

DARK DAYS

BY HUGH CONWAY.

Author of "Called Back"

(Continued from Sunday, August 5.)

The sending of Philippa to live under the charge of one of his own discarded mistresses was but another proof of the man's revolting cynicism. Mrs. Wilson's acceptance of the charge showed me to what a level a woman could sink. It told me moreover, that in spite of her letter she was not to be trusted. A woman who could lend herself to her former lover's purposes in such a way as this must have parted with every atom of pride. It seemed to me that the woman and the man were well matched in baseness.

Still her letter lifted a load from my mind. I felt that for awhile there could be no pursuit; yet I resolved to risk nothing, but hurry on with all possible speed. Only when we crossed the frontier of Spain could I sleep in peace.

All researches, with a view to obtaining evidence of the first Lady Ferrand's death, I postponed indefinitely. Some day, if all went well, I would return to England and procure the documents necessary to prove the validity of Philippa's marriage. There was no pressing hurry. As to any money which should be hers, never with my consent should she touch a penny which had belonged to the dead man.

Protracted as my meditations seem on paper, they were in reality much longer; indeed, they were not at all when the boat steamed into Boulogne harbor. I went in search of my companions, who, I was glad to find, had borne the voyage well. We were soon in the train, and, without any events concerning us, reached Paris at eight o'clock stood on the Gare du Nord.

We drove through the brightly lit streets to the Hotel du Louvre. The strains of travel washed away, my mother gave a sigh of satisfaction as she seated herself at the dinner table. Like a sensible woman, she was no despoiler of the good things of this life. There were other late diners in the great coffee room, and many a head was turned to look at the beautiful girl who sat on my right hand; for every day which brought her new health and strength brought also to my love an installment of her former beauty. In a very short time she would be to all appearances the Philippa of old.

"How long shall we stay in Paris, Basil?" asked my mother.

"It is now half-past nine; our train starts at 8:45 in the morning. Calculate the time."

"Oh, nonsense! It is years since I have been in Paris. I want to look at the shops. So does Philippa, I am sure."

"My dear mother, the man, much more the woman, who lingers in Paris is lost. If you are going elsewhere the only way is to go straight through, or else you get no further. I have proved this, and mean to run no risk."

"But remember we are only weak women. This poor child is far from strong."

She smiled at Philippa, whose eyes thanked her for the affectionate appellation.

"Don't be merciful, Basil," she continued, "give us at least one day."

"Not one. I am just going to look after a courier, so that you may travel in all possible comfort."

My mother seemed almost annoyed, and again said I was merciful. What would she have said had she known that, unless she had received that letter, instead of going to our present comfortable quarters we should have driven to the Orleans railway, and taken the first train to the south? Philippa knew—how little, I trusted, Philippa knew—from what we were flying!

I felt I must give my mother some reason for my haste; so, before going in quest of my courier, I took her aside.

"It is not well for Philippa to stay in Paris," I said. "Some one whom she ought not to meet was here a short time ago."

I blamed myself for the deception; but what could I do? Alas! it seemed to me that my life, which was so fearlessly open to the inspection of all, was now full of little else save deceptions. Should I ever again be my true self!

My mother raised no further objection. I found a courier—a bearded gentleman of commanding presence, who spoke every European language with impartial perfection. I gave him instructions to see to everything next morning; to collect our luggage save the small quantity we carried with us, and to register it through to Burgos. I had no particular reason for choosing Burgos, but it seemed a convenient place at which to take our first thorough rest.

The next day's journey was a dull, dreary, wearisome affair. My companions had not shaken off the fatigue of the previous day, and now that I felt Philippa's safety was, comparatively speaking, assured, a reaction set in with me. No wonder. I had her now as I think of the strain to which both body and mind had been subjected during the last fortnight. I was moody and listless. The air was full of fog and mist. The so-called express train puffed along after the well-known style of French railways. Orleans, Blois, Tours, Poitiers, an outsome, Combras and other stations passed me as in a dream. The dull day crept on until dark evening was upon us, and we were all thoroughly glad when our day's journey ended at Bordeaux.

