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Literary Selections.

THE FATAL CONCEALMENT.

BY AN ENGLISH BARRISTER.

Some years after I commenced practice—but the precise date I shall for obvious reasons, avoid mentioning—I had a friend at whose house I was a pretty constant visitor. He had a wife who was the magnet that drew me there. She was beautiful—but I shall not attempt to describe her—she was more than beautiful—she was fascinating, she was captivating. Her presence was to me like the intoxication of opium. I was only happy under its influence; and yet, after indulgence in the fatal pleasure, I sank into the deepest despondency. In my own justification, I must say that I never in a word or look betrayed my feelings, though I had some reason to suspect they were reciprocated; for, while in my company she was always gay, brilliant and witty; yet as I learned from others, at times she was often sad and melancholy. Powerful, most powerful was the temptation to make an unreserved disclosure of my heart, but I resisted it. That I had the firmness so to do, has been for years my only consolation.

One morning I sat alone in my chamber. My clerk was absent. A gentle knock was just audible at the outer door. I shouted "come in" in no very amiable humor, for I was indulging in a delicious reverie upon the subject of the lady of my heart, and the presence of an ordinary mortal was hateful. The door opened and Mrs. — entered; I do not know exactly what I did, but it seemed to be a long time before I had power to rise and welcome her, while she stood there with a timid blush upon her lips, which made me feel that it would be too great a happiness to die for.

"I don't wonder that you are surprised to see me here, she began, with a provoking little laugh; "but is your astonishment too great to allow you to say how do you do?"

The spell was broken. I pressed it more warmly and held it longer than was absolutely necessary.

"Perhaps your surprise will be increased," she continued, "when I inform you that I have come on business."

I muttered something about not being so ambitious as to hope that she would visit me from any other motive. She took no notice of what I said, but I perceived that her face turned deadly pale, and that her hand trembled as she placed before me a bundle of papers.

"You will see by these," she said in a low hurried voice, "that some property was left to me by my uncle and by my grandfather, but so strictly settled that even I can touch nothing but the interest. Now, my husband is in want of a large sum of money at this moment, and I wish you to examine the affair well, and see whether, by any twisting of the law, I can place any part of my capital at his disposal. Unintentionally I have done him a great wrong; in a tone so low, that no ears less jealous alive than mine could have understood their meaning. "and poor as this reparation is, it is all that I can make, and I must do it if possible."

I pretended to study the papers before me, but the lights danced and mingled; and if, by great effort, I forced my eyes to distinguish a word, it conveyed not the slightest meaning to my whirling brain. Every drop of blood seemed imbued with a separate consciousness, and to be tingling and rushing to the side next to her, whose presence, within a short distance of me, was the only thing of which I had a distinct perception—I hung my head to hide from her the emotion of which I was thoroughly ashamed.

It may well be believed that I was in no condition to give a professional opinion; but I got over the difficulty by telling her I must have time to study the case, and promising to let her know the result.

"You are a tiresome creature," she said, with a little coquettish air. "I really expected that for once in your life, and for a friend, too, you might have gotten rid of the days delays, and give me your opinion in half an hour, so far, at least, as to tell me whether there is any probability of my being able to do as I desire. But I see that you are like the rest of the lawyers—time! time! time! I suppose you will keep thinking about it until I am dead, and then it will go to my husband in due course of law."

"It may not require more than half an hour to ascertain so much, when I can direct my thoughts to do it for that space of time," I replied, and I know that the words rattled like shot out of my mouth.

"But would you be so unreasonable as to require an artist to draw a straight line when he was under a fit of delirium tremens?"

"You are an incomprehensible person," she replied, rather coldly, "so I shall leave you to your legal studies. But, if you are going to have a fit of the delirium tremens, I had better send in the doctor—shall I?"

"Well, I don't anticipate an attack this morning," I answered with a forced laugh; "so I will not give you the trouble. The fact is, I have been violently agitated a short time since, and my mind has not yet recovered its equilibrium."

