A Prison of Swords

By MAX PEMBERTON

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PART I.

Jacques de Serrefort was sleeping when the jailer opened the door of his cell; but he awoke while the keys still rattled in the lock, and sat up in his bed half blinded by the sunlight which streamed through the high window of his prison. It was a morning of early June, fresh with sweet breezes of the summer and the odor of roses in the air; but the captive, who had lived a day of the long ago in his dreams, regarded neither the hour nor the freshness of it. Every morning for fifteen years he had arisen from such dreams of the old time to forget them quickly in the terrible realities of his doom. The gentle smile upon his face, born of the visions of the night, passed at once in the first moments of the day. Sleep had carried him to the fair fields of Brittany, to the pastures of his homestead, to the hearth wherein his wife, and the daughter he had loved more than life, had been wont to greet him when the day's work was done. But the dawn destroyed illusions so welcome. He became the slave again. Nothing to him that it was the height of summer when all Paris was alive with merry music and feasting and the notes of bells calling lovers to the altars. Day or night, the fall of the leaf or the flowering of the blossom—the hour was long since passed when he remembered these.

The jailer entered the cell as he had entered it every morning during these terrible years. He and Serrefort had grown old together; old in association, almost in captivity. True, Baptiste, as they called the fellow, had a little house out in the cathedral close yonder, and went there at odd hours to gossip with his neighbors; but nine-tenths of his years were spent in the Conciergerie, and he knew every stone in it, nay, almost every crack in its tremendous walls. In his way he had been a good friend to Jacques de Serrefort—a friend in the little things of kindness whose worth to the prisoner is inestimable. Every morning, as soon as the bells of Notre Dame struck 6 o'clock, he would enter the wretched man's cell to cry: "Courage, comrade, here is the day. Who knows what it will bring." Jacques would declare sometimes that he had said the same things every day for fifteen years. But it came out of the goodness of his heart and was not to be resented. Indeed, the prisoner welcomed the sound of the homely voice; and when on this particular morning of June, in the year of 1761, the customary greeting was not given, Serrefort turned quickly to his jailer with a question upon his lips.

"How now, Baptiste," cried he, "you are silent this morning?"

Baptiste shook his head and went toward the window that Serrefort might not see his face.

"Courage, comrade," said he, "it will not be for long. Your daughter will return to Paris presently and then all will be well."

Serrefort, who had begun to dress, sat down upon his bed again. He divined that some great misfortune was about to overtake him, though of its nature he could foresee nothing.

"Come, Baptiste," said he, "you speak in riddles. What has my daughter to do with the Conciergerie? Have I not enough to bear that you should talk of her?"

"Dame," replied the old jailer, "I must speak of her since she alone has kept you from the Bombec Tower these two years and more. Think you, comrade, that the bailiff gives windows and red wine to all those who ask them? St. Dennis! you have the best quarters in the prison and the best food. And why—why? because your daughter has paid for such things. You don't know that?"

"I swear to heaven that I know nothing," exclaimed Serrefort. "You say that I have these things through my daughter and that she pays for them?"

"How else should you have them? Sapristi, a child would not be so simple. She has paid for them since your old protector, the Sieur Buchot, died. And she will pay for them again—when she comes back to Paris. Oh, be sure of it. She is a good child, and rare is the week when she does not tell me what she means to do for you. Do not lose heart, old friend. Who knows, she may be ill, or gone away upon an affair of importance. If the bailiff were reasonable he would think of these things. But he will not hear me, and the order now is that I am to carry you to the Bombec Tower this morning, and to show you no more favors until you can pay for them again."

Serrefort shuddered. He had not lived in the great prison for fifteen years without hearing many a grim story of the terrible oubliettes below the higher level of the River Seine, wherein, shut out from God's day and surrounded by horrors unnameable, the more wretched and poorer victims of Bailiff Hubert's greed went all too slowly to their doom. Captivity is apt to obliterate from a man's heart those finer affections which are fed upon freedom. Serrefort was tempted for a moment to bitter thoughts of the daughter who had left him to a fate so horrible. But anon he remembered Baptiste's words, that she must be ill or away upon an affair of importance. And then he complained no more but fell to wondering what her life had been since he had left her, a child of fifteen, in the old home in Brittany.

He could not forget altogether that he owed this enduring punishment to her and to her alone. The hardness born of prison life closed about his heart when he told himself that if he had not struck the man who had been the shadow upon her life he would not now be a prisoner in the Conciergerie. Such thoughts, however, passed upon the instant and his great love of her came flowing into his heart like a freshet; and he longed, with the accumulated longing of years, to take her to his heart again.

"Lord, let me see her once more," he prayed, and so praying, he dressed himself and told Baptiste that he was ready.

"Old friend," said he, "I have been blind indeed to take these gifts from the hand of one whose own need must be so great. Think you that I would have permitted Irene to work for me at a time when she has neither friends nor helpers in all the city? Heaven forbid that I should have so little love for her. Oh, I am ready to follow you, Baptiste. I care not where you carry me if only you bring me news that she is well. Have I aught else in the world to remember but my little Irene? God shield her always in the shadow of His love!"