My mother, who was rather great at glib books, had beguiled part of the journey by a Murray, which somehow made its appearance from her travelling bag. As she knew we were to sleep at Bordeaux she had been laying down the law as to what we were to look at. We were to see the curious high wooden fifteenth century houses of the old town; the cathedral, with its fine towers; the very old churches of St. Croix and St. Seurin, and a variety of other interesting objects. It needed all the assurance I possessed, all the invalid's querulousness and insistence I could assume, to induce her to consent to resume our journey the first thing in the morning. Even Philippa pleaded for delay, and gave me to understand that she thought I was using my mother unfairly. But I was firm. If I could I would have hurried on by the midnight train. Any way, now that we were within a few hours' journey of the frontier and of safety, I would leave no more than I could help to chance.

In the early morning I got my party together, and before it was light led them to the train. I believed that by now my mother looked upon me as rather out of my senses. She frankly owned she could not see the necessity of making a toil out of what might be a pleasure. She little knew that nothing could have made that journey a pleasure to me, that even finding Philippa's eyes now and again fixed on my face with what I almost dared to think was tender interest—that even the blush which crossed her cheek when I caught those glances—was not sufficient to reward me for my anxiety. A slow, a painfully slow train. Innumerable stoppages. A country which under the circumstances would have given me no interest even if we had been in summer instead of winter; and then, after nearly five hours' slow travelling Bayonne at last. Bayonne, with its strong fortifications towering

above it. In less than two hours we should be in Spain.

A curious dream seized me—a premonition so strong that ever since then I have lost faith in premonitions. Something seemed to tell me that all my efforts had been in vain; that at the frontier there would be certain intelligence received which would lead to my arrest; that Philippa, with one foot, as it were, in the land of refuge, would be seized and carried back to face the horrors and the shame of a trial for murder. It was, as events showed, an absurd fancy, and only the increasing tension of my nerves can account for the hold it gained upon me.



My companions were thoroughly alarmed.

I grew so pale, trembled so in every limb, that my companions were thoroughly alarmed. We had braved with us, which was duly administered to me. After awhile I recovered, and although the fear was still with me, sat with the staid man of an Indian at the table, awaiting what might happen at the frontier. I had done all I could. If, at the last moment, disaster overtook us, I had at least striven by every means within my power to avert it.

We have passed Biarritz, the merry bright watering place. We have passed Hendaye, the French frontier station. We leave the towering Pyrenees on our left. We are at Irun, where all baggage must be jealously scrutinized. We are in Spain! Nobody has troubled us. No suspicious-looking stranger has watched us. The stoppage has been long, for the custom house officials are notoriously particular in the discharge of their duty; but our noble-looking courier has saved us all personal trouble. He had done us yeoman's service. At last we are in another train, a train which runs on a line of another gauge. The very time of day has changed. We have lost or gained—I forget which—some twenty minutes. We now count by Madrid time. We are fairly on Spanish ground, and I have saved my love. Saved her from others—now to save her from herself. Never, never shall she know the secret of that dark night. We will speed away to the south—to the sun, the color, the brightness, the flowers. All shall be forgotten. The dark remembrance shall be swept from my mind. I will call it a dream. I will win Philippa's love—the love that I dare to believe is already almost mine. We will live forever in bright, sunny, glowing lands. Who cares for dull, dark, dismal England? Have we not youth, wealth, and, oh, blessed word! love! Before my love and me lie years and years of sweetness and joy. Shakes off black gloom and be merry, Basil North. You have conquered fate!

We have passed St. Sebastian, the sluggish train is slowly winding up the valley of the Urumea. We are in wild and glorious scenery. The railway is carried at a great elevation, from which we get now and again peeps of far-away valleys. Yes, I could now find time to admire the wonderful scenery which lasted until we passed Miranda.

My mood changed with the country. I laughed; I jested. Each of the many stations at which we stopped furnished materials for my new-born merriment. I laughed at the solemn looking Spanish railway officials, and drew pictures of the doleful fate of imaginary noble born hidalgos whom poverty forced to descend to such employment. I grieved not at the slowness of the train, although an ordinary traveler might well, when on a Spanish line, sigh for the comparatively lightning speed of the much maligned French trains. Time was nothing to me now. Was there not a lifetime stretching before me—and Philippa! My gaiety was contagious. My mother laughed until the tears came, and Philippa smiled as I had not seen her smile since we picked up under such sad circumstances that long dropped thread of friendship.

