

Not Guilty ;



Or, A Great Mistake.

CHAPTER XX.—(Continued).

"Suddenly, something occurred to my mind. Not long before we left Nice a rather disagreeable incident occurred. An old friend of mine, who also knew Carlton, had taken upon himself to speak to me of the life the young fellow had been leading.

"Now that your daughter is engaged to him," he said, "I hope he will settle down and cut loose from his old friends and associates."

"I suppose I replied a little shortly, for in the end we had rather an argument, which ended in his telling me that he doubted if Carlton were even then leading a decent life or behaving as the man who was engaged to my daughter should behave.

"Why, I was in his chambers the other day in town," he said, "I called on him unexpectedly, and his rooms are filled with photographs of some of the worst women in town. This, perhaps, would not be so bad in itself had he the decency to at least hide Miss Gaunt's picture, which was, on the contrary, displayed rather prominently."

"Well, I was not pleased with this conversation at the time, but I did not take so much notice as I should have done, for my friend was a man of exceedingly puritanical views, I knew. If I would consider an actress, even of talent, quite an impossible person; and I imagined he was exaggerating in his story. Carlton had probably been guilty of an act of very bad taste, but no worse, I thought, and I put the matter from my mind for the time.

"When I looked around the room that night in Regent Street, however, the conversation recurred to me. There were no photographs there on this occasion; but my eye caught various marks on the walls and on the plush which covered the mantelshelf, which told me that certainly some had only lately been removed.

"Why have you removed your photographs?" I said.

"Vivienne looked up in surprise, and Carlton flushed and stammered.

"His confusion made me doubt him for the first time, and I felt myself growing angry.

"I was about to broach the subject of my visit, and to do so, I am afraid, rather roughly, when suddenly the door in the hall opened, and a girl looked quickly into the room.

"Hullo, Claude, old man!" she said, and then suddenly noticing us, she stopped, gave a bold look around, and stood for a moment staring at Vivienne.

"She was painted and over dressed, though pretty; and Vivienne's eyes turned to mine in sudden disgust. I looked at Carlton. I never saw a man so overwhelmed, and yet, Colonel Gordon, now that I come to think of it under the light of subsequent events, I am not sure that there was not more wonder and amazement in his face than any other expression.

"Good God," he said, "what's this?"

"But the girl left him no time to speak. With a laugh and a quick 'Another time—sorry you're engaged,' she nodded to him, and left the room. We heard her rustling down the passage, and we heard the front door close behind her before anyone looked up again.

"I was the first to break the silence; for Vivienne's eyes were flashing and I saw that the incident had further affected her already overwrought nerves. 'I cannot regret that this has happened, Mr. Carlton,' I said, 'for it has made it easy for me to say what otherwise might have been difficult. I am sorry to tell you you must consider your engagement to my daughter at an end. 'Carlton turned white and started forward suddenly.

"Good God!" he cried. "But why? why? Because—because of that woman? Why, I swear to you that I don't even know her!"

"I stopped him quickly. 'Do not lie,' I said. 'But at all events, tell me this, and I regret to ask you the question in the presence of my daughter here.—Do you know Mary Charters?'"

"For a moment Carlton attempted to pull himself together, and it was then for the first time that I noticed he had been drinking. He looked imploringly at me, and then turned to Vivienne; but the expression in her eyes of anger and contempt made him bend his head.

"Yes," he said.

"Then—but you dared to enter a decent man's house and ask for his daughter's hand, while that story was true!" I cried furiously.

"He flushed, and then, turning from me, stepped towards Vivienne.

"Vivienne, I loved you," he said, "I love you."

"Vivienne shuddered and drew herself away from him. Then, quickly drawing herself up, she flashed her eyes at him in anger and contempt.

"And you dare to speak to me!" she said.

"Carlton staggered at her tone and the expression on her face. He had a mad temper, as I have told you, and he was, as I have also said, under the influence of drink. The situation was a cruel one for him, however much he was to blame; and I have, God help me, thought since that he might not have been so much at fault as everything then seemed to show. But however that

may be, nothing can excuse his subsequent conduct.

"Then you throw me over?" he cried furiously.