He stood up, dressed now, and the sunlight fell, bright and golden, upon his clear features and snow-white hair. He had been one of Condé's legion in the old time; a type of fine manhood and dashing courage. They said that there was no finer swordsman in the regiment; no better horseman. Fifteen years of captivity had robbed him altogether of that magnificent figure and soldierly carriage, which had been the envy of his comrades in the long ago, when Brittany was the fairest country in the world to him, and the face of his young wife the sweetest face in all France. He stood up now, the sun showing the pallor of his countenance, and the deep lines beneath his eyes; but his body was erect; his shoulders square, his step firm. And so, like a soldier upon parade, he quitted the cell, which had harbored him all those long years, and followed Baptiste to the corridor without.

There was a file of men in the passage, armed with halberds and spontoons; a little army to guard a prisoner who had never, in his wildest moments, dreamed of escape from a citadel so formidable as the Conciergerie. Serrefort exchanged no greeting with them, but he surveyed them with some scorn when they closed about him and began to march down the corridor and so to the head of a flight of steps which appeared to lead into the very bowels of the earth. For one short instant a window showed him the city, and beyond that the river, bright with lapping green waves and busy boats, and the houses all huddled together in the sunlight, and the streets full of hurrying throngs glad because the new day had come. He said that the world lay there, the world where men hoped and loved and worked; the world he would never know again. And then the window was passed, and he found himself descending the winding stairs of the great Bombec tower, which seemed to rise up from the very river itself. Though his guards had torches high above their heads, the place was so dark that even the garish yellow light could not penetrate the terrible blackness.

Serrefort feared almost to set foot upon the ground, that he should tumble into some horrid pit, or go headlong into the waters of the Seine. So heavy and damp was the air his lungs seemed to be filled with noxious vapors at every breath. Even the floor of the staircase was covered with wet and slime, while water dripped from the walls in a ceaseless "pat-pat-pat," which spoke eloquently of the surpassing misery of those who must live in depths so terrible. Serrefort had heard often of the Bombec tower. He remembered that when as a little child his father had brought him to Paris they had shown him this great stone bastile, one of the towers of the Conciergerie, springing up from the very river's bed, and they had spoken in hushed voices of the sufferings of those doomed to such a prison, and now he must learn of these things for himself. Indeed, the lesson had begun already, when the sunshine was left far above him; and an intolerable longing for air and light forced him to say that he must lose his reason if they did not carry him up again to the day he had left. And so he came to the foot of the staircase, and his guards, having gone some little way down a narrow and sinuous passage, one of them held a torch aloft, while old Baptiste unlocked the door of a cell and bade the prisoner enter

"Courage," said he, "for the love of heaven. It is only for a little while and your daughter will be back again. You will find a seat there—do not quit it until I come to you. It is the Prison of Swords you enter. God help you!"

There was a quaver in the old man's voice when he spoke; but Serrefort did not hear. His eyes were staring horribly into the hole which henceforth must be his home. Bright as the flare of the torch was, its light was impotent to illumine that den wherein the sun's rays had not entered for centuries nor any sound been heard but the groans and sobs of the wretched victims of the dungeon.

"Oh!" cried Serrefort, pitifully drawing back, "if I might die; I cannot enter—I cannot—"

But old Baptiste cried again:

"Courage, my son, courage: she will come back—I shall seek her today—oh, she has not forgotten you, be sure of it."

He spoke like a father might have spoken to a son; and, pushing the trembling prisoner gently forward, he closed the door upon him and hurried back to the light and the life above. Penalty enough that he should spend moments in an abode of such horror. Serrefort, on the other hand, took two steps forward and then sank down upon the moldy straw, with which the floor of his new prison was covered. There was no braver man in Paris, none with a stouter heart nor more noble courage; but the Bombec tower was quick to conquer him. Fear now dominated his mind until his whole body trembled and his very heart seemed to stand still. The darkness weighed upon him like a crushing burden. The foul cell appeared to be full of the shapes of those who had gone before him to this agony. His lungs were scorched by the stifling air; the dreadful silence, he said, was the silence of the tomb. Every moment he waited to feel the touch of some creeping thing upon his face. He crouched like a driven animal, putting out his hand to find the walls with his fingers. But his flesh was cut by the blade of a knife protruding from the stone work, and as he drew his hand back bleeding, he remembered what Baptiste had said, that he was then in the Prison of Swords. Full well he knew what the words meant. Many a time had he heard of this infamous cell, wherein the walls bristled with knives, and the floor of which, as tradition told, was covered with creeping things and even with loathsome reptiles.

"Oh, my God!" he prayed again. "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me. I cannot suffer it—I cannot!"