Those who have travelled in Spain will scarcely credit me when I say we had the compartment to ourselves. We were troubled by no cloaked Spaniard who, as is the wont of his kind, insisted upon smoking like a furnace and keeping both windows shut. Our noble courier had been given his instructions. His arguments were vain, and had I troubled about money I should have found them costly. But they carried the point, and no one intruded on our privacy. The hours went by. My mother slept, or pretended to sleep. I seated myself near Philippa, and whispered words of thinly veiled love. She answered them not—I expected no answer—but her eyes were downcast and her cheek was blushing. She sighed. A sad smile played around her sweet mouth; a smile that spoke of a world of regret. That smile, that smile, told me that she understood me, but told me also that, ah! it could never be. The past never forgives! But all the same she let her hand rest in mine; and although, considering what had happened, I scarcely dare to say so, for once, for many months, I was all but happy.

For me that journey ended only too soon. At night we reached Burgos, the capital of the old Castilian kingdom, and I laid my head on my pillow and enjoyed sleep such as I had not known since the night before that one when Philippa, with the snowflakes falling around her, stood outside the window of my cottage and gave me something to live for—something to hope for!

CHAPTER IX. SAFE—AND LOVED.

Now that we are safe in Spain; now that Philippa's arrest is a matter of impossibility, and her expulsion from a country so lax in its observance of international obligations highly improbable, when her guilt can at the utmost be only suspected, if indeed suspicion ever points to her, I may pass rapidly over the events of the next two months; the more so as my record of them would differ very little from the description of an ordinary tour in Spain. To me, after the feverish anxiety, the horrible dread as to what any hour might bring forth, which had characterized our flight from England, it seemed something very much like baths my dropping at once into the position of the everyday tourist taking a couple of ladies on a round of travel; but for the time I was outwardly neither more nor less.

From Burgos we went to Valladolid: from Valladolid to Madrid—Madrid, the high-perched city, with its arid, uninteresting surroundings and abominable climate. [Not long did we linger here. Bad and trying as the English winter may be, the cold of Madrid is a poor exchange for it. I had almost thrown aside the assumed character of an invalid; but I felt it would be the height of inconsistency, after forcing my companions to accompany me in search of warmth, to

make any stay in the Spanish capital, high-girded I was to leave it, and turn my face southward. Philippa was by now in apparently good health, both bodily and mental; but while at Madrid I trembled for her, as I should tremble for any one I loved who made that a resting-place—a city swept from end to end by crazy, treacherous, icy winds blowing straight from the Guadarrama mountains; insidious blasts in which lurk the seeds of consumption and death.

So at our leisure we went southward, halting at such places and seeing such sights as we thought fit; lingering here and there just so long as it suited us; travelling by easy stages and in such comfort as we could command. At Malaga we spent weeks, revelling in the balmy, delicious air; at Granada we were days and weeks before we could tear ourselves away from the interesting, absorbing glories of the departed Moor. We were in a new world—a world which I had always longed to see. At last—it was just at the end of April, when the land was full of roses, when vegetation was breaking into that rich luxuriance unknown in the northern lands—we turned our steps to the city which I had in my own mind fixed upon as the end of our wanderings, the half Spanish, half Moorish, but wholly beautiful city of Seville; brilliant, romantic Seville, with its flower-bedecked houses, its groves of orange and olive trees, its luxuriant gardens, its crooked, narrow streets, its Moorish walls, its numerous towers all of which sink into insignificance under the shadow of the lofty Giralda. All I wanted seemed to be here.

Here was everything for the sake of seeking which I had professed to leave foggy England—sun, warmth, color, brightness. Here I thought, if in any place in the world, will the one I love forget what she knows of the cruel past. Here it may be our new life shall begin.

Glorious, wonderful Seville! The magic charm of the place fell on my companions as it fell upon me, as indeed it falls upon all who visit it. By common consent we arranged to stay our course for an indefinite time. Perhaps by now we all thought we had endured enough of hotel life, and wanted some place which might bear the name of home; so, although such things are not very easy to find, I hired a furnished house. Such a house!

From the narrow street—the need of shade makes narrow streets indispensable to Seville—pass through a light openwork iron gate into a spacious white marble lined courtyard, or, as the Spaniards call it, patio; a courtyard open to the sky, save for the gayly colored awning which is sometimes spread over it; a space fragrant with the four corners with the perfumes of orange and other sweet smelling blossoms, bright with glowing oleanders, and musical with the murmur of fountains. Around the walls stands, some of the fair works of art, paintings and mirrors. Every sitting room in the house opening on to this cool central fairyland—a fairyland which, for many months of the year, is almost the only part of the house used in their waking hours by the Sevillians. Add to this a garden, not large but exquisite, full of the rarest and choicest blossoms, and if you are not hopelessly bigoted, and enamored of English fogs, you must long for such a home in courtly, beautiful Seville!

