

The Three Burglars—Continued.

I hoped that my wife would put herself on my side, and would say that we had enough of this sort of thing, but female curiosity is an unknown quantity, and she unhesitatingly replied that she would like to hear the young man's story. I sat down in despair. It was useless to endeavor to withstand this yearning for personal information—one of the curses, I may say, of our present civilization. The young man gave no time for change of opinion, but immediately began. His voice was rich and rather low, and his manner exceedingly pleasing and gentle.

"I wish to state in the first place," said he, "that I am a reporter for the press. In the exercise of my vocation I have frequently found myself in peculiar and unpleasant positions, but never before have I been in a situation so embarrassing, so humiliating, as this. In the course of my studies and experiences I have found that in literature and journalism, as well as in art, one can make a true picture only of what one has seen. Imagination is all very well, often grand and beautiful, but imaginative authors show us their inner selves and not our outer world; there is to-day a demand for the real, and it is a demand which will be satisfied with nothing but the truth. I have determined, as far as in me lies, to endeavor to supply this demand, and I have devoted myself to the study of Realism.

"With this end in view, I have made it a rule never to describe anything I have not personally seen and examined. If we would thoroughly understand and appreciate our fellow beings we must know what they do and how they do it, otherwise we can not give them credit for their virtues, nor judge them properly for their faults. If I could prevent crime I would annihilate it, and when it ceased to exist the necessity for describing it would also cease. But it does exist. It is a powerful element in the life of the human race. Being known and acknowledged everywhere, it should be understood, therefore it should be described. The grand reality of which we are a part can never be truly comprehended until we comprehend all its parts. But I will not philosophize. I have devoted myself to Realism, and in order to be a conscientious student I study it in all its branches. I am frequently called upon to write accounts of burglars and burglaries, and in order to thoroughly understand these people and their method of action I determined, as soon as the opportunity should offer itself, to accompany a burglarious expedition. My sole object was the acquisition of knowledge of the subject—knowledge which to me would be valuable and, I may say, essential. I engaged this man, James Barlow, to take me with him the first time he should have on hand an affair of this kind, and thus it is that you find me here to-night in this company. As I came here for the purpose of earnest and thorough investigation I will frankly admit that I would not have interferred with his processes, but, at the same time, I would have made it my business to see that no material injuries should result to any members of this family."

"That was very kind of you," I said, at which my wife looked at me somewhat reproachfully.

"If he really intended it," she remarked, "and I do not see why that was not the case, it was kind in him."

"As for me," said Aunt Martha, very sympathetically, "I think that the study of Realism may be carried a great deal too far. I do not think that there is the slightest necessity for people to know any thing about burglars. If people keep talking and reading about diseases they will get them, and if they keep talking and reading about crimes they will find the iniquity is catching, the same as some other things. Besides, this realistic description gets to be very tiresome. If you really want to be a writer, young man, why don't you try your hand on some original composition? Then you might write something which would be interesting."

"Ah, madam," said the young man, casting his eyes on the floor, "it would be far beyond my power to write any thing more wonderful than what I have known or seen. If I may tell you some of the things which happened to me you will understand why I have become convinced that in this world of amazing realities imagination must always take a second place."

"Of course we want to hear your story," said Aunt Martha; "that's what we have been staying here for."

"If I am unbound," said the young man, looking at me, "I could speak more freely."

"No doubt of it," said I; "but perhaps you might run away before you finished your story. I wouldn't have that happen in the world."

"Don't make fun of him," said Aunt Martha. "I was going to ask you to cut him loose, but after what you say I think it would perhaps be just as well to keep them all tied until the narratives are completed."

With a sigh of resignation the young man began his story.

"I am American born, but my father, who was a civil engineer and of high rank in his profession, was obliged, when I was quite a small boy, to go to Austria, where we had extensive contracts for the building of railroads. In that country I spent the greater part of my boyhood and youth. There I was educated in the best schools, my father sparing no money to have me taught every thing that a gentleman should know. My mother died when I was a mere infant, and as my father's vocation made it necessary for him to travel a great deal, my life was often a lonely one. For society I depended entirely upon my fellow scholars, my tutors and masters. It was my father's intention, however, that when I had finished my studies I should go to one of the great European capitals, there to mix with the world.

"But when this period arrived I was in no haste to avail myself of the advantages he offered me. My tastes were studious, my disposition contemplative, and I was a lover of rural life.

"My father had leased an old castle in Wurlicke, not far from the mountains; and here he kept his books and

charts, and here came for recreation and study whenever his arduous duties gave him a little breathing spell. For several months I had lived at this castle, happy when my father was with me and happy when I was alone. I expected soon to go to Vienna, where my father would introduce me to some of his influential friends. But day by day I postponed the journey.