"I did not reply, and Vivienne turning in contempt from his tone, his spoiled nature got the upper hand, and he turned in a moment into—there are no other words to describe his condition—a raving madman. On a table near the door were scattered some knives and weapons which he was fond of collecting, and seizing one of these he commenced to flourish it wildly. Every instant I feared he was about to stab himself to the heart, and I was moving forward to seize him, when he flung the weapon back again on to the table with a curse and a bitter laugh, and commenced a wild speech in which he insulted Vivienne and uttered imprecations on myself.

"I had taken Vivienne by the hand to lead her away, when, roused apparently to a condition of frenzy in which he forgot all sense of decency, Carlton uttered the words which brought about all the tragedy.

"I cannot tell you what he said, but I must tell you something, Colonel Gordon, which, though it is painful for me to tell, is, unfortunately, well enough known, and is necessary to my story.

"I regret to say that my wife is—not worthy to be Vivienne's mother. She left me some years ago, and—her subsequent behaviour has embittered my life and saddened Vivienne's, who was devotedly attached to her. I can forgive Carlton much. I can remember his furious and uncontrollable temper, and the unhappy condition he was in, but, dead as he is, poor fellow, I can never forget the insult he paid to Vivienne and myself.

"Go then," he cried furiously, "I am well rid of you," and then came half a dozen words which no one but a madman, as he was then, would have dared to utter.

"Wild with anger I sprang forward to strike him, but Vivienne was before me, facing him with blazing eyes.

"You coward!" she cried.

"And then suddenly, without a warning, the electric light went out and the room was in utter darkness.

"I heard a swift movement, a cry, a struggle, and then a deep groan; some heavy body fell to the ground, and all was still.

"Startled and confused, I stood for a moment hesitating. Then I attempted to grope my way to where I remembered the door to be. I had not gone three steps when I stumbled and fell over a body on the floor. I felt my hands wet with some warm and sticky liquid which made me shudder and spring again to my feet. I called out wildly and rushed forward, but the room was in utter darkness and strange to me. I struck the sharp corner of the mantel-piece and staggered back dazed. Man as I was, for a second I could have screamed like a child. And then, as suddenly as it went out, the electric light flashed on again, almost blinding me with its glare.

"And what a sight met my eyes. On the floor lay Carlton, stabbed to the heart, and covered with blood. Kneeling beside him, with her face pale as death, and her eyes turned to my hands with an expression which I shall never forget, was Vivienne.

"Father!" she cried wildly. "Oh, say it's not true! It can't be—it can't be true! But, oh God! It was my fault. It was I! It was I!"

"And then we both turned; for there, standing in the doorway, looking at us with his cold green eyes, was Usher.

"He remained there for a moment, looking from Vivienne to me, and then he came forward.

"I thought I heard a cry," he said.

"Then he saw the body on the floor, and seemed to take in the situation at a glance.

"There is not an instant to lose," he said, looking at neither of us in particular. "This may be discovered at any moment. Even now someone may be coming upstairs. I can save you both. You must let me think and arrange for you. Come, you must leave here instantly. He is quite dead, see! there is no question about that. There is only one chance: instant flight. You can hesitate, you can decide, later. Now you must come!"

"I began to stammer something, but the man's devilish quickness guarded him. 'Think of your daughter,' he said, and turning to me: 'Look at your hands,' he said.

"He seized me by the arm. 'I knew where to take you,' he said. 'Come!'"

"Dazed, overwhelmed, helpless, I obeyed. Vivienne had killed the man was all that I could think; my daughter had killed him, and her life was at the mercy of each instant. God help me, I never doubted it was she that struck the blow—how could I? Who could have done it but she? and had not her words even seemed to tell me so.

"Vivienne was staring at me with horror and fear in her eyes; she was hardly conscious, I could see, and every moment I expected her to fall senseless. Usher seized one arm, and I took the other, though I myself had little knowledge of what I did.

"We descended the stairs cautiously, and trembling at every sound.

"At the door Usher stepped forward and looked out, and I peered over his shoulder. Under a lamp-post, not ten yards away, stood a knot of young men laughing and talking. I turned to look at Vivienne. She was lying insensible on the ground. Usher muttered an oath and stood for a second biting his fingers.

"We cannot carry her," he said, "they will see us."

