

A CHRISTMAS COLUMN.

CHRISTMAS COMES AGAIN.

BY ELIZABETH STODDARD.

Let me be merry now, 'tis time, The season is at hand; For Christmas rhyme and Christmas chime; Close up, and form the band.

The winter fires still burn as bright, The lamp-light is as clear, And, since the deal are out of sight, What hinders Christmas cheer?

Why think or speak of that abyss In which lies all our Past? High festival, needs not miss, While song and jest shall last.

We'll drink and drink on Christmas Eve, Our ghosts can feel no wrong; They revolved ere they took their leave—Harken, my Soldier's Song—

"The morning air doth coldly pass, Comrades, to the saddle spring; The night more bitter cold will bring Ere dying—ere dying.

Sweetheart, comrade, parting glass, Glasses and sabre, clash, clash, clash, Ere dying—ere dying.

Stirrup-cup and stirrup-kiss— Do you hope the foe we'll miss, Sweetheart, for this loving kiss, Ere dying—ere dying.

The feast and revels of the year Do ghosts remember long? Even in memory come they here? Listen, my Sailor's Song—

"O my hearties, ye heave ho! Anchor's up in jolly Bay— Heave ho! Heave ho! Heave ho!

Types and swipes, hob and nob— Heave ho! Heave ho! Heave ho! Mermaid Bess and Dolphin Meg, Paddle over jolly Bay—

Heave ho! Heave ho! Heave ho! Tars haul in for Christmas Day, For round the vessel do we go; Never church, never bell, For to tell Of Christmas Day.

Ye heave ho, my hearties O! Haul in, mates, here we lay— Heave ho! Heave ho! Heave ho!

His sword is rustling in its sheath, His flag furled on the wall; We'll twine them with a holly-wreath, With green leaves cover all.

So clink and drink when falls the eve; But, comrades, hide from me Their graves—I would not see them here Beside me, like the sea.

Let not my brothers come again, As men dead in their prime; Then hold my hands, forget my pain, And strike the Christmas chime.

—Applauds the Journal.

HUNTING HIM DOWN.

A REINSTATEMENT STORY FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

BY TOM HOOD.

From the Christmas number of "Once a Week."

PART I.—MURDER.

Extract from the "Mudlock-um-Clay Express."

"At a late hour last evening the usually quiet village of Frogleigh-in-the-March was thrown into a painful state of excitement and alarm by the report that a body had been discovered in the vicarage fields. It bears marks of violence which cannot have been self-inflicted, and suspicion points to its having come to its end by foul play.

"The body was found by Mr. Potterton, of Dovecot Farm, who was returning from Sunnyside market. He immediately communicated with the police, who at once proceeded to the spot, and, under the guidance of Inspector Spry, the active and intelligent head of the Mudlock constabulary, are already on the track of the supposed murderer, and have strong expectations of his speedy apprehension.

"Further Particulars.

"At the moment of going to press we are enabled to give some further particulars connected with the mysterious discovery of a dead body in the fields near Frogleigh-in-the-March.

"Our reporter—who, we may state in the public interest, in order that the inhabitants of Mudlock and its vicinity may not be imposed upon by the impudent fabrications of insubstantial journals, was the only member of the local press who placed himself in communication with the authorities—has been furnished with the following additional information on this painful and terrible subject:—

"It appears that the body is that of a young man named John Redhope, son of a farmer residing at or near Mashborough. He has for some time past been paying his attentions to the daughter of Mr. Tronson, of the Red Lion Inn, at Frogleigh, and it was understood that they were engaged, and would be married at the beginning of next year. Within the last few weeks, however, there has been an estrangement between them, in consequence, it is alleged, of the deceased's jealousy with regard to Miss Tronson's receiving the attentions of another suitor, and which had been the subject of high words between them on more than one occasion.

"The unfortunate man's rival is said to be one William Travers, a person of notoriously bad character, and who has been in trouble on more than one occasion in connection with the frequent poaching affrays on Lord Fitz-Fessantrie's estates. It is known to the police that the deceased and Travers had words together no later than last market-day, and the latter was heard to threaten to 'knock the other's head off,' and which threat he is perfectly capable of performing. On going to Travers's lodgings, however, he was found to be absent, and it is believed that, hearing of the discovery of the body, he has fled to avoid arrest. The police, under our able and intelligent chief-constable, Mr. Spry, are on his track, and express themselves certain of his speedy apprehension.

