

## THE BLACK ROBE.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE, "THE MOON SHINE," "AFTER DARE," "NO NAME," "MAN AND WIFE," "THE LAW AND THE LAND," "THE NEW MAG-DALLEN," ETC., ETC.

AFTER THE STORY.

WINTERFIELD'S HEART CONSOLATED.

16th September.—No favorable answer so far as the port of London is concerned. Very little commerce with Mexico, and had harbor in that country when you do trade. Such is the report.

17th September.—A Mexican brig has been discovered at Liverpool, under orders for Vera Cruz. But the vessel is in debt, and the date of departure depends on expected remittances. In this state of things I may wait, with my conscience at ease, to sail in comfort on board my own schooner.

18th to 20th September.—I have settled my affairs; I have taken leave of my friends (good Mr. Marlowe included); I have written cheerfully to Stella, and I sail from Portsmouth to-morrow, well provided with the jars of whisky and the kegs of gunpowder which will effect the release of the captives.

It is strange, considering the serious matters I have to think of, but it is also true that I feel out of spirits at the prospect of leaving England without my traveling companion, the dog. I am afraid to take the dear old fellow with me, on such a perilous expedition as mine may be. Stella takes care of him, and, if I don't live to return, she will never part with him for his master's sake. It implies a childish sort of mind, I suppose, but it is a comfort for me to remember that I have never said a hard word to the dog, and never lifted my hand on him in anger.

All this about a dog! And not a word about Stella? Not a word. Those thoughts are not to be written.

I have reached the last page of my diary. I shall lock it and leave it in charge of my bankers on my way to the Portsmouth train. Shall I ever write a new diary? Superstitious people might associate this coming to the end of the book with coming to an end of another kind. I have no imagination, and I take my leap in the dark hopefully, with Byron's glorious lines in my mind:

Here's a sigh to those who love me  
And a smile to those who hate;  
And, whatever shall be my fate,  
Here's a heart for any state."

An inclosure is inserted in this place between the leaves of the diary. It consists of two telegrams, dispatched respectively on the first and second of May, 1864, and expressed as follows:

1. "From Bernard Winterfield, Portsmouth, England. To Mrs. Romayne, care of Mr. Raymond, St. Germain, near Paris.—Penrose is safe on board my yacht. His unfortunate companion has fled of exhaustion, and he is himself in a feeble state of health. I at once take him to London for medical aid. We are eager for news of you. Telegraph to Derwent's hotel."

2. "From Mrs. Eyrecook, St. Germain. To Bernard Winterfield, Derwent's hotel, London.—Your telegram received with joy, and sent on to Stella in Paris. All well. But strange events have happened. If you cannot come here at once go to Lord Loring. He will tell you everything."

THE DIARY RESUMED.

London, 2d May, 1864.—Mrs. Eyrecook's telegram reached me just after Dr. Wybrow had paid his first professional visit to Penrose at the hotel. I had scarcely time to feel relieved by the opinion of the case which he expressed, before my mind was upset by Mrs. Eyrecook's letter. Penrose was not the cheerful old land-lady I hurried away to Lord Loring.

It was still early in the day; his lordship was at home. He maddened me with impatience by apologizing at full length for "the execrable manner in which he had misinterpreted me on account of the deplorable occasion of the marriage ceremony at Brussels." I stopped his flow of words (very earnestly spoken, it is only right to add), and entreated him to tell me, in the first place, what Stella was doing in Paris.

"Stella is with her husband," Lord Loring replied.

My head turned giddy, my heart beat furiously. Lord Loring looked at me from the window, and in the next moment returned with a glass of wine. I really don't know whether I drank the wine or not. I stammered out another inquiry in one word.

"Reconciled?" I said.

"Yes, Mr. Winterfield, reconciled before he dies."

We were both silent for a while.

What was he thinking of? I don't know. What was I thinking of? I don't know either.

Lord Loring resumed by expressing some anxiety on the subject of my health. I made the best excuse for myself that I could, and told him of my object in leaving England and heartily congratulated me. "This will be welcome news, indeed," he said, "to Father Benwell."

"He left Paris last night," Lord Loring answered; "and he is now in London on an important business (as I understand) connected with Romayne's affairs."

"I instantly thought of the boy."

"Is Romayne in possession of his faculties?" I asked.

"While justice is in his power has he done justice to his son?"

Lord Loring looked a little confused.

"I have not heard," he said, "of any news far from satisfied. 'You are one of Romayne's oldest friends,' I remember."

sisted. "Have you not seen him yourself?"

"I have seen him more than once. But he has never referred to his affairs." Having said this he hastily changed the subject. "Is there any other information I can give you?" he suggested.