With such surroundings—almost those of a Sybarite—who can blame me for being lulled into security, if not forgetfulness, and for telling myself that my troubles were nearly at an end? Who can wonder at the castles I built as hour after hour I lounged in the patio, with its fragrant, soothing atmosphere, and gazed at Philippa's beautiful face, and now and again meeting her dark eyes, and sometimes surprising in those thoughtful depths a look which thrilled my heart—a look which I told myself was one of love!

True, that often and often in my sleep I saw the white, dead face, with the snore heaving over it. True, that often and often Philippa's wild cry, "The wags of sin—on, on!" rang through my dreams, and I awoke trembling in every limb; but in the daytime, in the midst of the sweet shaded repose, I could almost banish every memory, every thought which strove to lead me back to grief and horror.

The days, each one sweeter than the former, passed by. Each day was passed with Philippa. We wandered together through the marvellous gardens of the Alcazar; we drove under the shading trees of Las Delicias; we made excursions to Italica and other places, which the guide-book tells us every visitor to Seville should see; but I think we found in the ordinary sights, which were at our very door, as much pleasure as in any of the stock shows. We loved to watch the people. We delighted in the picturesque, ragged-looking, black-eyed Andalusian boy-rascals who played and romped at every street corner. We noticed the exquisitely graceful figures of the Sevillians; I, moreover, noted that the most graceful of these figures could not be compared to Philippa's own. We strolled up the awning-covered Calle de las Sierpas, and laughed at the curious windowless shops. Everything was so strange, so bright, so seeming with old-world tradition, so full of intense interest, that no wonder I could for the time send painful memories to the background.

And Philippa! Although there were times when her face grew sad and with sad remembrances; although at times her eyes sought mine with that troubled, inquiring look; although I trembled as to what might be the question which I seemed to see her lips about to form; I did not, could not, believe she was entirely unhappy. The smile—a quiet, thoughtful one, yet a smile—was often seen on her face. It came now of its own accord. More and more certain I grew that, if nothing recalled the past, or I should say, if nothing filled the blank, so mercifully left, of that one night, the hour was not far distant when my love would call herself happy. Oh, to keep that fatal knowledge from her forever!

Such was my life. So, in calm and peace, all but happiness, the days passed by, until the hour came when for the third time I started to tell Philippa that I loved her, to tell her so with the certainty of hearing her echo my words. Yes, certainly. Had I not for many days seen her eyes grow brighter, the grave, thoughtful look leave her face, her whole manner change when I drew near? Such signs as these told me that the crowning moment of my life was at hand.

Here for one moment I pause. I seem to excuse myself for wishing to marry a woman who had been, or supposed herself to have been, the innocent victim of a secondarily man of the world. I have nothing in common with those who think such an excuse is married. Mrs. Wilson's statement that the marriage was valid might be true or false. It gave me the impression that it was true, and I believed that Philippa could lay claim to bear the man's assumed name. But whether she was Lady Ferrand, or a trustful woman betrayed, for my own sake I cared little. She was Philippa!

As to my intention of marrying, my own wish to marry a woman who, in her temporary and fully-accounted-for delirium, had killed the man who so cruelly wronged her, I have but this to say. My tale, although I give it to the world, is not written for the purpose of fiction. It is the story of myself—a story which seemed to me worth telling—of a man who loved one woman passionately, blindly, and without consideration. Such was my great love for Philippa that I feel no shame in telling the

truth, and saying that had I seen her, in full possession of her senses, level that pistol and shoot her betrayer through his black heart, I should have held that only justice had been done. I should have regretted the act, but nevertheless I would have pleaded for her love as fervently and reverently as I was now about to plead for it.

Once more I say, if you condemn me throw the book aside.