Maddened, as many a prisoner before him, he hurled himself ferociously upon the floor, and writhed there with burning brain, and hands and arms cut by the sharp blades which protruded from the walls. When the fever passed and he lay weak and motionless upon the straw, he began to ask himself by what right the bailiff inflicted these wrongs upon him. Years had gone by since he had sinned in striking the Comte de Chateauneuf, the lord of his province, who sought to injure the one being for whom he would have given his life willingly. Had they such memories that they remembered the crime still. He could not believe it, but as misery grew upon him there came back, strong and clear and life-giving, his hate of the man who had doomed him to these torments. Often in the prison above he had prayed that the day might be his when he would meet the Comte de Chateauneuf face to face and reckon with him for these years. His brightest dreams were those wherein he fancied that his enemy lay dead at his feet and that he, Jacques de Serrefort, had the blood-dripping sword of victory in his hands. But these dreams were sent for his punishment, since how could he, a helpless prisoner, revenge himself upon a man who commanded in Paris an influence no less powerful than his influence in Brittany. He knew that it could not be; yet he hoped the more, and in his hope found the will to live.

It had been very early in the morning when they carried him to the Bombec tower, and old Baptiste had brought a manchet of bread and a flask of wine to the dungeon, so that Serrefort could not hope to see his jailer again before night fell. For the matter of that, he had nothing to tell him the hour; and he lay, it seemed for days, quite still in his cell while the rats ran over his arms. The patter of these animals was for a long time the only sign of life down there below the river's flood; but anon, he heard a gentle lapping of water and knew that the tide was rising. It was good at the first to think of Mother Seine which ran without, like some friend of the world he had forgotten. He took pleasure in calling to mind its aspects when last he had seen it. That was when they carried him over the Pont Neuf to prison. The river had been alive with boats then; with boats and barges, and gallants going down to Passy, and merry jesters making merry music, and all the life and brightness of the great city. Today, he said grimly, all that world passed within a stone's throw of him; yet his eyes were blinded to the sights, his ears deaf to the music; he would never see that river again; the world would pass forever by and no cry of his go out, no hand of pity be offered to him. And while this thought was in his mind the lap of the waves grew stronger; the sound of swirling water began to fill the whole cell. He realized quite suddenly, yet with a new and immeasureable dread, that the river would rise above the level of his cell. When at last a cold stream of water touched his feet, he cried out anew, thinking that they meant to drown him, and had brought him to the Bombec tower with that intent.

The water rose slowly, lapping about the feet and knees and hands of the prisoner, but he had imagined a fate which was not in the minds of those who sent him to the dungeon. Twice every day the Seine washed the floor of this cell, bringing up great rats in its flood, and leaving the oozing slime and filth of its waters upon the straw which made the prisoner's bed. Just when Jacques de Serrefort was telling himself that the water would cover his mouth presently, its flow ceased, and taught him the devilish malignity of his captors. Wet and cold and shivering, the wretched man stood for long hours while the stream ebbed. Then he sank again upon his reeking bed to ask how he should support another day of torture so revolting and cruel. He could not forget that there had been prisoners who had spent long years in this very cell, who had become raving mad-men and yet had lived on; sport for their jailers, but not food for death. Serrefort swore that no such fate should be his; he would find another way; he would cast himself upon the mercy of heaven and end the terror before reason robbed him of the power.

Until this time, and he judged that it must now be night, no sign had been given that those above remembered his existence. Though he listened long and called out with all his strength, he heard no answering voice, no tread in the passage without. He would have welcomed death as a gift of mercy; but, for the time being, he had neither the strength nor the will to compel death. Rather, he turned to think of old Baptiste's promise that he would come again; of his assurance that his daughter Irene would return to Paris to bring him the comforts of the cells above. But the hours wore on and no one came, and hope ebbed and the fever of the cell racked his bones. He had been known ever as one who had a clear mind, quick, active, farseeing; but the darkness of the dungeon in the Bombec already warred upon his brain. A drowsiness crept upon him, Nature's medicine against his terror; he could not sleep, yet became almost insensible to the horrors of the cell; he forgot where he was; visions of his home and wife came back to him so that when his cell door was opened presently and the flare of a torch lit up its inmost recesses, those who visited him found tears running down his cheeks and a world of love upon his lips.

Serrefort had thought, when he heard the key grate in the lock, that it was old Baptiste come back as he had promised; but so soon as his eyes were awake to the light, he looked up to see the bailiff, Hubert, the governor of the prison; and with him a tall gray-haired man, whose fine dress and white ruffles were strange things to find in the Conciergerie. The same soldiers who had conducted the prisoner to the cell in the morning now accompanied the governor and ranged themselves on either side of the prisoner, bidding him rise and salute the bailiff. Serrefort did so mechanically, shutting his eyes that he might not behold the dreadful sights which the torches disclosed. All his old spirit was broken now; he held his head erect no more—one day in the Bombec had made him an old man.

"Sirs," said he with a sob in his voice, "I beg you of your pity carry me from this place—you see how I suffer—oh, God knows what my sufferings have been!"

