The Incendiary

I KNEW James Dutton, as I shall call him, at an early period of life, when my present scanty locks of iron grey were thick and dark, my now pale and furrowed cheeks were fresh and ruddy, like his own. Time, circumstance, and natural bent of mind, have done their work on both of us; and if his course of life has been less equable than mine, it has been chiefly so because the original impulse, the first start on the great journey upon which so much depends, was directed by wiser heads in my case than in his. We were schoolfellows for a considerable time; and if I acquired—as I certainly did—a larger stock of knowledge than he, it was by no means from any superior capacity on my part, but that his mind was bent on other pursuits. He was a born Nimrod, and his father encouraged this propensity from the earliest moment that his darling and only son could sit a pony or handle a light fowling piece. Dutton, senior, was one of a then large class of persons whom Cobbett used to call bullfrog farmers; men who, finding themselves daily increasing in wealth by the operation of circumstances they neither created nor could insure or control—namely, a rapidly increasing manufacturing population, and tremendous war prices for their produce—acted as if the chance-blown prosperity they enjoyed was the result of their own forethought, skill, and energy, and therefore, humanly speaking, indestructible. James Dutton was, consequently, denied nothing—not even the luxury of neglecting his own education; and he availed himself of the lamentable privilege to a great extent. It was, however, a remarkable feature in the lad's character, that whatever he himself deemed essential should be done, no amount of indulgence, no love of sport or dissipation, could divert him from thoroughly accomplishing. Thus he saw clearly, that even in the life—that of a sportsman farmer—he had chalked out for himself, it was indispensably necessary that a certain quantum of educational power should be attained; and so he really acquired a knowledge of reading, writing, and spelling, and then withdrew from school to more congenial avocations.

I frequently met James Dutton in after years; but some nine or ten months had passed since I had last seen him, when I was directed by the chief partner in the firm to which Flint and I subsequently succeeded, to take coach for Romford, Essex, in order to ascertain from a witness there what kind of evidence we might expect him to give in a trial to come off in the then Hilary term at Westminster Hall. It was the first week in January: the weather was bitterly cold; and I experienced an intense satisfaction when, after despatching the business I had come upon, I found myself in the long dining room of the chief market inn, where two blazing fires shed a ruddy, cheerful light over the snow white damask tablecloth, bright glasses, decanters, and other preparatives for the farmers' market dinner. Prices had ruled high that day; wheat had reached 30*l*. a load; and the numerous groups of hearty, stalwart yeomen present were in high glee, crowing and exulting alike over their full pockets and the news—of which the papers were just then full—of the burning of Moscow, and the flight and ruin of Bonaparte's army. James Dutton was in the room, but not, I observed, in his usual flow of animal spirits. The crape round his hat might, I thought, account for that; and as he did not see me, I accosted him with an inquiry after his health, and the reason of his being in mourning. He received me very cordially, and in an instant cast off the abstracted manner I had noticed. His father, he informed me, was gone—had died about seven months previously, and he was alone now at Ash Farm—why didn't I run down there to see him sometimes, &c.? Our conversation was interrupted by a summons to dinner, very cheerfully complied with; and we both—at least I can answer for myself—did ample justice to a more than usually capital dinner, even in those capital old market dinner times. We were

very jolly afterwards, and amazingly triumphant over the frostbitten, snow-buried soldier-banditti that had so long lorded it over continental Europe. Dutton did not partake of the general hilarity. There was a sneer upon his lip during the whole time, which, however, found no expression in words.

"How quiet you are, James Dutton," cried a loud voice from out the dense smoke cloud that by this time completely enveloped us. On looking towards the spot from whence the ringing tones came, a jolly, round face—like the sun as seen through a London fog—gleamed redly dull from out the thick and choking atmosphere.

"Everybody," rejoined Dutton, "hasn't had the luck to sell two hundred quarters of wheat at today's price, as you have, Tom Southall."

"That's true, my boy," returned Master Southall, sending, in the plenitude of his satisfaction, a jet of smoke towards us with astonishing force. "And, I say, Jem, I'll tell ee what I'll do; I'll clap on ten guineas more upon what I offered for the brown mare."

"Done! She's yours, Tom, then, for ninety guineas!"