We talked a few minutes longer, she quizzing me in her light, playful manner, and I delighted to be so teased, standing stupid and dumb, scarcely able to say a word, though very anxious to prolong the delightful interview by keeping up the war of badinage. At length she went to the door, and I was about to escort her down stairs, when we heard one speaking below.

"Good God!" she exclaimed, clinging to my arm, "that is my husband's voice, if he finds me here I am ruined."

"Don't be alarmed," I replied, endeavoring to reassure her, "you came here on business, too! He could only love you the more for it."

"You do not understand so well about this as I do," she said shuddering convulsively. "He is jealous—exceedingly of you; and, oh! I fear not without some cause. Hide me somewhere for mercy's sake."

I don't know how it happened, but my arm was around her, and I half carried her across the room to a closet.

"Shut it! lock it; take away the key, or I shall not feel safe. There is a plenty of air," and sprang into the recess.

For one moment her eye met mine, and I have thought they beamed with impassioned love. The next I had locked the door upon my treasure, throwing the papers she had brought in a drawer, and was apparently busy with my pen when

round about way to question me upon certain points of the law respecting marriage settlements, &c.; and, after a tedious amount of circumlocution, he gave me to understand that all this regarded a desired transfer of some property of his wife's into his own hands. He had come upon the same errand as that generous creature. He had also a copy of the relatives' wills, and I was compelled to examine closely, for he was desperately pertinacious, and would not be put off.

I was angry at the thought of what his poor wife must be suffering, pent up in that narrow prison. I felt that I could have kicked her husband out of doors for keeping her there. At length he made a move as if to go. I started up, and stood ready to bow him out.

"So," said he, tying up his papers with provoking deliberation, "not hing but my wife's death you say, can put me in possession of this money. I want it very much, but nobody will suspect me of desiring her death for the sake of having it a little sooner."

He laughed at his own poor jest, and made a sort of hyena chorus to it, that sounded strange and hysterical, even in my own ears. He went at last, but stopped again on the stairs, and detained me there, talking for full five minutes longer. I felt by sympathy, all the pangs of suffocation. My throat seemed swollen—my forehead bursting. Great God! will he never be gone? Will he stand here gossiping about the weather and the generalities of the law, while his lovely wife, who came to sacrifice her individual interests for his sake, dies a terrible and lingering death. I rushed to my back room. A step behind me makes me turn round. It is my clerk—curse on him. I could ground him with unavailing rage. I could have stabbed him—shot him—beaten out his brains—hurled him headlong down stairs. But my violence would have compromised her. In a few minutes my brain was clear again.

"Watson," cried I, "Mr. — has just left me. He is gone up Fleet street, I think, run after him, and request him to leave those papers with me. Say to him I would like them more at my leisure. Run, run, quickly, and you will overtake him."

Watson disappeared. I turned the key of the outer door, and sprang towards the closet. As I unlocked it, I remembered the look she gave me when I shut it; I wondered, with a beating heart, whether the same expression would meet my enraptured gaze when I opened it. There she stood with her eyes calmly fixed on mine.

"You are safe, dearest," I muttered.

She did not rebuke me for calling her so; and emboldened by her silence, I took her hand to lead her from her narrow prison. She moved forward and fell into my arms a corpse.

I cannot recall what followed. I only know that every means was tried for her restoration to life, but alas! without success. Of one thing I was firmly convinced—she had not died from suffocation. I had seen a man who had met death in this manner. I recollected his purple and swollen face, and his warm limbs. She was pale, rigid and cold. The tumult of her own emotions must have killed her the moment the door was closed upon her. By some means I kept my secret from the knowledge of Watson and every one else. All that night I was trying to recover her. Then I formed the project of shutting her up in the closet, locking up the chamber, and going abroad for twenty years. But the idea was rejected as soon as formed; for it would be hardly possible that the presence of a dead body in the house should not be discovered before that time.