"Even as we spoke three of the young men left the group and came directly towards us.

"They must not see her!" whispered Usher. "At any cost that must be prevented." And quick as lightning he drew me out into the street, slammed the door behind him, and walked me swiftly on, talking loudly in an easy voice.

"We can go back as soon as we have lost sight of them," he whispered between two sentences.

"But we were not to get off so easily; and his very cleverness was his undoing, for almost directly we heard a shuffling step come after us, and a thick uncertain voice hailed Usher by his name.

"Startled, we both swung around, and saw before us one of the young men who had caused the contretemps. He was a young fellow in evening dress with a very flushed face and tie all awry, and there was no doubt he had been drinking heavily.

"Just come from Jimmy's," he said, thickly. "Come along, Usher, old boy, I am going back there."

Usher nodded and smiled. "Can't just now, Wilson," he said, carelessly; "we are just off somewhere."

"Alright," said the young fellow cheerfully, "I will come too."

"Usher ground his teeth, and for a moment I thought he would strike the man. But he restrained himself with an effort.

"I am sorry, Wilson," he said, suavely, "but not to-night. To-morrow I will do what you like."

"To-morrow he hanged!" returned the young man. "To-morrow's long way off. May never even see to-morrow. Who's your fat friend? Introduce me, and we'll make a night of it."

"Usher turned away and caught my arm. 'Come on,' he said, 'and leave this fool!'"

"The young fellow had dropped his cane, and was groping drunkenly for it on the pavement, but he looked up as Usher spoke.

"Who's a fool!" he said. "Always knew you were a cad, Us—Us—Usher. Come and fight!"

"Usher shrugged his shoulders and drew me on, the young man following.

"Yes, yes, come and fight, if you're so damn clever," he called after us, reeling along. "Your friend'll see fair do's."

"Usher did not reply or turn his head, but we increased our pace in the hope that we should shake off our unwelcome companion, while we wondered vainly what was happening to Vivienne.

"But there is nothing so obstinate as a tipsy man who gets an idea into his head. This young fool had taken umbrage at Usher's remark, and with the persistence of the offended drunkard, was determined not to be shaken off.

"We increased our speed till we were almost running, but still our pursuer stumbled after us; reeling and tripping, but resolved; we turned, and meeting him, attempted to argue him into leaving us to ourselves, but it was useless; he would fight Usher or continue to pursue us, and nothing else would satisfy him. I believe Usher would have willingly fought a dozen of him, and I am sure I would, but to fight in the public streets meant a crowd, and who knew what more besides; and we were at our wits' end.

"Heaven knows how far we took that drunken idiot that night, wandering round and round (choosing the more deserted streets, for fear that he should take it into his head to change his tactics and become more obstreperous), never daring to go far from the scene of the crime, yet fearful to go near because of our drunken friend's pursuit.

"It was not until we had been walking for, I should think, nearly an hour, that Usher, who had been thinking deeply, at length came to any decision: 'This will never end as it is,' he said at length. 'And the risk is terrible. I intended to take both you and your daughter to a place which I know of, and where you would be in safety; this maniac has spoiled that idea. There is only one thing to be done; you must go there by yourself, leaving me to settle with him.'

"I commenced to expostulate, but he continued:—'It is you that are the danger at the present moment. With that blood on your hands, and nervous as you look, any attention attracted to you would be fatal. That idiot will not trouble about you if you leave me, and when you are clear away I will settle with him pretty quickly.' He smiled savagely. 'He shall have all he wants. Then I will return to the flat, fetch your daughter, and follow you.'

"But why should I not go there myself?" I said.

"With those hands, and trembling and agitated as you are," he said. 'Good heavens, that would certainly be fatal. You might be seen entering, or found there, and the whole story must come out; while I, even if I were seen, can easily excuse myself. I could have no possible quarrel with Carlton, and I had no appointment with him which could transpire and connect me with the murder. As for Miss Gaunt, take my word, I shall get her away unobserved, no one will suspect her of the crime.'

"In the end he succeeded in convincing me that he was right, and I yielded. He gave me an address, whispered loud enough to escape the ear of our pertinacious follower, grasped my hand, and pointing to a cab which I hailed, advised me to keep my hands in my pockets, drive as near as was safe to the house he mentioned, and lie low until he came.