"Gie's your hand upon it!" cried Tom Southall, jumping up from his chair, and stretching a fist as big as a leg of mutton—well, say lamb—over the table. "And here—here," he added with an exultant chuckle, as he extricated a swollen canvas bag from his pocket— "here's the dibs at once."

This transaction excited a great deal of surprise at our part of the table; and Dutton was rigorously cross-questioned as to his reason for parting with his favourite hunting mare.

"The truth is, friends," said Dutton at last, "I mean to give up farming, and—"

"Gie up farmin'!" broke in half a dozen voices. "Lord!"

"Yes; I don't like it. I shall buy a commission in the army. There'll be a chance against Boney, now; and it's a life I'm fit for."

The farmers looked completely agape at this announcement; but making nothing of it, after silently staring at Dutton and each other, with their pipes in their hands and not in their mouths, till they had gone out, stretched their heads simultaneously across the table towards the candles, relit their pipes, and smoked on as before.

"Then, perhaps, Mr. Dutton," said a young man in a smartly-cut velveteen coat with mother-of-pearl buttons, who had hastily left his seat further down the table—"perhaps you will sell the double Manton, and Fanny and Slut?"

"Yes; at a price."

Prices were named; I forget now the exact sums, but enormous prices, I thought, for the gun and

the dogs, Fanny and Slut. The bargain was eagerly concluded, and the money paid at once. Possibly the buyer had a vague notion that a portion of the vendor's skill might come to him with his purchases.

"You be in 'arnest, then, in this fool's business, James Dutton," observed a farmer, gravely. "I be sorry for thee; but as I s'pose the lease of Ash Farm will be parted with; why— John, waiter, tell Master Hurst, at the top of the table yonder, to come this way."

Master Hurst, a well-to-do, highly respectable-looking, and rather elderly man, came in obedience to the summons, and after a few words in an undertone with the friend that had sent for him, said: "Is this true, James Dutton?"

"It is true that the lease and stock of Ash Farm are to be sold—at a price. You, I believe, are in want of such a concern for the young couple, just married."

"Well, I don't say I might not be a customer, if the price were reasonable."

"Let us step into a private room, then," said Dutton, rising. "This is not a place for business of that kind. Sharp," he added, *sotto voce*, "come with us; I may want you."

I had listened to all this with a kind of stupid wonderment, and I now, mechanically as it were, got up, and accompanied the party to another room.

The matter was soon settled. Five hundred pounds for the lease—ten years unexpired—of Ash Farm, about eleven hundred acres, and the stock, implements; the ploughing, sowing, &c., already performed, to be paid for at a valuation based on the present prices. I drew out the agreement in form, it was signed in duplicate, a large sum was paid down as deposit, and Mr. Hurst with his friend withdrew.

"Well," I said, taking a glass of port from a bottle Dutton had just ordered in— "here's fortune in your new career; but as I am a living man, I can't understand what you can be thinking about."

"You haven't read the newspapers?"

"O yes, I have! Victory! Glory! March to Paris! and all that sort of thing. Very fine, I daresay; but rubbish, moonshine, I call it, if purchased by the abandonment of the useful, comfortable, joyous life of a prosperous yeoman."

"Is that all you have seen in the papers?"

"Not much else. What besides have you found in them?"

"Wheat at ten or eleven pounds a load—less perhaps—other produce in proportion."

"Ha!"

“I see further, Sharp, than you bookmen do, in some matters. Boney's done for; that to me is quite plain, and earlier than I thought likely; although I, of course, as well as every other man with a head instead of a turnip on his shoulders, knew such a rawhead and bloodybones as that must sooner or later come to the dogs. And as I also know what agricultural prices were *before* the war, I can calculate without the aid of vulgar fractions, which, by the by, I never reached, what they'll be when it's over, and the thundering expenditure now going on is stopped. In two or three weeks people generally will get a dim notion of all this; and I sell, therefore, whilst I can, at top prices.”

The shrewdness of the calculation struck me at once. “You will take another farm when one can be had on easier terms than now, I suppose?”

“Yes; if I can manage it. And I *will* manage it.”