He stood before them sobbing like a child, fearful that they would leave him to the silence of the pit again, to the flowing waters and the maddening darkness. At any other time, his distress would have been a fine subject for merriment to the bailiff Hubert; but the man was dumb in the presence of a stranger who did not conceal his sympathy nor hesitate to utter it.

"Monsieur," said this stranger presently, "you are Jacques de Serrefort, I believe, sent to this place now fifteen years ago for threatening to kill the Count of Chateauneuf. Is that so?"

Serrefort raised his head quickly at the mention of his crime. His shoulders were squared again; he stood before them erect and fearless as he had stood before his officers in the old days.

"Monsieur," he said, "it is quite true that I am the Jacques de Serrefort you name. Yet whether it were a crime or no which sent me to this place, I leave my God to judge."

"Impudent fellow," cried the bailiff, "I will have you branded upon the face with an iron."

The stranger who did not appear to love the bailiff, hushed him with a gesture of his hand.

"Please to hold your tongue, monsieur," cried he, with the air of one accustomed to command, "I am here to interrogate the prisoner, not to listen to your anger."

The bailiff bit his lip and scowled at Serrefort. It was with difficulty that he turned a smiling face to the stranger at last and said as pleasantly as possible.

"Your pardon, Monsieur le Comte. Yet have a care, I beg of you, how you deal with this fellow, for he is very dangerous."

"I will be the judge of that myself," said the man addressed as Count; and then turning to Serrefort, he continued:

"Hark you, my friend, you are not to deceive yourself with any hope that I am come here to serve you. If I carry you away from the Conciergerie tonight, it will be that I may send you back when a few hours are passed to do as the bailiff shall bid you. But first you must give me your word as a man of honor—for such I know you to be, monsieur—that you will obey me faithfully and return here when midnight is struck. Are we agreed upon that, Jacques de Serrefort?"

Serrefort rubbed his eyes; the men, the light, the voices, were unreal to him. He heard the injunction and yet could not gather the words together.

"Monsieur," cried he at last, "if you should take me out of this place be it only for an hour, I will thank you from my heart. You know not what a place it is—oh, there is no crime which merits such a punishment as this, monsieur."

The count surveyed him with pity in his glance.

"Very well, Monsieur de Serrefort," cried he, after a moment, "we are agreed upon the bargain, then. You are to have your liberty until 12 o'clock in return for some information you shall give me presently. But it is understood that you return here at midnight, and that you will not seek to escape those who accompany you. I have your word, monsieur."

"A hundred times," replied Serrefort, to whom the thought of an hour's liberty was dear beyond price.

The count turned swiftly to the bailiff, Hubert.

"Let your prisoner be taken to my carriage at once," said he. "What else is to be done you have learnt already. Is it not so?"

The bailiff stammered an answer.

"Monsieur le Comte," exclaimed he, "this is a serious matter—I have no authority from the King—and—as monsieur knows—"

"Oh, my friend," cried the count, impatiently, "should any ask you upon what authority, answer them upon the authority of the Count of Saint Florentin and of this ring."

He held up a good signet ring—the ring of Louis, the Well-Beloved, King of France. That was a talisman powerful enough even to conquer the bailiff, who drew back with a little cry when the count spoke, and now made haste to offer his apologies.

"Sir," cried he, "had I known that you came on the King's business, it would have been different. Hold me not to blame in that I remember my duty and the security of those entrusted—"

"Oh, monsieur," said the count, whose impatience now amounted almost to anger, "if you would remember that I wait, I would even forget all your stupidities. Lead the way, sir, and let us hear less of your pestilent tongue."

The bailiff, astounded at the rebuke, and snarling with temper, commanded the guards to lead out the prisoner. Serrefort, who said still that this must be a vision of his sleep, followed the soldiers with trembling steps. Never in all his life had he known so sweet a moment as that which carried him from the foul depths of the Bombec tower to the world above and the gentle breezes of the night. Had it not been ever in his mind that he must return to his abode of suffering when a few hours had passed, he would have said that heaven had been too good to him and that he was not worthy of such happiness.

But the shadow of the dungeon lay upon him like the shadow of the living death. He thought still to hear the dreadful lapping of the water; still to feel the touch of the creeping things; still to be entombed in the very bowels of the earth with all the weight of that mighty stone crushing him down. He saw all things about him, the figures of the men, the torches and lanterns of the guards, the open square before the Halls of Justice, of which his prison was a part, and he said that they were phantoms of his burning brain. Nor was it different when the Count of Saint Florentin bade him enter a coach drawn up at the gates, and they drove him quickly across the Pont Neuf and to the heart of the city which he had not seen for fifteen long years. He was like a man walking in his sleep. The hum of Paris, awake to the pleasures of the night, the merry cries from the boatmen upon the river, the crowds in the streets, the flickering lamps, the great buildings—here was the world for which he had longed; but it meant nothing to him now. "At midnight," he said, always, "at midnight they will carry me to the Bombec again—oh, God have mercy upon me!"

To be Concluded.

A GOOD INVESTMENT.