"Latest Intelligence.

"We regret to say that no trace has been yet discovered of the suspected murderer, who, it is feared, has made good his escape. A reward will probably be offered for his apprehension, and the London police will be communicated with without delay.

"The shock has, we are sorry to learn, been very severe to Miss Tronson, who is completely prostrated, and is being attended by Dr. Cullum, who, however, states that no immediate danger is to be apprehended.

"Postscript.

"Since the above was in type, an individual has presented himself at the police station in this town, and has made certain revelations of great importance touching the suspected criminal. He states that he was in communication with Travers this evening at the Bull and Butcher Inn, in High street, and that Travers declared his intention of going to London by the 7:30 train. Enquiries at the railway station, however, tend to prove that Travers did not leave by that train, but as he mentioned his destination, hopes are entertained of his ultimate apprehension.

The police, under Inspector Spry, the intelligent and able head of the borough constabulary, are on the track, and express themselves certain of his speedy apprehension.

"To further the ends of justice, we may here append a description of the appearance of Travers. He is of the middle height, or thereabouts, with sandy hair and whiskers, the latter meeting under his chin, in what is frequently facetiously styled 'a Newgate frill.' His eyes are brown, and there is a little in one of them. His nose, which is a cast on one side, has a tendency to the aquiline. When last seen he wore a velvet coat and cord trousers, with a low-crowned felt hat."

PART II.—MYSTERY.

The Narrative of Thomas Mole, Commercial Traveller.

"I have the honor to represent the celebrated and uniformly solvent firm of Tetherbridge, Coulson, and Polge, of St. Mary Axe, in hardware. I am known at the chief hotels on my circuit, and among my friends in town as Tommy Mole, my precise and proper Christian name being Thomas. My residence is Hackney, my principles are Conservative, and my family three in number.

"Having placed the public acquainted with my name, position (commercial and domestic), and place of abode, I will at once proceed to explain how it is I come to pen this narrative.

"I have from childhood upwards been of a studious and meditative turn. I have read—I may almost go so far as to say devoured—the thrilling creations of Mr. Kilkee Collins, the distinguished novelist, and of his yet more distinguished master and teacher, Mr. Edgar Allan, poet and romantic. I never travel without carrying their works in my portmanteau when on the rail, and in the box-seat of the gig when on the road.

"My mind, I may state without vanity, is of the same order as those of the great writers above named. I have the same delight in threading the mazes of intricate and difficult mysteries; and I may state in all modesty that for the last ten years no murder of any importance has occurred with regard to which I have not placed myself in communication with the authorities by forwarding a minute report, at once analytic and synthetic, of the circumstances of the case, with my deductions as to the real culprit. I may add, that in the majority of instances I have been more or less right, more particularly in those in which the real culprit has hitherto escaped detection, chiefly in consequence of the failure of the police to follow up my suggestions, which would have led to the arrest of parties who I felt sure were guilty.

"While staying at Puddleock I received instructions from the firm which I have the honor to represent—those instructions necessitating my staying in that part of the country for at least a fortnight. My ordinary business in Puddleock and the neighborhood was speedily completed, and I was therefore left with a considerable amount of unoccupied time on my hands.

"It so chanced that while I was meditating how to turn this brief holiday to the best account, I took up the Mudlock-um-Clay Express, and read the particulars of a mysterious murder which had been committed in the neighborhood of that town.

"Here, I felt, was presented to me an opportunity for putting into practice myself those theories as to the detection of crime, of the soundness of which I had failed to impress that peculiarly obstinate body, the London police.

"I determined to give my mind—and not only my mind, but my Christmas holiday and my personal energies—to the discovery of this remarkable crime. I devoted the morning to a rapid glance at the writings of my two great literary guides, philosophers, and friends, and having thus refreshed myself at the springs of their wisdom and acumen, I turned my attention to the case under consideration.

