

Not Guilty ;

Or, A Great Mistake.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued).

The old driver looked down at him, and then shook his head sadly. "I couldn't do it, sir," he said. "Couldn't do what? Couldn't follow that man for half a sovereign?" "I couldn't do it, sir. It 'ud be robbing you. Look at the mare. The spirit is willing, but the flesh, well, there ain't no flesh on her."

"But, you old idiot, the man's walking." "Ay, we can keep up with him, now," returned the old man, without too much enthusiasm, however. "But what about when he gets into a hansom? Is that the one, that left in the grey trousers? He's sure to take a hansom."

"Yes," returned Gordon, half amused, half angry, and pacing along beside the cab with a fearful eye on Usher. "That's the man. But come on, no nonsense now. Half a sovereign is worth having. When he takes a cab we'll see."

The cabman nodded. "Well, well, sir, as you say, we'll see," he said. "We'll do our best, me and the old mare; we've done it for forty years. Don't blame me if we miss old grey trousers, though." But they did not miss him, nor were they likely to, as Gordon very quickly saw, and he congratulated himself on his judgment. It was evident that the old cabman, either in jest, or from excessive modesty, had underrated the powers of himself and his horse, for neither of them gave Gordon cause for a moment's uneasiness. In and out of the crowded traffic, down the Haymarket and the Strand, and even in the throng of Fleet Street, they never even for an instant lost sight of Usher's tall figure, and it was not until they reached St. Paul's Churchyard that Gordon's hand went quickly to the handle of the door.

The cabman bent down at the sound, however, and stopped him. "It's all right, sir," he said. "He's only getting on a bus. He's going to the Minories. I heard him ask the conductor. Don't you get out yet. We aren't afraid of a bus." Gordon hesitated. While Usher walked, he had been able to follow him with his eyes from the cab window. On the top of the bus he was invisible to him. Yet the cabman had done splendidly till now, and it was quite certain that Usher would recognize him if he himself took the bus. "All right," he said, "I'll leave it to you, but for goodness' sake keep your eyes open."

The cabman nodded, whipped up his old mare, who responded nobly, and the chase began again. At the Minories they stopped again, and Gordon held his breath, but after an instant the cab slowly continued its way, and Gordon cautiously peered out. There was no sign of Usher on that side, but on turning to the other window he saw him walking quickly down the road before them, and he mentally added another shilling to the promised reward.

Usher made his way, the cab following him, down the wide street, and under the railway arch, when he turned to the left along St. George's Road. "Where on earth is he going," George wondered, "surely not to Jamrach's." But the gambler passed the animal dealer's, and still went on, while the streets grew dirtier and more unsavory, and George more curious.

Suddenly the cabman pulled up, and descending from his box, came quickly round to Gordon. "We're done now, sir," he said. "He's going down Minden Lane, and the cab can't follow him. It's too narrow. But if you don't want him to see you, you can't get out and chase him, for there's no traffic, and he'd see you in a moment."

Gordon hesitated, and bit his lip. "What the deuce is to be done, then?" he said. "But I must try it at any cost." "I know," returned the old cabman, after a moment's reflection. "I'll do it for you. He's going in somewhere, there's no doubt of that, for Minden Lane don't lead anywhere. You look after the cab for a minute, and I'll tell you where he goes."

"Good," said Gordon quickly. "Go at once, I'll wait, but look sharp, or you won't catch him."

The cabman hurried off down the narrow turning, at the entrance to which the vehicle stood, and Gordon was left alone.

Where had this fellow Usher gone, he wondered, and what was his errand so far from the usual haunts of such a man. Was it something which bore upon the mystery of Claude Carlton's death and Miss Gault's strange confession? He felt it was. He felt he was upon the eve of some discovery, and he peered eagerly forth, looking for the cabman's return.

After a moment or two, that worthy returned, scratching his head doubtfully. "Well, sir, he's there," he said.

"Where?"

"In a house at the bottom of the lane there."

"Well, well?"

"But it's an empty house, sir."

"Empty?"

"Foller as a bad nut. There ain't a sound in it, but him. And I'm sure he's there. I just caught sight of him going into the door. I went down to have a look at the house just to give you the

tip, when, says I, it's an empty house. Well, I took a walk around the back to make sure, and sure enough it is. You can see into the rooms; no blinds, no curtains, no furniture, not a soul to be seen. Look out, here he comes!"