It was a shabby red brick on the shady side of fifty, the paint on its porch was blistered, and sparrows nested in its eaves. In its second story front a woman sat crying. She wasn't much of a woman to look at, and she was perfectly dreadful to hear. She was an old maid; she had a young sister to support, she had just lost her place in the Treasury, and she wished that she was dead.

The young sister was with her, but instead of crying there was in her voice that ring of jubilation that comes to youth when it sees a chance for a change.

"Oh, Matilda," she cried out, undaunted by the fact that she had been keeping it up right along without success ever since Miss Darrell's head had fallen by the official axe two days before, "do let us make a break and go. I don't ask you to pack, nor nothing—just give me the money—"

"Likely!" retorted the dismissed one, with a tear-choked sob of contempt. "I would as soon trust a baby with matches."

"That's what I call a burning shame; but even allowing that I wasted the money, we would at least indulge in a new set of woes. There's nothing like variety in one's miseries, Matilda; and if only you would trust me I would buy two tickets right away."

The firelight flickered for a moment on Miss Darrell's rivuleted face as she lifted it from the sofa.

"Tickets for what? Tickets for where?"

"Anywhere," answered Anne, the indomitable, with a generous circle of her arms as though to scoop in the universe. "For the West, I reckon, if the money would take us that far."

"Did I ever—"

"No, Matilda, you never! If you had ever done anything else but plod on in that old rut of an office you wouldn't be crying yourself into a Niagara because you are out of your rut today. Serves you right for not marrying Jack when you had the chance. Oh, you needn't moan and wriggle like that, Teddy, it's true, every word, and you know it."

Miss Matilda raised her head again, and this time her face flushed a dark, tempestuous red—it wasn't firelight, either.

"Even so, you are not the one to reproach me. If I kept to my rut it was because you had to be raised and cared for; and now that I am unnerved from—from my trouble, you can sit there and taunt me with your own superior sense. Wait until you have done something to prove your superiority before you begin to brag. Oh, my head, my head"—and down it went again among the cushions.

"You don't consider my head, nor my heart either, to go on in that unfeeling fashion—yes, it is unfeeling, Matilda, when you know I hate to see you suffer so, for nothing."

"Nothing? Good Lord!"

"I suppose," and with persistent cheerfulness the girl sat bolt upright and proceeded to check her facts, "I suppose half the world would swap livers with us this minute. Just think of the beggars in the street and the sick folks in the hospitals and the crazy folks in the asylum, and—"

"And then look at us—two women with one month's salary between us and starvation. The contrast is dazzling—ugh!"

She willfully ignored the small bank behind the clock, but Anne, wise from experience, suffered the omission in silence. It was so like her nervous-strung sister, to struggle on like a Spartan, and then stumble at last into the slough of dispondency with a helpless splash, that she crept over the sofa, and administered on the half-exposed cheek, a series of those caressing little dabs that go such a long way toward soothing woman's deepest troubles.

When the storm of tears had lulled into irregular and rather childish sobs, Anne, with her cheeks flushed and her voice vibrant with eagerness, began again:

"Oh, Teddy, do let us go. If we were among strangers we could be no worse off than we are here. If we were starving tomorrow, do you know a soul we could go to for a penny? I don't—and I am so dead tired of this one room and old Mrs. Beel's weak tea and that Tommy Tolson mooning at me from his side of the table."

"But where could we go and what could we do when we got there?"

"Anything—everything. Teach, sew—"

Miss Matilda shivered from head to foot.

"And, if necessary—scrub."

Miss Matilda screamed.

Anne laughed out in a fashion slightly boyish, but wholly delightful, because she enjoyed it to the last echo, and then sprang to her feet with a suddenness calculated to set her Teddy wild.

"If I arrange everything—everything," she cried, breathlessly, "will you let me have my way this time, Matilda—will you, will you, will you?" And because Miss Darrell was totally demoralized from her emotions she helplessly answered, "Yes." There exists no one on the top of this earth so helplessly irresponsible as a woman newly dismissed from a Government office—unless it be a man. When Miss Matilda had cried herself sick enough for a prescription she sank into a state of apathy—and stayed there—until Anne came home one evening after a week's busy planning, with two yellow tickets in her hand.

"They cost exactly $70," she cried, joyously. "And I decided on Goldville for two splendid reason. We shall have $30.52 with which to astonish the natives, and there is such a spice of prosperity in the name—"

"What's in a name?" quoted Miss Darrell, dismally, but Anne only laughed.

Miss Matilda almost wanted to laugh herself two days afterward when she found herself flashing through States that all her life had only meant so many red and yellow splashes on the map. There was no longer need to reprove Anne for the reckless handling of their future. The money was spent and, after all, there was a flavor of dangerous pleasure in daring fate to her worst. All her life she had walked in the beaten path that lay before her as prim as Dutch flower garden, and now that there had come an appalling end to her road all the comfort she got from Anne was a reference to "ruts" that wasn't sisterly, and another to Jack that wasn't genteel. Very well! there was no longer the despised rut to plod in. They had a desolate amount of freedom now to starve where they pleased and, if it suited Anne, for their bones to bleach on the boundless prairies.