Philippa, with her eyes half closed, was, as was usual at that hour, sitting in the patio. In her hand she held a sprig of orange blossoms, and ever and anon inhaled its delicious perfume; an action, by the by, severely useful, as the whole air was redolent of the fragrance thrown from the great tree in the centre of the marble space. She was, or fancied she was, alone, as sometimes time before I had left the court to obtain a fresh supply of cigarettes; and my mother, who could never quite adapt herself to the semi-open-air life, was taking a siesta in the drawing room. As I saw Philippa in all her glowing beauty, the white marble against which she leaned making as it were a suitable foil to the warm color of her cheek—the long, curved, black, downcast lashes—the bosom rising and falling gently—like an inspiration the thought came to me that in a minute my fate would be decided. Heavens! how could I have waited so long to hear the words which I knew she would say!

I crept noiselessly to her side. I passed my arm round her waist and drew her to me. I whispered words of passionate love in her ear—words, the confidence of which startled me; but then this time I knew that my love of years was to be rewarded.

She did not shrink away; she did not tremble like a leaf in my embrace. She sighed deeply, even hopelessly, and I saw the tears welling in her dark eyes. Closer and firmer I held her, and kissed her cheek again and again. Had that moment been my last I should have said that I had not lived in vain.

"Philippa," I whispered, "my queen, my love, tell me you love me at last."

She was silent. The tears broke from her eyes and ran down her cheeks. I kissed the signs of sorrow away.

"Dearest," I said, "it is answer enough that you suffer these kisses, but I have waited so long—been so unhappy; look at me and satisfy me; let me hear you say, 'I love you.'"

She turned her tearful eyes to mine, but not for long. She cast her looks upon the ground and was still silent. Yet she lay unresisting in my arms. That, after all, was the true answer.

But I must have it from her lips. "Tell me, dearest—tell me once," I prayed.

Her lips quivered; her bosom rose and fell. The blush spread from her cheek and stole down her white neck.

"Yes," she murmured, "now that it is too late, I love you."

I laughed a wild laugh. I clasped Philippa to my breast.

"Too late!" I cried. "We may have fifty years of happiness!"

"It is too late," she answered. "For your sake I have told you that I love you, Basil. My love, I will kiss you once—then loose me and let us say farewell!"

"And when death closes the eyes of one of us we will say farewell—not until then," I said, as my lips met hers in a long and rapturous kiss.

Then with a sigh she gently but firmly freed herself from my arms. She rose, we stood on the marble floor, face to face, gazing in each other's eyes.

"Basil," she said, softly, "all this must be forgotten. Say farewell; to-morrow we must part."

"Dearest, our lives henceforth are one." "It cannot be. Spare me, Basil! You have been kind to me. It cannot be."

"Why? Tell me why?" "Why? Need you ask? You bear an honored and respected name; and I, you know what I am—a shameless woman."

"A wronged woman, it may be, not a shameless one."

"Ah! Basil, in this world, when a woman is concerned, wronged and shamed mean the same thing. You have been as a brother to me. I came to you in my trouble; you saved my life—my reason. Be kinder still, and spare me the pain of parting you."

By look, by word, by gesture, she seemed to beseech me. Oh, how I longed to tell her that I firmly believed she was the dead man's wife! I had much difficulty in checking the words which were forming on my lips. But I dared not speak. Telling her that the marriage was a valid one meant that I must tell her of her husband's death, and, it might be, how he died.

"Philippa," I said, "the whole happiness of my life, my every desire is centred upon making you my wife. Think, dearest, how when I had no right to demand the gift my life was made desolate; think what it will be when I know you love me and yet refuse to be mine! Have I been true to you, Philippa?"

"Heaven knows you have."

"Then why, now that you love me, refuse me my reward?"

"Oh, spare me! I cannot, I will not give it. Basil, dear Basil, why with your talents should you marry the cast-off mistress—of Sir Mervyn Ferrand? Why should you blush to show your wife to the world?"

"Blush! The world! What is my world save you! You are all to me, sweetest. You love me—what more do I want! Before this time next week we will be married."

"Never, never! I will not wrong the man I love. Basil, farewell forever!"

She clasped her hands and fled wildly across the court. I caught her at the door, which she had reached and half opened. "Promise me one thing," I said; "promise you will wait until my return. I shall only be five minutes. It is not much to ask, Philippa."

Philippa bent her head as in assent. I passed through the door, and in a few minutes returned to the patio, accompanied by my mother, who glanced from Philippa to me in a surprised way.

"What is the matter?" she asked, with her cheerful smile. "Have you two young people been quarrelling?"



"What is the matter?" she asked. "Have you two young people been quarrelling?"