The warning came not a second too soon, for as he spoke Usher came round the corner of the street and was upon them.

CHAPTER XIII.

Swift as lightning Gordon flung himself down upon the straw at the bottom of the cab, and prayed that the gambler might not take a fancy to hire the vehicle; while the cabman, with a quickness which did him credit, leaned carelessly against the door, blocking it and the window with his broad shoulders.

Usher cast a glance at the cab and its antiquated steed, the cabman being careful not to catch his eye while he hesitated; then the suspense was over. It was evident that the appearance of the vehicle did not impress the gambler, and he walked past and down the street.

Gordon rose breathless from his crouching position. "Has he passed?" he asked, at last, in a whisper.

"Yes, sir, he's gone. He did look at us at one time; but, lor' bless you, he thought better of it. He didn't take much to our looks, me and the old horse."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, at all events," said Gordon. "I did not want him to see me, and I congratulate you on the manner in which you followed him. But we have lost him now, I suppose?"

"Lor, yes, sir; long ago, I'm afraid. He went straight down the street and was out of sight before you got up, almost. You wouldn't be likely to find him again now."

Gordon nodded. "I am not sure that it matters very much after all," he said, thoughtfully; and, opening the cab door, he stepped out on to the pavement.

The driver stared at him. "Going to stretch your legs a bit, sir?" he said.

Gordon laughed. "Yes, I am," he said, after a second, "but you need not wait while I do so. You can go home now; and, here—you've earned it—here's a sovereign for your trouble. Give the mare a good feed, will you?"

The driver nodded gratefully. "You're a gentleman, sir; yes, the old girl shall have the run of her teeth—what she's got left—to-night; and I'm much obliged to you. But, excuse me, sir, can't I take you back home?"

Gordon shook his head. "No, thanks," he returned. "I'm not going home just yet. I want to have a look . . ." He stopped, and, deciding not to say more, turned away with a nod.

The driver stared after him. "You want to have a look at the empty house, I suppose, sir," he said quickly. "Shall I wait for you? This is a queer neighborhood."

Gordon smiled at his tone. "No, thanks. I'll get home my own way. I'm not afraid of the neighborhood."

The driver scratched his head thoughtfully. "Perhaps not, sir," he said, "perhaps not, but an empty house is a funny thing."

Gordon looked up. "It was empty?" he asked, quickly.

"Lor, yes, it was empty. I looked all round. It must have been."

"Well, what then?"

The man pondered a moment, and then shrugging his shoulders, mounted his box. "As you please, sir; you've been a gentleman to me. Come up, old girl! All the same, an empty house is a funny thing. Good day, sir."

Gordon watched the cab rattle off, and turned towards the lane. "An empty house is a funny thing!" Yes, it is, my good man, and I'm going to have a look at it. It is empty, of course; but still, if it's empty, why on earth should Usher come all this way to see it? That's what you mean, I suppose; and if it's worth his while, now that I've lost him, and don't know what to do next, why shouldn't I have a look at it, too?"

He made his way down the narrow, ill-smelling lane, looking about him carefully. He had remembered, too late to inquire, that the driver had not explained the position of the house, but he had not much fear of failing to discover it, nevertheless.

He reached the end of the street, barred by the blank rear wall of a high building, however, without catching any glimpse of a house which seemed unoccupied, and for a moment he hesitated, looking about him. It was impossible that he could have mistaken the lane, equally impossible that the cabman should have deceived him; but where was the house. And suddenly he guessed.

He was standing under a high wall which extended at a right angle from the building, which made a cul-de-sac of the lane; and half hidden in this wall was a small iron gate. He crossed the lane, and standing on tip-toe, peered over. The roadway was narrow, and the wall high, but he could catch sight, nevertheless, of chimneys and a blank dark window staring down at him like a blind eye.

"That is the house," he thought. "Of course, the gate is open."