And then she did laugh at her own amazing stock of self-pity, and it brought a sparkle to Anne's eyes that it paid to be hopeful just to see them. And, indeed, the girl was so cheerily familiar with things she never saw before and knew nothing about; so worldly-wise in the matter of checks and so equal to the baggage men, that Miss Darrell, in spite of her thirty-and-something-dreadful-over years, was beginning by the second night to feel childishly, irresponsibly happy when—their journey came to an end.

Came to such a sudden and disastrous end that she had been lying in an ugly heap under the stars quite twenty minutes before she realized that there had been an accident and that like as not she was dead.

Wounded, certainly, for her arms lay under her as lifeless as a wooden thing and there was something trickling down her face, drip, drip, drip—then she fainted again.

The accident had happened in an out of the way part of the country with only a flag-man to blame. There was a column in the nearest paper and a two-line telegram sent out by the Associated Press—but it takes more than a handful of battered humanity to make headlines in these progressive days, so that when Miss Darrell opened her eyes on the world again it had quite forgotten all about her.

It was a rather unusual world for a pair of conventional eyes to open upon—four walls of round logs, chinked with mud of delicatest yellow; with a small, square slit for a window and a long panel slit for a door. Outside the window there were frost-coated mountains shooting above the sky line, and on the other side of the door came curious sounds of—what was it? What was that sound? And where in the name of sense was Anne? Anne was beside her, of course, and as her watchful eyes caught sight of Miss Matilda's investigating ones, there came into her face a pink wave of gladness that drowned out the pallor brought there by suspense.

"Honey," began Miss Matilda, in such a small, faint voice that it nearly frightened her into silence, "I've been ill, haven't I?"

"Yes, dear, but the doctor says—"

"Oh, have I needed a doctor?" and when she had asked her question she moaned and shut her eyes.

Anne could have told her that she had come near needing a coroner, but she only patted the white face and purred out endearments instead.

"And what did he say was the matter with me? Am I broken up beyond mending? My back is splinters, I know, and my arms and my—"

"Indeed, then, you are not even chipped," cried the girl, eagerly. "You were just shook up, you know, and spilled out and flattened down, and—and—things like that, but there was nothing downright smashed about you, because the jury sat on you, and I reckon they ought to know."

Then Miss Matilda Darrell's eyes flared open and her moans were something appalling.

"It only serves me right for trusting a scatter-witted girl like you with responsibilities that belong to myself alone. I don't blame you, Anne, but to come back to consciousness in a hovel like this, penniless and likely maimed for life—it makes me wish I had died—oh, I wish I had died—"

"If you knew what you were talking about, Teddy, you wouldn't go on in that harrowing way. This isn't a hovel; it's a very nice shanty, and outside there are mountains, and miles and miles of trees—and when you see the doctor!"

"And how am I to pay him, that's what I want to know? Oh, Anne, child, that was a bad investment you made of our last bit of money—"

"I call it a very good investment," interrupted the youngest Miss Darrell, stoutly. "I only had little over $100 to work with, and I'm sure I've realized on it to the extent of $1,000 and a beau."

"A—thousand dollars—and—and a what?"

"Beau—yours, not mine, Teddy, so don't stare at a body like that. You see, when you agreed to let us come Westward Ho-ing, I wrote to Jack; yes, I did, Teddy; I wrote to Jack and he wired that we were to start at once for Goldville and he would meet us at the station. Well, we didn't get there by ten miles, on account of the accident, and as you were not able to be moved, the darling lumbermen who own this cabin turned out—hear them chopping?—and Jack comes every day. The thousand dollars is the result of a compromise I made with the road—scatter-witted, indeed!"

"You are a dear, good child," sighed Miss Matilda, thankfully. "Still, if you had waited for me to decide, I shouldn't have accepted the money."

"You wouldn't have had the chance!" blurted out the dear, good one, with a cheerfulness streaked with pride. "You see, there wasn't a bone cracked in your whole body, while I—I broke my arm. You can't expect everything to go your way, Teddy, and as Jack doctors all the sick folks within forty miles and loves you dearly and owns a nice home to take you to, it wouldn't be Christian in you to grudge me my innings—especially as I've made such a good investment all around."

NANNIE LANCASTER.

A Mean Advantage.

"What an enthusiast on scientific investigations that Jimmie Busby is."

"Is he?"

"Yes, he had me looking up the airship twenty times last evening, and every time I'd look up he'd kiss me."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Papa's Idea of It.

Miss Ten Stryke—Well, what did papa say?

Percy—Oh, he said there had never been a fool in the Ten Stryke family yet, but that if you married me there would be two.—Twinkles.

NEW LONDON FORTUNES.

The Great Sum Amassed by Ernest T. Hooley.