Next I thought of setting fire to the place, burning all my books and papers, making a funeral pile of them, and thus ruining myself to preserve the secret. But that thought, too, was dismissed. It might cause loss of life and property to many innocent people, and would be a bungling proceeding after all, and if this fire was discovered early, policemen, firemen, mob, would break in, and finding the body there, all would be lost—for it was more to save her reputation than my life, that I was striving and plotting.

In the meantime I was prey to the most fearful anxiety. I was sure she must have been missed and sought for. Perhaps she had been seen to enter my chambers. Every step I heard, I feared might be that of a policeman. In the morning a stranger called on business. This of course, was nothing unusual; but when he was gone, I felt that he was a detective officer, and had come as a spy. I thrust a few clothes into a carpet bag, in

up a box of matches to set the place on fire, I grasped a razor and looked earnestly at its edge as the surest and swiftest way of ending my misery. But all these would leave her to the jests of the world, and my own sufferings were nothing in comparison. At this distance of time I can look back impartially and coolly upon the dreadful day; and I can solemnly declare, that I would rather be hanged for murdering her than to have allowed a breath to sully her fair name. I had just laid down the razor, when a hurried step crossed the ante-room. It was her husband's. Now, I thought, all is lost; she was seen to enter here, and he has come to claim her.

"My dear —" he began in a very nervous unsettled way, "you remember the business I came about yesterday?"

"Perfectly."

"And do you remember the words I used as I was going? I mean in answer to what you said about my not being able to touch this money until after the death of my wife?"

"Yes, I remember them distinctly."

"My wife has disappeared since yesterday morning," he continued, turning more pale than before, "and if anything serious should have happened, you know, and you should repeat those expressions, they might be laid hold of, and I don't know what might be the consequence—I might be suspected of having murdered her."

Poor fellow! If I had not known the truth, I should have suspected myself, from his excessive terror and anxiety. He wiped the perspiration from his face and sank into a chair. The sight of a person frightened more than myself reassured me. I was calmer than I was since the preceding morning.

"Where did she go? How was she dressed," I inquired, anxious to know all I could on the subject.

"I don't know. She told me she was going out shopping and visiting; but no one saw her leave the house and none of the servants knew exactly how she was dressed. When I went home to dinner the first thing I heard was that she had not returned."

"What have you done? Have you sent to the police and to the hospitals?"

"Yes, and to every friend and tradesman she would be likely to call."

"You may depend upon it," I replied, very impressively, "that I will not repeat what you said yesterday. You are right in supposing that it might tell against you very much, if she is found dead under suspicious circumstances."

He talked a little longer, and then went to renew the search for his wife. How

did I preserve self-possession during this interview? so far from being really calm, I could have gnawed the flesh off my bones in agony.

That night when the doors were fastened and I was alone, I shut myself up in the closet for two hours, to ascertain whether she died from want of air; for I distrusted my own knowledge of the appearance of suffocated persons. The place was well supplied with air from a couple of crevices. My first idea was correct—she had died from some other cause.

When I emerged from the closet, I found that the night was intensely dark. It was raining in torrents, and the thunder and wind roaring in dire chorus, surpented by the sullen booming of the river then at high tide and already swelled by the rain. I sat there in the dark upon the floor, holding the cold stiff hand of death within my own. I thought dreamingly how often it had welcomed me with its soft pressure, while the sweet eyes beamed brightly into mine, and the full pouting lips had wreathed into dimples of delight. Now, that hand that used to be so full of warmth and life was cold! Those lips were clammy and hard! Tears came to my relief. I wept as grown men seldom weep, and with that heart-easing gush came a new idea for her and me. I was to believe at that moment that her spirit rested upon mine, and inspired the thought, for it burst upon me suddenly with a conviction that, if executed at the instant, it would be crowned with success. How could I otherwise have the tenacity to snatch her up in my arms, carry her down stairs, at the risk of being encountered by some of the other inhabitants of the house; bear her through the courts, by a way I knew, into the garden?