"I wonder now, of course, how I could have allowed myself to have been guided and tricked so absolutely by such a

scoundrel, but you must remember that he was the only absolutely cool-headed one of the lot of us. Carlton's death alone would have been sufficient to upset me; I had been worried and harassed when I went to the poor boy's rooms that night; and, in addition, I had, or thought I had, the horrible knowledge that my daughter, in an outburst of almost justifiable anger, maddened by a cruel insult, had stabbed to the heart a man whom we had both been fond of, and who had so nearly been her husband. It was true, as Usher said, that the blood upon my hands would convict me at once should I be discovered near Carlton's rooms, if anyone knew already of the murder; while Vivienne, who was at all events safely out of the flat, might easily escape suspicion if seen, and, at all events, would certainly be less open to danger with Usher than with myself; for, as he said, and as I thought then, what possible quarrel could he have with Usher?

"Yes, the devilish coolness of that man mastered me then, and it amazes me now, Colonel Gordon, as I see it astonishes you, too; and the more I realize what he did that night, the more I understand the fact that I never for one second suspected the real truth.

"As I lay in that cage there, with the knowledge of his treachery broken to me for the first time by your intervention and his abduction of myself from Minden Lane, I have pieced it all out, going through the different scenes of that night again and again; with every look and incident recalled to my mind as clearly as when it occurred, and I can see it all, or nearly all. And yet, strangely enough, with all his cleverness, with all his cold and calculating wickedness, it was Fate, after all, which brought about what might have been, but for you, the complete triumph of his plans. For the tragedy, the final tragedy of that scene in the flat in Regent Street could not have been foreseen by one even cleverer than he, though with lightning astuteness he seized on his opportunity and used it to further his schemes. He could not have foreseen Carlton's murder, though it was he—yes, it was he, the villain!—who committed it; and he could not have foreseen Carlton's mad insult, or the terrible doubt which came to both Vivienne and myself when we realized that the boy was dead.

"But he foresaw much, nay, he planned it. It was he, I cannot doubt it now, who wrote, or caused to be written, the anonymous letters which upset Vivienne; it was he who sent that poor girl, Mary Charters, to us with her story, which I fear was only too true; it was he, I have thought since, remembering poor Carlton's amazed look, who planned that that other girl should burst into the room when he knew that Vivienne and I would be there. And his object? Ah, that is clear enough now! Vivienne will be a rich woman, and, with her affections free, any woman may be won. Usher, I see it now, must have hated poor Carlton and wished him out of the way; and he planned the scene that night. It was at the scene that his plans stopped, however; his quickness and devilish calculation helped him with the rest.

(To be continued.)

"SKY-FLYING TAUGHT HERE."

Institutions Where the Management of Balloons is Taught.

A few months ago a school was opened at Chemnitz, Germany, for theoretical and practical training in the construction and management of airships. The director, Herr Paul Spiegel, is a man of exceptional ability and of broad experience in every phase of balloon construction and management. He has made over 600 ascents.

The tuition for a year's course has been fixed at \$150, payable in monthly instalments. Examination will be held at the close of the course next April, and certificates of proficiency will be given the graduates. The training will be confined almost exclusively to the field of balloon construction and operation.

In France there is no actual school for training aeronauts in which a definite course is pursued. Such practice and instruction in aerostation as is offered is provided by the clubs and by the government in connection with the military service.

In Paris there are four important aeronautical societies or ballooning clubs, and five similar organizations exist elsewhere in France. These clubs were created for the promotion and practice of ballooning as a sport, as well as for scientific study and experiments. In some of these young men are given practical training, taught the theory and construction and use of balloons, their proper care and navigation.

If the students acquire a certain proficiency and pass a prescribed examination, they are permitted, when drawn for military service, to enter the Bataillon d'Aerostiers, established in the old zoological garden located between Versailles and St. Cyr. The post is under the control of a commandant, and the men are taught and practise the handling and care of the Government balloons, of which there are several of a capacity of less than 900 cubic metres.

