervous fingers of his opponent.

But, alas! for a time, fortune entirely favored the side opposite to Gordon. Occasionally the banker won, generally Usher's side was successful, but Gordon's side invariably lost. It mattered not what he did, whether he played high or low, or whether his side had good cards or bad, the banker was always victorious, and Usher's face became more and more smiling, while Gordon began to grow anxious and doubtful.

With a superstition which he could hardly have acknowledged even to him-

self, he had decided to take the result of this duel as an omen for the future, and the signs were already going terribly against him. The question of finance also commenced to trouble him slightly, not that he minded losing, for he could afford for once to do so, but that the stack of money which he had brought with him was dwindling very rapidly, and he did not wish to lose sight of Usher while he went home to replenish his pockets.

Suddenly an incident attracted his attention. One of the players on Usher's side made a laughing remark to that individual, and pointed to an object which lay before him on the table. Gordon looked at this object, and saw that it was an old and rather battered silver pencil-case. It was placed beside Usher's pile of counters, and every now and then he touched it carelessly.

"Yes, it's my mascot," he said laughingly, in reply to his companion's remark. "It always brings me luck, but I lost it for a time until to-day. However, it's doing its work pretty thoroughly after its rest."

Almost smiling as he did so, Gordon instinctively put his hand to his pocket. Mounted in silver, he always carried with him a bullet which had struck his watch-chain in South Africa, and which in some miraculous manner had spared his life. If fetishes were in fashion, why not set his bullet against Usher's pencil-case!

To his disappointment a search in all his pockets showed him that he had left the bullet at home, but his fingers encountering another and unexpected object he drew it forth and looked at it with a sudden thrill. It was the knife with which Carlton had been murdered. He had placed it hastily in his pocket on that eventful night, and in all the anxiety and excitement of the subsequent time, he had never thought of examining it further.

Pale and disturbed, he was about to hastily return it to his pocket, when a strange resolve came into his mind. The weapon, ghastly as it would have been open, with the blood now dried upon its blade, was closed and comparatively innocent looking. Yet Gordon knew that anyone who had ever owned it must recognize it, and he felt if it were possible that Usher had committed that awful deed, as at moments he half suspected, the sight of the knife facing him here on the table of the gambling house must draw from him some sign of guilt or terror.

Did it or not? Gordon could hardly say. He placed the knife upon the green cloth before him, and he fixed his eyes firmly upon Usher's face. The incident occurred at a pause in the game, and there was nothing to distract attention from his manoeuvres. All the players looked up and noted his action, some smiled and nodded—but Usher?

Gordon's eyes were glued to his white face, but so firmly were his features under his control, or so little interest did he take in Gordon's proceedings, that for a moment he could hardly have sworn that Usher recognized the knife and trembled.

And yet a moment later he could have vowed he did. It was not that the white face turned whiter; that was almost impossible, or that the hard green eyes wavered and moved restlessly, for they were never still; it was not really that there was any definite or explicable cause that made him feel that the stroke he had played had been a good one; but something in the man's whole attitude, which seemed to grow suddenly tense and rigid, in the whiteness of his knuckles, which turned color instantly, as if under the pressure of his clenched fingers, and one deep swift breath instantly repressed, which as he remembered and noted then, made George's heart beat faster.

The tension was over immediately, the game began again, the two fetishes were forgotten by all but their respective owners, but it was evident that a great change had taken place.

Whether Gordon's felish had virtues greatly superior to that of Usher, whether the luck had changed naturally, as luck often does, it is impossible to say, but it is certain that from the moment Usher's luck entirely deserted him, and upon his desolation he completely lost his head. He played heavily for a time, lost more and more, then drew in his horns when for a couple of rounds that he turned in his favor, plunged more heavily still when it turned again, and then commenced a fatal sea-saw, which brought him out a loser at every coup.

Gordon on his side contrived to hold his own, but his attention was wholly occupied in watching Usher, whose green eyes now met his occasionally with an expression Gordon could not help fancying almost venomous.

"He recognizes the knife," thought Gordon, "and he hates me like poison for having it, but it must puzzle him like the deuce to think how I came by it, and he'll end by thinking my exhibition of it pure accident; I sus, ect. However, things are progressing favorably; we'll wait and see!"

He was destined to get no more satisfaction for the moment, however, as Usher, whose losses were now enormous, after biting his fingers furiously in thought, appeared suddenly to take a resolution, and gathering up the small remnant of his counters, rose from the table.