Between ourselves, after all the old man’s debts are paid, I shall only have about nine or ten hundred pounds to the good, even by selling at the present tremendous rates; so it was time, you see, I pulled up, and rubbed the fog out of my eyes a bit. And, hark ye, Master Sharp!” he added, as we rose and shook hands with each other— “I have now done *playing* with the world—it’s a place of work and business; and I’ll do my share of it so effectually, that my children, if I have any, shall, if I do not, reach the class of landed gentry; and this you’ll find, for all your sneering, will come about all the more easily that neither they nor their father will be encumbered with much educational lumber. Good bye.”

I did not again see my old schoolfellow till the change be had predicted had thoroughly come to pass. Farms were everywhere to let, and a general cry to parliament for aid rang through the land. Dutton called at the office upon business, accompanied by a young woman of remarkable personal comeliness, but, as a very few sentences betrayed, little or no education in the conventional sense of the word. She was the daughter of a farmer, whom—it was no fault of hers— a change of times had not found in a better condition for weathering them. Anne Mosely, in fact, was a thoroughly industrious, clever, farm economist. The instant Dutton had secured an eligible farm, at his own price and conditions, he married her; and now, on the third day after the wedding, he had brought me the draft of lease for examination.

“You are not afraid, then,” I remarked, “of taking a farm in these bad times?”

“Not I—at a price. We mean to *rough* it, Mr. Sharp,” he added gaily. “And, let me tell you, that those who will stoop to do that—I mean, take their coats off, tuck up their sleeves, and fling appearances to the winds—may, and will, if they understand their business, and have got their heads screwed on right, do better here than in any of the uncleared countries they talk so much about. You know what I told you down at Romford. Well, we’ll manage that before our hair is grey, depend upon it, bad as the times may be—won’t we, Nance?”

“We’ll try, Jem,” was the smiling response.

They left the draft for examination. It was found to be correctly drawn. Two or three days afterwards, the deeds were executed, and James Dutton was placed in possession. The farm, a

capital one, was in Essex.

His hopes were fully realised as to moneymaking, at all events. He and his wife rose early, sat up late, ate the bread of carefulness, and altogether displayed such persevering energy, that only about six or seven years had passed before the Duttons were accounted a rich and prosperous family. They had one child only, a daughter. The mother, Mrs. Dutton, died when this child was about twelve years of age; and Anne Dutton became more than ever the apple of her father's eye.

The business of the farm went steadily on in its accustomed track; each succeeding year found James Dutton growing in wealth and importance; and his daughter in sparkling, catching comeliness—although certainly not in the refinement of manner which gives a quickening life and grace to personal symmetry and beauty. James Dutton remained firm in his theory of the worthlessness of education beyond what, in a narrow acceptation of the term, was absolutely 'necessary;' and Anne Dutton, although now heiress to very considerable wealth, knew only how to read, write, spell, cast accounts, and superintend the home-business of the farm. I saw a good deal of the Duttons about this time, my brother-in-law, Elsworthy, and his wife having taken up their abode within about half a mile of James Dutton's dwelling house; and I ventured once or twice to remonstrate with the prosperous farmer upon the positive danger, with reference to his ambitious views, of not at least so far cultivating the intellect and taste of so attractive a maiden as his daughter, that sympathy on her part with the rude, unlettered clowns, with whom she necessarily came so much in contact, should be impossible. He laughed my hints to scorn. "It is idleness—idleness alone," he said, "that puts love-fancies into girls' heads. Novel reading, jingling at a pianoforte—merely other names for idleness—these are the parents of such follies. Anne Dutton, as mistress of this establishment, has her time fully and usefully occupied; and when the time comes, not far distant now, to establish her in marriage, she will wed into a family I wot of; and the Romford prophecy of which you remind me will be realised, in great part at least."

He found, too late, his error. He hastily entered the office one morning, and although it was only five or six weeks since I had last seen him, the change in his then florid, prideful features was so striking and painful, as to cause me to fairly leap upon my feet with surprise.

"Good heavens, Dutton!" I exclaimed, "what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened, Mr. Sharp," he replied, "but what you predicted, and which, had I not been the most conceited dolt in existence, I, too, must have foreseen. You know that good-looking, idle, and, I fear, irreclaimable young fellow, George Hamblin?"

"I have seen him once or twice. Has he not brought his father to the verge of a workhouse by low dissipation and extravagance?"