The second and more important institution of this kind in France is known as the Etablissement Central du Materiel de l'Aerostation Militaire, at Chalais-Meudon, midway between Paris and Versailles. It has been in existence nearly 100 years, and is divided into two general departments—the factory where the balloons and equipments are made, and the department of tests and experiments. There is no definite course of instruction. It was there that Colonel Renard twenty-three years ago built and experimented with La France, the first dirigible balloon.

FARM NOTES.

We should not be satisfied with half crops or depend upon poor stock. It is easy to grade up our stock to a higher standard of production. All these things are the farmer's aids, and no must make them as good as he can.

Don't leave home on every lowly day and fritter away valuable hours at places of public resort, when there is so much work to be done about the premises. Make a memorandum of all the items of work to be done on rainy days. Suppose you should get wet a little—rain will not injure you.

The day is not far distant when the tiller of the soil will be not only the honest or independent farmer, but the intelligent man. He will dignify and be honored by the labor with head and hand, which will give him wealth and his home will be graced with comfort and refinement. But we must be content and bear in mind that all such improved conditions come by steady application and are of steady growth. They are not made to order.

Having spoiled my cattle for the last twenty years, I have learned something in a practical way, of the nutritive value of plants, writes a correspondent. With corn, my greatest success, all things considered, was from broadcast seeding, two bushels to the acre, making a magnificent growth in stalk, leaf and color; four acres cut and placed in shock, wintering thirteen head of cattle to the first of April, without grain and with only an occasional feed of hay. If, as is said, such corn is worth less stuff, my stock must have died; in fact, they came through in fair condition. In giving this test I am not advocating the feeding of corn exclusively, in any form.

BRISTLES.

Keep salt, charcoal and sulphur in every pig pen and pig yard.

Cleanliness and pure clean water are essentials in the care of pigs.

Hard-wood ashes are fine for giving strength to the bones.

A filthy hog pen is an inviter of disease and should not be tolerated.

The best medicine for a sick hog is just to let him alone and refrain from feeding him till he acts as if he were hungry.

It is difficult to carry breeding and stock hogs satisfactorily through the winter without the use of fine clover hay or alfalfa.

Jackson—"Heaven bless him! He showed confidence in me when the clouds were dark and threatening." Wilson—"In what way?" Jackson—"He lent me an umbrella!"

About the Farm

POULTRY KEEPING A BRANCH OF FARM WORK.

When a farmer is found who has hens in the barnyard, simply because it is an old custom he learned from boyhood, you will be sure to find a man who does not take the interest in each individual branch of farming that he should. Many failures which might otherwise be avoided are caused by attempting too much without having experience. A profit should be derived from all things on the farm, and the necessary details in the raising of poultry cannot be attended to without a knowledge of poultry raising in all its individual lines. Any farmer who keeps fowls on the farm, and there are not many who do not, must study the individual characteristic of the birds as well as he does the wants of his other stock, and then there will be more profit from poultry. So many seem to think they must have poultry on the farm to supply the house with eggs and fowls for the table, but they rarely stop to consider that if a little more care were bestowed on those birds, besides having all the eggs they needed, they would have enough to sell, and while they were having chickens for dinner they might as well have the money for some nice, healthy birds from the same flock which they have sold to someone who did not have any. There is great profit in poultry, more for the capital invested than for any other stock, proportionately. If the birds are attended to, but when fowls are allowed to roam and eat only refuse from the barnyard, drink muddy, filthy water, if they lay enough eggs to supply the farmer's table he may consider himself lucky. The farmer should learn the particular breeds and their uses, and also make a specialty of those that are best suited to his climate. The best breeds for laying will, in all probability, produce a failure unless they are surrounded by conditions suitable for success. The common barnyard stock is not as good as any other. So many farmers will not remove that stumbling block, and as long as they cling to former conditions and old customs in the poultry business they will most surely fail to improve along other lines. Good houses, warm quarters, cleanliness, pure water, careful selection of breeding stock, culling out stock, systematic feeding, and proper attention, all are conducive to the success of raising poultry on the farm. Fowls should be ready for sale when the best season arrives, so as to get the advantage of high prices, and they will not be in proper condition, nor can they be gotten into that condition in a few days, unless daily care is bestowed. The farmer must work from day to day with the object in view, and then and only then will he be successful with poultry.

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