"At a first glance I could see many salient points on which evidence would hang. First, that there was a murder; second, that there was strong reason for supposing some one to be the murderer; third, that there was strong reason for supposing that that murderer was Travers. So far all was clear enough. Then came this important question:—Travers had disappeared—where had he gone? It did not take me a moment to decide. The recent perusal of 'The Purloined Letter,' and of a story curiously resembling it, from the pen of Mr. Wollins, enabled me to argue the matter out, thus—Travers had declared he was going to London in order to fly from justice. Therefore Travers was still concealed in the neighborhood of his crime, because he would immediately argue that that was the last place where the police would look for him.

"I at once made up my mind what to do. I placed myself in communication with the obliging and accommodating manager of the Theatre Royal at Puddleock, and hired from him, for a few days, a room, and a billiard table, which I was to give for a charity at a neighboring town, a selection of such theatrical costumes as I thought might prove useful to me as disguises. Armed with these, I proceeded to the railway station to book myself for Mudlock-um-Clay.

"My reading of the works of the two writers I have named prepared me for one thing—the extreme probability of accident revealing important clues to the solution of the mystery. I was not, therefore, surprised when, on reaching the Railway Station, I happened to discover something that induced me at once to alter my plan of action.

"It was a cold day, and as the down platform was open and unprotected, I waited on the up platform, which afforded the shelter of the booking-office and waiting-room, until my train should be signalled.

"While seated in the later apartment I heard voices outside the window. Something was said which attracted my attention. I cautiously opened the window, found two persons outside talking in a low voice. I listened, but I could only catch a few words here and there, which I at once took down in my note-book.

Extracts from Note-book.

"Of course not! It would at once have brought the police upon us! No, he did not strike me, though he threatened to do so; but I was too quick for him. 'Serious injury,' 'Telegraphed to London.' 'A cut across the head, exposing the brain, and laying the cheek open.' 'Look about for some employment.' 'I had little difficulty in connecting these scraps of conversation with the Mudlock murder. Here was the criminal. All I had to do was to hunt him down.

"At this moment, unfortunately, I made an unguarded movement which attracted the attention of those outside. They turned round quickly, and looked hard at me, but with great presence of mind, I began to whistle, and assumed an air of indifference. To put them still more off their guard, I affected to be nodding and kissing my hand to some one on the opposite platform, and finding them still gazing intently at me, I drew out a coin and pretended to be amusing myself with pitch and tins. The ruse was successful. The two smiled and walked away.

"Of course I abandoned my notion of going to Mudlock. I would follow the individual whose words I had taken down. I did not know his destination, but that was immaterial. I would get into the same carriage and watch him, and getting out when he did could excuse my not having a ticket by showing that for Mudlock, and explaining that I had taken the wrong train. Under pretence of waiting for a down train I could contrive to go to an inn, where I could assume one of my disguises and follow the murderer unsuspected.

"Having come to this determination, I went out on the platform to compare him with the minute description in the Mudlock Express.

Comparison Extracted from Note-book.

"Mudlock Express. Observations. 'Of middle height or thereabouts. 'Yes, cerebraous certainly. 'Sandy hair and whiskers, the latter meeting under the chin. 'Dark hair and no whiskers. 'Eyes brown, and a decidedly slight convergence in one of them. 'Eyes brown, and a decidedly slight convergence in one of them. 'Nose on one side, and with a tendency to the aquiline. 'Nose hooked, and with the hook to the left."

"Here will be seen, except on one point, a very strong coincidence in the various peculiarities described. That point is the hair. But the difference in that respect is the one thing which made me respect my man. I had not read my Wollins and Allen in vain, and if the man had had sandy hair and whiskers with a Newgate frill, I should have doubted the accuracy of my conclusion, for I felt certain that he had altered that portion of his personal appearance. He had dyed his hair and shaved his whiskers. But he could not alter his height, the color of his eyes, or their squint, the shape of his nose, or its crookedness.

"When the train arrived, I followed him into his carriage and watched him narrowly while affecting to read the paper. He got out at Biberough, and I followed him. Of course, I had an altercation with the porters, and, to keep up appearances, threatened to report the guard for allowing me to get into a wrong train. My travelling companion seemed much amused, and waited to hear the dispute, which ended by my paying the fare, and going across to the Railway Hotel to get something to eat before taking a return train. I was glad to see that after chatting with the porters he came to the same place.