He was right. The latch turned easily

and lightly. It was evidently well oiled and cared for, and in constant use, and the discovery of this fact, together with the extremely deserted and dilapidated appearance of the house, which he immediately caught sight of, gave him a strange thrill. The cabman's words returned to him—"An empty house is a funny thing." Certainly there was something strange about such an empty house, with such a well-oiled gate handle.

He made his way up the weedy gravel path, by the shrubs which had evidently been for years untended, to the front door of the building, and stood looking at it.

It was a high brick house of three storeys, with a square ugly front and staring windows, curtainless and covered with dirt and cobwebs; a great many panes of glass were broken and stuffed here and there with paper, and the front door, from which the paint was peeling, looked as if it had not been opened for years.

"A very different affair to the gate," thought Gordon, after a quick and comprehensive glance; and he made his way round to the back. Yet here again the inspection brought small results. The dirty yard, which enclosed the back of the premises, was strewn with the rubbish of years; the windows were as unclean and dilapidated as those of the front, and their broken panes showed plainly only the bare and cobwebbed rooms beyond.

"It is an empty house with a vengeance," thought George. "But there is nothing funny about it, for it seems to me I am wasting my time."

He tried the handle of the back door; it turned easily enough, but there might be nothing in that, the thing was fastened, and as he had no key, he could not tell in what condition the mechanism of the lock was.

Undecided, he took a walk around the house, peering into the windows and listening intently, but he learned nothing. There appeared no disguise about the place; it was even aggressively frank and open. He could see into every window, and all the rooms were as empty, dirty and evidently as long unused as those he had first seen; no sound came to him, and no trace of recent occupation, even of recent visitors, rewarded his investigations.

"I can break open the back door and make still more sure," he thought, returning disconsolately, "but is it really worth while? Usher did not stay long; why is it not possible that he came to see some friend and found him gone? And, after all, what did I expect to discover in an empty house? But, by Jove, is it empty, after all!"

For he had turned suddenly with a start, and was watching some object on the ground.

This object which had caught his roving eye and riveted his attention, was only an ordinary London sparrow, but it was wrestling in the dust with a crumb which was too large for it, and Gordon wondered how the crumb got there.

"I am sorry to interrupt you, but you can come back and finish afterwards, old chap," he said, stepping forward, "this crumb needs consideration."

He picked it up—it was, in reality, quite the size of a cherry—and looked at it. It was only a piece of ordinary bread, not at all new, but for a moment Gordon felt as if it told him a whole history. It had been carried there, and that quite recently, for there were no houses near from which it could have been thrown, and the sparrow's efforts told him that it was beyond the power of a bird to control. Therefore . . . but Gordon wasted no time in futile questioning. He turned to the door, and, with all the strength of his powerful frame, shattered the lock and entered the passage.

Did he hear a movement as his steps resounded in the hollow hall; was there anyone within? He could not tell, but there had been, at least; for there were footprints in the dust of the passage, and almost at his feet lay the end of a burnt-out cigarette.

But an examination of the interior of the house for a time brought him nothing further. He searched the ground floor rooms religiously, and continuing his way upstairs, explored the whole of the other two storeys. There was no one there, and, indeed, it seemed incredible there could be, for the dust had evidently been long undisturbed; however, the house was dark, the windows being too dirty to admit the light, and Gordon was not going to rely too much upon first impressions, remembering the incident of the crumb. But still, when he had gone through every nook and corner of the two floors, he descended a little disappointed. "What the deuce did anyone come into an empty house to smoke a cigarette for?" he wondered, "and why bread? Let us have a look at the footprints."

He lighted a match and glanced at the marks on the passage floor. Long, narrow, footprints, light impressions; Gordon remembered Usher's cat-like walk, and followed them along the hall eagerly. And then he understood. A passage, dark and narrow, led from the front door to the back of the house, growing darker as it went, until, reaching the stairs, it took a turn under them, and Gordon's match going out suddenly, vanished.

But he had already caught a glimpse of a low and narrow door in the wall, and he struck another light immediately. "By Jove, a cellar!" he said. "What a fool I am!"

Holding a match in one hand he caught the handle and turned it. The door did not open and he pulled harder. Still it did not open, but it gave a little, and then, as he relaxed his hold, it closed with a little jerk. He seized the door again, and the same thing happened, and then, grasping the situation, he gave a short laugh. Someone on the other side was holding the door.