"Walking one morning a few miles from the castle I saw at the edge of a piece of woodland a female figure seated beneath a tree. Approaching nearer, I perceived that she was young, and that she was sketching. I was surprised, for I knew that in this part of the world young women, at least those of the upper classes, to which the costume and tastes of this one showed her to belong, were not allowed to wander about the country by themselves; but although I stood still and watched the young lady for some time, no companion appeared upon the scene.

"The path I had intended to take led past the piece of woodland and I saw no reason why I should diverge from my proposed course. I accordingly proceeded and when I reached the young lady I bowed and raised my hat. I think that for some time she had perceived



SHE WAS SKETCHING.

my approach, and she looked up at me with a face that was half merry, half inquisitive and perfectly charming. I can not describe the effect which her expression had upon me. I had never seen her before, but her look was not such a one as she would bestow upon a stranger. I had the most powerful desire to stop and speak to her, but having no right to do so I should have passed on had she not said to me in the best of English: 'Good morning, sir.' Then I stopped, you may be sure. I was so accustomed to speak to those I met in either French or German that I involuntarily said to her: 'Bon jour, Mademoiselle.' 'You need not speak French,' she said; 'I am neither English nor American, but I speak their language. Are you the gentleman who lives in Wurlicke Castle? If so, we are neighbors, and I wish you would tell me why you live there nearly all the time alone.'

"At this I sat down by her. 'I am that person,' I said, and handed her my card. 'But before I say any more, please tell me who you are.' 'I am Marie Dorfir. My father's house is on the other side of this piece of woodland; you can not see it from here; this is part of his estate. And now tell me why you live all by yourself in that old ruin.' 'It is not altogether a ruin,' I answered; 'part of it is in very good condition.' And then I proceeded to give her an account of my method of life and my reasons for it. 'It is interesting,' she said, 'but it is very odd.' 'I do not think it half so odd,' I answered, 'as that you should be here by yourself.' 'That is truly an out-of-the-way sort of thing,' she said, 'but just now I am doing out-of-the-way things. If I do not do them now I shall never have the opportunity again. In two weeks I shall be married, and then I shall go to Prague, and every thing will be by line and rule. No more delightful rambles by myself. No more sitting quietly in the woods watching the little birds and hares. No more making a sketch just where I please, no matter whether the ground be damp or not.' 'I wonder that you are allowed to do these things now,' I said. 'I am not allowed,' she answered. 'I do them in hours when I am supposed to be painting flower pieces in an upper room.' 'But when you're married,' I said, 'your husband will be your companion in such rambles.' 'Hardly,' she said, shrugging her shoulders; 'he will be forty-seven on the 13th of next month, which I believe is July, and he is a great deal more grizzled than my father, who is past fifty. He is very particular about all sorts of things, as I suppose he has to be, as he is a Colonel of infantry. Nobody could possibly disapprove of my present performances more than he would.' I could not help ejaculating: 'Why, then, do you marry him?' She smiled at my earnestness. 'Oh, that is all arranged,' she said, 'and I have nothing to do with it. I have known for more than a year that I'm to marry Colonel Kaldheim, but I can not say that I have given myself much concern about it until recently. It now occurs to me that if I expect to amuse myself in the way I best like I must lose no time in it.' I looked at the girl with an air of earnest interest. 'It appears to me,' said I, 'that your ways of amusing yourself are very much like mine.' 'That is true,' she said, looking up with animation, 'they are. Is it not delightful to be free, to go where you like, and do what you please, without any one to advise or interfere with you?' 'It is delightful,' said I, and for half an hour we sat and talked about these delights and kindred subjects. She was much interested in our castle; and urged me to make a sketch of it, so that she may know what it now looked like. She had seen it when a little girl, but never since, and had been afraid to wander very far in this direction by herself. I told her that it would be far better for her to see the castle with her own eyes, and that I could conduct her to an eminence, not half a mile away, where she could have an excellent view of it. This plan greatly pleased her, but looking at her watch she said that it would be too late for her to go that morning, but if I happened to come that way the next day, and she should be there to finish

her sketch if the weather were fine, she would be delighted to have me show her the eminence."

"I think," interrupted Aunt Martha, "that she was a very imprudent young woman."

"That may be," he replied, "but you must remember, madam, that up to this time the young lady had been subjected to the most conventional trammels and that her young nature had just burst out into temporary freedom and true life. It was the caged bird's flight into the bright summer air."

"Just the kind of birds," said Aunt Martha, "that shouldn't be allowed to fly, at least until they are used to it. But you can go on with your story."

"Well," said the young man, "the next day we met I took her to the piece of high ground I had mentioned, and she sketched the castle. After that we met again and again nearly every day. This sort of story tells itself. I became madly in love with her, and I am sure she liked me very well; at all events I was a companion of her own age and tastes, and such a one, she assured me, she had never known before, and probably would never know again."