"I sent for the landlord of the hotel, and took him into my confidence. In order to impress him the more I described myself as a detective, without feeling it necessary to add the qualification 'amateur.' He undertook to forward my views, and to instruct the servants not to take any notice of the disguises I might think it to assume. I then sent him to learn what my intended prisoner was doing. After some delay, he came back and said he was lurching in the coffee-room.

"I determined to dress myself as a Dissenting Minister, having a costume of that description in my portmanteau, because the green spectacles belonging to it would allow me to watch my man unobserved.

"Soon after I came down stairs he took his hat and went out. I followed him. He strolled about the town with a well-assumed appearance of innocence and spontaneity, calling merely at one shop where he stayed a few minutes only. Unfortunately it was impossible to follow him in such a purposeless stroll without risk of raising his suspicions, a result which I feared was the case as I saw him watching me as we returned towards the hotel. I therefore waited behind for a time, and then, slipping in unobserved, went upstairs and assumed a fresh disguise.

"This time I assumed the appearance of a naval officer. I found him in the smoking-room, and entered into conversation with him. I contrived very cautiously to turn the conversation so as to be able to ask him his destination. He said he was going to start that night for Norchester. After smoking a cigar or two with him, I took my leave, and returning once more to my room, assumed another disguise.

"This time I dressed myself as a lady; it necessitated my shaving off my whiskers, but what was that compared with the object I had in view? As I came downstairs I observed his luggage in the hall. It was labelled 'Dr. Masters, Plaskerton, near Norchester.' I went across to the station and learnt that Norchester was two stations further on, and that Plaskerton was about four miles from Norchester.

"I had not been at the station long, before he came across. Something had evidently made him suspicious; nothing more perhaps than a guilty conscience, but he was certainly about to start some hours earlier than he had stated to me in the coffee-room.

"I had no time to lose, for the train was due in two minutes. I must leave my portmanteau at the hotel, and pay the bill when I returned. I was soon seated in the same compartment as my man, being whirled along to Norchester. I had learned from one of the porters that the station (like many others), though called Norchester, was situated some mile or more from the town, and as Plaskerton lay in the opposite direction it was customary for passengers who wished to go to the latter place to order a conveyance to meet them.

"This was all that I could wish. As an unprotected female I could not reach Norchester throw myself on his protection, and obtain a place in the vehicle he had doubtless ordered to meet him. I now saw why he had waited at Biberough. It was in order that he might send on to have a fly ready at Norchester, and so throw his pursuers off the scent at Biberough, should they have traced him to Puddleock. He was journeying in this disjointed way, in short, in order that they might be at fault at every turn. It was some triumph to me to think how I was circumventing all his clever and deeply-laid schemes.

"I determined to exercise all my ingenuity, in entrapping him into damaging admissions in the train and on the road, and to hand him over to the police at Plaskerton. With this view I got into the same carriage with him, and got into conversation with him by artfully pretending that I thought I knew him; asking him if I had not met him at Frogleigh-in-the-March. With a marvellous assumption of nerve, he answered without a tremble that it was possible. I then told him I was going to Plaskerton, at which he was evidently much surprised. Telling him I was a stranger to the place, I asked him if there was a conveyance from Norchester, upon which he explained that it was necessary to order one beforehand, but that if I had not done so he should be happy to give me a lift so far, as he was also bound for Norchester.

"On arriving at that station he left me and his luggage to go to a neighboring inn, where he had ordered his trap to wait. He evidently did not wish to have it waiting at the station lest it should attract attention. He was gone some time, which I employed in drawing up this statement."

Further Extracts from Note-book.

"The vehicle was a gig. We have driven to Plaskerton, where he has stopped at an inn. He is now in the stable, and I have the horse. I have despatched a note to the police station by a waiter in his absence. Since his arrival he has been nervous and excited. I fear his suspicions are roused. When he returns from looking after the horse, I shall effect his capture, whether the police arrive or not."

The Statement of Charles Masters, M. D.