Gordon (taken by surprise for a second hardly knew what to do. He had a heavy stake upon the board, but he could not afford again to lose sight of Usher, and he rose quickly and made for the door. Even as he reached it, he heard the voice of the fat proprietor calling after him, and he was obliged to turn back and return thanks for his stake, which by the irony of fortune had increased considerably in value.

The delay had been brief, however, and he felt that he had still every hope of catching his man, and he made for the front door as quickly as he could.

His hopes were not falsified, for turning into the street, he saw the tall thin form of Usher before him in the moonlight.

"I have got him this time," thought Gordon, following closely, "and now at least I may discover something of interest."

It was evident that on this occasion Mr. Usher had no fear of being followed, or no desire to escape supervision, for he strolled so slowly without looking behind him, and Gordon had no difficulty in keeping him in view.

The chase on this occasion was a short one. Usher made his way down Park Lane, turned into Piccadilly, and at the entrance of the Bath Hotel, he turned for a moment and looked around him. Gordon had been prepared for this to happen at any time, and he had been keeping carefully in the shadow of the houses. He did not, therefore, think that Usher had seen him, or had any idea that he was being followed, yet a queer gesture which the gambler made as he rang the bell of the hotel remained in his memory and slightly puzzled him.

When the door of the hotel had opened and admitted him, Gordon waited a moment or two, and then rang the bell in his turn.

"Is Mr. Usher staying here?" he asked the hall-porter, who appeared presently.

"Yes, sir; just come in, sir. Shall I say you want to see him?"

"No, thanks; it does not matter," returned Gordon quickly. "I will call tomorrow." And he turned away.

"He is living there," he thought, "and tomorrow I will go and see him. He recognizes that knife, I am certain, but I must think out some good excuse before tracking him, or I shall arouse his suspicions and lose my chance."

As he turned back to make his way homewards, a man brushed against him. George did not notice the fellow at the time, but as he approached his house in Regent Park, the same thing occurred again, and George, taking a quick look at the man fancied that he recognized his features. Unless he was mistaken, it was one of the club servants, the man who had charge of the players' coats and hats. This man had been following him then, there could be no doubt of it, and that must be the meaning of Usher's queer gesture as he stood at the entrance to his hotel. He must have guessed that Gordon would follow him when he left the gambling house, and in that brief interval while George was delayed by the affair of his deserted stake, he must have bribed the man to follow him.

Gordon bit his lips as the cleverness of the white-faced man became evident, but the knowledge had a bright side as well as a dark. The gambler would know from his satellite that Gordon had followed him home, and would be upon his guard for the future; but, on the other hand, Gordon was now assured that he had not been mistaken when he thought that Usher recognized the knife, and he had not misconstrued the sinister expression of his fierce, green eyes. It was something to have gained that knowledge.

For a moment he hesitated at the entrance of his house. Should he attempt to shake off the fellow who had stuck to him so closely, or to bribe him to desist from his spying? Yet where would be the use? His name was after all upon the club books, and his house in any London directory. He had nothing to conceal, he thought, and without even turning to look behind him he entered his home.

Yet even as the door shut behind him he remembered that he had something to conceal, some reason which must compel him to be cautious. For as he stood in the hall the sight of the hospital nurse moving softly across one of the landings recalled the lovely girl who lay ill upstairs, and the danger to her which might lie in the espionage of his movements and the watching of his house. Had he been wise to let that man go so easily who had been following him?

He strode quickly to the hall door again and threw it open, but in the moonlit road there was no sign of his mysterious shadower, and he was forced to resign himself to the situation with a sigh.

He caught the hospital nurse as she was making her way to her patient's room again, and asked her as to the young girl's condition.

"Much better, sir," was the reply. "She has become conscious again, the fever has almost left her, and she is altogether greatly improved. Doctor Seymour was here this evening, and he was astonished; he has seldom seen so rapid a recovery. We must hope the progress will continue."

"Indeed we must," returned Gordon, sincerely. "Spare no trouble, nurse, and ask for all you want. Could I—might I see her, do you think?"

The nurse motioned him to wait for a moment, while she softly opened the door of Miss Gaunt's room and peeped in.

"You can see her if you are very quiet," she said, holding the door open for Gordon. "She is sleeping. I took her temperature an hour ago, and everything is all right. I hoped she would get a little rest."

Holding his breath, Gordon looked in at the sleeping figure, whose long dark ringlets swept the white face of the pillow; but he turned quickly away again. The fever had passed, the delirium had spent itself; it was no longer a sick and unconscious being who lay there, but a young girl sleeping a sleep that was pure and innocent, and on whose peaceful beauty he felt he had no right to gaze.

And he made his way upstairs to his room.

(To be continued.)

WHAT HE OWED.

Blowz—"All I am to-day I owe to my mother."