I had still to learn under what circumstances Romayne had left Italy for France, and how the event of his illness in Paris had been communicated to his wife. Lord Loring had only to draw on his own recollections to enlighten me.

"Lady Loring and I passed the last winter in Rome," he said. "And there we saw Romayne. You look surprised. Perhaps you are aware that he had defied him by advice which we thought it our duty to offer to Stella before her marriage?"

"I was certainly thinking of what Stella had said of the Lorings on the memorable day when she visited me at the hotel."

"Romayne would probably have refused to receive us," Lord Loring resumed, "but for the gratifying circumstance of my having been admitted to an interview with the Pope. The Holy Father spoke of him with the most condescending kindness; and hearing that he had not yet seen him, gave instructions commanding Romayne to present himself. Under these circumstances it was impossible for him to refuse to receive Lady Loring and myself on a later occasion. I cannot tell you how distressed we were at the sad change for the worse in his personal appearance. The Italian physician, whom he occasionally consulted, told me that there was a weakness in the action of his brain, produced in the first instance by excessive study and the excitement of preaching, and aggravated by the further drain on his strength due to incessant mourning. He would eat and drink just enough to keep him alive, and no more; and he persistently refused to try the good influence of rest and change of scene. My wife, at a later interview with him, when they were alone, induced him to throw aside the reserve which he had maintained with me, and discovered another cause for the deterioration in his health. I do not refer to the return of a nervous misery from which he has suffered at intervals for years past. I speak of the effect produced on his mind by the announcement—made no doubt with the best intentions by Dr. Wybrow—of the birth of his child. This disclosure, as you are ignorant of his wife's situation when he left her, appears to have affected him far more seriously than the English doctor supposed. Lady Loring was so shocked at what he said to her on the subject that she has only repeated it with a certain reserve. 'If I could believe I did wrong,' he said, 'in dedicating myself to the service of the Church, after the overthrow of my domestic happiness, I should also believe that the birth of this child was the retributive punishment of my sin and the warning of my approaching death. I have not taken this view. And yet I have it not in me, after the solemn vows by which I am bound, to place any more convincing interpretation on an event which, as a priest, I am bound to maintain as even to think of.'"

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treated him to let me go alone. His devotion to Romayne was not to be reasoned with. While we were still vainly trying to convince each other, Dr. Wybrow came in.

To my amazement he sided with Penrose. "Oh, get up by all means," he said; "we will help you to dress." We took him out of bed and put on his dressing-gown. He thanked us, and saying he would complete his toilet by himself sat down in an easy-chair in another moment he was asleep again—so soundly asleep that we put him back in his bed without waking him. Doctor Wybrow had foreseen this result; he looked at the poor fellow's pale, peaceful face with a kindly smile.

"There is the treatment," he said, "that will set our patient on his legs again. Sleeping, eating and drinking; let that be his life for some weeks to come, and he will be as good a man as ever. If your homeward journey had been by land Penrose would have died on the way. I will take care of him while you are in Paris."

At the station I met Lord Loring. He understood that I too, had received bad news, and gave me a place in the coupe carriage which had been reserved for him. We had scarcely taken our seats when we saw Father Benwell among the travelers on the platform, accompanied by a gray-haired gentleman who was a stranger to both of us.

"Paris, 3d May.—On our arrival at the hotel it was informed that no message had yet been received from the embassy. We found Lady Loring alone at the breakfast-table, when we had rested after our night journey.

"Romayne still lives," she said. "But his voice has sunk to a whisper, and he is unable to breathe if he tries to rest in bed. Stella has gone to the embassy. She hopes to see him to-day for the second time."

"Only for the second time?" I exclaimed.

"I don't forget, Mr. Winterfield, that Romayne is the priest. He was only concerned on the ordinary condition of an absolute separation from his wife. On her side—never let her know that I told you this—Stella signed a formal document sent from Rome, asserting that she consented of her own free will to the separation. She was relieved from intervals for years past. I speak of the effect produced on his mind by the announcement—made no doubt with the best intentions by Dr. Wybrow—of the birth of his child. This disclosure, as you are ignorant of his wife's situation when he left her, appears to have affected him far more seriously than the English doctor supposed. Lady Loring was so shocked at what he said to her on the subject that she has only repeated it with a certain reserve. 'If I could believe I did wrong,' he said, 'in dedicating myself to the service of the Church, after the overthrow of my domestic happiness, I should also believe that the birth of this child was the retributive punishment of my sin and the warning of my approaching death. I have not taken this view. And yet I have it not in me, after the solemn vows by which I am bound, to place any more convincing interpretation on an event which, as a priest, I am bound to maintain as even to think of.'"

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