"Yes. Well, he is an accepted suitor for Anne Dutton's hand. No wonder that you start. She fancies herself hopelessly in love with him—Nay, Sharp, hear me out. I have tried expostulation, threats, entreaties, locking her up; but it's useless. I shall kill the silly fool if I persist, and I have at length consented to the marriage, for I cannot see her die." I began remonstrating upon the folly of yielding consent to so ruinous a marriage, on account of a few tears and hysterics, but

Dutton stopped me peremptorily.

“It is useless talking,” he said. “The die is cast; I have given my word. You would hardly recognise her, she is so altered. I did not know before,” added the strong, stern man, with trembling voice and glistening eyes, “that she was so inextricably twined about my heart—my life!” It is difficult to estimate the bitterness of such a disappointment to a proud, aspiring man like Dutton. I pitied him sincerely, mistaken, if not blameworthy, as he had been.

“I have only myself to blame,” he presently resumed. “A girl of cultivated taste and mind could not have bestowed a second thought on George Hamblin. But let’s to business. I wish the marriage settlement, and my will, to be so drawn, that every farthing received from me during my life, and after my death, shall be hers, and hers only; and so strictly and entirely secured, that she shall be without power to yield control over the slightest portion of it, should she be so minded.” I took down his instructions, and the necessary deeds were drawn in accordance with them. When the day for signing arrived, the bridegroom-elect demurred at first to the stringency of the provisions of the marriage contract; but as upon this point Mr. Dutton was found to be inflexible, the handsome, illiterate clown—he was little better—gave up his scruples, the more readily as a life of assured idleness lay before him, from the virtual control he was sure to have over his wife's income. These were the thoughts which passed across his mind, I was quite sure, as taking the pen awkwardly in his hand, he affixed *his mark* to the marriage deed. I reddened with shame, and the smothered groan which at the moment smote faintly on my ear, again brokenly confessed the miserable folly of the father in not having placed his beautiful child beyond all possibility of mental contact or communion with such a person. The marriage was shortly afterwards solenmised, but I did not wait to witness the ceremony.

The husband’s promised good behaviour did not long endure; ere two months of wedded life were past, he had fallen again into his old habits; and the wife, bitterly repentant of her folly, was fain to confess, that nothing but dread of her father’s vengeance saved her from positive ill usage. It was altogether a wretched, unfortunate affair; and the intelligence—sad in itself—which reached me about a twelvemonth after the marriage, that the young mother had died in childbirth of her firstborn, a girl, appeared to me rather a matter of rejoicing than of sorrow or regret. The shock to poor Dutton was, I understood, overwhelming for a time, and fears were entertained for his intellects. He recovered, however, and took charge of his grandchild, the father very willingly resigning the onerous burden.

My brother-in-law left James Dutton’s neighbourhood for a distant part of the country about this period, and I saw nothing of the bereaved father for about five years, save only at two business interviews. The business upon which I had seen him, was the alteration of his will, by which all he might die possessed of was bequeathed to his darling Annie. His health, I was glad to find, was quite restored; and although now fifty years of age, the bright light of his young days sparkled once more in his keen glance. His youth was, he said, renewed in little Annie. He could even bear to speak, though still with remorseful emotion, of his own lost child. ‘No fear, Sharp,’ he said, ‘that I make that terrible mistake again. Annie will fall in love, please God, with no unlettered, soulless booby! Her mind shall be elevated, beautiful, and pure, as her person—she is the image of her mother—promises to be charming and attractive. You must come and see her.” I promised to do so; and he went his way. At one of these interviews—the first it must have

been—I made a chance inquiry for his son-in-law, Hamblin. As the name passed my lips, a look of hate and rage flashed out of his burning eyes. I did not utter another word, nor did he; and we separated in silence.