Hammer—"Yes, and I understand that all you have got owe to your mother's father."

Miss F.—"I remember the first time I was in love." Miss Chance—"What you did I give for a memory like that?"

ENGLISHMEN IN COBALT

VIEWS OF ONE OF THE VISITING JOURNALISTS.

Cousin Jacks in Red Shirts and Promiscuous Shooting Are Not In Evidence in Canadian Camp.

H. Hamilton Fyfe, in the London Mail, in an article on Cobalt, says: "The big financiers have got into Cobalt by now. The camp is settling down, and the wildly exciting days of first finds are over. But all the ground-floor men were poor men, and there are chances for the poor man yet. Engineers who have been in every silver mining camp in the world say that this looks like being the richest region yet discovered. If that prophecy is justified, there are bound to be many more exciting 'finds.' But it is an 'if' in which there is much vice. The danger is that Cobalt may 'pinch out,' as other silver fields like it have done in the past. There is so much precious ore right on the surface that there are places where you can rub your boot on the rock and see it shine like a bright new silver sixpence. But most geologists believe that the rich veins lie only near the surface, and will soon be exhausted. However, geologists, like other people, are as often wrong as right, and at present the man who should express a doubt on the spot as to Cobalt being a deep-level proposition would be well advised to leave camp by the next train. The camp stinks with lowered voice of truck loads which fetched their owners ten thousand, fifteen thousand, twenty thousand pounds. That three mines alone have made already \$20,000,000 between them is an authentic fact. It is nothing out of the way for the ore to yield 75 per cent. of silver, and there are by-products, too.

SMALL FELLOW FLEECE.

The pitiful part of it is that the small investor should be so fleeced. It may be the richest silver mine field in the world, but if it were capable of yielding a quarter of what the wild-cat prospectuses have promised it would have to be four times richer than even the optimists believe it to be. Already more money has been lost over worthless properties than has been made out of paying mines. A mania seized the Canadian public. The newspapers were filled with alluring baits for the get-rich-quick, who swallowed them with falacious avidity. Now they are beginning to see what fools they were. Even if the production for 1907 totals up to \$10,000,000, the figures predicted by the most hopeful, I have the authority of Mr. Nicholas, of the Canadian Geological Survey, for saying that this will not serve to pay a reasonable dividend on more than half the capital invested. And it was not "a reasonable dividend" which prospectuses promised—it was anything from 15 to 25 per cent.

The profits dangled before the eyes of those who are out to buy claims as yet unworked are even more alluring. I had not been ten minutes in the camp—I had only strolled from the station on the edge of the lake up the muddy road to the hotel just above—before a persuasive prospector was trying to sell me a new property which was morally certain to turn out a cinch. And as we went off to look at it—for I liked the prospector's company, although I did not want his mine—up shambled a rough fellow, a French-Canadian miner, and pulling a bit of ore out of his shirt, tried the same game on my persuasive friend himself!

NO BRET HARTE ELEMENT.

It is an easy place to see, Cobalt, for all the big propositions lie close around the lake, which is itself to be burrowed under in the hope that beneath its waters lie rich deep veins of silver. The Right-of-Way and Larose shafts are within a biscuit-toss of the station. The Nipissing, just across the lake, the University but a short walk, and so on. The miners' wooden shacks with hotel, restaurant, stock exchange (which is also the theatre), and a few stores, all cluster together on one little hill just above the railway track. It looks, of course, like a place that was only started yesterday. Upon the permanence of the vein hangs the question whether it shall grow into a big town or whether the hill-side, now a busy human ant-hill, shall in a few years be deserted again, and the wooden buildings left to rot in silent loneliness. Whatever happens Cobalt will always be an interesting memory by reason of certain peculiarities which mark it off from all other mining camps. There is no Bret Harte element about it—no Cousin Jacks in red shirts, no promiscuous revolver shooting, no lawlessness, very little gambling, and, strangest of all, no drink. I never thought to see a fetotal mining camp, but that is what Cobalt professes to be. The hotel provides no stronger stimulant than ginger ale. At the restaurant you drink water or go dry. There is smuggled whiskey in some of the shacks—and capital whiskey, too, as I discovered, my prospector being a hospitable soul, even when he found I was not a buyer. But no liquor is openly on sale, and anything like disorder is put down with a heavy hand.

SUCCESSFUL.

Little Willie—"Say, pa, what is a diplomat?"

Pa—"A diplomat, my son, is a politician who can make people believe that he doesn't want what he can't get."

NOT QUITE CLEAR.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed," is a saying that seems funny; how can a friend who is in need advance a fellow money?"