London, April 24.—Not since the days of the Bonanza Kings and "Coal Oil Johnny" has the world seen the making of such wonderful fortunes as those which have been gained on the London Stock Exchange in the past fourteen months. The shuffle of wealth has been almost incredible. Stock exchange messengers and clerks, who a year ago were considered happy on a maximum income of thirty shillings a week, which is $7.50, have suddenly become metamorphosed into the possessors of unheard-of fortunes, and, on the other hand, solid and purse-proud merchants and brokers have tasted for the first time in their lives the bitterness and cruelty of poverty.

The Englishman is, above all things, a gambler. The conditions under which he lives make it necessary that he should be so. There are no corner lots in England, and there is no real estate exchange in which a legitimate means of barter can be established. There is so much money afloat and the people are so speculative by nature, and so eager to increase their wealth that the only recourse left for them is the Stock Exchange. The result is that hardly a single day passes on which the British public is not swindled out of thousands of pounds, and the more they are swindled the more eager they seem to throw their hard-earned money into the maelstrom of the city of London.

The past year has probably been the worst, so far as reckless gambling is concerned, that has occurred since the South Sea bubble. More people have been ruined and more have become almost phenomenally rich—the happy days of Argentina not excepted—until now this great and wealthy nation lies panting for breath like an overfed python, having swallowed more stocks and shares than it can possibly digest.

It is natural when such conditions as this arise that there should be some men to reap the harvest which has been so recklessly sown. Common gamblers are many. "Coal Oil Johnny" was a common gambler. Jabez Balfour was another. So was Baron Grant, the memory of whose deeds crops up every now and then in the bankruptcy court.

We have had so much of this every-day stripe of money maker and money loser that nowadays it requires absolute genius to attract the attention of the world, and this has really been accomplished by a man who, a few years ago, was an unknown and unappreciated lace manufacturer of Nottingham. His name is Ernest Terah Hooley. He has made $50,000,000 in less than one year. He has enriched his friends by more than double that sum in the same time. He has become a world-famous man. The city of London is at his feet. His movements are chronicled like those of royalty, and he has managed to make himself one of the most conspicuous beings in Europe. And all because he possesses an adamantine nerve which has probably seldom been surpassed.

Two year ago Hooley gave up his lace business in provincial and antiquated Nottingham and began to dabble in the local stock market. He was not a poor man, and, in fact, has never known poverty. He says that he has always managed to make $15,000 or $20,0200 a year ever since he was twenty-one years of age, and he is now thirty-eight. His first year in the stock market netted him over $100,000. Even an ordinary ambition, it seems to me, would be fired by such a remarkable achievement, and Hooley's ambition, as will be seen, is most extraordinary.

Nottingham seemed to afford few opportunities for a mind of his nature, and the natural sequence was a move to Capel Court, the London Wall Street. Arrived in London, he had no sooner furnished his office and put his desk in order than he made straight for the highest flights of financial operation. The world was startled one morning to learn that the Dunlop Pneumatic Tire Company had been purchased by a syndicate for the sum of $20,000,000. This was an enormous price, even in these days of gigantic figures, but the surprise occasioned by the purchase was nothing compared to the subsequent shock when it was learned how the deal had been carried through. No other man in the city of London could have done this save Hooley. An idea of his personality, his manner and his mode of operation can be had from the way in which he engineered it.

The Dunlop Company was willing to sell out. Hooley obtained from it an option of purchase of $10,000,000 for one week. Then he employed every possible means of communication to notify his friends and associates that he was in a deal to purchase the Dunlop Pneumatic Tire Company; that it would be the greatest financial success of the year, and that he wanted their various signatures to help him in the purchase. The result was that in two days Hooley exercised his option at $10,000,000, and on the third day he turned the property over to his friends and associates for the sum of $20,000,000, a little transaction which netted him exactly $10,000,000 without ever causing him to put his hand into his pocket for a single shilling. This course may give the uninitiated the impression that Hooley's friends and associates had been made use of to their frequent disadvantage, but the subsequent profits made by the company have been so large that every man who invested a penny in the stock has expressed his unbounded confidence in and gratitude to the daring promoter.

Again, there was the Bovril Company. Hooley's tactics were exactly those that he had made use of in the purchase of the Dunlop business. Bovril is a sort of beef extract, enormously advertised here for many years. He obtained an option for Bovril at three days for $2,500,000. The next morning he sold it to his friends for $5,000,000.

The rush in the bicycle business created a demand for tubes. Coventry was simply crying out for them. The cycle industry was at a standstill because there were not enough tubes to go on with. Mr. Hooley heard of this and sent an agent to Coventry to secure orders for tubes. No one knew how or where he was to procure these tubes, but, inasmuch as Hooley's name was mentioned, it was deemed satisfactory, and the agent secured a large and valuable business.

Without further delay the British public was invited to invest $3,000,000 in the Swedish Tube Company, which it was proposed to establish at Coventry for the purpose of filling the orders secured by Mr. Hooley's agent. The money was subscribed for ten times over. Hooley's share was a round million, and the property, now that the factory has been built, is in the most flourishing condition.