"I am one of the medical officers of the Lunatic Asylum at Plaskerton. I had long given my attention to the phenomena of mental disease; indeed, I had so over-exhausted my strength in pursuing the study of mania, especially in the very atmosphere of the disorder, that it became necessary for me to go away for twelve months for change of air.

"As I was on my way back to my duties, I met at the Puddleock Station an old fellow-student at St. Panurge's Hospital. We had not met for years, and fell into a long professional chat. I remember relating to him some of my experiences at Plaskerton, among others, a curious case which happened not long after I became medical officer there. A patient had escaped. We were most anxious to recapture him without publicity. Should the police have heard of his escape, the case would have got into the papers and considerable harm would have been done to the reputation of the Asylum, and the character of its officers. We went in every direction to look for him, and at last we found him among some strolling players, whom he had joined, and who did not discover that he was mad. We took him. He threatened to strike me, but I was too quick for him, and we captured him. Then he got it into his head that we had done him a serious injury in the struggle, and nothing would satisfy him but that we must telegraph to London for the first medical assistance. To humor him we pretended to do so, describing him as having received a cut across the head, exposing the brain and laying the cheek open. Of course the clerk merely pretended to send off the message, and we eventually got our patient safely into the asylum again. In his complete recovery, and was discharged, the last I heard of him being that he had gone to London to look for some employment.

"As I was telling this anecdote a noise behind us attracted our attention. We saw an odd-looking person close behind us at the waiting-room window. His antics were so extraordinary that I could not help saying that I thought he was mad. I was going to stop at Biberough, en route for Plaskerton, to do some business. The eccentric stranger got into the same carriage with me. He behaved in so strange a manner that I felt assured of his insanity even before we got to Biberough, where he got out, and declared that he believed he was going in the opposite direction to Mudlock. I was now so strongly convinced of his madness that I determined to keep an eye upon him, and, if necessary, secure him, and take him to the asylum until his friends could be communicated with.

"To my intense amusement I found he had a mania for assuming various disguises. He was evidently a crazy actor, and I learnt from the landlord, to whom I was well-known, that he had told him some cook-and-bull story about being a detective. I kept my eye on him, until I thought he began to be alarmed, and dressed himself up as a woman; and leaving his luggage at the inn, he went off without paying his bill, and tried to get away by train. I however followed him, and by humoring him, and assenting to all he said, I got his confidence. To my surprise I found he was going to Plaskerton. I thought it not impossible that he was some patient who had been received during my year of absence, and discharged not sufficiently cured, and that with the folly, which so often takes the place of the proverbial cunning, of madness, he was actually running into the jaws of the law. I had determined to follow him wherever he went, and to obtain aid to secure him at the earliest opportunity, but on learning his, or rather her, destination (for, as I have said, he was dressed as a woman), I offered him a lift in a gig which I easily procured from one of the farmhouses, near Norchester Station. When we got to Plaskerton, under pretence of seeing to the horse I slipped out and sent to the asylum for a couple of keepers."

PART III.—MISAPPREHENSION.

The Evidence of William Jenkins, Constable.

"I am chief constable of Plaskerton. From information I received in the shape of a note, signed 'T. Mole,' I went to the Golden Lion, in Plaskerton. That note stated that the writer was in company with Travers, who was suspected to be the Frogleigh murderer, and for whom the police were looking. I was aware at the time that the Frogleigh murder, as it was called, had been explained, but I went to see what the writer meant.

"From information I received on reaching the Golden Lion—that is to say, from the sound of heavy thumps on the floor, and loud voices, I proceeded to the coffee-room, where I found two parties struggling violently, one of them being Dr. Masters, of the Asylum. As I came in at one door two keepers came in at the other. 'Seize him!' cries Mole; 'he's the man as done it!' 'Secure him!' cries the doctor; 'he's an escaped lunatic!' The keepers were about to secure Mr. Mole, but considering that an interference with the prerogatives of the police and the liberty of the subject, I interfered. Explanations ensued, and by my mediation matters were brought to an amicable and satisfactory arrangement, including a bowl of punch and likewise consideration for lost time to the keepers. I refused such in my capacity of policeman, but as a private individual acting in a solid recognition of my judicious bringing of matters to a pleasant issue."

The Testimony of Benjamin Bung, Innkeeper.