It was evening, and I was returning in a gig from a rather long journey into the country, when I called, in redemption of my promise, upon James Dutton. Annie was really, I found, an engaging, pretty, blue-eyed, golden-haired child; and I was not so much surprised at her grandfather's doting fondness—a fondness entirely reciprocated, it seemed, by the little girl. It struck me, albeit, that it was a perilous thing for a man of Dutton's vehement, fiery nature to stake again, as he evidently had done, his all of life and happiness upon one frail existence. An illustration of my thought or fear occurred just after we had finished tea. A knock was heard at the outer door, and presently a man's voice, in quarrelling, drunken remonstrance with the servant who opened it. The same deadly scowl I had seen sweep over Dutton's countenance upon the mention of Hamblin's name, again gleamed darkly there; and finding, after a moment or two, that the intruder would not be denied, the master of the house gently removed Annie from his knee, and strode out of the room.

"Follow grandpapa," whispered Mrs. Rivers, a highly respectable widow of about forty years of age, whom Mr. Dutton had engaged at a high salary to superintend Annie's education. The child went out, and Mrs. Rivers, addressing me, said in a low voice: "Her presence will prevent violence; but it is a sad affair." She then informed me that Hamblin, to whom Mr. Dutton allowed a hundred a year, having become aware of the grandfather's extreme fondness for Annie, systematically worked that knowledge for his own sordid ends, and preluded every fresh attack upon Mr. Dutton's purse by a threat to reclaim the child. "It is not the money," remarked Mrs. Rivers in conclusion, "that Mr. Dutton cares so much for, but the thought that he holds Annie by the sufferance of that wretched man, goads him at times almost to insanity."

"Would not the fellow waive his claim for a settled increase of his annuity?"

"No; that has been offered to the extent of three hundred a year; but Hamblin refuses, partly from the pleasure of keeping such a man as Mr. Dutton in his power, partly because he knows that the last shilling would be parted with rather than the child. It is a very unfortunate business, and I often fear will terminate badly." The loud but indistinct wrangling without ceased after awhile, and I heard a key turn stiffly in a lock. "The usual conclusion of these scenes," said Mrs. Rivers.

"Another draft upon his strong box will purchase Mr. Dutton a respite as long as the money lasts." I could hardly look at James Dutton when he reentered the room. There was that in his countenance which I do not like to read in the faces of my friends. He was silent for several minutes; at last he said quickly, sternly: "Is there no instrument, Mr. Sharp, in all the enginery of law, that can defeat a worthless villain's legal claim to his child?"

"None; except, perhaps, a commission of lunacy, or—"

"Tush! tush!" interrupted Dutton; "the fellow has no wits to lose. That being so—But let us talk of something else." We did so, but on his part very incoherently, and I soon bade him good-night.

This was December, and it was in February the following year that Dutton again called at our place of business. There was a strange, stern, iron meaning in his face. “I am in a great hurry,” he said, “and I have only called to say, that I shall be glad if you will run over to the farm tomorrow on a matter of business. You have seen, perhaps, in the paper, that my dwelling house took fire the night before last. You have not? Well, it is upon that I would consult you. Will you come?” I agreed to do so, and he withdrew.

The fire had not, I found, done much injury. It had commenced in a kind of miscellaneous storeroom; but the origin of the fire appeared to me, as it did to the police officers that had been summoned, perfectly unaccountable. “Had it not been discovered in time, and extinguished,” I observed to Mrs. Rivers, “you would all have been burned in your beds.”

“Why, no,” replied that lady, with some strangeness of manner. “On the night of the fire, Annie and I slept at Mr. Elsworthy’s” (I have omitted to notice, that my brother-in-law and family had returned to their old residence), “and Mr. Dutton remained in London, whither he had gone to see the play.”

“But the servants might have perished?”

“No. A whim, apparently, has lately seized Mr. Dutton, that no servant or labourer shall sleep under the same roof with himself; and those new outhouses, where their bedrooms are placed, are, you see, completely detached, and are indeed, as regards this dwelling, made fireproof.”

At this moment Mr. Dutton appeared, and interrupted our conversation. He took me aside.

“Well,” he said, “to what conclusion have you come? The work of an incendiary, is it not?

Somebody, too, that knows I am not insured—”

“Not insured!”

“No; not for this dwelling house. I did not renew the policy some months ago.”

“Then,” I jestingly remarked, “you, at all events, are safe from any accusation of having set fire to your premises with the intent to defraud the insurers.”

“To be sure,—to be sure, I am,” he rejoined with quick earnestness, as if taking my remark seriously. That is quite certain. Some one, I am pretty sure it must be,” he presently added, “that owes me a grudge—with whom I have quarrelled, eh?”