And what is this great financial genius like? He is distinctly dissimilar from any of the noted promoters and speculators of our country and this. He is of a much higher type of intellect and refinement than Col. North was and than Barney Barnato is. His love for dabbling in newspapers reminds us a little of Jay Gould and his ambition to shine as a churchman suggests at least one of the Rockefellers, but we have not yet developed a millionaire gambler or exploiter who never makes a deal without remembering all his friends and usually giving them as much benefit as he gets from them.

In personality his friends consider him a charming, genial, and suave man, smooth to the last degree of diamond polish, and equally sharp. He likes a good dinner, enjoys having friends around him, carries on all his operations in a glare of publicity, never hesitating to do business in a cab, a bedroom or a restaurant. Unlike any other Englishman that it is easy to name, he is as quick as lightning. Down in what is called "the city" the business men say that Hooley's first noticeable quality is his faculty for quick decision. He never yet heard a business proposition as much as half set forth before he snapped out his decision; in fact, he puts periods in the middle of almost every sentence that is spoken to him.

One of the strangest eccentricities is his fondness for threepenny bits with holes in them. He has out a standing order to the managers of four or five of the banks he deals with for all the mutilated threepenny pieces that come in their way. Unfortunately for those who know of this he only pays the market price of the coin, else he would get bagfuls of them where he gets cupfuls now. He has never told anyone the secret of his passion for these little discs of silver, but his friends believe that this smallest silver coin of the realm once played an important part in a notable turn of his fortunes.

He does not think there is anything wonderful about the way he has made money.

"It is not a question of luck," he says, "merely a matter of extremely hard work. My income in Nottingham was always a large one, but then I put in sixteen hours a day and never tried to think, smoke and work at the same time. It can't be done. Then I always made a point also of going to bed at 10 o'clock. This is quite late enough if you want to get up fresh and eager for business in the morning. I always like to be up early and get a little bit in front of every one else. That's the whole secret.

"Again, I have always gone in for big things. If you go half way up the ladder you will find it crowded with competitors. If you go to the top you practically have the field to yourself. There are plenty of men ready to deal in thousands, but they get frightened when you talk of millions. The average city man of today is an easy going sort of chap. He doesn't make very much and doesn't do much good with what he gets. Young men knock off work at 6, go to the theater, and get to bed late and then wonder why they do not get on. Making money is more a matter of will and self-sacrifice than of luck or brains. It is, in a sense, a question of morale, though people cannot see it.

But a money ambition is not all that this wonderful man yearns to satisfy. He has political aspirations, which, for some unknown reason, lead him to believe that some day he will be a cabinet minister. Doing nothing by halves, he has entered the Parliamentary list in the same eager, alert and unique manner which has made him a power in the city. The first thing to do in order to become a properly accepted candidate for Parliament is to nurse the constituency which the aspiring politician hopes to represent, and Mr. Hooley has begun to nurse Derbyshire as no English constituency has been nursed in recent times. It is usual for a candidate to spend a couple of thousand dollars a year on his division or borough, just as our candidates for Congress find it necessary to contribute to the local charities, societies and churches, but Hooley's idea as to the best way of spending his money and incidentally solidifying Derbyshire in his favor are on the most marvelous scale.

His first move on signifying his intention to become a candidate was to notify the local authorities that in future they could draw upon him for $75,000 a year, to be distributed among the various charities of the district. Aside from this he is spending $1,500 a week among the poor of the Ilkeston division of Derbyshire, and if he continues this poor Sir Walter Foster, who now represents the district, and who is only an ordinary, everyday sort of a millionaire, will certainly find it necessary either to increase his dose of local pap or to give up his seat at the next election.

Hooley could have had the choice of two or three perfectly safe seats, but he objects to the carpet-bagging business and wants to represent the country in which he was born. He hopes when he becomes a member of Parliament to pass an old-age pension bill, which is as stupendous in its conception as it is impracticable. His scheme is simply to tax imported cereals and from the revenue thus derived to pension off all aged and impoverished subjects of the Queen. For instance, England imports every year 400,000,000 bushels of grain. This taxed at 15 cents per bushel would produce about $65,000,000 per year, and this amount put aside for three years with compound interest would amount to $200,000,000.

In three years there would be a fund which would enable the government to give $1.25 per week to every man and woman over sixty years of age in Great Britain. Hooley says he has talked with men of the highest influence and position in the country about this scheme, and that they heartily agree with him; but they are too timid to propose it.

Farming and sheep breeding are this man's hobby; he is at present the biggest land owner and sheep breeder in England. He has purchased nearly every estate that has come upon the market in the last ten months. He owns more manor houses and country seats than any other man in England. His shooting estates are immense, yet he does not shoot, because he is so tender-hearted that the sight of a bird with a broken wing or a wounded hare makes it impossible for him to adopt this sport. Wherever he goes he is accompanied by three secretaries, who are busily at work from 8 o'clock every morning until 10 o'clock at night, at which hour Mr. Ernest Terah Hooley is generally found in bed.

Her Little Game.

Last fall, when a national election was impending and every vote was carefully