The river was running strong and deep against the wall. I pressed one kiss upon her cold forehead, and threw her into the stream. Gladly would I have gone with her, and held her to my heart till death; but the impulse was still on me, and the

thought that her body had been found far down the river. The medical evidence, after a post-mortem examination, was that she had died from rupture of the heart, and that her death took place before her immersion in the water. So they conjectured that she had been standing by the river, when the fatal attack seized her, and had fallen in unperceived; and they returned a verdict of accidental death, and buried her in a pretty churchyard near where they found her.

I shall die a bachelor. I am lean and pale, and bowed down and grey headed, and the sound of my laugh is strange to me.

A BACHELOR'S REFLECTION.—Bless me I am thirty-nine to-day; six feet in my stockings, black eyes, curly hair, tall and straight as a cedar of Lebanon, and still a bachelor. Well it is an independent life at least, no it isn't either. Here are three new gloves of mine full of ricks, eyes, nice silk handkerchief in my drawer wants hemming, buttons off my shirt; what's to be done? How provoking it is to see those married people looking so self-satisfied and consequential, at the head of their families as if they had done the State some great service. As to children, they are as plenty as flies in August, and about as troublesome; every alley and court and garret are swarmed with them, they're no rarity; and any poor, miserable wretch has a wife—enough of them, too, such as they are!

It is enough to scare a man to death to think how much it costs to keep 'em! Silks and satins, ribbons and velvets, feathers and flowers, cuffs and bracelets, gineracks and fol-de-rols; and you must look at the subject of its bearings; little jackets and frocks, and wooden shoes and dolls, pop-guns and ginger-bread; don't believe I can do it, by Jupiter!

But here I sit with the toe of my best boot kicking the grate, for the want of something to do; it's coming awful cold and dreary weather, long evenings, can't go to concerts forever, and when I do the room looks so much the gloomier when I come back, and it would be cozy to have a nice little wife to chat and laugh with.

I've tried to think of something else, but can't; if I look in the fire, I'm sure to see a pair of bright eyes; even the shadows on the wall take fairy shapes; I'm on the brink of ruin—I feel it; I shall read my doom in the marriage list before long—I know I shall!

The woman who reigns queen of the ball-room is very seldom found capable of being the governess of her own children.

LONG SERMONS.—A writer in the London Quarterly Review, in an article entitled "Home Heathenism," makes the following comment on "the immoderate length of sermons"—which we shall extract for the benefit of clergy and others:

"The length of the modern sermon is a great disadvantage and a growing evil; but it is not the main cause of listlessness in the hearer; for it is not the last portion which tires us; we are tired before we get that relief; and there are long sermons which never appear long. The fault is both in the matter and the style. The topics are to generally stale, and extremely limited in their range; the public mind wants variety and freshness.—The mass of the truths uttered from the pulpit need no proof; it is an idle waste of patience and skill to offer it. If all vain repetitions of thought were excluded, and the best of the remainder were alone retained, sermons would not be so unreasonably long. And generally the style is verbose; it is not close, compact, nervous. The rule might be, to see how much space the gold can be made to cover; the practice is, not to be perspicuous, convincing, brief. The word-painter fails to exhibit his own thought, probably because it is not clearly conceived by himself; for he who thinks clearly and vigorously will express himself with sufficient perspicuity; thought shapes the style.—The one radical error, not universal, but general, is excessive verbiage—"the seven grains are hid under a bushel of chaff. We are of the opinion that it is the sin of the age; and indiscreet persons freely bestow their praises upon young ministers—especially if they have plenty of bold 'figures'—in proportion to their being unable to remember anything that is said. The 'cloud land' style is, in our judgment, the most offensive; an accumulation of what are no better than cant terms, compound epithets, and words without definite significations; and these are often accumulated into an incongruous mass of words, and a confused and unmeaning jargon."

FROM DISTINCT ISOLATED SPECIMENS FOUND IN STONES AMIDST THE COAL BEDS, WE DISCOVERED THE NATURE OF THE PLANTS OF THIS ERA.—They are almost all of simple cellular structure, and such as exist with us in small forms, [horse tails, club mosses and ferns,] but advanced to an enormous magnitude. The species are long since extinct. They generally are such as now grow in clusters of tropical lands; but it must have been the result of a high temperature obtained otherwise than that of the tropical regions now in existence, and even polar regions.