I turned away, went past the screen which is sometimes put up to insure privacy, out of the iron gate, into the narrow street. I watched the lounging, dignified-looking man and the dark-eyed woman who went by; I looked at the merry urchins at play; and, after what seemed an interminable quarter of an hour, returned to learn how my gentle counsel had succeeded with my suit.

My mother and Philippa were sitting with their arms around each other. Philippa, as I entered the patio, raised her eyes to mine with a look of shy happiness. My mother rose and took the girl by the hand.

"Basil," she said, "I have at last been able to persuade her that you and I, at least, rise above the conventionalities of what is called the world. I have told her that, knowing all I know, I see nothing to prevent her from being your wife. I have told her that simply for her own sweet sake I would rather see you marry her than any woman in the world. And, Basil, I fancy I have made her believe me."

With her soft eyes full of maternal love my mother kissed me and left the court. I opened my arms to close them round the fairest woman in the world, and all the earth seemed bright and glorious to me. My great love had conquered!

And yet, even in that moment of bliss, my thoughts involuntarily flew away to a snow-heaped road in England—to a white drift, under which for days and days a ghastly object had once been lying. A dream! A dream! It must have been a fearful dream. Forget it, Basil North, be happy in the happiness you have at last won!

CHAPTER X. THE SWORD FALLS.

Once conquered—once convinced that the obstacles which her solicitude for my welfare raised against my wish were not insuperable—Philippa offered no further resistance; while as for me, every day that might be counted before I called her my wife seemed a day spoiled, if not entirely wasted. With my mother's arguments to back my own fervent persuasion, I had no difficulty in winning Philippa's consent to our marriage taking place as soon as the needful formalities could be complied with. And yet, although the day was fixed, it was at my instance changed, and the ceremony postponed for a while.

My reason for deferring my crowning happiness was this. Knowing all that I knew, the question arose, under what name was Philippa to be married? Under her own maiden name, under the false name which for some time Sir Mervyn Ferrand, for reasons best known to himself, had made her assume; or under that name which, supposing Mrs. Wilson had spoken the truth, she was legally entitled to bear? So anxious, so resolved was I that there should be no shadow of doubt as to the validity of her second and happier marriage, that after due consideration I determined to sacrifice my own inclination, and postpone our wedding long enough to give me time to pay a flying visit to England, where I could do my best to obtain such evidence as would show that Philippa was the dead man's widow.

I made the excuse that I found many matters of business connected with my property must be attended to before I could be married. I travelled to England—to Liverpool—as fast as I could. I stayed there for a week, and during that time made full researches into the life and death of a woman who, as Mrs. Wilson said, had died on a certain day, and been buried under the name of Lucy Ferrand.

The information I acquired as to her antecedents in no consequence to my story. Whatever her faults may have been, her history was a sad one; indeed it seemed to me that the history of any woman who had been cursed by Sir Mervyn Ferrand's love was a sad one. However, the result of my investigations was, in short, this: Ferrand had married the woman many years ago. They had parted by mutual consent. With his cynical carelessness he had troubled no more about her; and, stranger still, she had not troubled him. She died on the date given by my informant. The question of identity could be easily settled; so that if ever Philippa chose to claim the rights appertaining to Sir Mervyn Ferrand's widow, she would have no difficulty in making that claim good. But I trusted that years might pass before she learned that the man was dead.

I made my presence in England known to no one; in fact, I felt that in returning to my native country I ran a certain amount of risk. For all I knew to the contrary, there might be a warrant out against me, if suspicion as to the author of that night's work had in any way been directed to Philippa, I, the partner of her flight, could not hope to escape free. However, I comforted myself by thinking that if danger menaced us I should have heard something about it, as after our first hurried start I had made no attempt to conceal our whereabouts. It would have been useless. My mother had friends in England with whom she exchanged letters.

I had an agent and lawyer with whom, in only for financial reasons, I was bound to correspond. I had been obliged to write to my old friend William, and instruct him to get rid of the cottage as best he could, and to look out for a fresh place for himself. But all the same I did not care to let it be known that I was now in England.

While engaged upon raking up evidence on Philippa's behalf, I did not neglect to make such inquiries as I could respecting the event which had happened that night near Roding. I found that, so far as the general public knew, the crime was still veiled in mystery. No one had been arrested; no one had been accused; no reason for the deed had been discovered, and as yet suspicion pointed to no one. Indeed, in spite of the hundred pounds reward offered by government, it seemed that Sir Mervyn Ferrand's murder was relegated to swell the list of undiscovered crimes. By this I knew that Mrs. Wilson had kept her promise of silence; and now that months had gone by, now that public attention had been turned from the thrilling affair; now that Philippa seemed as far or farther than ever from giving any token which suggested the avenger

CAUGHT AT LAST.