“It may be so, certainly.”

“It *must* be so. And what, Mr. Sharp, is the highest penalty for the crime of incendiarism?”

“By the recent change in the law, transportation only; unless, indeed, loss of human life occur in

consequence of the felonious act; in which case, the English law construes the offence to be willful murder, although the incendiary may have not intended the death or injury of any person."

"I see. But here there could have been no loss of life."

"There might have been, had not you, Mrs. Rivers, and Annie chanced to sleep out of the house."

"True—true—a diabolical villain no doubt. But we'll ferret him out yet. You are a keen hand, Mr. Sharp, and will assist, I know. Yes, yes—it's some fellow that hates me—that I perhaps hate and loathe"—he added with sudden gnashing fierceness, and striking his hand with furious violence on the table, "as I do a spotted toad!"

I hardly recognised James Dutton in this fitful, disjointed talk, and as there was really nothing to be done or to be inquired into, I soon went away.

"Only one week's interval," I hastily remarked to Mr. Flint one morning after glancing at the newspaper, "and another fire at Dutton's farmhouse!"

"The deuce! He is in the luck of it apparently," replied Flint, without looking up from his employment. My partner knew Dutton only by sight.

The following morning I received a note from Mrs. Rivers. She wished to see me immediately on a matter of great importance. I hastened to Mr. Dutton's, and found, on arriving there, that George Hamblin was in custody, and undergoing an examination, at no great distance off, before two county magistrates, on the charge of having fired Mr. Dutton's premises. The chief evidence was, that Hamblin had been seen lurking about the place just before the flames broke out, and that near the window where an incendiary might have entered there were found portions of several lucifer matches, of a particular make, and corresponding to a number found in Hamblin's bedroom. To this Hamblin replied, that he had come to the house by Mr. Dutton's invitation, but found nobody there. This, however, was vehemently denied by Mr. Dutton. He had made no appointment with Hamblin to meet at his, Dutton's, house. How should he, purposing as he did to be in London at the time? With respect to the lucifer matches, Hamblin said he had purchased them of a mendicant, and that Mr. Dutton saw him do so. This also was denied. It was further proved, that Hamblin, when in drink, had often said he would ruin Dutton before he died.

Finally, the magistrates, though with some hesitation, decided that there was hardly sufficient evidence to warrant them in committing the prisoner for trial, and he was discharged, much to the rage and indignation of the prosecutor.

Subsequently, Mrs. Rivers and I had a long private conference. She and the child had again slept at Elsworthy's on the night of the fire, and Dutton in London. "His excuse is," said Mrs. Rivers, "that he cannot permit us to sleep here unprotected by his presence." We both arrived at the same conclusion, and at last agreed upon what should be done, attempted rather, and that without delay.

Just before taking leave of Mr. Dutton, who was in an exceedingly excited state, I said: "By the bye, Dutton, you have promised to dine with me on some early day. Let it be next Tuesday. I shall have one or two bachelor friends, and we can give you a shakedown for the night."

"Next Tuesday?" said he, quickly. "At what hour do you dine?"

"At six. Not a half moment later."

"Good! I will be with you." We then shook hands, and parted.

The dinner would have been without interest to me, had not a note previously arrived from Mrs. Rivers, stating that she and Annie were again to sleep that night at Elsworthy's. This promised results.

James Dutton, who rode into town, was punctual, and, as always of late, flurried, excited, nervous—not, in fact, it appeared to me precisely in his right mind. The dinner passed off as dinners usually do, and the after-proceedings went on very comfortably till about half-past nine o'clock, when Dutton's perturbation, increased perhaps by the considerable quantity of wine he had swallowed, not drunk, became, it was apparent to everybody, almost uncontrollable. He rose purposely it seemed—sat down again—drew out his watch almost every minute, and answered remarks addressed to him in the wildest manner. The decisive moment was, I saw, arrived, and at a gesture of mine, Elsworthy, who was in my confidence, addressed "Dutton. By the way, Dutton, about Mrs. Rivers and Annie. I forgot to tell you of it before."

The restless man was on his feet in an instant, and glaring with fiery eagerness at the speaker.