Gordon's match went out, and he struck another; then, taking a good grip of the handle, he pulled hard. This sudden tug made the thing give, as usual,

but as usual the ground he had gained was quickly lost again. Gordon set his teeth, however, and for a minute or two the contest wavered. Then his match burned down to his fingers, and, forcing him to relax his efforts, made him mutter an oath. As if in response to the situation, a stronger pull came from the other side, and the door closed again.

Gordon shrugged his shoulders. "Very well," he said to himself, "we'll do it in the dark, since one hand is not enough. All the same, I wish I had a candle."

Relinquishing the glowing fragments of his match, he put both hands to the knob of the door. Gordon was an exceptionally powerful man, and in good training; and he was using two hands now; moreover, instinct told him that his unseen opponent was probably down a step or two, and so at a disadvantage, yet, nevertheless, for a time the result of the battle remained in doubt.

Gordon bit his lip. "I wonder which will give in first?" he thought. "Not I, I'll swear. I don't know how weight is, but strength seems to be about equal. But surely living in a cellar must tell before long."

He pulled even harder, and listened intently, and the sound of a heavy and labored breathing came to him through the key-hole.

"It's coming," said George, with a last effort, and it came. There was a groan, a splutter, and then a crash; the door flung open, and Gordon was dashed by the recoil against the opposite wall. As he recovered himself, he heard the swift patter of footsteps flying down the dark stairs which faced him, and he darted in pursuit.

The vanquished one knew the stairs intimately, evidently, while Gordon simply saw blackness in front of him; yet he hurled himself down, and for a second he almost seemed to feel a rough tweed coat within his grasp. Then he reached a turning, struck violently against a wall, stumbled, rubbed himself, and even while he rubbed heard the flying footsteps swallowed up by the darkness.

He struck a match and looked about him. He was in a dark, dirty, but fairly dry cellar. It was empty, but opposite to him was a low archway, and he darted forwards. His match went out as he passed through, but he struck another and went on. Here again there was no sign of the unknown himself, though a pile of clothes, thrown on the floor, and some plates with broken food upon an upturned barrel was evidence that he had been there. There was, however, another archway before Gordon, and from beyond came still the sound of scurrying steps. George dashed down his half-burned match. "These cellars run into one another, and go around the basement," he thought, with a sudden flash of inspiration. "While I blunder about, that fellow will be around the place, up the stairs, and out of the back door. This won't do."

He let the flying one go, and turning quickly, ran back through the first cellar. Even as he reached the foot of the stairs a scurrying near him and a sudden halt warned him he had not been a moment too soon. "What an inspiration," he thought, "if only I can fasten that door."

His hand went nervously to the lock, and to his delight his fingers grasped a key. "That fellow was listening at the door, and I never gave him time to lock it," he thought. "What a piece of luck."

He quickly turned the lock, and after trying the door, put the key in his pocket. "Now, my man, we can take it quietly," he said out loud, and he made his way down the stairs again.

(To be continued).

About the Farm

SHEEP MANAGEMENT.

There is a general impression existing among those that know little about sheep that these animals will live and become fat on weeds and brush and that the cost of keeping a flock of sheep is next to nothing. The experienced flock master knows better than this, and he gives his sheep good feed and good care throughout the entire year. Unless this is done the sheep will not be profitable. When a few sheep are kept under the other method they will continue to exist, but their owner will be greatly disappointed at not receiving the profits from them he thinks he should receive.

From my experience and observation in raising sheep I have found that they must be given the best of care and attention at all times, writes an experienced breeder. They require good pasture, and to this should be added plenty of shade and fresh water. The feeding should be the best that can be done in the fall months so that the sheep will go into winter quarters in good shape. I find that unless they start into winter right they will not thrive in the latter part of it. So, in addition to the patronage, the sheep should have turnips and pumpkins in the fall and sugar beets will be found to be particularly valuable. I am sorry to say that, according to my observation, a great many flocks do not get the amount of attention they should receive, and seldom get anything but pasture. This is a fruitful cause of disappointment to their owner.