Two North Carolina Boys Arrested for Robbing the Mails.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 23.—Inspector Henderson, of the postoffice department, has just succeeded in causing the arrest of two mail robbers, who, though mere lads, had, by the newsiness and dexterity of their operations, baffled the skill of the inspectors for a long time. Since June a number of complaints have reached the postoffice department that registered letters passing between Salisbury and Albemarle, N. C., have been rifled. These towns are connected by a star route, over which the mails were carried by George H. Eagle, aged eighteen. After a careful examination the inspectors concluded that Eagle was robbing the mails. Decoy letters, containing marked money, were placed in the registered pouch, and a watch placed upon Eagle. Upon his arrival at the end of the route the decoy letters were found to have been rifled and Eagle was promptly arrested and searched. No money was found on his person and the inspectors were forced to release him for lack of evidence, though confident of his guilt. On the night of his discharge Eagle bought a horse and disappeared in the pine woods. Some time afterward while digging at the bottom of a well on the premises of one Armand, the well digger heard Jethro Armand, a lad of eighteen years, confess to his father that he had the money stolen by Eagle. The father told his son to keep the money. Armand had formerly carried the mail over the same route. The well diggers informed the inspectors of the facts, and Armand was arrested and the proofs of the crime secured. Eagle was arrested yesterday in Arkansas, where he had fled. It appears that the boys met in the woods and opened the pouches with home made tools. An old knife had been converted into an exceedingly keen serviceable saw. With this tool the clasps of the pouches were severed on one side, bent back with another instrument and room thus secured for the insertion of a hand into the pouches. The letters were skillfully opened, the money abstracted and with the aid of a bottle of mudilage the envelope was neatly resealed. Armand seems to have been the custodian of the stolen funds. Inspector Henderson says this was one of the cleverest devices for robbing the mails he has ever discovered.

THE STAPLE.

Decreased Estimates by the New Orleans Cotton Exchange.

NEW ORLEANS, Sept. 3.—The monthly report of the cotton exchange says of the growing crop: For the first time this season do reports show deterioration in crop prospects, but shedding has been so prevalent during a greater portion of August that, excepting Virginia and Georgia, no State has held its former rating. Rust and worms have also done some harm. Cotton lands complain of excessive rains, but a cessation thereof would do much towards bringing those sections up. Drought has been the trouble on uplands and throughout the greater part of Texas, but in the latter State particularly, timely showers have fallen easterly in many localities, and prospects have accordingly brightened in the visits so favored. Labor as a rule is sufficient and working well. Take it altogether, the crop has met with a reverse, but favoring seasons from now on with a late freeze, would go far towards compensation. For reason, therefore, as above stated, the per cent. has been reduced from 97 at the end of July to 91 now. Below are the stated averages: Virginia, 91; North Carolina, 90; South Carolina, 89; Georgia, 94; Florida, 92; Alabama, 94; Tennessee, 91; Arkansas, 89; Mississippi, 91; Louisiana, 91; Texas, 90; average for the belt, 91.

From Shreveport.

Special to Commercial Herald.

SHREVEPORT, Sept. 3.—Only seven miles of rails now remain to be laid to complete the Shreveport & Houston narrow gauge to its terminus, Logansport, on the Sabine river, the dividing line between Louisiana and Texas. Superintendent John R. Jones has a large force employed and reports that he will have the road in complete running order during this month. As soon as this section is completed a movement will be made to complete the road from Shreveport to Magnolia, Arkansas, to connect with the Texas & St. Louis narrow gauge. Both roads run through a productive country. Nothing has been learned here of the progress of work on the Houston East & West Texas, which connects with the Shreveport & Houston at Logansport, although Capt. Simon Levy, receiver of the Shreveport & Houston, has endeavored to ascertain.

At the sessions of the American Microscopical Society, in St. Louis, R. N. Reynolds showed astonished visitors millions of bacteria in a little drop of scrapings from their teeth, but was himself astonished to find that the bacteria from one man's mouth was dead. It transpired that the man had just taken a drink of whiskey.