"I keep the Railway Hotel, Biberough. I remember being called to Mr. Mole, who wished to see me. He informed me that he was a detective, and that he was on the track of a murderer who was in the coffee-room. He called on me to assist him, and I agreed. With a pardonable curiosity, never having seen a murderer, I looked into the coffee-room, where I found Dr. Masters, who was well known to me. He told me the gent up stairs was a lunatic, and that we were to humor him till the doctor had done his business in Biberough, when he would have him taken and carry him off to Plaskerton.

"N. B.—Mr. Mole absconded subsequently, leaving behind him a trunk, containing a curious assortment of second-hand clothing and the following bill— unpaid:—

Bill of Railway Hotel.

Apartment..... £ 5 0
Candles..... 0 7 6
Chop, etc..... 0 2 0
Sherry..... 0 2 0
Cigars..... 0 2 0
Breakfast..... 0 2 0
Attendance..... 0 1 0
Total..... £ 10 10 0

"Subsequently settled, though exorbitant.—T. M.

PART IV.—MISREPORT.

Extract from the "Mudlock-um-Clay Gazette."

"Our idiotic contemporary, the Express, during one of those temporary obfuscations which occur to it so often on the evening of market-day—the evening unfortunately on which it goes to press—was guilty of discovering a mare's nest of remarkable proportions. Whether it was the victim of a hoax or merely of its own innate stupidity we cannot say, but at any rate it gave a full, true, particular, and circumstantial report of a murder—which didn't take place! The Express says:—

"Our reporter—who we may state in the public interest, in order that the inhabitants of Mudlock and its vicinity may not be imposed upon by the impudent fabrications of insubstantial journals—was the only member of the local press present, etc.

"The charges of 'impudent fabrications' and the terms 'insubstantial journals' fall back rather hard on our friend's own head. As for its reporter, he was evidently 'all there,' and no mistake."

The Confession of the "Express" Reporter.

"I had certainly been at the George all the afternoon. Farmer Potterton called in there for a glass on his way home. I distinctly understood him to say that he had seen young Redhope in the fields near the vicarage at Frogleigh, dead! He certainly said young Redhope was courting Miss Tronson. I must admit the farmer was the worse for liquor. I am no judge of my own state, but I should say I was decidedly sober. I merely added a few details to his, which I felt were necessary to swell the paragraph to its proper importance. I communicated the information to Inspector Spry, whom I met on my way to the Express office."

The Admission of Giles Potterton, Yeoman.

"I was not more drunken than usual of a market-night when I met Mr. Chivery, the Express agent at the George. He asked me what news there was. I told 'un I didn't know of none, except I'd passed young Redhope, lying dead-drunk in the ditch near passon's house, to Frogleigh. I said 'You know—the chap as were courtin' Polly Tronson!' He didn't say much, but then he couldn't, you see, for he were well on. But he wagged his head and looked solemn."

The Deposition of Inspector Spry.

"I met Mr. Chivery, who informed me that Mr. Potterton had told him he had seen the body of young Redhope. He advised me to go at once to Frogleigh. He asked me if I knew of any one who had a grudge against young Redhope, and I mentioned that I had been called in to separate him and Travers at the Red Lion one night when they were fighting. Mr. Chivery was not sober, and I don't suppose the farmer was, being market night. However, I felt it my duty to investigate, and went over to Frogleigh at once. I met young Redhope just as I was getting to the village. He had not been murdered."

The Explanation of the Murdered Man.

"Nobody hasn't murdered me, as I'm aware of. On the night in question I was lying under the hedge near the vicarage. It was Polly's evening out, and we were going for a walk. I saw Farmer Potterton ride by, but didn't speak to him, because I knew he was drunk. I did have a fight with Travers once, but it was all in friendship. He's left these parts in consequence of Lord Fitz-Fessantrie's keepers being that hard upon him."

Latest from Mr. Mole.

"I have returned to Puddleock, and shall henceforth devote myself entirely to the hardware."

"N. B.—To be disposed of, a bargain, the complete works of Kilkee Wollins and Edgar Allan. Apply to T. M., care of Messrs. Tetheridge, Coulson, and Polge, St. Mary Axe. No reasonable offer refused."

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