The conclusion, therefore, to which most geologists have arrived is, that the earth, originally an incandescent or highly heated mass, gradually cooled, until in the carboniferous period it fostered a growth of terrestrial vegetation all over its surface, to which the existing jungles of the tropics are mere barrenness in comparison. The high and uniform temperature combined with a greater portion of carbonic acid gas in the atmosphere, could not only sustain a gigantic and prolific vegetation but would also produce dense vapors, showers and rains; and these again gigantic rivers, periodical inundations and deltas. Thus all the conditions for extensive deposits of wood, in estuaries would arise from this high temperature; and every circumstance connected with the coal, measures points to such conditions.

REMARKABLE OCCURRENCE.

A circumstance of a somewhat extraordinary character occurred a short time since in one of our flourishing towns of the middle counties. A clergyman died, and his wife and daughters, on the third day after decease, recollecting that no likeness remained, it was agreed ere the grave closed o'er him, that the body should be unshrouded and a portrait taken. A young lady of some professional celebrity was engaged for the task. She, with the assistance of the attendant, took off the shroud and placed the body in the requisite posture; but other duties requiring the artist's attention, the sketch was deferred till noon.

About 12 o'clock, at the foot of the bed, the lady commenced and went through an hour's work on this image of death. At this stage of the proceedings, by some unaccountable motion, the head of the death-like figure fell on the side. Nothing daunted, the artist carefully took the head to replace it, when lo! the eyes opened, and staring her full in the face, the dead inquired,

"Who are you?"

The young professional, without trepidation, took the bandage from the head and rubbed his neck. He immediately saw the shroud, and laughed immoderately. The artist quietly called the family; their joy may be imagined but cannot be described. That evening, he who had lain three days in his shroud, benumbed by mother and sisters with agonizing tears, gladdened their hearts by taking his accustomed place at the tea table, and at this moment is making an excursion in North Wales.—Bedford (England) Times.

Men are like buzzes—the more brass they contain the further you can hear them. Women are like tulips—the more modest and retired they appear, the better you love them.

HOW COAL WAS MADE.

Geology has proved that, at one period, there existed an enormous land vegetation, the ruins or rubbish of which, carried into seas, and there sunk to the bottom, and afterwards covered over by sand and mud beds, became the substance which we now recognize as coal. This was a natural transaction of vast consequence to us, seeing how much utility we find in coal, both for warming our dwellings and for various manufactures, as well as for the production of steam, by which so great a mechanical power is generated. It may naturally excite surprise that the vegetable remains should have to completely changed their appearance, and become black. But this can be explained by chemistry; and part of the marvel becomes clear to the simplest understanding when we recall the familiar fact that damp hay, thrown closely into a heap, gives out a heat, and becomes of a dark color. When a vegetable mass is excluded from the air, and subjected to great pressure, a bituminous fermentation is produced, and the result is the mineral coal, which is of various character, according as the mass has been intermingled with sand, clay or earthy impurities. On account of the change, effected by mineralization, it is difficult to detect in coal the traces of a vegetable structure; but these can be made clear in all except the highly bituminous caking coal, by cutting or polishing it down into thin transparent slices when the microscope shows the fibre and cells very plainly.

From distinct isolated specimens found in stones amidst the coal beds, we discovered the nature of the plants of this era.—They are almost all of simple cellular structure, and such as exist with us in small forms, [horse tails, club mosses and ferns,] but advanced to an enormous magnitude. The species are long since extinct. They generally are such as now grow in clusters of tropical lands; but it must have been the result of a high temperature obtained otherwise than that of the tropical regions now in existence, and even polar regions.