"There was some excuse for her," said Aunt Martha; "but still she had no right to act in that way, especially as she was so soon to be married."

"I do not think that she reasoned much upon the subject," said the young man, "and I am sure I did not. We made no plans. Every day we thought only of what we were doing or saying, and not at all what we had done or would do. We were very happy."

"One morning I was sitting by Marie in the very place where I had first met her, when we heard some one rapidly approaching. Looking up I saw a tall man in an undress military uniform. 'Heavens,' cried Marie, 'it is Colonel Kaldheim.'

"The situation was one of which an expectant bridegroom would not be likely to ask many questions. Marie was seated on a low stone with her drawing block in her lap. She was finishing the sketch on which she was engaged when I first saw her, and I was kneeling close to her looking over her work, and making various suggestions, and I think my countenance must have indicated that I found it very pleasant to make suggestions in that way to such a pretty girl. Our heads were very close together. Sometimes we looked at the paper, sometimes we looked at each other. But in the instant I caught sight of the Colonel the situation had changed. I rose to my feet and Marie began to pick up the drawing materials which were lying about her.

"Colonel Kaldheim came forward almost at a run. His eyes blazed through his gold spectacles, and his close-cut, reddish beard seemed to be singeing with the fires of rage. I had but an instant for observation, for he came directly up to me, and with a tremendous oburgation in German he struck me full in the face with such force that the blow stretched me upon the ground.

"I was almost stunned, but I heard a scream from Marie, a storm of angry words from Kaldheim, and I felt sure he was about to inflict further injury. He was a much stronger man than I was, and probably was armed. With a sudden instinct of self-preservation I rolled down a little declivity on the edge of which I had fallen, and, staggering to my feet, plunged into a thicket and fled. Even had I been in the full possession of my senses I knew that under the circumstances I would have been of no benefit to Marie had I remained upon the scene. The last thing I heard was a shout from Kaldheim, in which he declared that he would kill me yet. For



I WAS ALMOST STUNNED.

some days I did not get out of my castle. My face was bruised, my soul was dejected. I knew there was no possible chance that I should meet Marie, and that there was a chance that I might meet the angry Colonel. An altercation at this time would be very annoying and painful to the lady, no matter what the result; and I considered it my duty to do every thing that was possible to avoid a meeting with Kaldheim. Therefore, as I have said, I shut myself up within the walls of old Wurlicke and gave strict orders to my servants to admit no one.

"It was at this time that the strangest events of my life occurred. Sitting in an upper room, gazing out of the window over the fields through which I had walked so happily but two days before to meet the lady whom I had begun to think of as my Marie, I felt the head of a dog laid gently in my lap. Without turning my head I caressed the animal and stroked the long hair on his neck.

"My hound Ajax was a dear companion to me in this old castle, although I never took him in my walks, as he was apt to get into mischief, and when I turned my head to look at him he was gone, but strange to say the hand which had been stroking the dog felt as if it were still resting on his neck.

"Quickly drawing my hand toward me it struck the head of the dog, and, moving it backward and forward, I felt the ears and nose of the animal, and then became conscious that its head was still resting upon my knee.

"I started back. Had I been stricken with blindness? But no; turning my head, I could plainly see every thing in the room. The scene from the window was as distinct as it ever had been. I sprang to my feet, and, as I stood won-

dering what this strange thing could mean, the dog brushed up against me and licked my hand. Then the idea suddenly flashed into my mind that by some occult influence Ajax had been rendered invisible.

"I dashed down-stairs, and, although I could neither see nor hear it, I felt that the dog was following me. Rushing into the open air, I saw one of my men. 'Where is Ajax?' I cried. 'A very strange thing has happened, sir,' he said, 'and I should have come to tell you of it, had I not been unwilling to disturb your studies. About two hours ago Ajax was lying here in the court-yard; suddenly he sprang to his feet with a savage growl. His hair stood straight upon his back, his tail was stiff, and his lips were drawn back, showing his great teeth. I turned to see what had enraged him, but there was absolutely nothing, sir, nothing in the world. And never did I see Ajax so angry. But this lasted only for an instant. Ajax suddenly backed, his tail dropped between his legs, his head hung down, and with a dreadful howl he turned, and leaping the wall of the court-yard, he disappeared. I have since been watching for his return. The gate is open, and as soon as he enters I shall chain him, for I fear the dog is mad.'

"I did not dare to utter the thoughts that were in my mind, but bidding the man inform me when Ajax should return I re-entered the castle and sat down in the great hall.

"The dog was beside me; his head again lay upon my knees. With a feeling of awe, yet strangely enough without fear, I carefully passed my hand over the animal's head. I felt his ears, his nose, his jaws and his neck. It was not the head, the ears, the nose, the jaws nor the neck of Ajax!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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