The necessity for starting the sheep into winter with a good lot of muscle and fat on their bodies is because during the winter there is quite a drain made upon them in two or three directions. One of these is the growing of wool, which continues to develop all through the winter. Another is the fact

that the ewes are developing their young, and unless they have a great supply of substances to start with it will be found exceedingly difficult to keep them in good condition. A third drain is the loss of animal heat, which in turn causes the burning up of all the fat on their bodies.

In considering the management of sheep, it must be remembered that a flock cannot be handled or fattened successfully without a close observation of their habits and peculiarities. There are a great many little things that enter into the attention and management that may seem trivial, but they have much to do with the profit, thrift and comfort of the flock. The competent feeder acquires a trained eye that detects at a glance any evidence of disorder that will be manifest if a single animal is off its feed or out of condition. To the unobserving or inexperienced feeder, sheep all look alike, but when rightly studied no class of stock presents more marked peculiarities or so clearly manifest evidences of thrift and well doing. Attention to these little details, accompanied by regular habits and a quiet manner, constitutes the keynote of successful sheep feeding. There is nothing that will contribute more to good results than contentment and quiet surroundings. Harsh treatment and rough manners absolutely disqualify any man for success in this work, and the feeder who disturbs the quiet and comfort of his flock every time he goes about it, should quit the sheep business at once. The natural timid and nervous temperament of the sheep necessitate gentle treatment. Their daily habits about eating and drinking must be indulged as fully as practicable. No kind of stock naturally selects a wider variety of feed, particularly of rough forage and vegetation; but two essentials are always exacted, namely: cleanliness and palatability. Sheep should never be given any stale or undesirable feed, nor should they be expected to eat any feed left over from a previous meal. The ration should be always wholesome and tempting to the appetite.

The barn or stable quarters should never be without fresh, pure atmosphere and an ample supply of dry bedding during the winter months. Sheep rarely suffer from cold if kept dry and protected from direct drafts. The open air is better than a poorly kept shed or barn.

WINTER FEEDING FOR FOWLS.

Mash—2 ounces to each fowl per day. Grain—4 ounces to each fowl per day. Cut bone, boiled beef heads or meat. Gut—Pound to 15 layers three times a week.

Meat-meal and beef scraps at such times as cut bone is not fed, 2 ounces per fowl. Meatmeal if generally mixed in the mash. Beef scraps are most frequently given alone and occasionally in the mash.

Green Stuff—In shapes of lawn clippings, clover, hay, etc. The former should be cut short, steamed and given alone in moderate quantities twice or thrice per week. Clover hay also cut short and steamed is generally used in the mash in proportion of one-fourth of its weight. It may be given alone steamed or dry where vegetables or roots are scarce.

Roots and Vegetables—The better if in the shape of cabbage, should be hung two feet from the floor of the pens so as to incite the hens to exercise by jumping for it. Cabbage is also used on the mash when boiled. Roots, such as mangels, turnips, etc., should be supplied at all times.

Grit for grinding up hard food in the gizzard and ground oyster shells to make lime for shells and pure water should constantly be furnished the layers. The attention to these details are all important.

There may be, and doubtless are, forms of waste not mentioned here to be found on farms throughout the country, and which, if clean and wholesome, may be used to good purpose.

A DESIRABLE JOB.

I'd like to be the idle rich,
Without a thing to do
But walk around and look at things
And loaf enough for two,
No time clocks calling me to work,
No boss to make me dance;
It might demoralize me, but
I think I'd take a chance—

A carriage wailing at my beck
Wherever I might go
An automobile if I thought
A carriage much too slow,
Or, for a change, a special train
To keep some silly date,
Expense, not cutting any ice,
Say, wouldn't it be great?

I'd be the busy idle rich,
But not at useful toil,
Until the novelty wore off
I'd keep things at the boil.
I'd wear ten suits of clothes a day,
Each one of the latest style,
Oh, yes, I guess it would be poor
And hardly worth the while.

If I were but the idle rich
And not the busy poor,
I'd hire a man to breathe for me
But not to eat, I'm sure,
Though critics might declare that I
Was but a parasite,
I'd buy some critics of my own,
To say I was all right.

NO CAUSE FOR IT.

"I admit," said Mr. Vane, "that I'm somewhat conceited. It's a bad fault."
"Not only that," replied Miss Peppery "but it also indicates very bad taste."