The conclusion, therefore, to which most geologists have arrived is, that the earth, originally an incandescent or highly heated mass, gradually cooled, until in the carboniferous period it fostered a growth of terrestrial vegetation all over its surface, to which the existing jungles of the tropics are mere barrenness in comparison. The high and uniform temperature combined with a greater portion of carbonic acid gas in the atmosphere, could not only sustain a gigantic and prolific vegetation but would also produce dense vapors, showers and rains; and these again gigantic rivers, periodical inundations and deltas. Thus all the conditions for extensive deposits of wood, in estuaries would arise from this high temperature; and every circumstance connected with the coal, measures points to such conditions.

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SCHOOLMASTER BOARDING ROUND.

Extract from the journal of a schoolmaster, published in an Ohio paper:—

Monday—Went to board at Mr. B's. had a baked goose for dinner. Suppose from its size, and the thickness of its skin, with other venerable appearances, to have been one of the first settlers of this state. Made a slight impression on the patriarch's breast.

Supper—Cold goose and potatoes.—Family consisting of the husband, god-wife, daughter Peggy, four boys, Pompey the dog, and a brace of cats. Fire built in the square room about 9 o'clock, and a pile of wood lay by the fire-place. Saw Peggy scratch her fingers and couldn't take the hint. Felt squamish about the stomach, and talked about going to bed. Peggy looked sullen, and put more wood on the fire in the square room. Went to bed and dreamed of having eaten a quantity of stone wall.

Tuesday—Cold gander for breakfast, swamp tea, and some nut-cakes, the latter some consolation.

Dinner—The legs, &c. of the gander, done up warm, one nearly done up.

Supper—The other leg, &c., cold.—Went to bed as Peggy was carrying in the fire to the square room. Dreamed I was a mud-turtle and got on my back and could not get over again.

Wednesday—Cold gander for breakfast. Complained of sickness, and could eat nothing.

Dinner—Wings, &c. of the gander warmed up. Did my best to destroy them for fear they should be left for supper; did not succeed. Dreaded supper all the afternoon.

Supper—Hot johnny-cakes. Felt relieved. Thought I had got clear of the gander and went to bed for a good night's rest. Disappointed—very cold night and couldn't keep warm in bed; got up and stopped the broken window with my coat and vest—no use—froze the tip of my nose.

Thursday—Cold gander again. Felt very much discouraged not to be able to eat supper, and to have such a pleasant dream.

Friday—Breakfast abroad. Dinner at Mr. B's. Cold gander and hot potatoes—the latter very good; ate these and went to school somewhat contented.

Supper—Cold gander again and no potatoes, bread heavy and dry. Had the headache and couldn't eat. Peggy much concerned; had a fire built in the square room, and thought she and I had better sit there out of the noise. Went to bed early. Peggy thought too much sleep had for the headache.

Saturday—Breakfast, cold gander and hot Indian johnny-cake—did very well—glad to come off so.

Dinner—Cold gander again. Didn't keep school this afternoon. Weighed and found that I had lost six pounds the last week! Grey alarmed. Had a talk with Mr. B., and concluded I had boarded out his share.

What a man really is, will appear in the truest light under his own roof and by his own fireside. I can believe that he is a Christian, when I know that he faithfully takes up the daily duties, and bears the crosses that cluster within his own doors. I shall think that the world rightfully calls him a philanthropist, when, notwithstanding common faults and infirmities, he receives the spontaneous award of the good husband and father, and the kindness of his nature is reflected in the very air and light of the dwelling. And talk of noble deeds! where will you find occasions for, where will you behold manifestations of a more beautiful sacrifice, a more generous heroism, than in the labors and in the endurance of thousands of men and women shut out from the world's observation in silent nooks and corners of this very city, amidst the relationship and cares and struggles of home? But whether it be in forms of good or evil, we know that the real elements of character, the genuine moral qualities of people must be expressed there.—REV. E. H. CHIEN.

An exchange quotes Paul's writings—"Owe no man anything," and then adds, "Guess some of our subscribers never read Paul's Epistles." The poor man gave a look at his delinquent list—sighed, as only a printer can sigh—and quietly resumed his labor.

A man's temperature is generally about 98 Fahrenheit. A scientific observer, that, to increase his temperature, all that is necessary is to pull his nose.