"What! what!" he cried with explosive quickness, "what about Annie? Death and fury!—speak! will you?"

"Don't alarm yourself, my good fellow. It's nothing of consequence. You brought Annie and her governess about an hour before I started to sleep at our house—"

"Yes—yes," gasped Dutton, white as death, and every fibre of his body shaking with terrible dread. "Yes—well, well, go on. Thunder and lightning! out with it, will you?"

"Unfortunately, two female cousins arrived soon after you went away, and I was obliged to escort Annie and Mrs. Rivers home again." A wild shriek—yell is perhaps the more appropriate expression—burst from the conscience and fear-stricken man. Another instant, and he had torn his watch from the fob, glanced at it with dilated eyes, dashed it on the table, and was rushing madly towards the door, vainly withstood by Elsworthy, who feared we had gone too far.

"Out of the way!" screamed the madman. "Let go, or I'll dash you to atoms!" Suiting the action to the threat, he hurled my brother-in-law against the wall with stunning force, and rushed on, shouting incoherently: "My horse! There is time yet! Tom Edwards, my horse!"

Tom Edwards was luckily at hand, and although mightily surprised at the sudden uproar, which

he attributed to Mr. Dutton being in drink, mechanically assisted to saddle, bridle, and bring out the roan mare; and before I could reach the stables, Dutton's foot was in the stirrup. I shouted "Stop" as loudly as I could, but the excited horseman did not heed, perhaps not hear me: and away he went, at a tremendous speed, hatless, and his long grey-tinted hair streaming in the wind. It was absolutely necessary to follow. I therefore directed Elsworthy's horse, a much swifter and more peaceful animal than Dutton's, to be brought out; and as soon as I got into the high country road, I too dashed along at a rate much too headlong to be altogether pleasant. The evening was clear and bright, and I now and then caught a distant sight of Dutton, who was going at a frantic pace across the country, and putting his horse at leaps that no man in his senses would have attempted. I kept the high road, and we had thus ridden about half an hour perhaps, when a bright flame about a mile distant, as the crow flies, shot suddenly forth, strongly relieved against a mass of dark wood just beyond it. I knew it to be Dutton's house, even without the confirmation given by the frenzied shout which at the same moment arose on my left hand. It was from Dutton. His horse had been staked, in an effort to clear a high fence, and he was hurrying desperately along on foot. I tried to make him hear me, or to reach him, but found I could do neither; his own wild cries and imprecations drowned my voice, and there were impassable fences between the high road and the fields across which he madly hasted.

The flames were swift this time, and defied the efforts of the servants and husbandmen who had come to the rescue, to stay, much less to quell them. Eagerly as I rode, Dutton arrived before the blazing pile at nearly the same moment as myself, and even as he fiercely struggled with two or three men, who strove by main force to prevent him from rushing into the flames, only to meet with certain death, the roof and floors of the building fell in with a sudden crash. He believed that all was over with the child, and again hurling forth the wild despairing cry I had twice before heard that evening, he fell down, as if smitten by lightning, upon the hard frosty road.

It was many days ere the unhappy, sinful man recovered his senses, many weeks before he was restored to his accustomed health. Very cautiously had the intelligence been communicated to him, that Annie had not met the terrible fate, the image of which had incessantly pursued him through his fevered dreams. He was a deeply grateful, and, I believe, a penitent and altogether changed man. He purchased, through my agency, a valuable farm in a distant county, in order to be out of the way, not only of Hamblin, on whom he settled two hundred a year, but of others, myself included, who knew or suspected him of the foul intention he had conceived against his son-in-law, and which, but for Mrs. Rivers, would, on the last occasion, have been in all probability successful, so cunningly had the evidence of circumstances been devised. "I have been," said James Dutton to me at the last interview I had with him, "all my life an overweening self-confident fool. At Romford, I boasted to you that my children should ally themselves with the landed gentry of the country, and see the result! The future, please God, shall find me in my duty—mindful only of that, and content, whilst so acting, with whatever shall befall me or mine."

Dutton continues to prosper in the world; Hamblin died several years ago of delirium tremens; and Annie, I hear, *will* in all probability marry into the squirearchy of the country. All this is not perhaps what is called poetical justice, but my experience has been with the actual, not the ideal world.

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